

SUBJECTS OF HISTORY: READING SOUTH AFRICA AFTER THE TRUTH AND
RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

by

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Abstract

“Subjects of History: Reading South Africa after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” asks how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has operated as the infrastructure through which the South African nation, its subjects, and its literature have been imagined in the post-apartheid era. I argue that the TRC worked as a nation- and subject-making project that helped embed new forms of subjection and capital accumulation within the idea of the “new” South Africa. The Commission continues to shape the possibilities for engaging with South African literature, and as such it demands a sustained critical *re*-reading.

Chapter 1 begins with an exploration of the contemporary manifestations of the TRC’s logics and limitations. Drawing on poetry and short fiction by young writers published by the independent presses *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock*, I investigate how the 2015-2016 university student protests revealed ongoing systems of racialized subject production that are in conflict with the hegemonic “non-racial” discourses of the state. These contradictions inform my reading of the South African bildungsroman in Chapter 2. I argue that the genre and the Commission participate in the same project of subject-production; the bildungsroman offers a parallel infrastructure of development which, at times, may threaten to undermine the project of the TRC. Chapter 3 explores the TRC’s historiographic project, one that attempted to write a new national history that entered South Africa into the progressive time of capitalist modernity. I offer a reading of texts that refuse the state’s claim over temporality and recognize the radical *other* times that these texts create. My final chapter investigates the conditions under which “truth” could be articulated within the structures of the TRC. I ask how the demand for parrhesia was complicated by the aims of the Commission and the legacies of race that shape the post-apartheid

subject. I conclude by reflecting on the South African state's abandonment of the nation-building project and its impacts on reading contemporary South African literature in the future.

Lay Summary

This dissertation explores the influence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on contemporary South African literature. The TRC has been widely praised for its attempt to provide victims of apartheid with a sense of healing in order to build a new, liberal nation. I argue, however, that its ability to address the injustices of the past was limited, and that the TRC operated as a means of shaping the ideal post-apartheid subject in accordance with new forms of capitalism and operations of power in the country. I turn to contemporary South African writing to investigate how the assumptions that were central to the TRC—assumptions about what makes a “good” citizen, about how a national history is written, about how truth is spoken—have been adopted and challenged by writers in the wake of the Commission.

Preface

This dissertation is the original, independent work of the author, Deena Dinat.

An early version of the introduction was presented at the English Department Seminar Series at the University of the Witwatersrand in April 2018. Material included in Chapter 3 was first published in 2021 as “Encountering ‘Confusions in Existing Arrangements’ in South African Literature: Contesting Temporality in Imraan Coovadia’s *Tales of the Metric System*” in *English Studies in Africa*. Early versions of Chapter 4 were presented at the “Critical Nationalisms, Counter Publics” conference held in Vancouver in March 2019, and in May 2019 at the African Literature Association Conference held in Columbus, Ohio.

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Introduction: Truth, Reconciliation and Subjection in Contemporary South African Literature

We must wipe the slate clean but we haven't even written on the slate yet!

TRC Commissioner Mary Burton, quoted in *Dealing with the Past: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (1997)

Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure.

Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity" (1970)

This dissertation began as an attempt to grapple with my relationship to the country I call home. The end of apartheid and the establishment of a 'new' non-racial, democratic South Africa¹ meant that in many ways South Africa felt like the centre of global attention in the mid-1990s. I also knew that I did not belong, entirely, at this centre. My parents had been forced into exile in 1977 along with thousands of other anti-apartheid activists. Eventually settling in neighbouring Botswana, they raised a family in exile. The first few years of my life were lived as a refugee, without citizenship, and my parents could not return to South Africa until a ban was lifted in 1990 and the apartheid regime began to be dismantled. The national optimism and euphoria that surrounded the 1994 election of the African National Congress (ANC) as the ruling party, the ascension of Nelson Mandela to state President, and the establishment of a liberal democracy was muted in my family. As a new ruling elite was established, it quickly became apparent that

¹As noted by Rob Nixon in the 1991 essay "An Everybody Claim Dem Democratic: Notes on the 'New' South Africa" the phrase "new South Africa" was coined by F.W. De Klerk, the last apartheid President, and used as "an indispensable asset in the astute international marketing of his regime as converts to decency and penitence" (23). I use the term in my dissertation with a sense of irony. As my argument makes clear, the idea of a truly *new* South Africa is a fiction that occludes the many historical and newly invented forms of exploitation that continue to operate in the country.

the story of South Africa—its miraculous transformation from global pariah to inspirational model—relied on a suppression of histories too tangled and compromised to be useful to the nation-building project. This tension between national celebration and the political realism of my family came to a head over a heated discussion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC, as my parents saw it, was designed to ease the consciences of white South Africans who had benefitted, and would continue to benefit, from apartheid and centuries of colonial rule. It was made clear that while our family had returned to South Africa, “South Africa” itself was not a concept that could be bought into completely.

A second formative moment in the development of this project came when I saw a poster for a three-day event celebrating the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission soon after I arrived in Vancouver.² By this point, public opinion about the promise of the new South Africa, and the role of the TRC in establishing it, had soured; it was clear that the discourse of a “miraculous” nation was quickly turning “ordinary.”³ Among the sponsors of this Vancouver TRC event was Kinder Morgan, a gigantic oil and gas company responsible for enormous environmental destruction of Indigenous lands around the continent, and in particular the Trans Mountain Pipeline being built through the lands of 15 First Nations between Alberta and British Columbia. Their sponsorship of this particular TRC event appeared to be a remarkably transparent public relations exercise. While the South African TRC was never quite so directly tied to the interests of industry, the Vancouver event brought these connections, and the

²The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created as part of the 2007 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and sought to address the experiences and legacy of the Residential Schools on First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. It was in existence between 2008 and 2015. Kinder Morgan sponsored the 2013 Vancouver TRC event, as discussed in “Why is Big Oil Funding Reconciliation Week Events in Vancouver?” by Khelsilem Rivers.

³The title of Neville Alexander’s 2002 collection of essays, *An Ordinary Country*, presaged this change in the national mood.

complaints of my family, to the surface. How and why had the idea of a TRC been so mobile, so adaptable? What has it fostered, and what has it suppressed, in order to be so politically useful?

Finally, a chance encounter with a photograph at the Wits Art Museum in Johannesburg in early 2018 brought these experiences into the present. I came across an image⁴ by photographer Masixole Feni that seemed at first glance to depict the everyday struggle of the poor: it seemed the kind of photograph that would accompany a newspaper story about South Africa's many shantytowns, about poverty or a lack of service delivery. It was the image's title, "A Couple Evicted from a Public Space at the Famous Site that was District Six," that provoked the uncanny, the return of a history of dispossession on the same piece of land that has become synonymous with the very *idea* of dispossession in South Africa. Building on forced removals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in 1962, the apartheid state began forcing sixty thousand, mostly coloured, residents out of their District Six homes and into segregated townships outside the city.⁵ District Six operates as a metonym for apartheid itself; along with Sharpeville, Soweto and Sophiatown, it cannot be named without gesturing to the system that created it. Feni's photograph and its accompanying caption returns us to this site half a century after it took on this meaning. Not only is the viewer returned to this particular site, but the site itself re-emerges as a venue for a continued process of removal, a seemingly perpetual system of dislocation that can be traced back over centuries. This perpetual return, the re-emergence of what has been

⁴The photograph is undated, from a collection *A Drain on our Dignity: An Insider's Perspective* that was awarded the prestigious Ernest Cole Award in 2015.

⁵A note on racial terminology in this dissertation. The apartheid regime established a rigid taxonomy of four races, "White," "Black," "Coloured" and "Indian." These categories have long been challenged by political movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement (who categorized those oppressed under apartheid as sharing a Black political identity) and academics like Mohamed Adhikari, who has written extensively on "coloured" identity." I use these racial categorizations with the knowledge of their construction and the violence with which they have been enforced. However, a discussion of race, identity and politics in contemporary South African literature could not be had without recourse to this colonial legacy. In keeping with Zoë Wicomb's writing on coloured identity, I maintain the lower-case spelling to avoid the totalizing language of the apartheid designation.

occluded, is in stark contrast to the non-racial, liberal, democratic order that was established in South Africa after the end of apartheid in 1994; it is a photograph that challenges the idea of a transformed South African nation-state.

There is a tempting impulse to understand this image as evidence only of the unchanged nature of poverty and precarity for many poor, Black South Africans. Yet framing the structures of dispossession and marginalization in post-apartheid South Africa as such ignores the scale of change after the end of apartheid. This framing ignores, too, the ways in which post-apartheid South Africa has generated and produced its own forms of dispossession crucial to both the contemporary nation-state and the operations of capitalism. Annie Coombes in *History After Apartheid* (2003) writes of how public sites of memory, “monuments, museum narratives, the reanimation of particular sites and spaces... are all forms of public spectacle that together enable an analysis of the different possibilities,” for thinking through ideas of the nation, community and belonging (11). Feni’s image invites us to ask how these questions are negotiated through a radically different kind of public spectacle and public site in contemporary South Africa, how categories of community and nation are organized and managed by formations of the state and capital. It is an image that asks what kinds of subjects are made available for dispossession. It asks how this scene of violent removal challenges the rhetoric of a modern, liberal democracy, and it forces a consideration of how the state has transformed criteria of citizenship and subjection under the exigencies of new South African nationhood and postcolonial capitalism. At stake in these questions is the very idea of the South African nation-state, and how it exercises power over its subjects.

Contemporary South African literature is a literature of subjection. To read contemporary South African literature is to contend with the formations and exercises of power that produce it

while, simultaneously, reading for literature's potential to pierce, even if only briefly, the domination of state and capital, for its ability to reveal what lies beyond and beneath. My dissertation traces the formation of contemporary South African literature through the processes of subject-making and capital accumulation that have come to dominate the political and literary imagination of the country in the decades since the end of apartheid. To this end, the TRC offers a crucial lens through which the contemporary comes into focus: I argue that the TRC provided, through an often furtive, haphazard, and incomplete process, an articulation of the normative South Africa, its subjects, and its narratives. As the TRC set out the norms of the new South Africa and the subjects that constitute it, it also worked to establish the constitutive "outside" of the nation, the surpluses and excesses essential to postcolonial forms of capital accumulation. Drawing on public testimonies, historical documents, and reporting from the TRC, I argue that the Commission provided an infrastructure through which the new South Africa could be imagined. It is in the literature of post-apartheid South Africa, in works that explicitly reference the Commission and also those that do not, that the consequences of the TRC's infrastructural project continue to be adopted, contested, and reimagined. My engagement with the novels, poetry, short stories, and images that animate this dissertation stems from a recognition of the ways in which fiction works to illuminate the ideological structures of the material world while allowing for the articulation⁶ of alternative social formations, modes of thought, and constructions of meaning that are essential to any attempt to unmake the structures of power that shape South African life. I argue in this dissertation that fiction works to articulate the

⁶I draw on Stuart Hall's conception of articulation which signals both the utterance and the connection of difference, a "connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" ("On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall" 53). Articulation is "both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects" (53).

relationship between the ideological infrastructures of the nation and the quotidian experiences of the subject through the play of meaning always embedded in language. In this sense, fiction is not simply a *useful* form of engagement with the political crises of the day; it is, rather, *essential* to an analysis of the forms of power that shape South African lives, *essential* to the urgent task of imagining different political and ethical possibilities for the future. Bringing contemporary South African fiction to bear on the TRC allows for an investigation of what has been naturalized in the years since the end of apartheid; the ambiguity and alterity of the fictional unsettles claims on narrative, history, and the subject made by the new South Africa through the Commission. Fiction does not offer a simple affirmation or denunciation of the infrastructures established by the TRC. It is fiction's ambivalence, its capacity to both attest to and undermine the material conditions of the contemporary, that makes it essential to understanding South Africa as it is lived today. I turn to work by internationally celebrated writers (K. Sello Duiker, Antjie Krog, Ivan Vladislavić and Zoë Wicomb), as well as those less well-known outside of the country (Imraan Coovadia, Nadia Davids, Mishka Hoosen, Thabo Jijana, and Pravasan Pillay), to explore how the subject- and nation-making project of the TRC continues to inform contemporary literature, while, simultaneously, fiction provides its own mode of critique, an alternative infrastructure, through which we encounter the contemporary nation.

Returning to the Political in South African Literary Criticism

This dissertation engages a series of questions around how South African literature in English is read in the post-apartheid era, the relationship between the nation and the literature that it produces, and how literature works to challenge the norms of the nation itself. These are questions that have animated South African literary criticism over the past four decades,

predating the end of apartheid. While the TRC demanded an interrogation of the role of literature and storytelling in the formation of the South African subject and the establishment of the new nation, more recent scholarship has often side-stepped the questions of power, capital, and subjection that I return to in this dissertation.

Predating the end of apartheid, and predicting the terrain of debate that would define post-apartheid literary criticism, Njabulo Ndebele's call for the "rediscovery of the ordinary" and Albie Sachs' suggestion that the ANC ought to "ban [itself] from saying that culture is a weapon of struggle" (239) identified the ways in which South African literature and literary criticism would have to be reinvented as the apartheid regime, the gravitational centre around which South African reading and writing orbited, began its dissolution. Writing two years after the eventual conclusion of the TRC, Leon de Kock reflects on the complexities introduced by democracy and its effects on reading South African literature in 2005's "Does South African Literature Still Exist? Or: South African Literature is Dead, Long Live Literature in South Africa." Now that our "many identities have been affirmed by constitutional proclamation," he writes, has South African literature "finally outlived its usefulness?" (70-71). De Kock argues that South African literature had in the apartheid era "found its urgency, its deep reason for being," in the political realm, a realm deemed political "in the deep sense as a contest over terms of identity and forms of belonging" (71). In de Kock's argument, these political contestations are now largely confined to South Africa's past, as in the present "we no longer have such clear and simple urgencies, such absolute contests—the space for dialogue and exploration has become infinitely more diffuse" (78). De Kock articulates here what has become a familiar critical response to post-apartheid South African literature in English: a post-structuralism that attempts to challenge the essentialisms that underpinned both the apartheid state and activist writing in

opposition to it. This has often taken the form of metaphors that attempt to account for difference in South Africa without reproducing the racial essentialism of the apartheid regime, including de Kock's use of the *seam* "a place of simultaneous convergence and divergence," (12) in 2004's *South Africa in the Global Imaginary*, and Sarah Nuttall's 2009 *Entanglement* in which she looks not to "the register of difference," but instead to "the intricate overlaps that mark the present and, at times, and in important ways, the past, as well" (1). I understand these formulations as efforts at undoing the epistemological and ideological structures of the past, but also as efforts that fail to attend to structures of power in the present. Confining the "political" to the past, and the suggestion that contemporary South African literature is no longer defined by political urgencies and contestations, has only worked to naturalize the forms of power exercised by the state and capital over the subjects of South Africa. Similarly, the deployment of increasingly esoteric metaphors for difference obscures the operations of power and subjection that shape contemporary South African literature.

We see the consequences of this strand of literary criticism re-emerge in attempts to define contemporary South African writing. Reflecting on a 2009 symposium at the University of Johannesburg on "post-transitional" South African literature, Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie list in their 2010 article "Contesting 'Post-Transitional' South African Literature in English" a number of "pressing questions," that were raised but not explored at the symposium: "is current South African literature racially marked? Has class supplanted race as formative of identities and cultural practices? Has the ideology of current social movements, such as 'Y-generation' (Nuttall) aesthetics or service delivery protests, displaced more conventional manifestations of political resistance?" (5). In this list of questions, unaddressed as they were, we witness the way in which a political analysis of the state, capital and the subject has been

excluded from a conception South African literature. These questions reify, too, the rhetoric of the new South Africa and the insistence on a politics of non-racialism, in which deeply political and deeply racialized service delivery protests are cast as a “current social movement,” rather than a crisis of governmentality that constitutes the very terrain of political struggle in the country. These protests are, instead, conflated with Nuttall’s analysis of shopping mall culture in South Africa in an attempt to define the “post-transitional.” These efforts to establish the language of contemporary South African literature reveal the ways in which the logics of the “new” South African dispensation, the logics articulated and enacted through the TRC, have been almost entirely internalized in readings of post-apartheid literature, so much so that the very idea of the “political” is made somehow antiquated. As such, this mode of critique has often worked in conjunction with the neoliberal victory at the end of the Cold War, nullifying the ongoing contestations—both political and literary—that I argue are crucial to reading contemporary South African literature.

The turn away from material analysis and from an analysis of power has often limited critical approaches to reading South African literature. Frenkel and MacKenzie, for example, identify the features of the “post-transitional” in a “new wave of writing, which 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 humour and incisive satire, and the mixing of genres with zest and freedom. All of this often renders nugatory traditional markers like nationality, race or ethnicity” (2).⁷ The attempt to

⁷Frenkel and MacKenzie list Yvette Christiansë’s 2006 novel *Unconfessed* (“a rich retelling of a woman’s life as a slave in the Cape Colony during the 1800s”) and Zoë Wicomb’s 2006 *Playing in the Light*, a novel I discuss in Chapter 4, as examples of this “post-transitional” mode in South African literature (2). It is unclear to what extent these texts could be understood as “unfettered to the past” or how they might work to “render nugatory traditional markers like nationality, race or ethnicity,” concerned as they are with the experiences of South African slavery and coloured identity.

render “nugatory” questions of race, power and the subject in contemporary South African literature works to abet the ways in which capital accumulation, subjection, and exploitation have been reorganized and are exercised in the country today.

My return to the TRC as the central infrastructure through which I theorize contemporary South African literature is, in part, an attempt to take up the overtly political questions of subject and state introduced by the TRC to ask how these categories have been imagined through literary forms set out and instrumentalized by the Commission at the threshold of the new South African national project. That the TRC was a flawed, compromised, and contested process is precisely what allows for the interrogation of that which has been made natural in discourses on post-apartheid literature. The TRC was also a venue in which the Commission itself and its role in establishing the new South African nation was challenged by those who participated in it. Through testimony, and the literature that came after it, we witness the ways in which the South African national project continues to be challenged and remade through both the literary imagination and political action. To this end, Shane Graham’s *South African Literature After the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss* (2009) provides an important conceptualization of the TRC’s function in establishing “new forms of literal and figurative ‘mapping’ of space, place, and memory” (1-2). Graham’s focus on the TRC as a *generative* structure, framed through both a spatial and affective mapping, is an especially crucial intervention in understanding the *longue durée* of the TRC, and the ways in which it continues to determine the kinds of expressions that are rendered legible and possible in contemporary South Africa. In keeping with Graham’s insistence on reading the TRC as “the opening chapter in the vast, ongoing process of transformation,” and as a means of making “possible the continual writing and rewriting,” of the South African national narrative, I also read TRC testimony in relation to traditional literary

forms as a means of articulating the ways in which the literary attempts to both represent and challenge the assumptions of the Commission (3). Reading TRC testimonies and literary texts in conversation demonstrates the ways in which a subaltern historiography, a counter history of the new South Africa, continues to be written from both within the domain of the state and outside of it. Placing testimony and literature in close proximity is not an attempt to instrumentalize testimony as metaphor; rather it is a recognition of the terrain they share, a terrain in which language, storytelling, and historiography become the material through which the subject is both constructed and deconstructed.⁸

In a similar vein, Mark Sanders' 2007 *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission*, notes that "the dominant tendency among scholars interpreting Truth Commission testimony has been to point out the inadequacy of the Commission's procedures in allowing stories to be told, or to its facilitating only certain kinds of stories" (7). Sanders considers instead the ways in which stories are shaped by their telling before the law, and the ambiguity inherent in this telling as law is "never simply law, but is constantly doubled and inhabited by its others" (8-9). This doubling is one the TRC performed as it "generalized responsibility across the body politic by making itself a proxy for the perpetrator" (9). The Commission's attempt to both take on the sins of the past and institute new forms of subjectivity is essential to understanding its ambiguous operations, and the ways in which it established patterns and modes of encountering the national subject in the years since its end. This ambiguity has also meant that the norms and procedures of the TRC have not been adopted uncritically. As I demonstrate in my engagement with testimony, both victims and perpetrators of violence reveal

⁸As I discuss in Chapter 4, Antjie Krog's treatment of TRC testimony as *poetry* in *Country of My Skull*, in addition to the reach of that text, has had profound consequences on how "truth" has been understood in relation to the Commission.

the ambiguities, the limits, and the compromises of the TRC and its broader functions in the South African imagination. In this sense, I argue, both testimony and literature operate in similar ways, shaped as they are by the ideological and political demands of the nation and TRC; they also operate similarly as they mimic and undermine the underlying ideological and narrative assumptions of the Commission. As Sanders points out, this ambiguity demands an “ethics of reading,” where “reading—or listening—practices at the [C]ommission’s hearings show how reading and listening involve a basic disappropriation: the parties involved are put out, put out of themselves, the identity of each conditioned by a response to, and for, the other” (16). Sanders’s notion of this ambiguous disappropriation invites us to ask how literature might challenge the state’s processes of subject-making, as well. Central to my argument is the ongoing tension between attempts by the state and capital to appropriate the imaginative possibilities of the nation, while also disappropriating those unable to fit within those possibilities, suppressing the ability to imagine different forms of subjectivity and citizenship. This is a tension contested in the texts I consider in this dissertation, as each claims its own imaginative possibilities for thinking through the South African nation.

Running through my argument is a concern with the conditions of exclusion that define the nation and postcolonial capitalism. I add to recent work that asks how South African literature has accounted for these exclusions, even as the state obscures them. Gabeba Baderoon’s 2018 article “Surplus, Excess, Dirt: Slavery and the Production of Disposability in South Africa,” for example, asks how the idea of “‘natural disposability’ has been generated through the category of surplus, excess and waste beings, whose freedom of movement and labour were severely constrained, and whose exposure to violence was viewed as normal, necessary and even beneficial, a legacy which continues into the present” (258). I share with

Baderoon an interest in how the “category of ‘disposable populations’ functions in South Africa, and how such disposability is masked by distributed and therefore normalised forms of violence” (263-264). Whereas her focus is on metaphors of dirt, I attempt to trace this disposability through a focus on the TRC and its afterlives. Jennifer Wenzel, similarly, draws on a genealogy of waste and surplus in “We Have Been Thrown Away”: Surplus People, Projects and the Logics of Waste” (2018). She argues that South Africa has been posited as “a paradigmatic site where notions of human surplus have a long history and have established their own genres and cultural forms” (185). Rendering populations as surplus is a material and imaginative process, Wenzel writes, but also a process of “un-imagining,” which is to say making the surplus subject “unthinkable and beyond the limits of recognition or understanding” (186). The TRC’s role in the creation of a new national narrative, an imaginative infrastructure, demands a consideration too of what and who is un-imagined, and by whom. Setting this process within the functions and demands of postcolonial capital accumulation, I argue, reveals the way in which the TRC established the parameters for the normative subject, while excluding the surplus populations that must be managed and policed by the state until such a time as is required.

This, too, is a project that challenges attempts at establishing a normative historiography and temporality of the new South Africa. I argue that South African literary criticism needs to attend to the ways in which authors articulate and undermine the notions of progressive, linear time that underpins the national project. While much of South African literary criticism has fixated on “post” designations,⁹ Ashraf Jamal’s “Bullet Through the Church: South African

⁹Post-apartheid literature has been supplemented by Michael Chapman’s “post post-apartheid,” (“Introduction: Conjectures on South African Literature,” 2009) the “post-transitional” offered by Frenkel and MacKenzie, and Aghogho Akompe’s “post-TRC” (“Towards a Reconceptualization of ‘(Post)Transitional’ South African Cultural Expression, 2016). These have all been formulations that only serve to locate the temporal within the domain of the nation-state and thus confining South African literature to a limited function within a statist reading.

Literature in English and the Future-Anterior” (2010) argues that the ideas of a struggle literature and a post-apartheid literature are “hallucinatory projections... overdetermined, teleological,” categories that work to diminish “our ability to grasp that which is immanent, hybrid” (11). Jamal borrows the idea of the future anterior (the *will-have-been*) as a means of bypassing “conventional categories such as struggle literature and post-apartheid literature,” in order to “generate a more lateral and untimely schema... to think of an avant-garde as an impulse that is *always already* present” (13). Although I do not share Jamal’s interest in the affective dimensions of this reading, I recognize in his notion of temporality both the inescapable material history with which South African literature must contend and the unique role of literature in imagining a different present; those different presents are indeed immanent, always already contained within an inescapable national history. Andrew van der Vlies’s 2017 *Present Imperfect: Contemporary South African Writing* follows Jamal’s argument by turning to queer theorizations of temporality and affect to consider the disappointments of the present in South African literature and its temporal impasses. While an affect of disappointment restates its own teleology of the nation, van der Vlies’s reading of David Scott’s and Walter Benjamin’s conceptions of history are especially productive, and he offers a postcolonial and post-revolutionary temporality that invites the imagination of a different literary present. This works alongside a reading offered in Michael Titlestad’s 2017 article “Contesting Teleology as Literary Interpretation,” which troubles a genealogy of South African history and literary representation through a negotiation of both theological and secular concepts of time in South African literature. My return to the TRC is in part an attempt to recognize the concentration of potential temporalities, the potential imagined pasts, presents, and futures, that the Commission allowed

for. It is an attempt, too, to recognize the ways in which literature in South Africa has continued to test those potentials in the decades since the Commission's end.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Infrastructure of the Contemporary

The South African TRC was established by The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995. It held public hearings between 1996 and 1998, and officially ended in 2003. During the course of its existence, it received 21 296 statements from victims of political violence between 1960 and 1994; these revealed 36 935 gross violations of human rights (*Final Report Volume 3 3*). These hearings formed the core of the TRC's stated mission, which was set out in the Act that created it; the TRC was to "provide for the investigation and the establishment of as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights committed during the period from 1 March 1960 to the cut-off date" (1).¹⁰ It would, the Act continued, also be responsible for "the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective committed in the course of the conflicts of the past during the said period," and afford "victims an opportunity to relate the violations they suffered" (1). The final tally provided by the Department of Justice lists 7112 applications for amnesty, with 849 granted, 5392 refused, and the remainder withdrawn or incomplete ("Amnesty Hearings & Decisions"). The TRC published its findings in seven volumes between 1998 and 2003, detailing its own establishment, the historical context in

¹⁰Eventually established as 10 May 1994, the date of Nelson Mandela's inauguration as the first democratically elected leader of South Africa.

which it intervened, its findings and recommendations, and a list of names of victims it identified.

The South African TRC formed part of the second generation of truth commissions on the international stage. The first generation,¹¹ as explained in Onur Bakiner's *Truth Commissions: Memory, Power, and Legitimacy* (2016), largely centred on investigations into military dictatorships and were established within a year of their respective ends. The second generation of commissions were established between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s; this generation included the South African TRC.¹² These addressed "civil war and internal armed conflict between the government forces and insurgent groups" (35). These were established either by United Nations peace agreements or by newly established democratic regimes, as was the case in South Africa. The third generation of truth commissions were formed by "consolidated" democracies (37).¹³ It was the South African TRC, Bakiner writes, that shifted global attention around truth commissions, and with that "irruption of interest... the institutional form could be transported across geographies" (36). South Africa's was the first truth commission to have hearings open to public audiences and broadcast on television and radio, which Catherine M. Cole writes in *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (2010), made it unique on the world stage at the time (xii). The TRC "was held in front of two sorts of audiences: the crowds that assembled in the town halls, churches and public venues throughout the country where the public hearings were held over roughly two years from 1996 to 1998 and the spectators and listeners who tuned in via television and radio... For many

¹¹Countries that held first-generation commissions: Argentina, Uganda (in 1986), Nepal, Chile, and Chad. Incomplete commissions were attempted in Uganda (1974), Bolivia and Zimbabwe.

¹²This second generation also included El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Haiti, Guatemala, Nigeria, Peru, Timor-Leste, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

¹³The third generation saw commissions in Uruguay, South Korea, Panama, Grenada, Ghana, Chile, Paraguay, Ecuador, Mauritius, the Solomon Islands, Brazil, and Canada.

South Africans, these public hearings *were* the commission,” Cole explains (xii). The images and sounds of the TRC—of harrowing testimonies of loss and grief, of weeping commissioners and audience members, of defiant apartheid agents—were broadcast around the world and played a significant role in the transformation of the South African TRC into a global, internationally reproduceable, spectacle. François du Bois and Antje du Bois-Pedain suggest in *Justice and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2008) that it was the South African TRC’s focus on *reconciliation* that set it apart from older truth commissions, making it “worthy of emulation in transitional circumstances,” and that reconciliation “enjoys wide and perhaps growing currency in discussions of the appropriate response to historical injustice. For these reasons, South Africa’s experience offers something akin to a testing ground for an idea that is of global significance” (291). I argue that more crucial to understanding the ongoing influence of the TRC and its significance for reading South African literature, culture and society is the question of its structural, and indeed infrastructural, role in processes of subjection, nation-making, and capital accumulation.

My characterization of the Commission builds on critiques from various perspectives. Richard A. Wilson, for one, casts the TRC as a body that lent legitimacy to the establishment of the new South African state in *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (2001). Truth commissions, he writes, represent “one of the main ways in which a bureaucratic elite seeks to manufacture legitimacy for state institutions, and especially the legal system” (19). They function in accordance with Benedict Anderson’s concept of the “imagined community” in which the modern nation is built through establishing “a shared national past [that] is simultaneously the basis of the assertion of a shared national future” (Wilson 14). As a means of granting legitimacy to new regimes, the role of truth

commissions within transitional states is deliberately ambiguous, Wilson writes. Truth commissions are “liminal” institutions, existing between state apparatuses, the legal system, religious institutions, and the public. The TRC was created and backed by constitutional and parliamentary power, but not directly under the supervision of parliament, for example. It is this liminality that allows for “the core moral values of society,” to be “restated and internalized,” by participants (19). As Dina al-Kassim writes in 2008’s “Archiving Resistance: Women’s Testimony at the Threshold of the State,” “South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission has become the paradigmatic instance of a state mechanism capable of inducing the change from nationalist to politico-social consciousness” (167). I build on this analysis of the Commission by asking what values, forms of legitimacy, and conceptions of the subject have been embedded in this politico-social consciousness. How has the TRC worked to shape the nation as it has attempted to transform itself and its subjects, and to what end? How might South African literature both participate in and challenge the transformational ambitions of the TRC?

The TRC self-consciously performed its role as an essential component in the nation-building effort; this was often presented through the metaphors of a national infrastructure, metaphors deployed consistently in legislation and in the Commission’s reports. According to the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, the TRC was designed to establish, along with the interim South African Constitution of 1993, “a *historic bridge* between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex” (2, italics my own). Minister of Justice Dullah Omar introduced the Act as a “*pathway, a stepping stone*” towards the TRC, which would eventually lead to “the *reconstruction* of society,” as it provided “that secure

foundation” envisioned by the Constitution (*Final Report Volume 1* 48, italics my own). The first volume of the *Final Report* produced by the Commission furthers the idea that it was “conceived as part of the *bridge-building* process designed to help lead the nation away from a deeply divided past to a future founded on the recognition of human rights and democracy,” and it continues to describe the TRC as operating within “the context of a number of other *instruments* aimed at the promotion of democracy” (*Final Report Volume 1* 48, italics my own). The TRC, the Land Claims Court, the Constitutional Court and the Human Rights, Gender and Youth Commissions were understood as “institutional ‘*tools*’ in the transformation of South African society” (*Final Report Volume 1* 48, italics my own). These mixed metaphors of construction (a bridge, a pathway, a stepping stone, an instrument, a tool) were deployed to facilitate a specific kind of movement through history; they positioned the TRC as infrastructural in the sense that it was designed to facilitate and disseminate specific ideas, narratives, and discourses at the threshold of the democratic, liberal South African nation-state. It is infrastructural in the sense that, while it is no longer active, the Commission continues to shape and direct ideas of narrative, the subject, and the nation that have come in its wake, allowing for certain kinds of emergences, while making others impossible, unfeasible, or unnecessary, as the construction of a road network makes some routes of travel possible, while making others unthinkable.

Understanding the TRC as operating infrastructurally through South African literature asks for a consideration of the relationship between state power, social reality, and literary representation. Brian Larkin offers in 2013’s “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure,” the notion that infrastructures are often deployed as a means of establishing the state’s own representation of a social and political reality, after which the “state proffers these representations to its citizens and asks them to take those representations as social facts” (334-5).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the disjuncture between the infrastructure of the state—through discourses of healing, forgiveness and unity offered and performed by the TRC—and the social facts of the nation are in ever-increasing contradiction, now often inhabiting entirely separate material and discursive fields.

Yet these disjunctures produce their own social, political, and creative responses. As AbdouMalik Simone demonstrates in the 2004 article “People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg,” the intersections, negotiations, improvisations, and inventions of those who live in inner-city Johannesburg—often used as a byword for decay, abandonment, and chaos—now form the very basis of the inner-city itself. Masixole Feni’s image strikes me as emblematic of this disjuncture, between that which is *intended* and that which is *lived*. We are allowed to witness in his photograph the array of historical, political, economic, and social influences that make the image possible, the ways in which an infrastructure of dispossession has been established, allowed to decay, reimagined, remade, and resisted. The remnant of a wall once painted white visible in the photograph, reduced now to a crumbling pile of bricks, offers a glimpse at the remains of District Six. The policeman, his back to the camera watching over the couple at the centre of the frame, embodies the processes of securitization and privatization that dominates South Africa’s cities. The couple themselves, seemingly recently awoken: their presence, the presence of a home, amidst this historic ruin has produced an infrastructure of its own—plastic tarps, repurposed buckets, hanging clothing on a metal pole, all constructed both *because* and *in spite of* the dense history signified by Feni’s image. The photograph brings to our attention the palimpsestic nature of infrastructure: history repeats itself on this patch of land that was cleared decades ago for a project that never came to fruition, space and time are compressed in this representation, a facsimile of a home is created where a formal, brick-and-mortar building

once stood. The concrete foundation the policeman stands on, the low brick walls, the rubble—it all gestures to a structure of South African life no longer legally enforced, and yet that past continues to provide the basis for life for so many in South Africa at this moment in history.

What gives rise to the possibility of this scene? Is the image evidence of crisis, or evidence of the normal state of things? Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman speak to the crisis of the contemporary African subject: the crisis that produces subjectivity, the crisis that signifies the moment of its production, in their article “Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis.” They name this moment, this crisis, a

regime of subjectivity.... A shared ensemble of imaginary configurations of ‘everyday life,’ imaginaries which have a material basis; and system of intelligibility to which people refer in order to construct a more or less clear idea of the causes of phenomena and their effects, to determine the domain of what is possible and feasible, as well as the logics of efficacious action. More generally, a regime of subjectivity is an ensemble of ways of living, representing, and experiencing contemporaneousness while, at the same time, inscribing this experience in the mentality, understanding and language of a historical time.
(324)

The relationship of historical national time, the *material basis* that Mbembe and Roitman identify,¹⁴ and the imaginaries they produce is crucial to my conception of the TRC’s ongoing

¹⁴The “acute economic depression, the chain of upheavals and tribulations, instabilities, fluctuations and ruptures of all sorts (wars, genocide, large-scale movements of populations, sudden devaluations of currencies, natural catastrophes, brutal collapses of prices, breaches in provisioning, diverse forms of exaction, coercion and constraint)” (324). I would contribute to this list, the end of apartheid in South Africa and the formation of a liberal, non-racial democracy.

role in the South African national project. The question of what has constituted South Africa's own regime of subjectivity, the domain of what is possible and feasible in the years since the end of apartheid, is also a question of what has been built to make possible production, reproduction, and growth, and what, simultaneously, has been made impossible, unfeasible, and unrepresentable.¹⁵ In his 2013 text *(Post) Apartheid Conditions*, Derek Hook notes that the outbreak of horrific xenophobic attacks in 2008 and the 2012 Marikana massacre which took place in the ostensibly new South Africa, seemed not only out of place but also “*out of time*,” evidence of a reversion to apartheid histories of violence but also “along the lines of *anticipation*, as a harbinger, a foreshadowing that even more disruptive forms of social and political unrest may loom on the horizon” (1-2, italics in the original). I share this concern with the “irrational patterns of history—or indeed, of historical *causality*,” that Hook identifies in these moments of spectacular violence in post-apartheid South Africa, but they are also apparent in the quotidian forms of violence that continuously operate beneath the surface of the nation, along with the insistence that these events “were not just reminiscent of the brutalities of apartheid, but represented instead a far more complex continuation of its historical legacy” (2). This complex and contradictory experience of historical national time, its repetitions and its ruptures, animates the third chapter of this dissertation, but it also informs my reading of the TRC more broadly as an infrastructural intervention in the “irrational patterns of history.” While the TRC is not a direct causal force in contemporary South Africa, it continues to provide a means of understanding what patterns of history are codified through the contemporary South African

¹⁵This is not dissimilar to the idea of “capitalist realism” developed by Mark Fisher, in which the logics and operations of late-stage capitalism condition and dominate the ability to imagine forms of life beyond those offered by capitalism itself.

state, and the operations of historical causality as they play out in South African literature, culture, and society more broadly.

Writing in the context of North American settler-colonialism, Deborah Cowan argues in “Infrastructures of Empire and Resistance” that while infrastructure has operated as means of securitization, control, and dispossession, it can also be the basis for the transformation of these structures as we currently know them (“Infrastructures of Empire and Resistance”). The creation of alternative infrastructures, such as those social systems Simone identified operating in downtown Johannesburg, the historical example Cowan offers of the Underground Railroad and the improvised cities formed at Standing Rock, demonstrate the possibilities for imagining and creating new, critical infrastructures in opposition to those used to dominate and subjugate marginalized subjects. Similarly, Bruce Robbins in his 2007 article “The Smell of Infrastructure: Notes Towards an Archive,” writes that we “need to make infrastructure visible as a guide to the struggles of the present” (32). My reading of the TRC in this dissertation attempts to make visible that which produces the present and argues for the necessity of examining the infrastructures of South Africa’s past as a means of making possible different futures. As I argue in the first chapter of this dissertation, the demands of student activists in the #FeesMustFall protests that brought South African universities to a standstill in 2015 and 2016 were often demands that reimagined the state’s role in the infrastructures of education and in the creation of young South African subjects. My second chapter builds on this idea by engaging with the genre of the bildungsroman as an infrastructure that allows for the emergence of specific kinds of subjects amenable to the national project. Core tenets of the genre, I argue, were adopted by the Commission in its subject-making process, while the TRC continues to inform expectations for the post-apartheid coming-of-age narrative and the young subject. Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate

how the TRC and contemporary South African literature make competing claims over concepts of temporality and truth, respectively. In these chapters I ask how it is that time and the demand for the truth-telling subject have come to be understood and experienced in the post-apartheid nation through the definitions offered by TRC. As the Commission attempted to corral the heterogeneity inherent in postcolonial experiences of temporality and the truth-telling subject, I turn to a range of texts that I argue work to puncture the claims of the Commission and that gesture toward alternative infrastructures through which we might glimpse the new South Africa.

Postcolonial Capitalism and the Outside of the Nation

Neoliberalism and the Post-Apartheid State

Much of the criticism of the post-apartheid state, particularly in relation to wealth inequality and a lack of redistribution, has been articulated around the ANC's turn to neoliberalism as its preeminent organizing principle. This was a shift in the 1990s that brought South Africa into line with the dominant global form of capitalism at the end of the Cold War. Characterized by the loosening of trade restrictions, a severe reduction in welfare spending, the privatization of state resources and services, and a drive in financialization, neoliberalism is marked most broadly by a withering away of the state and the public sphere. The ANC's neoliberal turn after the end of apartheid has been the subject of generative and important critique from South African academics, activists, trade unions, and NGOs. Patrick Bond's *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (2000) traces, tellingly, the transformation of the ANC's mission from a radical anti-apartheid organization to business-friendly ruling party in the matter of a few years. Nelson Mandela's insistence, soon after his release from prison in 1990, that the

ANC remained committed to its long-held policy aims of nationalizing mines, banks, and monopoly industries, was entirely abandoned within a few years.

By 1996 the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) policy, which cemented neoliberal orthodoxy, would come to define the course of South Africa in the democratic era. Vishwas Satgar looks to Antonio Gramsci's notion of the "passive revolution" to describe this shift from mass anti-apartheid movements to the "elitist, technocratic and top-down politics," that supplanted them after 1994 in 2008's "Neoliberalized South Africa: Labour and the Roots of Passive Revolution" (39). In the South African case this passive revolution "points to a form of politics in which mass initiative is contained from above such that struggle around the post-apartheid state form, the globalization of a re-racializing import-substitution model, the unraveling of [ANC] hegemonic leadership and the rise of a transnational fraction of South Africa's ruling class, contributed to a limited process of historical change" (40-41). Satgar writes that the "prestige of the ANC led liberation movement, the 'Mandela factor' and the disingenuous marrying of transnational neoliberalism with national liberation discourse has generally obscured attempts to understand what happened in post-apartheid South Africa" (40). The seeds of this neoliberal turn were however, as Bond notes, established *before* the ANC came to power, and though no formal Structural Adjustment Policies were instituted by the Bretton Woods organizations, this was largely due to the fact that the ANC would adopt its own version of the Washington Consensus of its own volition. Despite, and perhaps because, of the radical influences on the ANC during the struggle against apartheid, leaders in the party like Thabo Mbeki, Alex Erwin and Trevor Manuel "turned occasionally to a kind of leftist rhetoric in defending their 'engagements' with the [World] Bank," but were otherwise committed to the path preferred by the Bank (Bond 156). As David Harvey writes in *The New Imperialism*, South

Africa would become emblematic of the new global neoliberal order as “[t]he World Bank treated post-apartheid South Africa as a showcase for the greater efficiencies that could be achieved through privatization and liberalization of the market” (159).

The formation of the TRC fits neatly within this adoption of a neoliberal consensus. Writing in his account of the TRC in *A Country Unmasked* (2000), Alex Boraine, the primary architect and Deputy Chairperson of the TRC, tells of visiting three former Eastern Bloc nations in 1992, none of which had held truth commissions, as he sought models of the “transition from totalitarianism to democracy,” that South African could emulate (2000: 14).¹⁶ The incorporation of these states into the global capitalist system at the “end of history” suggests the path envisioned for South Africa’s own transition to democracy, and also a confirmation of the economic and ideological possibilities available to the post-apartheid state. Josh Bowsher’s 2020 article “The South African TRC as Neoliberal Reconciliation: Victim Subjectivities and the Synchronization of Affects,” contextualizes South Africa’s neoliberal turn around the TRC. The Commission, he writes, operated not only as a means of avoiding descent into civil war or widescale violent retribution but “also as a way of addressing the necessities of nation-building and broader questions of justice at a time when socio-economic redistribution was off the agenda” (50). Bowsher casts the TRC as “a constellation of practices central to legitimizing and thus sustaining the trajectory of post-apartheid neoliberalism,” through processes of “de-collectivization” and the emphasis on “the image of the market and the subject as an individualized entrepreneur” (42-43). This is a productive framing of the South African TRC, particularly in the immediate historical context that surrounded it. Yet Bowsher’s claim that the

¹⁶According to Boraine’s account, it was only in 1995 with a visit to Guatemala that he and the members of the Institute of Democratic Alternatives for South Africa (IDASA) visited a country that had a truth commission, though IDASA hosted a conference in 1994 that included representatives from Chile, Argentina and El Salvador, countries that had instituted truth commissions (2000: 17)

post-apartheid transition “totally reconfigured South Africa’s economic model, from racialized capitalism, in which ‘white’ and ‘black’ were operative categories of accumulation and exploitation,” in favour of an atomized, non-racial neoliberal project also serves to reinscribe the façade of non-racialism in the discourses of the new South Africa (55). To what extent can we say that a centuries-long history of racial capitalism has been supplanted or overwritten by this contemporary neoliberal order? A cursory examination of present day South African political crises reveals the simple fact that capital accumulation, and its corollary, dispossession, remains structured through the colonial logics of race. Post-TRC national crises, such as the Marikana massacre, ongoing service delivery failures, university shutdowns, and the recent coronavirus pandemic are all fundamentally *racialized* forms of state violence, in spite of the individualizing and non-racial assumptions of neoliberalism. The subject-making processes of the TRC, while aligned with the logics of neoliberalism, were not enacted evenly, or implemented without resistance; the relationship between the infrastructures, tools, and techniques of the state, and the lives of South African subjects is still one cast through racialized notions of delinquency and criminality. This neoliberal turn does not account for the history of racial capitalism in South Africa, nor the growth of new techniques of governmentality in the post-apartheid state that I argue are central to a reading of South African literature.

The Paradoxes of Non-Racialism and Racial Capitalism¹⁷

While non-racialism is enshrined as a founding provision in the South African Constitution,¹⁸ racial capitalism remains the basis for capital accumulation and techniques of governing. The tension between the racial structure of capitalism in South Africa and the ideal of a non-racial nation was subject to critique long before the advent of democracy; the swift neoliberalization of the South African state after the end of apartheid relied on a non-racialism that effectively masked the historic relationship of race to capital in South Africa as part of the “passive revolution” steered by the ANC. The TRC’s own attempts to establish a national history of South African race and racism worked paradoxically, denouncing and confining racism to the past, while allowing for the structures of racial capitalism to be neatly folded into the discourses of the new South Africa.

The work of several Marxist and Black Consciousness academics and activists writing in the 1970s established in the South African context the deeply imbricated relationship of race and capital that by then had come to define the apartheid project. Common to the analysis of these theorists is an identification of industrial mining as the primary driver of racial capitalism, which reached its most intensely violent form in apartheid. Bernard Magubane, writing in 1979’s *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*, locates this development within the history

¹⁷A note on terminology. While the term “racial capitalism” is most often associated with the work of American political theorist Cedric Robinson and his 1983 opus *Black Marxism*, Robin D.G. Kelley writes in an online article “What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?” that Robinson encountered the phrase while on sabbatical in London through the work of South African intellectuals in exile to describe the apartheid system (Kelley). Arun Kundnani directly credits Martin Legassick and David Hemson with the first use of the term in their pamphlet *Foreign Investment and the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism in South Africa*, although he notes that Robinson’s key insight was to argue that South Africa was not an exception to the character of capitalism, but revealed its actual operation (“What is Racial Capitalism?”)

¹⁸Useful genealogies of the term are offered by Raymond Suttner in “Understanding Non-Racialism as an Emancipatory Concept in South Africa” (2012) and Nhlanhla Ndebele’s 2002 “The African National Congress and the Policy of Non-Racialism: A Study of the Membership Issue.” Suttner, however, repeats the restates the notion of race and class as distinct categories of analysis, which I argue against.

of settler colonialism, which “clearly illustrates the connection between the imperative of colonization—the desire to take land—and that of capitalism—the desire to exploit [B]lack labour” (8). This differentiated the form of settler colonialism in Southern Africa as fundamentally different to those forms in North America and Australia. The South African War,¹⁹ which was fought between Great Britain and the white settler Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Free State between 1899 and 1902 after gold and diamond discoveries, was “not intended to ‘clean the lands’ of the original inhabitants... Instead they gave the white settlers the best lands and a considerable measure of control over African labour” (10). This particular form of settler colonialism relied on an ability to draw on what Harold Wolpe called the “cheap labour-power,” of dispossessed Black subjects in his 1972 article “Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid.” While white settlers initially relied on the existence of pre-capitalist modes of production provided by Black labourers, the emergence of industrial modes of production after the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand threatened the continued existence of those pre-capitalist modes, and with them the loss of cheap Black labour. This potential labour crisis, Wolpe argues, is what made segregation and then apartheid necessary to provide “the specific mechanism for maintaining labour-power cheap through the elaboration of the entire system of domination and control,” that defined the apartheid regime (425).

While the apartheid regime was nakedly violent in its management and maintenance of this system of racialized “cheap labour-power,” a concurrent attempt to moderate and ameliorate the brutal oppression of apartheid was made by white liberal capitalists to allow racial

¹⁹Known also as the Second Boer War or the Anglo-Boer War, though those names have fallen out of official usage because they do not acknowledge the contributions of and effects on Black South Africans in the conflict. The use of the “South African” war, however, also obfuscates the centrality of settler colonialism in these wars. We see in this naming convention the way in which responsibility for historical violence is transformed into a *national* history of non-racialism and generalized responsibility.

exploitation to continue under friendlier auspices. We see in *Foreign Investment and the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism in South Africa*, an enormously influential 1976 pamphlet produced by Martin Legassick and David Hemson, a critique of these attempts to reform racial exploitation from within. The pamphlet takes particular aim at the idea that capitalism can provide the basis for ending racial discrimination, a position taken by Anglo American chairman Harry Oppenheimer and espoused by the Progressive Party he funded. Oppenheimer, according to *Foreign Investment* was the representative of the belief “that continued economic growth, continued industrialisation, fueled by foreign investment, would undermine relationships of racial prejudice and discrimination” (1). It is made clear by Legassick and Hemson that, contrary to this claim, foreign investment in the South African system of racial capitalism could only cement, rather than dislodge, racism. The specific historical moment in which they make this critique of Oppenheimer locates the TRC directly within this liberal conception of race and class in South Africa. Oppenheimer is made, in this argument, representative of “that prime personification of South African capitalism” (2). This is in reference to a May 1974 speech Oppenheimer gave in which he criticized the idea of wage increases for Black labourers floated by Parliament: “[s]urely there is something silly,” Oppenheimer argued “in discussing the level of wages entirely without reference to the historical background, to the level of productivity prevailing, to standards of education and skills, to the structure of the labour market. It is rather as though the problem of poverty could be solved simply by imposing a high minimum wage level” (2).²⁰ Legassick and Hemson note that real wages of Black workers had, in fact, fallen between 1911 and 1973, and make clear in their critique that capital could only offer cosmetic

²⁰These debates were likely in response to the Ovambo worker’s strike in 1971-2 and the Durban general strike in 1973. The Durban Strike would be central to the formation of the Black Consciousness movement, as well as the growth of trade unions in the fight against apartheid after the banning of the ANC and Pan African Congress in 1960.

changes to the structure of South Africa, and that capitalism “has been forced to reappraise and sophisticate the forms of ideological defence of its role in South Africa” (1). This Oppenheimer speech took place as Alex Boraine, future TRC Deputy Chairperson, ended his work as a labour consultant for Oppenheimer’s Anglo American (between 1972 and 1974) and began his career as a Progressive Party member of parliament (between 1974 and 1986). Both roles were undertaken at the personal insistence of Oppenheimer, according to Boraine’s autobiography *A Life in Transition* (2008). Boraine laments that during his period of work, Anglo American could do little to influence state policy about Black mining unions, but reforms were needed to enjoy what he called “industrial peace” (2008: 78). Boraine writes that among his “best achievements was changing the tenor of the chairman’s annual report, so as to include concrete proposals for change in labour relations” (2008: 75). Boraine’s work in this period fits neatly within the critique offered by Legassick and Hemson. They identify the belief that liberal reforms and the free market could put a “human face”²¹ on a fundamentally inhuman system, a position central to the promise of liberalism. As a result, while Harry Oppenheimer may have been “appalled at the conditions” of a mining canteen he visited with Boraine, he would still pressure parliament to reject the idea of mandated wage increases in 1974 (2008: 76). While Boraine was not the only actor in the establishment of the TRC, and we should be wary of a history that focuses on the actions of one particular individual, he looms in the background of the hugely influential critique offered by Legassick and Hemson. His close association with the “personification” of racial capitalism’s liberal face in South Africa locates the establishment of the TRC within the relationship of capitalism, race, and class but also in a history of attempts to smooth the public-facing edges of a deeply violent system of exploitation.

²¹In less delicate language, they write “capital will try to present its human face when under pressure, just as a baboon exposes its arse” (2).

The turn to a non-racial basis for the post-apartheid state, through the TRC and the Constitution, would continue this trajectory, allowing for the disavowal of race as a governing logic while leaving in place the structures of racial capitalism that define the nation. Neville Alexander predicted in a speech entitled “Nation and Ethnicity in South Africa,” delivered at a National Forum²² meeting in 1983, the ways in which a non-racial turn in anti-apartheid South African discourse would be used to maintain a deeply racialized social and economic system. Alexander elucidates the differences between a multi-racial, a non-racial, and an anti-racist vision for a future South Africa: to understand South Africa as multi-racial, he argues, reinstates the logic of apartheid and its adherence to the idea of South Africa’s “four races”: African, European, Coloured, Indian (1985: 53). The use of the term “non-racial” only further reinforces this, he writes. He argues that “[i]t has become fashionable to intone the words a ‘non-racial democratic South Africa’ as a kind of open sesame that permits one to enter into the hallowed portals of the *progressive* ‘democratic movement,’” but it is only through a policy of anti-racism, one that recognizes the functions of race in systems of oppression, that the liberation movement might achieve its goals (1985: 53, italics in original).

Given the extensive academic debate on the history of racial capitalism in South Africa, the national turn to non-racialism is crucial to understanding both the continuations of racial capitalism and the transformations of subjection in post-apartheid South Africa. As part of its historiographic mission, its bridge-building programme, the TRC provided its own account of race in South African society. In TRC Chairperson Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s foreword to the first volume of the TRC’s *Final Report*, he contextualizes racism as a phenomenon *inherited* by

²²Formed in 1983, the National Forum comprised groups such as the Azanian People’s Organization (AZAPO) and the Azanian Students’ Movement (AZASM), who were committed to establishing the revolutionary future state of Azania. They opposed to the liberal-influenced aspects of the ANC and other anti-apartheid organizations, as well as those who participated in the Tri-Cameral Parliament at the time.

the apartheid regime. He writes that while apartheid and racism played a “defining role in the history of the period under review,” this was “not the same as saying that racism was introduced into South Africa by those who brought apartheid into being. Racism came to South Africa in 1652; it has been part of the warp and woof of South African society since then” (16). Tutu continues: it “was not the supporters of apartheid who gave this country the 1913 Land Act... [i]t was not the upholders of apartheid who introduced gross violations of human rights in this land” (16). On the introduction of “gross violations of human rights,” to South Africa, Tutu claims that that “happened when 20 000 women and children died in the concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War,” and that he hoped the TRC might inspire “some representative of the British/English community,” to confess to this wrong and ask for forgiveness, and that “it would be wonderful too if someone representing the Afrikaner community,” responded with forgiveness and offered to tell the story of Afrikaner suffering (16). Rather than identifying the South African War as a settler colonial land-grab that led to the system of racial subjection that the TRC now had to address, it was transformed in Tutu’s telling into a matter of confession and forgiveness between two groups of white settlers through the telling of stories, as “the telling has been an important part of the process of healing” (16). This history of racism in South Africa goes on to reduce apartheid to a system which “merely saw the beginning of a refinement and intensifying of repression, injustice and exploitation” (16). Here we are provided a non-racial history of South African racism: racism was inherited by all South Africans, and thus it is shared equally among its subjects; in this account, the apartheid regime acted “merely” to refine and continue the work started by the Dutch East India Company so many centuries before. Here, history is made of individual actors who could confess and be forgiven, their roles confined to the past. By 1998 and through the TRC “[t]hose who brought apartheid into being,” “the

supporters of apartheid” and “the upholders of apartheid,” no longer remained. Those who brought apartheid into being were likely dead, and when apartheid had definitively ended a kind of amnesia took hold: somehow only the extreme fringes of white South Africa would admit to having supported apartheid, and suddenly the vast majority had been working tirelessly to see apartheid to its inevitable end. The conclusion to Tutu’s foreword makes the audience of this non-racial history of racism clear: it is directed at white leaders who have been reluctant “to urge their followers to respond to the remarkable generosity of spirit shown by the victims,” present at the TRC (17). Somehow both exonerating and chastising, Tutu’s history of racism in South Africa worked to mollify the fears of white citizens while it also scolded those insufficiently deferential to the establishment of a non-racial South African future.

Later in the *Final Report*, a fuller list of historical wrongdoing is offered, one that acknowledges the slave trade, colonial wars of dispossession, the multiple genocides enacted against indigenous peoples of South Africa and Namibia, and the crushed labour strikes that took place before the purview of the TRC and before the system of apartheid was established. Once again, this is prefaced with the statement that, given this long history, “it is evident that it was not the National Party government that introduced racially discriminatory practices to this part of the world. Nor is it likely that the National Party government was the first to perpetrate some or most of the types of gross violations of human rights recorded in this report” (25). This attempt made by both Desmond Tutu in his foreword, and the *Report* as a whole, to place the apartheid regime within a progression of centuries of colonial racism positions the non-racial basis of the new South Africa as a definitive historical break with the past, a reminder of the concurrent historiographic mission of the TRC.

The attempt to transform South Africa into a non-racial society made racism into an infrastructural logic left in place but no longer named. As Greg Ruiters writes in his 2020 article “Non-Racialism: The New Form of Racial Inequality in a Neo-Apartheid South Africa,” racial inequality is “inscribed in the non-racial form of the state” (1). South Africa’s new legal order “centred on the *abstract* legal person, owner of property and sovereign buyer and seller that would seek to ‘extinguish’ the memory of exploited social groups, primitive accumulation and concrete collective experience of oppression” (2). The non-racial, abstract citizen, Ruiters argues, was fetishized as a means of protecting the capitalist class, which in South Africa remains largely synonymous with whiteness, and as such “[n]on-racialism as appearance and the rule of ‘law’ became a ruling class mantra” (2). This shift to the veneer of non-racialism in relation to the expansion and reformulation of governmentality, criminalization, and privatization is central to my conception of contemporary South Africa. I argue in my first chapter that the attempt to create this non-racial, abstract citizen is reflected in a literature of melancholia in relation to the racialized spaces of contemporary South Africa, in which the infrastructures of apartheid are also sites of belonging that simultaneously work to exclude the young subject from a normative non-racial sociality.

Postcolonial Capitalism and Infrastructures of Governmentality

As the ideology of neoliberalism came to dominate the South African political, social, and economic realms, we have seen too the development of new forms of governmentality that worked to generate and manage subjects and populations in a democratic South Africa.

Discourses around freedom have been particularly celebrated in the post-1994 nation, particularly as those freedoms were enshrined in South Africa’s constitution, embodied by the

figurehead of Nelson Mandela, and applied to an entire generation of South Africans “born free” after the end of apartheid. In spite of this notion of *negative* freedom, the freedom from direct state coercion, South Africa is dependent on the reproduction of partial inclusion in (and, by extension, partial exclusion from) the national project. We see this form of partial inclusion in operation in the Masixole Feni image that opened this introduction: how are these subjects, now granted civil rights including the right to housing and free movement, still made surplus to the formal, legitimate realm of the country? Whereas the apartheid and colonial regimes of South Africa enforced a system of partial inclusion through crude racial categorization, land seizures, and the violent suppression of Black civil and human rights, techniques for identifying and managing marginal populations have been reoriented in the democratic era. Rather than relying only on force or coercion,²³ the process of population- and subject-management forms a core function of the contemporary postcolonial state.

I draw on Partha Chatterjee’s conception of postcolonial governmentality, which he develops in *The Politics of the Governed* (2004), to think through the marking and management of the formal and informal boundaries of the South African nation-state. Chatterjee differentiates the postcolonial *citizen* from the *population*: the former “inhabit the domain of theory,” while the latter inhabit “the domain of policy” (34). Whereas the citizen “carries the ethical connotation of participation in the sovereignty of the state, the concept of population makes available to government functionaries a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of their ‘policies’” (34). We see in post-apartheid South Africa the remarkable growth of strategies to secure legitimacy through an increase in forms of governmentality aimed at populations rather than only through the participation of

²³Which is not to say that force is only reluctantly used by the state, South African policing remains incredibly violent and highly militarized.

individual citizens in democratic processes; the TRC is emblematic of this form of governmentality. While “A Couple Evicted from a Public Space at the Famous Site that was District Six” is an incongruous image of the relationship of liberal state to free *citizen*, it is not an incongruous representation of the relationship of the governmental postcolonial state to a marginalized and managed *population*. We see in the case of post-apartheid South Africa the simultaneous creation of the individual and the management of surplus populations,²⁴ a system built on the legacies of segregation and racial capitalism that still dominate the country.

The figures at the centre of Feni’s frame have not been recast as free neoliberal subjects, or “individualized entrepreneurs,” to return to Bowsher’s claim. Those are descriptors that hold true in the formal domain of citizens but not in the governing of populations. What is increasingly evident is that some kinds of subjects are incorporated into the formal domain, and with it the full privileges of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism, while others are decidedly not. These populations are not simply cast out of the nation-state, but rather held in reserve²⁵ through the privatization of basic services and networks of grants, through shrinking employment and education opportunities, but also through calls for unity and collective identity on one hand, and the insistence on an autonomous, “free,” entrepreneurial citizen on the other. It is through the expansion of the neoliberal project *and* through new techniques of population management and governmentality that these populations are maintained in the constitutive “outside” of the formal realm of the nation. This outside is most prominently expressed through post-apartheid notions of criminalization, which Elizabeth Stanley notes, was evident in the

²⁴See, for example, Natasha Vally’s “Insecurity in South African Social Security: An Examination of Social Grant Deductions, Cancellations, and Waiting,” in which she notes that by 2012 more than 30 per cent of South Africa’s population receive direct social grants, while cash transfers from the state are an important form of income for many more (966). It is, Vally continues, state “assistance rather than workplace social insurance that occupies the terrain of the ‘social’ in South Africa” (966).

²⁵The language of the Bantustan re-emerges here, not coincidentally.

judicial weakness of the TRC. In a 2001 article “Evaluating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” Stanley writes that “[i]n practice, perpetrators of human rights violations [identified by the TRC] have received little worry from the judiciary. Given a determined focus on the ‘new criminals’ of South Africa, identified as the disaffected [B]lack youths whose lives have been dictated by conflict, responsibility for past state crime has been neutralised” (533). As the TRC employed performances of confession, storytelling, forgiveness and healing to a national and global audience, its focus was on what it determined the *political* crimes of the past. This designation is one that I return to in my final chapter, but I note here the TRC’s attempt to distinguish the idea of the political crime of the apartheid era from the ordinary crime of the new South Africa as one important method through which the new South Africa has attempted to draw a line in the history of the nation, with the political crimes dealt with as a matter of the *past*, while crime in the present is rendered non-ideological, a technical and judicial matter of policing and punishment.

These processes of delineating the formal from the informal, the political from the non-political, and the citizen from the population, explain how the criteria for inclusion in the nation-state (and the exclusion of those unable to participate in it) have been transformed by changes in modes of capital accumulation and the state’s techniques of subject management. Kalyan Sanyal identifies these processes as central to his theorization of “postcolonial capitalism” in *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-colonial Capitalism* from 2007. Drawing on David Harvey’s concept of accumulation by dispossession, Sanyal asks how it is that the necessary outside of capitalism—what Harvey calls capitalism’s “othering”—is managed and sustained by the postcolonial state (151).²⁶ I use this framing to look to the very

²⁶In keeping with capital’s recursive nature, Hannah Arendt writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that the ‘new’ form of imperialism that followed Europe’s economic crisis of the 1860s and 1870s was one of overproduction

edges of the formal nation-state, to the populations held tenuously at the threshold of what is acknowledged as a normative South Africa, and to consider the ways in which these edges of the nation constitute the South African nation-state itself. Sanyal's identification of the intersection of ongoing processes of primitive accumulation and new forms of governmentality challenges the notion of the South African nation-state as a political entity premised on the inclusion of all subjects as full citizens. Sanyal argues that, in the postcolony, the process of primitive accumulation is continuous, not confined to the pre-history of capital as Karl Marx had argued. In *Capital Vol. I*, Marx looks to 15th and 16th century England to trace the means by which the enclosure of common land used by the peasantry for farming and herding made subsistence labour impossible; this foundational moment in the capitalist mode of production led to "great masses of men ... suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and 'unattached' proletarians on the labour-market" (508). Not all of those torn from traditional forms of life could be absorbed by the nascent capitalist economy, and as such those subjects were "turned *en masse* into beggars, robbers, vagabonds... Legislation treated them as 'voluntary' criminals, and assumed that it depended on their own good will to go on working under the old conditions that no longer existed" (522). In traditional readings of *Capital*, this question of primitive accumulation is already decided: it is a historical artifact, the original sin that allowed for the development of capitalism itself. Sanyal, however, returns to this question of how subjects and populations are made available as free labourers to produce surplus value, but also, crucially, how others are perpetually excluded from even that process of being "hurled" onto the labour market in the postcolonial state. In conversation with Chatterjee, Sanyal insists

seeking new frontiers, and with it the 'scramble' for Africa in the late 19th century. Whereas the 19th century saw a constant search for new frontiers of dispossession through imperial expansion, the 21st century manages these frontiers through postcolonial governmentality.

on the fact that those traditional Marxist readings are unable to account for the processes of exclusion that structure the postcolonial state. “You cannot understand these excluded people with the concept of class,” Sanyal tells Chatterjee, “Marx’s idea of exploitation is irrelevant here: the excluded are not being exploited by capital. In fact that is precisely the problem” (2016: 107). What becomes of the subject unable to participate in the formal economy, unable to participate in the discourses of self-representation demanded by the TRC? How do materialist critiques contend with the postcolonial subject rendered entirely outside the usual spheres of analysis?

As Franco Barchiesi writes in *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa* (2011), the alliance of the ANC, South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions made wage labour and Black-led unions central to the anti-apartheid struggle in an approach that “ideally regarded industrialization and proletarianization both as midwives of apartheid and the causes of its ultimate downfall” (3). Black wage labour was central to the image of a free South Africa and, as Barchiesi argues, the idealised South African citizen. At the advent of the new democratic nation, it was formal work, “emancipated from the shame and violations of the past” that “could now contribute to democratic nation-building as the formerly oppressed rightfully reclaimed their land and an equitable share of the wealth they produce” (3). It is clear that this has not been the reality of South Africa after the end of apartheid; as of November 2021, the official unemployment rate in South Africa is 34.9%, but the rate is far higher when taking into account those who have simply been unable to enter into the formal workforce, and those who have given up trying entirely (“Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS): Q3 2021”). As Ivor Chipkin asks in 2003’s “‘Functional’ and ‘Dysfunctional’ Communities: The Making of National Citizens,” if formal work is a precondition for full citizenship in contemporary South Africa, “under what

conditions does a ‘citizen’ behave as a *citizen*?” (64, italics in the original). What are the consequences of this concept of the South African subject in our national literature? What social, ethical, and imaginative possibilities are shaped, curtailed, or generated through this conception of the citizen and subjection in post-apartheid literature? South Africa has seen an increasing focus on education, financialization, and entrepreneurship on one hand, and an increasingly violent criminalization of poverty on the other, in an attempt to manage its own continuous processes of primitive accumulation. These practices of partial exclusion—or what Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson call “differential *inclusion*” in 2013’s *Border as Method, Or the Multiplication of Labour*—constitute the South African nation-state itself (7, italics my own). These practices of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion inform my investigation of the structures that work to define the expectations and norms of the South African nation-state through what, and who, is rendered extraneous to it. It is the TRC, I argue, that remains essential to reading contemporary South African literature precisely because it articulates the criteria for belonging.

Dissertation Methodology and Structure

My dissertation begins with an exploration of what I consider the crisis of the young subject in contemporary South Africa, a manifestation of the TRC’s subject-making efforts. Chapter 1 considers the 2015-2016 student protests that brought South African universities to a standstill as a means of revealing the limitations and failures of the national project as imagined through the TRC. These university protests, I argue, have demanded a broader consideration of how the infrastructures of subject-making have reproduced racialized inequality most keenly felt by a generation of South Africans supposedly “born free.” I turn to two independent literary

publications, *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock* to investigate the ways in which a generation of young South African writers have responded to and represented the crisis of the national project made visible by university protests. I offer a reading of the work of three of these writers, Thabo Jijana, Pravasan Pillay, and Mishka Hoosen, none of whom have been the subject of formal academic scholarship as far as I am aware. Responding through multiple forms and from different parts of the country, these writers reveal the ways in which a new generation of South African writers are encountering and challenging the infrastructures that have been established to manage, define, and produce subjects and populations amenable to the South African national project. These writers explore the ways in which South Africa's formerly racially segregated communities—townships or former rural Bantustans, for example—produce their own forms of loss and mourning which cannot be accounted for within the post-TRC South African conception of the nation and the ongoing crises of accumulation that have rendered large swathes of South African youth surplus to it.

It is this crisis of youth that leads to my second chapter, which looks to the TRC directly in order to investigate the narrative construction of the young national subject. In this chapter I begin to draw directly on TRC testimony to frame my literary readings which allows for an investigation of what infrastructural norms have been instituted by the Commission, while asking how literature provides a means of both revealing and challenging these norms. I argue that the TRC adopted tenets of the bildungsroman within its formation, while simultaneously, the TRC's emphasis on non-racialism, self-construction, and reconciliation have been naturalized in normative examples of the genre. Drawing on a TRC hearing concerning youth in the building of the new nation, I ask how the Commission functions as part of a broader disciplinary effort to produce young subjects amenable to the national project. As it does so, I contend, it also

produces the surplus subjects and populations necessary for the functions of postcolonial capitalism. The bildungsroman is a genre that emerges directly from the development of the modern nation-state, and stages in miniature the ways in which the young protagonist must be disciplined into a productive citizen; as such, the proliferation of bildungsromane in post-apartheid South Africa coincides with the effort to instill a new national culture as brought into the public sphere by the TRC. I offer a reading of Nadia Davids's *An Imperfect Blessing* (2014) as an ideal post-apartheid bildungsroman. In this novel, the historical conflicts that separate one Cape Town family are resolved through the genre conventions of the bildungsroman, and as such the genre itself mirrors the resolution of long-standing political struggles through a focus on individual healing and reconciliation. On the other hand, I argue that K. Sello Duiker's novella *Thirteen Cents* (2000) functions as anti-bildungsroman, one that refuses the linear development of the subject and forces a confrontation with the production of the abject subject, demonstrating the ways in which the South African project must produce its own non-subjects, its surpluses and excesses at the margins of society.

Chapter 3 considers the TRC's attempt to build a "historic bridge," as described in the *Final Report*, as an entry into questions of temporality, the nation, and the subject. I begin this chapter by considering the multiple inquests into the death of Ahmed Timol, an anti-apartheid activist killed in detention by apartheid police in 1971. I argue that the TRC functioned as an attempt to institute a national time, a temporality that would encompass the citizens of a new nation. The TRC, in my reading, adopted a normative national temporality and in doing so cast the multiple, heterotemporal possibilities that structure material reality in South Africa as outside the new nation, a process that I argue should be challenged in a reading of contemporary South African literature. I turn to Imraan Coovadia's novel *Tales of the Metric System* (2014) and Ivan

Vladislavić's *Double Negative* (2010) as examples of two texts that disaggregate the idea of a national time articulated by the TRC. Both novels, I argue, challenge the idea of a linear, progressive notion of temporality, and as such reveal the many times that undergird the idea of the nation and of postcolonial capitalism itself. These are both novels, I contend, that mimic an idea of history progressing linear time, but that also attempt to undo and challenge that progression through the adoption of supposedly rational technologies of measurement and representation.

My final chapter investigates the relationship between parrhesia and the formation of the post-apartheid South African subject. As the act of speaking the truth before the nation was foundational to the operations of the TRC, the question of what kinds of subjects and what kinds of speech could be understood as *true* is crucial to establishing what constitutes a legible, coherent subject. In this effort I draw on the testimony of an *askari*—a Black undercover apartheid agent—who applied for amnesty for his role in the murder of student activists on behalf of the apartheid state. His testimony is particularly instructive in thinking through the limits of political speech within the strictures of both the TRC and the emerging order of the new South African nation-state. I then offer a reading of two novels by Zoë Wicomb, *David's Story* (2000) and *Playing in the Light* (2006). These novels offer a complex interrogation of coloured subjectivity and the complexities of presenting and representing the self in the wake of centuries of colonial domination and the forms of subjectivity brought into being through, and in spite of, South African constructions of race. As the TRC has made truth-telling essential to the establishment of the post-apartheid subject, both Wicomb novels challenge the way in which accounting for the self has been instrumentalized as a non-racial means of entering into the new South Africa. I end this chapter by bringing to bear these questions of parrhesia and self-

disclosure on the relationship of the TRC to Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998), a text that I argue is so closely aligned with the infrastructural project of the TRC that it has been taken up as a metonym for the Commission itself, which has allowed for the dissemination and naturalization of the logics of Commission and its ideological commitments.

By way of conclusion, I return to the present to consider what I see as the state's abandonment of the project of nation-building. The fires that continuously erupt into the nation's consciousness, I argue, are indicative of rot in critical forms of infrastructure—both literal and metaphorical—but also evidence of the pervasive violence that defines South Africa today. The state has, since the end of the TRC, ceased participating in the imaginative realm of South Africa, responding to each crisis by exercising its right to violence before retreating to await the next outbreak of anger and frustration. In this sense of stasis, the dissenting subject is seen, increasingly, as criminal, aberrant, a threat to social and political order. The work of critique, I contend, is in the recognition of these shifts in the relationship of state and subject, but also in asking how the aberrant subject, and new literary forms, may pose a challenge to the way in which South Africa continues to be imagined.

Chapter 1: Melancholia and the Crisis of the Young Subject in Contemporary

South African Literature

If the social is always past, in the sense that it is always formed, we have indeed to find other terms for the undeniable experience of the present.

Raymond Williams, “Structures of Feeling” (1977)

im in the veranda of wrong/i aint in the house.

Pravasan Pillay, “Passing of Renishaw Folklorist” (2009)

The crisis of the contemporary in South Africa comes into view through the young subject, the subject through whom the national project operates and through whom the nation is brought into being. This crisis was most keenly witnessed in the university protests of 2015-2016, generally and collectively referred to as the “Fallist” movement.²⁷ After years of student protest at Historically Black Institutions (HBIs) over fees and housing shortages, these concerns erupted in South Africa’s Historically White Institutions (HWIs) as well: the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Stellenbosch University and Rhodes University, most notably. The Fallist movement was led by a generation of young South Africans “born free” after the end of apartheid, born too late to experience the collective national catharsis engineered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), too late to live through the discourse of the “miraculous” transformation of the South African state. It was a movement that revealed the disjuncture between the nation’s promises of fairness, equality, and opportunity, and

²⁷The “MustFall” construction would eventually go on to inspire several other related protests. It began with #RhodesMustFall before taking on tuition increases with #FeesMustFall. These protests would eventually morph into #RhodesSoWhite, #OpenStellenbosch, #TransformWits, #KingGeorgeMustFall, #TheStatueMustFall and broader protest actions, such as #ANCMustFall (directed at the ruling party), #ZumaMustFall (directed at the former President Jacob Zuma) and #PatriarchyMustFall. Here I use the term “Fallism” to denote the calls to decolonize institutions and end fee-exclusions at South African universities in 2015 and 2016.

the realities of postcolonial capitalism and its structural production of excess, surplus subjects that make the national project possible.

As early as 2009 this generation of “born free” South Africans was cast as a “social time bomb,” a generation of disaffected young people who now posed a threat of “serious social disruption,” according to a *Mail & Guardian* piece by Prim Gower (“Idle Minds, Social Time Bomb”). The contradiction between the promise of freedom and the realities of dwindling employment and educational opportunities was not lost on those involved in the protests; Clinton Chauke, a student protestor and writer, described the disaffection that spurred Fallism: “[g]rowing up, we were told that we could be anything we wanted to be, but then we realised that we had to pay for it. The goalposts had been moved” (“When you put a price tag on anything, you invite inequality”). The university has become a central site through which to view the contradictions that have transformed the “born free” into a threat to the social order of South Africa. It represents a kind of bottleneck in the production of normative subjects, and Fallism demonstrated that even the most prestigious institutions were now failing to fulfill their mandate to produce the new citizens of the new South Africa. Citizenship is no longer determined or claimed through a specific racial or cultural identity, as it had been under apartheid—a racial or ethnic claim to citizenship has been rendered archaic and even antithetical to the non-racial, post-apartheid dispensation. Instead, the South African subject can only make a claim to full citizenship by entering into the productive economic sphere of the nation. As Franco Barchiesi writes in *Precarious Liberation* (2011), the citizen in post-apartheid South Africa has been reimagined as “an abstract individual primarily relying on economic initiative and the labour market as objective sources of socioeconomic emancipation” (63). With this concept of the subject, a degree from Wits or UCT ought to provide a guarantee of emancipation for the young

citizen. Yet the neoliberalization of the education system in South Africa, along with the broader abandonment of policies of redress and redistribution of wealth in the country, have made this an impossible path for many Black South Africans, in particular. Calls to end the practices of financial exclusion from the university, along with the decolonisation of curricula, place names, and other institutional practices, were not simply challenges to university policy; they were interventions in questions of citizenship and notions of freedom that underpin the nation. For those excluded from the university, those who account for the “social time bomb,” these institutions represented the most visible bureaucratic and financial barriers used to maintain the “exterior” of the nation, creating populations to be managed and maintained on the edges of the formal state and economy. To be granted access to the university on the basis of “merit”—a metric deeply embedded within a racially divided education system—only to be excluded or marginalized by that university represents a betrayal easily mapped onto the failures of the post-apartheid state. The Fallist movement identified not only the exclusionary practices of the university, but also the ways in which the university ought to operate as a means of transforming the young subject into the paradigmatic *national* citizen in a way that traditional engagements with the state—through voting, constitutional protections, recourse to the Bill of Rights, and so on—do not.

In this chapter I look to two independent, alternative literary magazines, *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock*, as a means of exploring this crisis of *youth* in South Africa. Drawing on distinct strands in South African literary history, they provide a way of tracing the multiple, complex literary responses to the infrastructures of subjection that frame the experiences of the “born free” generation. In my reading of three young South African writers published in these venues, Thabo Jijana, Pravasan Pillay, and Mishka Hoosen, I explore how their returns to historical

infrastructures of subjection—the township, the Bantustan, the sugarcane plantation, the asylum—allow for a broader investigation into the limited freedom now available to young South Africans, a limited freedom that was brought into spectacular view by the Fallist protests. In Jijana’s poetry we encounter the long histories of colonial enclosure that created the former Bantustans and that still shape the subjects of his texts. Enclosure haunts two of Jijana’s poems, “Banana Moon” (2015) and “Sprinkling ashes” (2015), which evoke a pre-colonial past to reflect on the experiences of loss and mourning in the present, experiences that cannot be reconciled within the contemporary national project. Pravasan Pillay’s “Sivakami” (2009) saga—told through fictional newspaper articles and correspondences—were published in *Chimurenga* and explore the legacy of indentured Indian labour in KwaZulu Natal. Through these metafictional texts, Pillay traces a history of exploitation and extraction that remains central to the experiences of the Indian subject in South Africa. In this series he also performs his own parody of literary appropriation, in which the folktales and histories that emerged from the plantation become the sites of new forms of exploitation. In later writing published in *Prufrock*, Pillay turns to a sombre realism to explore the domestic spaces of Chatsworth, an Indian township near Durban defined by the racial infrastructures South Africa’s past and the stasis of the present. His focus is on young women trapped within narrow domestic scenes, women who reveal the way in which these spaces provide comfort to the young subject while simultaneously marking them as archaic and unassimilable to the new South Africa. Mishka Hoosen’s debut novella *Call it a difficult night* (2015), meanwhile, has been positively reviewed in *Chimurenga* (which also co-hosted its launch in Cape Town), and Hoosen has published poetry in *Prufrock*. *Call it a difficult night* centres on the psychic crisis of a young protagonist caught within the disciplinary institutions of the university and the psychiatric hospital. Through his poem “Newclare Girl” (2017), published

in *Prufrock*, Hoosen offers a nostalgia for a coloured township on the outskirts of Johannesburg, a nostalgia complicated by loss and violence that escapes language. I bring these disparate voices together in this chapter as they all return to sites of a supposedly *past* unfreedom. Working parallel to each other, they demonstrate the ways in which those sites have been disavowed in the imagination of the new South Africa, and yet remain formative to those “born free.”

What emerges from my reading of these texts is neither rage, nor a sense of political urgency. Instead, the poetry and short fiction that animates this chapter is marked by ambivalence and a fundamental *melancholia*. Freud’s distinction in “Mourning and Melancholia” between mourning, part of the normal grieving process, and melancholia, the pathological reaction to the loss of the loved object, suffuses the work of these young writers. In the case of melancholia, Freud writes, the object of loss is “withdrawn from consciousness;” loss has occurred “but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost” (245). What precisely has been lost in the new South Africa? What has been lost in the townships and in the Bantustans that define the subject, but that are now associated with the nation’s past and not its future? What becomes of these infrastructures and spaces now that they no longer work to produce the normative, racialized young subject as envisioned by the liberal, democratic nation? The experiences of melancholia in response to the new South Africa are identified in Thomas Blom Hansen’s 2012 ethnographic study of Chatsworth, *Melancholia of Freedom*. Hansen recognizes the ways in which a marginalized community once found a collective sense of identity and meaning within the strictures of apartheid’s violent racism, but now experiences “[r]eal freedom and sovereignty within the new nation... as a partial loss” (294). In my argument, this sense of melancholia, and the ambivalent character of freedom in South Africa, extends beyond the single township of Hansen’s study. The disjuncture between the formative experiences of the young

subject and the demands made of them by the national project is one that remains, to adapt the language of the TRC, irreconcilable.

In the poems and short stories I analyze in this chapter, the subject is consistently positioned within the racialized infrastructures of the past, a positioning that gestures to the unfreedom inherent in those “born free.” The writers I bring together in this chapter offer an indirect response to Jacob Dlamini’s 2009 *Native Nostalgia*, in which he asks what it means for Black South Africans to look back fondly on life in the township under apartheid. Dlamini asks of the persistence of the township in the post-apartheid era: “[i]f we fought to make all of South Africa a home to all South Africans, where then do townships belong? Are they in a different country? Do townships not occupy the same space-time configuration as the rest of South Africa?” (163). Dlamini suggests that, for many Black South Africans, formerly white suburbs and institutions now represent the logical end point of a particular concept of South African modernity. In the texts I turn to in this chapter neither this notion of the past, nor the freedom and modernity on offer in the present, provide the young subject a means of securing entry into South Africa’s future. Though nostalgia might guide a return to those apartheid-era infrastructures, what is revealed in this return is rarely a source of solidarity or political creativity. The young subject in these texts remains in a fundamentally ambivalent relationship to those sites now rendered antiquated in South Africa’s national imagination. In this crisis of the young subject, the diagnosis offered by Antonio Gramsci, “[t]he old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms,”²⁸ must be reimagined: the new *has* been born, but the old refuses to die (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 276). It is

²⁸In the South African context, this was a diagnosis adopted mostly famously by Nadine Gordimer, who quoted Gramsci in the epigraph to 1981’s *July’s People* and also in a 1982 lecture, “Living in the Interregnum.”

through the literary intervention of these young writers that the “morbid symptoms” of the present, those that have led to the eruptions in the university, reveal themselves.

1.1: University Protests and the South African National Project

On March 9, 2015, Chumani Maxwele, a UCT student and activist, plastered the statue of Cecil John Rhodes that stood at the heart of UCT’s leafy Rondebosch campus with excrement collected from the impoverished, mostly Black, township of Khayelitsha, some twenty kilometers away. Maxwele’s visceral protest brought the crisis of service delivery in South Africa’s poorest communities to the centre of its most venerated educational institution. In doing so he transformed the university into a crucial site of contemporary political struggle. Initially focused on the colonial iconography and knowledge-production of UCT, the scope of the original protest expanded dramatically. By the end of that March, protests demanding the radical transformation of a number of universities across the country had begun, including demonstrations at Wits, the University of Stellenbosch, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and the University of the North West. By September, protests would include the University of KwaZulu Natal and centre around the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NFSAS), tuition fee increases, student housing, and financial exclusions. Several universities were shut down in response to protests in October 2015; marches on Parliament in Cape Town and the seat of the executive, the Union Buildings in Pretoria, were met with police brutality and multiple arrests.²⁹ The call to decolonize the university would eventually see protest action at Oriel College at Oxford University as well as Harvard Law School, among other venerated Western institutions. Eventually, several concessions were won, including a freeze on proposed

²⁹See Booyesen and Kuda Mandama’s “Annotated Timeline of the #FeesMustFall Revolt 2015-2016” in Booyesen’s *FeesMustFall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa* (2016).

tuition increases, partial debt cancellation for students facing financial hardship, changes to NSFAS payments, the end of most labour outsourcing at Wits, and a new language policy at the University of Stellenbosch, still seen as a bastion of Afrikaner conservatism by many Black students.

Maxwele's defacement of the Rhodes statue, writes Susan Booyesen in her introduction to *FeesMustFall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa* (2016), "metamorphosed into a movement for decolonisation (the Fallists' radical iteration of transformation, focusing for now primarily on nationalism, racism and associated exclusion) and grew in its hold on the student community and society" (3). Booyesen sets out the material concerns of the protestors in stark terms: "[p]overty, marginalisation, exclusion and thus possible disqualification from future life opportunities brought in a link to mobilisation on radical causes" (3). The idea of "possible disqualification from future life opportunities," is a telling summation of the promise of the university as an extension and representative of the nation-state, one that educates and disciplines subjects into a productive citizenry. The university is central to the biopolitical functions of the new South Africa, a nation that confers full, autonomous citizenship through neoliberal logics of employment and productivity.

In the post-apartheid era, the university has often functioned as a metonym for both South Africa's lofty ambitions and its failures of transformation. The entrenched whiteness and Eurocentric systems of knowledge-production of its elite universities have been readily naturalized within the discourses of academic "excellence" and neoliberal productivity.

Reflecting on the "Makgoba Affair"³⁰ in a 1997 article, former UCT Director of African Studies

³⁰The scandal concerned Professor Malegapuru William Makgoba's appointment as the first Black Vice Chancellor of Wits, and the subsequent backlash by 13 deans and academics who accused him of falsifying his credentials after rejecting his attempts to "Africanize" the university and its forms of knowledge production.

Mahmood Mamdani writes that “the university is one of the most racialised institutions in South African society—as racialised as big business. The only difference is that while big business is sensitive to this fact, universities are not. The university is proud of its exclusivity, considering it an inevitable consequence of the pursuit of excellence” (1997: 2). This proved to be as relevant a critique in 1997 as it would be in 2015. While businesses would be forced to adopt more racially inclusive ownership structures in the new South Africa,³¹ HWIs have largely held on to the “pursuit of excellence” as the basis for admission, in spite of the deeply-rooted racial inequalities within the entire education system in the country.³² As Fallism would highlight two decades after the Makgoba Affair, the twinned concepts of “future life opportunities” and the “pursuit of excellence” were still in conflict with the racialized infrastructure of the university. In many ways, the biopolitical functions of the university are imbricated with its status as an *aspirational* site for young South Africans. To be able to enter the grand, progressive narrative of the nation requires the deracialized young South African to enter into the university, and in doing so shed those racialized histories that have supposedly been confined to the nation’s past.

The critiques offered by the Fallist movement of the South African university and its relationship to the state is in stark contrast to many historical student-led movements in Europe and North America, which have traditionally sought to protect academic freedom from state encroachment. Fallism identified the state not as a *threat* to academic freedom, necessarily. Rather, the state was accused of having abandoned its responsibility to develop the young subject and by extension, the “new” nation envisioned during the struggle against apartheid. The movement emphasized too the ways in which the neoliberalization of the university has corroded

³¹These policies, admittedly, made only superficial changes to the racialized structure of the national economy.

³²This reflects, too, a movement toward the commodification of higher education on a global scale; competitive rankings are now a byword for “excellence” and as such ends in themselves.

its subject-making functions, which is particularly galling as the university remains among the few legitimate options available to many attempting to enter into the formal economy. As Ivor Baatjes writes in 2005's "Neoliberal Fatalism and the Corporatisation of Higher Education in South Africa," universities "like most other public spaces cannot escape the onslaught of neoliberal militancy that claims to provide the revolutionary solutions to social problems in a country still heavily stained with the deeply rooted legacies of apartheid" (1). The result of this onslaught, he continues is, that "public educational institutions are increasingly viewed as complete failures and are largely being abandoned and left to their own demise" (2). The corporatization of the university has, of course, only hastened this demise. Yet the university—partially abandoned by the state in order to be reimagined as a neoliberal centre of production—remains fixed in the national imagination as the site through which the young subject must pass in order to be recognized as a legitimate, legible citizen. The university is caught in a contradictory bind: it is abandoned and decaying, while it is also held aloft as the primary institution through which access to "future life opportunities" is granted.

The critiques made by the Fallist movement recognized too the ways in which the corporate, neoliberal university has supplanted non-state and anti-capitalist pedagogical infrastructures that had produced a generation of anti-apartheid revolutionary intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s, in particular. As Salim Vally writes in the 2007 article "From People's Education to Neo-Liberalism in South Africa," the adoption of a neoliberal framework in post-apartheid South Africa "ruptured the education principles and practices established by civil society in the 1970s and 1980s" (41). Those oppressed groups excluded from formal education by the apartheid regime had formed their own pedagogical networks, often drawing on the work of Brazilian theorist and educator Paulo Freire to establish grassroots educational systems known

as “People’s Education.” With the formal dismantling of the apartheid education system after 1994, and the formalization of non-racial education by the ANC government, Vally demonstrates the ways in which the logic of neoliberalism has suffused every sector of formal education in the country and delegitimized those informal infrastructures that ran parallel to the state in the final decades of apartheid. In the early 21st century, Vally writes, “[e]ducation is seen as an economic investment in which students and workers are value added products and a means by which the economy is to be improved” (49). This is a process which has transferred, Vally continues, “the responsibility for unemployment to individual deficiencies” (49). With formal employment and productivity tied so closely to legitimate citizenship in contemporary South Africa, these “individual deficiencies” have come to define a generation of young subjects who have turned to the university to provide them access to the national project, to the autonomy and freedoms promised by the new South Africa, only to be denied that possibility through either financial exclusion, or by an ever-narrowing path to gainful employment that even a university degree no longer guarantees. The neoliberal hollowing out of the university has not only made it a key site of political contestation, it has also revealed the ways in which the post-apartheid state has rendered community-led alternatives, often based in townships and factory floors, to this process of subject-making *unimaginable* in the contemporary demand for the rational, productive, and internationally competitive subject.

What becomes of the young subject within these shrinking paths of development, marked by these “individual deficiencies?” As the educational infrastructures of the past have been dismantled and remade through complementary discourses of human rights and universalism on one hand and neoliberalism on the other, the new South Africa has worked to delegitimize and disavow those infrastructures that had produced prior generations of South African subjects. The

young subject at the centre of the Fallist movement, with no recourse to those alternatives and shut out of the neoliberal university, has been forced to stake a claim to citizenship through the re-affirmation of the *biographical* form, writes Danai Mupotsa. She offers in her meditation on the Fallist protests at Wits in “A Question of Power,” a chapter from *What Politics? Youth and Political Engagement in Africa* (2018), that the biographical form:

refers to a linear narrative of a life, where an individual is born ‘free’ according to the legislated promise made at the end of apartheid. As the story goes, this young and ‘free’ South African comes to recognize the impossibility of this deal, often felt through experiences with poor education and poor delivery of infrastructure and services such as water, electricity and shelter. The image of a free South Africa, post the racial makeover of 1994 that so starkly shaped the promise this generation carried for the present/future, collapses due to these lived experiences. This biographical tone is also a narrative of becoming, or *bildungsroman*. (24)³³

This experience of *collapse* “offers us a splintered category of ‘I’ that both demands a politics of recognition while simultaneously refusing and disrupting the possibilities of that very wish,” Mupotsa adds (23). Mupotsa’s turn to Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* troubles this turn to the biographical form. In a similar vein, the writers I consider in this chapter look to marginalized writers from prior generations—Head, Wopko Jensma, St. John Page Yako, and Emma Hauck—as a means of challenging the contemporary expectations of the biographical form, a means of exploring that “splintered” subject “born free” and yet enmeshed within the

³³In the next chapter of my dissertation, I turn toward the *bildungsroman* itself to further engage with the contradictions of the young, splintered subject and the post-apartheid dispensation.

strictures of the past and the limitations of the new South Africa. As I explore below, the literary publications *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock* have provided dynamic venues through which this splintered young subject has been negotiated and contested.

1.2: *Prufrock* and *Chimurenga*

Two wildly divergent literary magazines, both based in Cape Town, provide a series of literary entry points into the crisis of the young subject. Though differing significantly in their aims, scopes, and styles, I look to *Chimurenga* (2002-current) and *Prufrock* (2013-2019) as venues through which this crisis has been explored, contested, and negotiated in the short fiction and poetry of young South African writers. While *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock* draw on two historically distinct literary traditions—a radical Black Pan-Africanism, and a white liberal tradition, respectively—both have also operated adjacent to the formal publishing industry and have provided venues for the emergence of young writers who have largely not been published by established presses. While I cannot provide a full accounting of their histories or literary activities here, both publications have produced remarkably broad and diverse bodies of work that live through printed magazines and online editions, and they contribute to a growing network of small presses and digital arenas that form an emergent archive of 21st century South African writing and criticism. I look to these publications as a means of exploring the crucial questions that animate this chapter: how has the young subject, and the young South African writer, responded to the infrastructures of subjection that remain central to the national project? What literary emergences might be identified in these venues, and what connections might be drawn between the disparate and diverse writers contained within them? How do these new

voices negotiate the conflicts between South Africa's past and its purportedly unfettered present, and what possible futures can be sighted in their writing?

Chimurenga was founded in 2002 by Ntone Edjabe. More than a literary magazine, it is better described as “a publisher, a broadcaster, a workspace, a platform for editorial and curatorial activities and an online resource” (Eshun et al. 81). Publishing fiction, criticism, academic scholarship, and non-fiction essays through various outlets, *Chimurenga*'s own organizational map incorporates the “Chimurenga Factory” and the Pan-African Space Station (PASS), replete with “investigation and narration,” “transmission” and “speculation and imagination” modules drawn in pencil on grid paper—a deliberately unfinished, malleable sketch of a network (Aterianus-Owanga 253). The name, *Chimurenga*, speaks to the historical sweep of the magazine's project. From the Shona for *revolutionary struggle*, it ties late-19th century anti-colonial efforts in what is now Zimbabwe to Thomas Mapfumo albums of the 1970s and to the imagined space station of an African future. A Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga essay on the site, “A Brief History of Chimurenga as a Communal Laboratory,” makes an argument for the history of the term “chimurenga” as an all-encompassing political, religious, communal, and environmental concept. While it references the Zimbabwean wars of independence fought in 1896-1897 and again in the 1960s and 1970s, “chimurenga” also encompasses the radical repurposing of infrastructure in the struggle for freedom. As Mavhunga writes, “chimurenga” is

another name for Mwari (God)—hence chimurenga, the way of Murenga, or spiritually guided warfare. Second, it is an approach to war involving the whole community, not just those carrying arms. Third, chimurenga is a transformation of *zvakatikomberedza*

(environment—caves, mountains, rivers, pools, valleys, forests, animals, trees) into military assets and infrastructure, with or without physically modifying them. (Mavhunga)

Mavhunga's description of *Chimurenga* speaks to the amorphous, rhizomatic structure of the publication's history. He invites us to think of *Chimurenga* as an ongoing process of transformation rather than only a historical reference, to think of the texts, radio broadcasts, and websites that *Chimurenga* disseminates as providing an insurgent infrastructure that exists in plain sight but remains concealed from forces of colonialism and contemporary forms of postcolonial and neoliberal exploitation.

Might we see, too, the possibility for a reversal of this formulation, in which the existing infrastructures that dominate the landscape of post-colonial Africa are transformed into the material of the everyday, adapted and remade to suit the changing needs of local writers and artists? In the work of the writers I consider in this chapter, the revolutionary fervour of past generations has been dampened, and yet, as *Chimurenga* suggests, the possibilities for a revolutionary practice remains embedded in the land, in the infrastructure available to the young subjects of the new South Africa. As the Fallist protesters demonstrated, the halls and concourses of the university itself could be reimagined as the infrastructure through which transformation could be enacted. During #RhodesMustFall, Mupotsa writes, black queer womxn occupied a building at UCT now known as Azania House, transforming it into a space where “they read, debated and considered what a radical curriculum, pedagogy and institutional life for the university might look like” (25). After fee increases were scrapped at Wits, “many students continued their occupation of Solomon House because it was a space where they could imagine the project of the university. It was in meetings at Solomon House that several workshops on

labour, knowledge, sexual difference and power would occur,” she continues (38). As *Chimurenga* and the Fallist movement recognized, the existing infrastructure, natural and built, provides the material necessary for imagining different forms of power, of life, within the nation. Yet, as I argue in my reading of several authors published in *Chimurenga*, this radical possibility appears increasingly mired in the post-revolutionary affects explored more directly in *Prufrock*.

Prufrock, which published fifteen issues from its inception in 2013 until its shuttering in 2019, was founded in 2012 by Helen Sullivan, Anneke Rautenbach, Nick Mulgrew and James King in Cape Town. In some senses, it speaks directly to a national project that no longer holds the promise it once did; its name, after T.S. Eliot’s infamously indecisive character, is telling in this regard. *Prufrock*’s first editorial locates it within a post-apartheid milieu, comparing “an almost twenty-something democratic South Africa,” with Eliot’s character, who “embod[ies] some of this post-honeymoon nation’s less becoming qualities: disillusionment, paralysis, apathy” (*Prufrock* 1, 3). These affects are deeply political in some sense—a frustration with the present, an inability to conceive of a different future—but they are also seemingly apolitical, where apathy stands in opposition to a call for revolution. Compare these “less becoming qualities” to the first issue of *Chimurenga*, published a decade earlier, entitled “Music is the Weapon.” *Chimurenga* arrived with no formal statement of intent, no manifesto. Instead, the cover image offers a mission statement, comprising only a scratchy photograph of Peter Tosh on a stage holding a microphone to his mouth with his right hand, and a guitar shaped like an M-16 rifle with his left.

There is a facile dichotomy to be drawn here, between the Black radical mission of *Chimurenga* and the white liberal pretensions of *Prufrock*. This is a convenient but overly broad division: *Prufrock* would go on to publish several pieces in isiXhosa and isiZulu, and it would

feature work by dozens of young authors from South Africa and neighbouring countries. *Chimurenga*, meanwhile, often provided a venue for older, more established writers from across the continent and the African diaspora rather than focusing on a particular demographic. Both *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock* operated in parallel to the formal South African publishing industry, and both relied on print and online sales and funding from various grants rather than corporate benefactors. In the small independent publishing industry that exists in the country, they provide a complementary rather than adversarial perspective on South African literature in the 21st century. Indeed, many writers have published in both magazines, suggesting their differences are less stark than they might appear at first.

The three authors I turn to in this chapter, all of whom have been published or reviewed in *Chimurenga*, *Prufrock*, or in one of their associated projects, use these venues as a means of exploring the ways in which South Africa's past continues to limit and shape the possibilities for the young subject. Given the purported freedoms of the new South Africa, why do all three authors return to the racialized infrastructures of prior regimes? How do these venues shape these texts, and to what end? As I argue in my reading, these texts reveal not only the "splintered" young subject, but also a sense of irreconcilable loss for which the national project cannot account.

1.3: Thabo Jijana and the Persistence of Enclosure

Thabo Jijana's poem "Banana Moon" opens the tenth issue of *Prufrock* and is also published in his 2016 Ingrid Jonker Prize-winning collection *Failing Maths and My Other Crimes* (2015). Jijana writes often of the rural Eastern Cape of his birth in 1988, and in particular the region of eNgqushwa which was once part of the Ciskei Bantustan. Lying between the city of East London

and Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown, the home of Rhodes University), the former Ciskei stands at a particular historical intersection: a rural strip of land designed to hold “excess” Black labourers between the urban centre of East London and the university named for Cecil John Rhodes. Ciskei was created to be, in the words of the apartheid state, the home of the “non-productive,”³⁴ to exist outside of the formal state and economy until needed. In this tenuous position, we recognize Giorgio Agamben’s identification in *Homo Sacer* (1995) of the paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from the realm of politics and the state: “[t]here is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an *inclusive exclusion*” (8, italics my own). Jijana’s poetry, concerned as it is with the legacies of inclusion in and exclusion from the nation-state, speaks to precisely this relationship of the subject to biopolitical life in contemporary South Africa.

“Banana Moon” begins with an exhortation, an imperative: “To see this story better, close your eyes/and picture a mud village, safely hidden in a quiet valley” (4). It offers a welcome, and yet we are simultaneously made cognizant through the speaker’s instruction of the *distance* and *difference* the text introduces. This village, Jijana’s speaker indicates, exists beyond the immediate grasp of the reader; it lives instead in an imagined elsewhere, “safely hidden.” At the outset of Jijana’s text is a reminder of the “splintered category of I” proposed by Mupotsa: a speaker who both recognizes the poetic mode as a means of reaching beyond the confines of this site, while also acknowledging the limitations of the text itself. Jijana provides the reader this

³⁴A 1967 Department of Native Affairs statement: “It is accepted government policy that the Bantu are only temporarily resident in the European areas of the Republic, for as long as they offer labour there. As soon as they become, for some reason or another, no longer fit for work or superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country of origin, or the territory of the national unit where they fit in ethnically..... no stone is to be left unturned to achieve the settlement in the homelands of non-productive Bantu at present residing in European areas (Department of Bantu Administration and Development. "General Circular 25 of 1967.")

splintered relationship of recognition and refusal, an invitation and a rebuke, as the entry point into a family drama.

Jijana details the aftermath of a funeral: the speaker is a young man looking on as a grief-stricken uncle “a keen public speaker/and reigning champ/of dining-room raconteuring,” weeps before the gathered mourners (4). Unable to account for his uncle’s display of grief, and an outsider to the masculine expectations of stoicism, he turns instead to his contemporaries:

I won’t say my cousins weren’t having fun.
The five of them piled into Nyaniso’s jalopy,
to each man his own glass. It was there, I suspect that they carried out
their aftertears,³⁵
a tippler’s caucus
on a cold August. (5)

The speaker casts himself in this scene as “the omission,” excluded from the male camaraderie that surrounds the gathering (5). Jijana’s speaker will come to loathe these formal and informal funeral rituals, and his exclusion from both: “[t]his was before I had matured enough/to detest the modern black funeral,” he complains (5). In this scene, the “modern black funeral,” is “comparable only to a birthday party/with a guest of honour/whose presence/is only a grainy ID photo/enlarged on a piece of paper” (5). This image of the dead, represented through a distorted

³⁵A reference to the informal post-funeral rite of drinking and reminiscing in honour of the dead, largely practiced by younger members of the family. See, for example, Niq Mhlongo’s *After Tears* (2007)—about a young black student who fails law school at UCT and returns to Soweto as a celebrated young advocate without revealing his failure. The title of Jijana’s *Failing Maths and My Other Crimes* draws a similar connection here between the expectations of an upwardly-mobile generation of young black South Africans and the institutions that fail them.

facsimile of a government document that regulates so much of South African life, stands at the border of life and death in this village. Perhaps, more accurately, it confers both life and death upon the subject. The green, plastic-covered identity document that every South African is issued at the age of 16 bestows upon its bearer several basic powers: it must be presented to vote, to enter into contracts, to receive social grants, to be legitimately employed.³⁶ It is not only a reminder of the pass books that regulated the movement of Black South Africans throughout the country under apartheid, but a reflection of the ways in which the non-racial South Africa has transformed the overtly racist technologies of domination and control into a means of accessing citizenship, employment, and education in the new nation. To possess an ID book is to make a claim on life itself; it is, indeed, colloquially referred to as “the book of life” by older South Africans. What does it mean now, as a marker of the dead? Jijana’s insistence on the quiet valley as the setting of this scene is disrupted by this crude facsimile, a reminder of state bureaucracy and coercion that maintains its power even in Jijana’s imagined elsewhere.

The distance announced at the outset of the poem, between reader and speaker, between the forms of knowledge assumed of the reader and what is required to “see this story better,” is not *resolved*: Jijana’s speaker concludes with the idea of death as repetition and persistence rather than movement or transcendence, as the poem reflects on a past that he now disowns. He offers a plaintive complaint, “for the festive vigils/that go on and on/and on and on/after the burial/at the tavern” (5). A more redemptive reading may argue here for the persistence of life in the face of death, but the speaker’s exclusion from the scene of celebration and mourning, and

³⁶The company tasked with producing these documents, somewhat ironically, draws a direct line between the “dompass” (dumb pass) apartheid-era documents and the introduction of new “smart” biometric IDs: once a technology used to limit, monitor and prohibit the movement of Black South Africans, it is now in the language of the Government Printing Works “a restorer of dignity and common citizenship” (“The New South African ID—From ‘Dumb Pass’ to Smart Card”)

the reader's exclusion from the "mud village, safely hidden in a quiet valley," suggests a loss that cannot be healed through the "after tears" ritual. Rather, the vigils and the poorly reproduced ID photo mean that even death and mourning remain within the realm of the nation-state, which cannot provide any meaningful resolution to this loss. In this milieu, where funerals are beloved in the "way some people/love public holidays," death is continuously folded into local and national celebration, the way the Sharpeville Massacre has been transformed into Human Rights Day, or the Afrikaner victory over the Zulu army in 1838 is now celebrated as the Day of Reconciliation (5). Within the infrastructures that define Jijana's speaker—his family, his small community, this former Bantustan, his nation—death and loss are only meaningful if transformed into a means of reaffirming the living. Though Jijana's speaker asks the reader to join him in a return to the racialized spaces of South Africa's past, he finds little to comfort him there. We see here the paradox of the "born free," compelled to participate in celebratory discourses of freedom, opportunity, and equality, while at the same time these discourses cannot account for the ongoing experiences of loss that define the young, racialized subject. As both opportunities for escape and mourning are deferred, "on and on," melancholia comes to define "Banana Moon."

Jijana's *Failing Maths and My Other Crimes*—published in 2015 by uHlanga Press, founded by *Prufrock's* Nick Mulgrew—reproduces "Banana Moon." In the context of this collection, Jijana's concern with melancholia takes on a more direct spatial and temporal critique. Like "Banana Moon," the speaker of "Sprinkling ashes" begins with a declaration: "This is not an ode about home, where the grass is tall/and the hills are green, where the rivers are full/and ever potent" (59). Again, we are presented with a home firmly located *elsewhere*, temporally, and spatially distant from the reader. We are also reminded of the fundamental,

irreparable difference between speaker and reader. This is *not* an ode, and yet it offers a conception of a home that slips into verdant mythology as soon as it is recalled. In keeping with the offer to conjure a “mud village,/safely hidden in a quiet valley” in “Banana Moon,” Jijana here evokes a fantasy of prelapsarian, pre-colonial life: “where the girls are to cherish and the young/men never tire of answering to the riddles of manhood” (59). This idyll is short-lived, however. In a sharp turn, the speaker asks, accusatorily, what “might you be like” had you been presented, instead, with a man in a busy marketplace, “spun around/as though a hurried hawker had bumped him from behind,” attempting to keep track of his shadow in an “ill-fitting coat and khakis, toenails poking like prying eyes/from his toe rags” (59). Far from traditional forms of life and community, we are presented here with a man beset by the vertiginous movement of the market around him, grasping at shadows, sprinkling the ashes of the dead onto unfeeling cement.

Jijana leaves the spatial relationship between the idyllic past and the chaotic present uncertain: where is this man, where is this market? He offers the reader two temporalities in this poem centred on the same stretch of land, one transformed by time and capital. This man stands where “the grass is tall” and “the hills are green,” but it is clear that those descriptions have faded into memory. What might the reader be like, Jijana asks, if the poem began in the *present*, a present that can only offer the confusion and bewilderment of a contemporary urban market? Like the instruction to close one’s eyes at the outset of “Banana Moon,” we cannot begin this text as *anything other* than an ode to a past that Jijana provides, only to then deny, the splintered subject both demanding and refusing recognition. There is a chasm, he suggests, between these two experiences of the same site, between the speaker and the reader, between the pre- and post-colonial, that cannot be bridged. An ironic, intrusive voice appears: “*If you travel,/you see things with your own eyes*” (59). Jijana marks this ironic voice in italic script and splits it between the

last two stanzas of the poem. There is no literal travel in this text; instead, it is the land that has transformed the poem, from *not* an ode about “home” to an ode about “the marketplaces of Africa,” leaving a lone figure adrift in space and time, grasping at shadows as “[t]he quiet silhouettes of others whirled/past him, trampling his clone” (59). Now the speaker does, and indeed can only, offer an ode, “an ode about/the marketplaces of Africa, where many of my people/endure daily, trying, struggling, failing, trying yet again/to make it to another Monday” (59). The specificity of home has now been replaced by a generic African marketplace, a place that demands endurance and struggle, but offers no “full/and ever potent” rivers, only the possibility of temporary survival.

In both “Banana Moon” and “Sprinkling ashes,” ideas of home are evoked in order to be subverted, negated, and challenged. Death in “Banana Moon” offers no reprieve from the endless cycles of machismo and the demands of the state, while “Sprinkling ashes” sees traditional conceptions of home overwritten by the indifference of capitalist modernity. Jijana’s ironic evocation of the idea of home brings him into conversation with the celebrated Xhosa poet St. John Page Yako and his most widely published piece, “The Contraction and Enclosure of the Land,” (1959) which narrates the initial, historical loss that Jijana returns to in his poetry. “The Contraction,” collected in *The Lava of this Land* (1997) begins “[t]hus spake the heirs of the land/Although it is no longer ours./This land will be folded like a blanket/till it is like the palm of a hand” (24). This process of enclosure was twice formalized during Yako’s lifetime, first through the Natives Land Act of 1913, and then again through the Bantustan system built upon it from the 1950s on. “The Contraction” repeats imagery of the natural in ever-smaller spaces, the “racing ox will become tangled in the wire” as the state threatens to “crowd us together like tadpoles/In a calabash ladle” (24). Trapped within the colonial logics of dispossession, the

familiar objects of everyday life are turned into weapons, used to confine and punish their wielders, a reversal of the revolutionary potential of the land embodied in the concept of “chimurenga.” In Yako’s lament, the experience of enclosure is not simply a loss of land, it degrades the very possibility of communal and social relations within what remains. Through this experience of loss, communities are forced together in an attempt to “unite the different peoples/ Until we no longer care for each other/As a cow licks her calf” (24). Jijana reiterates the loss of youth within this system of enclosure, a loss of the “girls” who “are to cherish.” In “Sprinkling ashes” he can only provide an “ode about the marketplaces of Africa,” echoing Yako’s lament that “[o]ur girls/Will have their lobola³⁷ paid with paper./Coins that come and go, come and go” (24). We see in Jijana’s poetry not only the mourning of a material loss—the literal enclosure of land—but also the mourning of the very possibility of evoking those images of the past in relation to the present. In the new South Africa, now that the possibilities for building new social formations, new possible futures, seem to have slipped from the official national imagination, what does this attempted return to a communal past provide? In Jijana’s telling, to raise the image of an idealised past offers little comfort. The interjections his speakers make in both “Banana Moon” (“close your eyes”) and “Sprinkling ashes” (“[t]his is not an ode about home,” and “[i]f you travel,/you see things with your own eyes”) mark the contemporary experience of subjection as one etched in the language, and in the psyche, of his speakers, as well as in the land.

Yako’s poem concludes “[...] we fold up our knees/It’s impossible to stretch out,/because the land has been hedged in” (24). Between Yako’s poem of enclosure and Jijana’s chaotic market, the establishment of infrastructural subjection in South African history can be traced

³⁷The practice of providing a bride’s family with cattle, traditionally, in marriage negotiations, practiced by Xhosa, Zulu, Swazi, and Ndebele communities.

through the transformation of space, of land, and the subject. The experience of being “hedged in” is ongoing in Jijana’s work. In bringing these two historically distant writers together, we see the ways in which enclosure and primitive accumulation cannot be confined to the pre-history of capitalism, as Marx argued in the first volume of *Capital*. Instead, enclosure forms a crucial and ongoing process that gives rise to the contemporary malaise of Jijana’s poetry, but also the very structures that constitute the South African nation-state. As Jijana demonstrates, enclosure and primitive accumulation are not stages of history that have been supplanted. Rather the originary violence of colonial capitalism is ongoing, part of a contemporary, shifting process of racialized dispossession.

This experience of being forced out of the communities and infrastructures that once constituted “home” and being barred from entering into the new formations of the state—of *inclusive exclusion*—continues to be weaponized in contemporary South African political discourse, particularly around the question of access to education. Helen Zille, the former leader of South Africa’s largest opposition party, and the former premier of the relatively wealthy Western Cape, described students from the neighbouring province of the Eastern Cape—South Africa’s most impoverished region—as “education refugees” in a 2012 Tweet (Pietersen). Zille blamed overcrowding in Western Cape schools on an influx of students that she cast as part of a national *other*, marking some as outsiders to the nation-proper, regardless of citizenship or the guarantee to the fundamental right to education. The remark was widely and rightly condemned, but it reveals the ways in which enclosure continues to work through myriad forms, even in the absence of the coercion and violence practiced by colonial and apartheid regimes. We see through Yako’s lament, Zille’s Twitter tirade, and Jijana’s melancholic depiction of a distant past, how exclusion has been repeatedly reimagined and re-imposed on the young subject. The

loss established through the process of primitive accumulation that initially ruptured the relationship of people to the land is now recast through bureaucracy, through the inequalities of the public education system, and through the indifferent market. They combine to produce the key tension in Jijana's poetry: to negotiate these losses, subtle and hidden as they often are, is to "endure daily, trying, struggling, failing, trying yet again" ("Sprinkling ashes" 59). To mark death in "Banana Moon" is to witness "the festive vigils/that go on and on/and on and on/after the burial/at the tavern" (5). This sense of unending loss that cannot be articulated or mourned within the infrastructures of the new South Africa is one that permeates the work of the young writers in this chapter. As I discuss below, Pravasan Pillay, like Jijana, returns to those infrastructures of the past, dense with both loss and melancholia and notions of home and community, to negotiate the expectations of the young subject of the new nation.

1.4: Pravasan Pillay: The Afterlife of Primitive Accumulation

Pravasan Pillay, born in Durban in 1978, has published two poetry chapbooks, *Glumlazi* (2009) and *30 Poems* (2015), and a short story collection, *Chatsworth* (2018). His work has appeared in both *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock*, where we see a divergent set of texts that reveal shifting responses to South African history after the end of apartheid. The pieces Pillay published in *Chimurenga*, "nervous (for wopko jensma)" in 2004 and the 2009 "Sivakami" saga stand in stark contrast to "Girls" and "Crooks," two realist short stories published in *Prufrock* Volume 2, Issue 4 (2015) and in *Prufrock* Volume 3, Issue 1 (2016) respectively.

A 2004 edition of *Chimurenga* places a letter from Bessie Head to Tom Calvin, a reader and friend, next to a reproduction of a hybrid text, Pravasan Pillay's reworking of Wopko Jensma's "Black Bottom Stomp," originally part of the collection *Where White is the*

Colour/Where Black is the Number that was banned by apartheid censors in 1975. On the left of the magazine spread Head's letter is reproduced in the style of a hastily printed zine: amid the typewriter-mimicking typeface are words—"dESTROY," "NERVOUS BREAKDOWN," "I AM THE DOG OF THE HEAVENS," "horror, horror"—in enormous, line-breaking letters (4). Beneath the text of the body, mirrored scraps of Head's letter are repeated, semi-transparent background for the "original" text. A border of bright, blood red text contains overlapping words "[H]ATRED," "MALICE," "SUFFERING," and "PAIN" (4). The border on the bottom of the page consists of a dense, repeated two sentence mantra in faded pink: "Love me. Help me." The effect is dizzying, disturbing; the text refuses to be confined by the limitations of the reproduction itself. The text-jamming style of Head's letter, detailing her struggles with schizophrenia, racism, and poverty, looms over the Pillay/Jensma poem almost literally.

Pillay's prologue of sorts, titled "nervous (for wopko jensma)," begins:

i shake my legs when im angry
i shake my legs perpetually
thought I could shake this city
up a little
but the ground never gives
i shake my legs when I'm nervous
i shake my legs perpetually. (5)

At first glance, it appears a kind of respite from the intense crisis signified—both textually and aesthetically—by the Head letter. Pillay's intervention, however, reflects on a tension inherent in

Jensma's text, published almost three decades prior. The unsettled nature of Pillay's intervention, the shaking of a leg, suggests both movement and stasis, and expenditure of energy that eventually exhausts while producing nothing. After this prologue we are presented with the seven stanzas of Jensma's original poem, reproduced in its entirety, in which his speaker appeals to the American blues pioneer Ma Rainey: "ma rainey dear—/my black-rim hat don't fit/my head's polluted with grief/also my binsey poplars/all felled, felled, are all felled/gone" (5). "Black Bottom Stomp" provides, in the context of this issue of *Chimurenga*, an uneasy kind of clearing—both in the sense of an opening in a dense forest, but also the violent felling that produces it. In this nervous chasm, Jensma looks to Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Binsey Poplars" and the "Ten or twelve, only ten or twelve/Strokes of havoc," that "unselve/The sweet especial scene," in his appeal for salvation (Hopkins). It is quickly made clear that no salvation is forthcoming.

In Jensma's second stanza we are told of an impending absence:

i am here, yet nowhere
gone lost
been at't
been walking
been swingin
been hollerin
it's ova
all happened right here
fast

an cuff'd
behind a bars'f yo voice
now bear with me
bear it slow
i am here yet nowhere. (5)

It is now impossible to read this stanza outside of the context of Jensma's sudden 1993 disappearance. Like Head,³⁸ Jensma struggled with schizophrenia throughout much of his life; the unresolved nature of his disappearance from a Salvation Army Men's Home in Johannesburg is, in a sense, predicted here, "gone lost" nearly two decades after the publication of "Black Bottom Stomp." Jensma's poem ends, "no/no road/no road has no end," leaving only an absence for Pillay to tentatively fill (5). Pillay's turn to Jensma is not a recuperative effort, nor is there the suggestion that Pillay wishes to honour or celebrate Jensma, necessarily. The clearing provided here is, more accurately, an abdicated space, one borrowed from Hopkins, and intruded upon by Pillay, a restless, tentative figure unable to fill the absence presented to him.

This early Pillay publication contextualizes two strands in his work that I pick up in this section of the chapter. First is the idea of self-conscious play and experimentation that will re-emerge in his "Sivakami" saga, published in *Chimurenga* five years after this poem. In the "Sivakami" pieces I discuss, Pillay places a version of himself amidst the stories, poems, and histories of a fictional outsider artist. It is an intrusion that reflects on how subjection has been continually refined and transformed over centuries within the specific racial and cultural context of Indian communities on South Africa's east coast. Throughout his *Chimurenga* pieces, we see

³⁸Both lived and worked as teachers at the same school in Serowe, eastern Botswana, in the late 1960s.

how histories of extraction and exploitation are now being mined, again, for entertainment, for academic research, and for publication.³⁹ The second thread present in “nervous” is a rumination on loss and absence—unexplained and irrevocable in the case of Jensma—which recurs in Pillay’s more contemporary short stories in *Prufrock*. Here, the nostalgic domestic spaces of Chatsworth are suffused with an unnamed absence, a melancholic response to the broader historical processes that have transformed this community.

The *Chimurenga* pieces speak to questions of authorship and authority in ways that are both disturbing and playful. Pillay’s provocation at the beginning of “nervous” is pushed even further in a series of interconnected, fictional pieces published in a 2009 issue of *Chimurenga* entitled “Everyone Has Their Indian.”⁴⁰ “PASSING OF RENISHAW FOLKLORIST,” “SONGS OF SIVAKAMI,” “LETTER TO THE PARK RYNIE GAZETTE (UNEDITED),” “SONGOLOLO MAN,” “EMAIL TO PRIYA PAUL (4 October 2008)” and “SONGOLOLO SONG” are presented as separate pieces, but they form a loose narrative, one in which “Pravasan Pillay”⁴¹ plays the role of an exploitative writer, keen on extracting local folklore to turn into material of his own. In the “Sivakami Saga,” Pillay presents us with the writer attempting to excavate what he can from the past in order to make his claim on the present.

“PASSING OF RENISHAW FOLKLORIST,” a fictional newspaper obituary, begins the saga with a footnote from “Pillay”: “Sivakami’s family were unhappy with the occult characterisations I made in the article. At their request and with journalist James Moodley’s

³⁹Mark Gevisser provides in his pseudo-memoir *Dispatcher: Lost and Found in Johannesburg* a literal example of this process of extraction and then re-extraction that has shaped the landscape of Johannesburg. Reflecting on William Kentridge’s 2010 Kyoto Prize speech, Gevisser notes that while mine dumps once formed the topography of the city, the early 21st century saw them flattened as new technologies allowed for these “mountains” to be re-mined for trace amounts of remaining gold (208-210).

⁴⁰An ironic reference, perhaps, to the outsized role Indians play in contemporary South African business and backroom politics

⁴¹The quotation marks are used from hereon to indicate the fictional Pillay of the text.

permission I have changed all the relevant names and locations” (Cluster G, page 5). The folklorist in question is Sivakami Chetty, a name we are told at the outset is false, an elderly resident of Renishaw near the resort town of Park Rynie, south of Durban. Survived by a daughter, Priya Paul,⁴² Sivakami was known for “her moving devotional singing and for her skilled storytelling,” and though illiterate she “amassed an impressive oral store of sugarcane plantation and barracks folklore” (G5). “Pravasan Pillay” enters into the obituary as “a Durban writer, who, for the last three years, has recorded Chetty’s stories, songs, and trances,” to address “a shortage of sustained accounts of plantation creatures, demons and for lack of a better phrase, bad men. For instance, Sivakami’s story of Thumbi–Tamil for ‘little brother’—a devil, who dressed in sugarcane leaves, and murdered young girls, is essentially a spoken novella” (G5). The recordings “Pillay” has made of Sivakami’s stories are cast as a “parallel history of the south coast and her occult ontology” (G5). A small ink portrait “Pillay by Kellerman” accompanies the obituary, and features “Pillay,” presumably, dressed in a suit and hat and the words “im in the veranda of wrong/i aint in the house,” flank a stack of books with titles “Songs & Spells,” “Outdoor Recording,” and “Folksongs of the South Coast.” To be in “the veranda of wrong,” but not “in the house,” offers us an image of the writer skirting the ethical questions presented in these texts, remaining at a distance and perhaps peering *into* the house, into the centre of this history, without daring to enter it completely. It speaks more broadly to a liminality that operates throughout the texts in this chapter, to the ambivalence of the young subject unable to enter into the normative national project, and yet unable to remain within the racialized infrastructures of the past.

⁴²Another “absent” character in this series, who the reader never hears from directly. The initials she shares with “Pravasan Pillay” suggests another sleight-of-hand in the texts, in which the fictional author has produced a female double, perhaps.

The second piece, “SONGS OF SIVAKAMI” is presented as an interview between “Pravasan Pillay” and a fictional Dutch magazine *Unsigned*; once again we are told that Sivakami’s name is a false one. The interview establishes conflict between “Pillay” and the Chetty family, and that “Pillay’s” interest in her music and stories revolves around “bad men—either human or supernatural” (G6). “Pillay” uses the interview to complain that the stories and songs cannot be published in full as the Chetty family insists on removing “occult passages” from the recordings, and he rejects the idea that he is treating the supernatural nature of Sivakami’s story ironically (G6). “Pillay’s” excavation of Sivakami’s work is presented here as a kind of novelty that can be turned into narrative, retold and sold to foreign magazines looking for exotic tales to entertain a European readership. “Pillay” is, of course, presented as an obliging accomplice.

Through a fictional public letter and interview in the non-existent *Park Rynie Gazette*, “Pillay” is more firmly established as one of the “bad men” Sivakami told of, eventually reproducing her songs, embodying the trickster Songololo, and committing acts of arson in the small town he feeds on. Before his final violation, the reproduction of her song,⁴³ an email from “Pillay” to Paul once again begs for permission to reproduce Sivakami’s work. The email confesses that “Pillay” has “had a rather lean patch publishing-wise and [that he had] not had a piece of writing published (outside the self-published route) in over 4 years. Indeed, the last piece of any substance “The Radio-Cabinet”—a short story—was published 8 years ago. [He thinks] this might be an opportunity [...] to re-enter the South African writing scene” (G9). The extractive nature of “Pillay’s” project is laid bare here, his desperate pleas reveal the process of turning historical forms of exploitation, dispossession, and displacement into contemporary

⁴³Readers are encouraged to follow a link to the *Chimurenga* website to hear this song, but it is no longer an active link as of my writing in early 2021.

narrative forms, narratives that seem to only continue those past ideas of exploitation rather than offering a resolution to them.

The series of texts builds through this Nabokovian system of allusions, self-deprecating jokes, and sleights of hand. By the end of the series, the subject at the centre of the narrative, Sivakami, is entirely obscured by layers of translation, the struggle over her folk stories and songs, and “Pillay’s” interventions. The final song as eventually published has been translated from the original Tamil into English by a different poet while “Pillay” has adapted it to fit a rhyming scheme and removed any “occult” signifiers (G9). In addition, “Pillay’s” girlfriend has recorded a cover of the translated song, we are told. Though “Pillay” claims to celebrate this elderly folklorist, she remains voiceless throughout. Named for a millipede (usually “shongololo” from the isiZulu), Sivakami’s song is “Songololo,” another mutation of the original: “[g]o to bed, rest your head/Songololo will be fed...Dry your tears, close your ears/Or in there he disappears” (G9). By the end of the series of texts, “Pillay” himself has transformed into the “Songololo” of myth, invading, consuming, and ultimately penetrating into the lives of this family, preying on the women of a small rural town in order to monetize a life narrative and communal forms of storytelling.

This transformation of the author into the occult “Songololo” stages in miniature several scenes of accumulation specific to the east coast of South Africa, among the sugarcane plantation and the labour of indentured Indian migrants and their descendants. Living “[u]nder stone, stick and bone x 2/Songololo lives alone,” we are told (G9). The Songololo emerges through the labour of those in the plantation: “[w]hen we hoe, when we sow x 2”/He comes out from below” (G9). The emergence of the Songololo is specific to this process of turning the land–foreign to the first waves of Indian labourers who would have tilled it–into a profitable agricultural product,

transforming South Africa in the process. The majority of South Africa's Indian population arrived on the Natal coast between 1860 and 1890 and were from lower-caste communities in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and the northern Bhojpuri region (Hansen 27). "It was unclear," write Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed in *Inside Indian Indenture: A South African Story, 1860-1914*, "whether the kind of life that they would come to live was immediately apparent to the indentured when they signed or thumb-printed the contract—that they would be bound in a 'legally authorised domination which denied them choice as to work, residence or remuneration, and assumed that their labour lay in their ownership of some lord, master, employer or custodian'" (1). Once these indenture contracts were ended, "many laborers bought or leased small patches of land and began farming or market gardening in and around Durban and along the coast," and by the 1940s there was the establishment of "large Indian working-class neighbourhoods with a rich popular culture in Durban" (Hansen 28). Sivakami, we are told in "SONGS OF SIVAKAMI," was born in 1916 and worked as a market gardener; this thin biography casts her as, mostly likely, the child of indentured labourers who would claim only the most tenuous grasp on a working-class livelihood. As this agricultural work moved from large-scale plantations to leases on small patches of urban land, the Songololo remains a mercurial trickster figure, one who travels from plantation to city garden, emerging from smaller and smaller parcels of land as sites of Indian labour shift.

As Sandro Mezzadra argues in his 2011 article "How Many Histories of Labour? Towards a Theory of Postcolonial Capitalism," the notion of 'free' labour that was created as a result of enclosure and primitive accumulation in the history of capital in Europe must be seen as "contested, limited and contradictory" (157). The history of capital in KwaZulu Natal we see in this series of texts is similarly contested, limited and contradictory. The rapid industrialization

and urbanization that shaped South Africa in the late-19th century would continue well into the 20th, producing new forms of difference to sustain these transformative material forces.

Sivakami, caught in this history, comes to represent “free” labour only in the most contradictory sense. The conditions of freedom in the South African nation-state, Pillay reminds us, have never been conceptualized outside of the infrastructures of race and subjection that produce it. We see in these pieces the continuous motion of exploitation and dispossession in the colony and then the postcolony, and the demands made of the subjects at the centre of that historical progression. Mezzadra turns to Michael Taussig’s exploration of the “ways in which ‘social production of difference’” plays “a key role in the subsumption of labour under capital” (158). Who is available to fill the demands of capital? How are they made available as “free” labour? Taussig had identified the persistence of the *devil* as an explanation of this process. We are reminded of the idea of the devil (“*A friend of the devil is a friend of mine*”) that links “African-American sugar plantation workers in Western Colombia and indigenous tin mine workers in Bolivia in their attempt to come to terms with processes of ‘primitive accumulation’ and proletarianization” (Mezzadra 158, italics in the original). Might we add the sugar plantation worker and the urban gardener in Natal to the itinerary of the devil? Might it take the form of a local misnaming in the “Songololo?” Emerging from the earth of the plantation, the urban garden, and in the 21st century in textual form, the Songololo marks the persistent churning of primitive accumulation—always hunting for new ground to till. In this latest form, it is “Pravasan Pillay” who attempts to conjure, control, and eventually embody the Songololo, returning again to those racialized sites of primitive accumulation to pick over what remains. While the techniques of subjection and capital accumulation have changed, the Songololo persists.

1.4.1: The Township and the Melancholia of Youth

The two Pillay short stories published in *Prufrock*, “Girls” (2015) and “Crooks” (2016), appear six and seven years, respectively, after the “Sivakami” saga in *Chimurenga*. The intervening years, as well as the new publishing venue, seem to have produced a spare, realist turn in his short fiction. *Mail & Guardian* writer Niren Tolsi describes Pillay as “a literary ascetic” in his review of *Chatsworth*, a 2018 collection that includes both stories (Tolsi). It is a collection, Tolsi writes, “largely unencumbered by adjectives and adverbs” (Tolsi). While this description appears to signal an entirely different project on Pillay’s behalf, given the postmodern play of the “Sivakami” pieces, I argue here that we see in the *Prufrock* stories the subtle, domestic effects of over a century of extraction, dispossession, and exploitation play out in Pillay’s “ascetic” prose. Like Jijana, Pillay returns to a site that retains its hold on the young subject, one that offers this subject only limited access to the new nation. What emerges in this return is once again an experience of profound loss that goes unrecognized by the national project.

In both “Girls” and “Crooks” we are introduced to pairs of women in quotidian Chatsworth homes. “Girls,” as the name suggests, follows two teenagers, Vimla and Arti, on an unsupervised after-school afternoon. Attempting to bleach “the soft black hair above her friend’s upper lip,” Vimla helps Arti test the dye on her arm hair, but the offending lip is never subjected to the chemical solution (25). Instead, they pore over a love letter from a boy enamoured with Arti and dance to a tape recording of Mariah Carey’s 1991 hit “Emotions,” hidden within a cassette of religious songs. The tape offers a glimpse of a broader world outside of the devotional hymns of their parents and the insular community of Chatsworth. As they dance to the American pop song, Arti notes the hair on her arm changing colour, now lighter than before. She is thrilled by this momentary de-racialization, the attempt to shed signifiers of Indian-ness and enter into

the new South Africa, into a global pop culture market; with that entry comes the promise of abundance and access now available for the first time to young Indian subjects in Chatsworth. The girls mark this transformation, this possibility, limited as it is, with a high-five and continue dancing. The transformation Arti undergoes constitutes a tiny transgression, one that remains ensconced within the religious world of her parents, and the racial signifiers of her own skin and hair. Pillay offers no other glimpses of the world beyond the confines of Arti and Vimla's afternoon, no indication of the political turmoil that engulfed South Africa as the apartheid regime collapsed in the early 1990s. Yet the coming-of-age narrative is clear: there exists a world beyond Chatsworth, one that promises freedom and excitement.

The design of *Prufrock* itself challenges a simplistic reading of "Girls," and allows for a recollection of that "splintered" young subject, caught within the racial strictures of the past and the promise of a non-racial freedom to come. The story is reproduced in neon pink text, befitting, perhaps the child-like excitement of the narrative. It is interspersed, however, with collages of found photographs by Cape Town-based artist Sitaara Stodal, who has turned them a bright, eerie green. The collages reproduce quotidian scenes of a South African past—suburban homes, family portraits, a bride and groom cutting into a wedding cake—but each image has an alteration that distorts this past. The images have been cut up and pasted back together haphazardly, the faces of the subjects have been blotted out and replaced with empty, white visages. As Pillay returns the reader to Chatsworth in "Girls," Stodal's images serve as a reminder of the violence of South Africa's past; moreover, they challenge the idea that this "return" can provide the basis for the future subject. As Arti bleaches the hair on her arm, the images remind us that she risks too the erasure of her own identity, one forged within the township at the precipice of obsolescence. Does the bleach give Arti a means of transforming herself, from child to woman, from Indian

subject to non-racial citizen? Stodal's intervention provides a reminder of the impossibility of the "born free" designation, and the inability of those coming-of-age in the new South Africa to claim it. It is a reminder that the past maintains its hold on the subject even as evidence of that past is altered. Like the juxtaposition of Bessie Head's letter with "nervous (for wopko jensma)" published in *Chimurenga* over a decade earlier, *Prufrock* interrupts Pillay's narrative by placing the quotidian image of Vimla eating carrot *atchaar* below the image of a mother and child literally defaced in the entrance to their home. As Pillay reaches back into this adolescent scene of becoming, one that negotiates the precipices of individual and national forms of freedom, we are reminded that the past, and specifically the townships of the past, do not provide the image of a future South Africa in Pillay's fiction.

"Crooks" tells the story of Kamla, a widow, and her adult daughter, Ambi. Once again, Pillay returns to Chatsworth and the young subject. This time there is little to suggest the apparent freedom of the new South Africa. Instead, we are returned to a parental relationship that makes the notion of freedom impossible. To Kamla, "everything about her daughter seemed alien;" Ambi has grown so obese that she is unable to bathe herself, and she seems to Kamla "to be made up entirely of folds of flesh, each fold, like a trap door, covering her true skin" (7). Torn between concern for her daughter, yet only able to express care by enabling Ambi's pathological consumption, Kamla is often depicted touching Ambi—bathing her, drying her with a towel, smothering her in Vaseline: "[t]his was how Ambi's days and years had gone by. The baths in the morning; television the entire day; breakfast, lunch, tea and supper eaten on the sofa; and bed at ten o'clock in the evening." (17). This is funded by a small tuckshop run by Kamla out of their home, and the illegal sale of bottles of alcohol to supplement income from the usual bread, milk and sweets. The narrative ends with Kamla discovering Ambi eating Deep Heat, a pungent

ointment used to massage Ambi's sore calves. The final image is of Kamla using her own finger as a toothbrush to rid her daughter's mouth of the substance.

The title gestures to the illicit sale of alcohol, but also the enfolded nature of the relationship at the centre of the narrative, the bends and folds of Ambi's body that Kamla must care for, the way in which melancholia has made its way into the most intimate spaces of this home and these bodies. In these domestic, feminine spaces, Pillay's characters perform the distinction Freud makes between the process of mourning and melancholia. Mourning, in this scene, has taken on a pathological form: what has been lost in this family—the death of a husband and father, and the economic devastation of that loss—is never recovered, replaced, or healed. The usual course of mourning has spilled beyond normative forms, and into the folds of this mother-daughter relationship. This pathology becomes increasingly internalized throughout the narrative, culminating in Ambi's attempt to ingest the same ointment used to ease her physical and mental pain. Within this relationship, Pillay suggests, there can be no exterior, and no future to cling to, as was briefly on offer in "Girls." In "Crooks" Chatsworth is presented as only a site of insularity, one that looks backwards, a site from which the future cannot be imagined. Chatsworth, Pillay notes in the *Mail & Guardian* piece is "a place where people were forcibly removed to, from other parts of Durban during apartheid [from the 1950s onwards], so there is an obvious sadness in its origins, however, the melancholia I sense is something more, it's a way of being in the world, it's a heaviness" (Tolsi). Returning to *Prufrock's* assessment of what South Africa represents to a new generation of writers ("disillusionment, paralysis, apathy"), melancholia seems another appropriate register through which to encounter these narratives. Hansen ties this sense of melancholia to the experiences of "[a]nxiety, embarrassment, and obsessions with the gaze and visibility," that mark South African Indian life, partly due to

Indians' status as an "intermediary" group, between the wealth and privilege of whites and the disenfranchisement of Blacks (15). Hansen argues that this is compounded by a "pervasive sense of loss and displacement," in a place like Chatsworth, where the community formed under the pressures and violence of apartheid has slowly eroded (16). He explicates this loss as one that combines the material and psychological anxieties of a post-apartheid order:

Today thousands of Africans live in informal shacks or newly built government houses in Chatsworth and in other formerly Indian areas.⁴⁴ The effect of these changes has been a multilayered sense of loss: loss of economic security, loss of the township as "our place," loss of perceived existential and physical safety, and a loss of what Hegel called the "loss of the loss," that is, the disappearance of the blockage—unfreedom and apartheid—that prevented true self-realization and thus explained most problems and shortcomings in everyday life. (16)

Connecting Pillay's *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock* stories is this idea of loss, the "disappearance" of infrastructural "blockage," rather than a stylistic or formal unity: melancholia emerges in response to these uncertain absences, where precisely what is being mourned is unclear. Both "nervous (for wopko jensma)" and the "Sivakami" pieces centre on the absent: the troubled, mysterious artist who vanished seemingly without a trace at the precipice of a democratic South Africa, the dead, impoverished Indian woman who continues to be wrung out by the forces of capital and the literary scavenger "Pillay." "Girls" and "Crooks," meanwhile, intensify this notion of melancholia, now stripped of the more experimental, metafictional aspects of Pillay's

⁴⁴The complicating factor of anti-Black racism in Indian communities emerges as a key consideration later in Hansen's study.

early pieces. We see in Pillay's *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock* pieces the historical and structural losses that have made the nation-state of South Africa as we now know it, as well as those subjects unable participate in the transformational discourses of a new nation, one constructed around those experiences of loss. As the celebrations of freedom, truth, and reconciliation have ebbed, the everyday remains haunted by melancholia.

1.5: Mishka Hoosen and the Institutions of Crisis

South African novelist and critic Masande Ntshanga writes in an April 2016 *Chimurenga Chronic Books* review of Mishka Hoosen's debut novella *Call it a difficult night*, "I get the impulse to remove its pages from the binding and to rearrange them into a remix of the book" (36). Ntshanga is quick to note that this impulse is a reflection of Hoosen's "searing psychological logic," and the structure of the text, one that "gallops forward with the headiness of a palimpsest, crossing in, out, over and under itself, employing repetition and motifs, switching from the first person to the second—into verse and tracts of non-fiction" (36). His review is suitably breathless, attempting to grapple with a text that seems at times to exceed the bounds of its slim casing. *Call it a difficult night*, published by the small press Deep South in 2015, tells of a young woman institutionalized in a South African psychiatric hospital, writing through a haze of pharmaceuticals of the horrors of the institution, but also of memories of a youth spent in Cape Town and Michigan.⁴⁵ Continuing a tradition of writing on Southern African psychological crisis that includes the aforementioned Bessie Head and Wopko Jensma, as well as

⁴⁵According to Hoosen's own website, he is currently based in Cape Town, having graduated from the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan and having completed a Masters in Creative Writing at Rhodes University; there appear to be several autobiographical references at work in the novella (Hoosen "About"). A 2014 author biography accompanying "The Prayer Everywhere" in *Plume* describes Hoosen as 22 years old, which would suggest he was born in 1992.

Dambudzo Marechera and K. Sello Duiker, Hoosen focuses most directly on the psychiatric hospital in a series of vaguely connected vignettes, poems, and recollections of voices and images from a past that trap the protagonist in violent, demonic episodes.

The cover of the novella reproduces a 1909 letter by German artist Emma Hauck, “*Herzenschatzi komm [Sweetheart come]*”. Institutionalized first at the Psychiatric University Clinic in Heidelberg, and then in Wiesloch where she would eventually die, Hauck wrote what the visual artist Miranda Argyle describes as “extraordinary and intense,” letters to her husband, letters that implored him to rescue her from the institution (“Unseen and Unheard” 1). The requests are written in black cursive script, hundreds and perhaps thousands of the same marks repeated until the sentence ceases functioning as text and instead transforms into a forest of columns and breaks, dense enough in places that the paper underneath is entirely obscured. The effect is not dissimilar to the repetition of “Love me. Help me,” in the Bessie Head letter that looms over Pillay’s “nervous (for wopko jensma)”—a thicket of text, a repeated plea to the outside world for rescue. In both cases we sense the presence of the outsider artist whose work and biography extend beyond the grasp of a neat teleological or biographical form. Hoosen’s text reproduces the story of Hauck in a dry, semi-academic style amidst an account of the nightmares that haunt the narrator. It is one of several digressions into the history of the asylum that locates the narrator in a rich tradition of *madness*. These passages self-consciously place her on Foucault’s “ship of fools” in which “[t]he madman’s voyage is at once a rigorous division and an absolute Passage... his exclusion must enclose him; if he cannot and must not have another *prison* than the *threshold* itself, he is kept at the point of passage. He is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely” (*Madness and Civilization* 11). Neither in the prison, nor entirely free, Hoosen’s narrator locates herself at that threshold alongside Head, Hauck, and Jensma. In the

context of South Africa, the asylum has long formed part of a racialized system of discipline that continues to shape the subjects of the democratic state. As Sally Swartz writes in “The Black Insane in the Cape, 1891-1920,” the construction of sanity and insanity in South Africa has been determined through the racial logic of the colonial project. If the asylum worked to produce knowledge of the Black subject in the colonial Cape—a “colonial gaze on the [B]lack insane [that] inscribed bodies rather than mental life,” Swartz writes—then Hoosen returns to this site of inscription in the post-apartheid dispensation, to encounter that site once more (415). In this text, inscription is both mental and physical; there are few overt signifiers of race, yet the narrator remains ensconced within the deeply racialized spaces of the asylum and before that the university.

The use of Hauck’s letter and story in *Call it a difficult night* marks it as a text that is concerned with the exclusion of those who stand in excess to the national project, and broader processes of capital accumulation. In the work of Jijana and Pillay, these subjects were enmeshed within the literal infrastructures of racialized subjection in South Africa: through the enclosures that created the Bantustan, the sugarcane plantation, the township. In Hoosen’s novella, these systems of exclusion manifest both psychically and materially, in the university and the psychiatric institution which Hoosen’s narrator recognizes as producing the same “splintered” young subject that disrupts the biographical form of those “born free.” In this sense, the novella turns the subject-making institutions of the university and the psychiatric hospital into sites that both produce and manage those “excess” subjects.

Call it a difficult night begins in the midst of a terrifying vision: “[n]o-one else sees him, he’s come from that other place now, made himself from shadow to stand there” (6). An emissary from a “spirit world” hails the protagonist into a nightmare as Hoosen adopts, and then

soon abandons, the second-person voice: “[y]ou draw a line in the dust and you cross it, into that other place. The voices come from there” (6). The vision warns that there is “no more cheating that debt... Things come back. Things echo” (6). While the Songololo in Pillay’s “Sivakami” pieces spoke of the sugar plantation, and the old man grasping at shadows in Jijana’s “Sprinkling ashes” spoke to the enclosure of the land, this “[I]ean, blonde, ragged” figure looms as a spectre associated with the university and the institutions of *bildung* (6). Hoosen’s narrator explains that these visions began “a few months into my first year of university. Slowly, like a flame catching, my mind and nerves lit and ran rampant” (6). Rather than obscure the reality of the world, the “lines between things became visible, copper wires stitching the world into a mess of threads, a trap ready to spring” (7). The university is presented as a site that gives rise to the narrator’s own psychotic break, while elsewhere it is the place where “someone tells [the narrator] that a student committed suicide in his room, but was only found when the smell filled the dorm room corridor and made his neighbours complain” (110). It is, in every mention, an institution defined by psychosis, death, or, in the references to Hauck, synonymous with the psychiatric hospital. The institutions of this world are defined by these trip-wires that both reveal the structure of “the lines between things;” and make navigating those structures impossible. We are presented with a very similar image in Hoosen’s poem “The Prayer Everywhere,” published in the online poetry magazine *Plume* in 2014. ‘The day is a snare,’ the speaker begins, before attempting to

[...] *fucking account for everything.*

I was listing the names of the shot miners

and the Palestinian high schoolers,

and the murdered eight year old

with her clitoris cut out in Joburg.

The little boy in Sao Paulo whose father pushed 50 needles into his body.⁴⁶

Enormous, unthinkable violence awaits those who trigger the snare. A series of invisible lines and markers undergird the world of the text, divisions invisible to most, but not to Hoosen's narrator. These are not static or unchanging snares, they are sensitive and active, waiting to trap those who run afoul of the political and psychic systems that lurk beneath the recognizable external world. It is fitting that the narrator of *Call it a difficult night* experiences this series of snares in the space of a university library, in particular, where she notes that "[she] dropped a pile of books and threw [herself] through the revolving doors, ran to get away from all those whispers, the electric hum coming through the books, the staring eyes that [she] believed saw through [her], saw [her] cowardly heart, [her] inadequate mind" (7). We later learn that, prior to this university experience, she had "been sent home to South Africa from the boarding school in Michigan because of 'psychiatric issues'" (49). Both of these educational institutions contain an "unnamed dread" that engulf the protagonist (49):

I found that the cage I'd lived in all my life, and only just escaped when I left home to go to art school in Michigan, was only holding another cage, my body, and inside that, another cage, my mind, and that was struggling and fretting, tearing itself to pieces deep down

⁴⁶These harrowing images are returned to in *Call it a difficult night*, when Hoosen's narrator ties them to her own institutionalization: "The day I was sent to hospital, a two year-old boy in Sao Paulo, Brazil, was found with 50 needles pushed into his body," she tells us (109). Later, we are told "[a]lso on the day I was sent to hospital, I heard that a little girl of nine was found in an abandoned hostel outside of Johannesburg. She had been gang-raped, and her clitoris cut out" (109). The borders between her own experiences and the horrors of the world are porous.

there, was something like my soul, and more than that even—my memory. (50)

Hoosen's text provides a counter-argument to Fred Moten and Stephano Harney's claim in 2004's "The University and the Undercommons" that "the only possible relationship to the university today is a criminal one" (101). Moten and Harney argue for the need to use the university as a site for a deviant, defiant education. It is a "place of refuge," and we are encouraged to "abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony" (101). Indeed, the occupation of South African universities by student protestors demonstrated the possibilities of this defiant education. Yet Hoosen depicts the university as an institution that makes refuge impossible rather than necessary. In the context of South Africa's own crisis of higher education, the university itself cannot provide a space of refuge unless it is entirely remade. As it is experienced today, in Hoosen's telling, it is a space that offers only violence and expulsion to those unable to accede to its demands. Where Moten sees a subversive community within the university itself, *Call it a difficult night* recasts the university as a paradigmatic site of expulsion and rejection, designed to encourage what is acceptable to the nation-state and capital and violently spit out what is not. For the text's protagonist, the university is where the process of *bildung* fails irreparably, where there can be no promise of refuge.

What remains in the text, what can only remain, once those sites of *bildung* have failed, is the psychiatric hospital, itself a barely functional parody of Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault's theorization of technologies of surveillance: "I stuck my tongue out at the security cameras in the reception. I was taken to an examining room, weighed and measured," the narrator tells us, defiant in the face of the rationalizing, measuring institution (11). We are told of the outlay of the building, with a "cubicle firmly in the corner so no-one can sneak up on them,

windows of glass with little round holes you can talk to them through. Dumb attempt at a Panopticon, I think, feeling smart for remembering stuff like this” (11). While the university may have given the narrator the ability to name these technologies, that process of naming seems to offer little comfort to her as she is stuck within the panopticon of the psychiatric facility; the institutions of the state that are designed to produce normative, healthy South African subjects and can only offer a further splintering of this one.

What is made clear in the novella’s ending is a familiar sense of the unerring continuation of things as they were, tying *Call it a difficult night* to Jijana’s vigils that “go on and on” and Jensma’s “i am here yet nowhere.” The narrator’s pain may be briefly ameliorated, but in the final scene “seizures have [her] howling and thrashing on the floor, unable to stand” (111). A dog watches on in these final pages, “wide eyed,” but it only approaches the narrator after the seizures pass and the two “sleep without a sound” (111). In keeping with the tone of Jijana’s and Pillay’s laments about the continuation of historical forms of exclusion and subjection within the South African national project, Hoosen leaves the narrator otherwise alone at the end of the novella. She remains enmeshed within the infrastructures that have produced this crisis, now only marginally better able to navigate them. Futility, inertia, and melancholia appear once again to define the crisis of the young subject.

1.5.1: “Come Back Like Ash”: Returning to Newclare

Following a similar trajectory to Pillay’s publishing in *Prufrock*, Hoosen’s poem “Newclare Girl” eschews the formal and narrative experiments of earlier work in favour of a meditation on lost youth. “Newclare Girl” appears in the twelfth issue of *Prufrock* and begins “[i]n the little lipgloss bottles there’d be/fake flowers, purple, like what grew/between the train tracks”

(*Prufrock* 12, 20). The artificial signifiers of youth are supplemented here with the real flowers that grow only in liminal spaces, in the dangerous gaps between train tracks while children “bought blue ice cream/from the old woman opposite the barb-wire fence” (20). These colourful signifiers of childhood are snatched from interstitial spaces designed, through the racial logic of apartheid and maintained by post-apartheid obsessions with security, with the express purpose of exclusion, spaces that continue to carry with them the threat of violence. The poor, largely coloured community that forms the backdrop of this poem lies at the southern edge of Johannesburg. One of the few recent news articles about Newclare available online describes it as a “forgotten community,” and tells a harrowing story of an 11-year old boy killed by a speeding car (Patrick). It is a community that seems to warrant scant attention or coverage, a point made even by the little news coverage it *does* get. “Newclare Girl” does little to romanticize this place, and yet the speaker insists that she will “keep singing/will I get back there—radio songs/for the brown-legged girls, what we were” (20). As with Pillay’s “Girls,” nostalgia for a racialized community is paired with the recognition that it cannot ever be reclaimed within the logics of the post-apartheid dispensation.

At the centre of the poem stands an acknowledgement of a loss that cannot be named: “*I don’t know who it was but she’s gone now*” (20, italics in the original). “I can’t even hold her name in my mouth,” the speaker continues (20). The idea of home, of belonging, is tied to this experience of loss that cannot be fully articulated or mourned. We hear in the final lines of “Newclare Girl” the now familiar refrain of a demand or a plea that goes unanswered. Like Bessie Head’s plaintive “Love me. Help me,” and Emma Hauck’s “*Herzensschatzi komm*,” Hoosen’s speaker asks for a reprieve:

I want to say, baby, honey,
Girl, sweet thing, keep safe.
Go to sleep safe, stay there, stay.
Or come back like ash,
Soft in the air like your ghost.
Come back to say, “here”, and, “still.” (20)

As with Head, Hauck and Jensma, Hoosen’s speaker hears no answer to this plea for return or for a continued presence in the *here* and *still* of Newclare. Even the request, to “come back like ash,” is unfulfilled; there can be no return of that which has been burnt and scattered. Newclare, like Chatsworth, like the vigil in the former Ciskei, seems to represent only a monument to loss that reinscribes an original loss, now beyond the grasp of the speaker. In these sites, these young writers have attempted to rediscover what has been lost—a childhood friendship, a dead relative, a folk legend—only to encounter absence. It is in this return that we witness the unfreedom at the heart of South African freedom, at the heart of the “born free.” Hegel accounts for this ongoing sense of loss that accompanies apparent freedom in *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

[w]here that ‘other’ is sought, it cannot be found, for it is supposed to be just a *beyond*, something that can *not* be found...Consciousness, therefore, can only find as a present reality the *grave* of its life. But because this grave is itself an *actual existence* and it is contrary to the nature of what actually exists to afford a lasting possession, the presence of

that grave, too, is merely the struggle of an enterprise doomed to failure” (131-2, italics in original).

The experience offered by Hoosen, Pillay, and Jijana of *actual existence* in the racialized infrastructures their characters inhabit is of the other that cannot be found, of the grave that marks what was once present and can no longer be retrieved and moreover can no longer be mourned. What can be easily memorialized and sanctified in South Africa’s history has been incorporated within the national project, emblazoned in official records, commemorated by stamps and coins that enter the circulation of discourse and exchange. Yet what remains outside of those markers, of those official discourses, is left to the wayside of history. This is the condition of freedom in South Africa, one that raises the past as the necessary condition of the present, while that past unfreedom continues to operate to make the present possible. As Theodor Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics*, freedom “can be defined in negation only, corresponding to concrete forms of a specific unfreedom” (231). The texts I have considered in this chapter are, as Jijana’s speaker insisted, *not* odes to home: for the young writers in this chapter, freedom cannot be divorced from its negation, even in the return to the spaces that shape the young subject.

1.6: Conclusions

The rupture in the national project made visible and legible by Fallism came a generation after the deliberate, celebrated, and much studied attempts to forge a unified South Africa, the attempts to heal the violence of the apartheid era through the public deliberations of the TRC and through legislative and electoral means. Fallism revealed the ways in which these interventions

failed to account for the infrastructural systems that continue to shape the young subject, and the inability of the university to provide a means out of those systems, mired as it is in the logic of South Africa's history of racism, its contemporary embrace of neoliberalism, and ongoing processes of postcolonial capital accumulation.

Both *Chimurenga* and *Prufrock* have provided alternative literary venues for young writers outside of the established publishing industry and academic discussions of South African literature. As such, these publications offer a means of engaging emergent poetic and narrative voices and forms, as well as emergent critiques of the state in the contemporary historical moment. Despite the racial and geographical distinctions between Thabo Jijana, Pravasan Pillay and Mishka Hoosen, my reading of their work reveals a shared response to the contemporary experience of the young South African subject. None articulate the revolutionary fervor on display in the Fallist protests. Perhaps this is to be expected: given the incredible media coverage and social media response to the events of Fallism, many activists articulated those revolutionary calls themselves. Instead, the writers I considered here often looked beyond the university, to the subject-making infrastructures that shape the youth, in an effort to come to terms with the conflicts and contradictions that Fallism revealed. It is their melancholic experiences of home and loss that render their characters in *excess* to the nation, a nation that can no longer account for these racialized infrastructures and the losses they engender. In the work of these young writers, a return to the Bantustan or the township is a reminder of the unfreedom that continues to make possible the national project. These are the spaces, we are told, that still mark the young subject as abject, as a melancholic figure. The university is the latest addition to this list.

In the chapter that follows I return to the TRC to further investigate the construction of the young subject in the new South Africa. Given the TRC's overtly disciplinary operations and

the proliferation of the South African bildungsroman in the years since the advent of democracy, how might the Commission and the genre provide an understanding of the normative subject in the South African imagination? While the writers I have read in this chapter mourned the loss of the past and the exclusions of the present, what norms and expectations were set out through the TRC and the South African bildungsroman? The conditions of subjection and subject-making in post-apartheid South Africa are, once again, made visible through the notion of youth in the national imagination.

Chapter 2: Developing the South African Subject: The Bildungsroman after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

PROF MEIRING: Can I ask for a volunteer? Anybody in the audience; either a young man or a young girl to come and sit with Tarien and just off the cuff, in two minutes, say what is in your heart about the TRC and proposals for reconciliation. Any young person. I'm looking for a hero. There he comes. Thank you so much. Yes, you can applaud him.

[APPLAUSE]

PROF MEIRING: I need your name. Paulus Mnisi, you're not the Mnisi on—the man that should have been here?

MR MNISI: Yes.

PROF MEIRING: Are you Mr Mnisi?

MR MNISI: Wonderful. I think you should retract your applause.

TRC Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee Workshop, Ermelo, 8 July 1998

The Promotion of National Unity Act of 1993 that legislated the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission created three sub-commissions that would address crucial aspects of the TRC's mandate: a Committee on Human Rights Violations, a Committee on Amnesty, and a Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation ("Promotion of National Unity Act" 1-2). The latter hosted a workshop in the winter of 1998 in Ermelo, Mpumalanga, a town two hours east of Johannesburg. Piet Meiring, the theologian who led the session, was called to serve on the Committee specifically because the Dutch Reformed Church, the religious wing of conservative Afrikanerdom and apartheid, was not adequately represented in TRC leadership ("TRC Episode 74 Part 04").⁴⁷ Both Meiring's inclusion in the committee and his use of prayer to open the proceedings of the workshop reiterated the TRC's reliance on Christian notions of sin and

⁴⁷The TRC was, in both its conception and execution, deeply tied to Christian practices and rituals. The paternal presence of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, its investment in practices of confession and forgiveness, and the significant input from a range of Christian organizations in the establishment of the TRC's mission all attest to its Christian ethos. The relationship of Christianity to the TRC is further explored in Megan Shore's 2009 book *Religion and Conflict Resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*.

absolution; through this process of religiously inspired cleansing a new moral national community could be formed.

The Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation (“R&R” as Meiring abbreviates it, somewhat comically) had returned to Ermelo after the TRC’s initial hearings: “[w]e want to hear from you all the advice you have for us, especially in the field of reparation and very much in the field of reconciliation,” Meiring explains (TRC Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee Workshop, Ermelo).⁴⁸ “We would like to hear from you what has been done locally for reconciliation. Do you have plans? Do you have projects? Do you have ideas, not only for this year, but for the coming year and for the future on reconciliation and the community[?]” The workshop then turned to the representation of Ermelo’s youth, in keeping with the TRC’s attempt to include marginalized and underrepresented segments of South Africa’s population in the project of reconciliation and nation-building. The *Final Report* of the TRC details the special hearings focused on children and youth as necessary in “light of the direct impact of the policies of the former state on young people and the active role they played in opposing apartheid,” and because so few children had approached the TRC to tell their stories before the creation of this special hearing (*Final Report Vol. 4* 250). As part of the “healing ethos” of the Commission, the necessity of South Africa’s new human rights discourse was restated “to ensure that [children will be] given the opportunity to participate fully in South Africa’s new democratic institutions” (*Final Report Vol. 4* 251). This opportunity naturalized the core functions of the Commission: the speaking, self-representing subject is offered healing from the wounds of the past and entry into a national future through an appearance before the Commission and a watching national public. This was a process made possible by the adoption of a human rights framework as the

⁴⁸Quotations from the workshop are all from this source.

means through which the young subject is rendered legible as a member of the new South Africa. The TRC offered the young subject before it—and those who would watch, read, and listen along—access to a new process of formation, of development; it offered a national *bildung* plot.

The Commission presented the question of South Africa's youth at the end of apartheid in the language of crisis, a crisis to be solved through the nation-building process. Describing those who did not choose to appear, a report notes that “[m]any saw themselves not as victims, but as soldiers or freedom fighters and, for this reason, [they] chose not to appear before the Commission at all,” before acknowledging that others feared reprisals from their families or communities (*Final Report Vol. 4* 251). The report notes, too, that no “concerted attempt was made by the Commission to encourage those young people who *did* attend the hearings to speak of themselves as heroes” (*Final Report Vol. 4* 251). Paulus Mnisi's introduction into the Ermelo workshop, however, was hailed as a heroic act. Encouraged to address the workshop as a representative of the young Black Ermelo community, Meiring described him in the same language the *Final Report* would later go to great lengths to avoid: “I'm looking for a hero,” he stated, before encouraging the crowd to applaud Mnisi as he approached the committee. The heroism Meiring sought was not in Mnisi's personal story—little was offered on his background or history. Instead, the appearance before the Commission was itself heroic. Mnisi, however, used his platform to offer a complex and contradictory account of those he was being asked to represent. His first statements reiterated the heroism of many young Black South Africans in the fight against apartheid: “[i]nnocent and armed young women and men fearlessly confronted an apartheid monster, defended by men who were armed to their teeth. It was due to those battles of the struggle that today we speak of a democratic South Africa.” It was through violent resistance—not negotiation, reconciliation, and settlement—that a new South Africa was made

possible. Yet what was recently considered heroic in the fight against apartheid would soon be pathologized, deemed unsuitable in the establishment of a new South Africa its young subjects. The young people who “fearlessly confronted an apartheid monster,” Mnisi stated, now represented “a generation of highly politicised young people leading on the struggle on township streets, hence the image of young lions or to the then state leader [sic]; a lost generation who had boycotted and burned down schools, instinctively violent and irretrievably delinquent.” Mnisi’s solution to this impasse proposed “reform on legislation, the criminal justice system with specific reference to the juvenile justice system, [completely] updated data and accurate statistics on youth on crime... anti-crime activities and programmes...policing institutions...[and] effective social engagement for young people through sport and recreation, arts and other activities.” Remaking the youth of South Africa, Mnisi claimed, required that the state resumed its disciplinary functions, but also a process of “networking with [the] Human Rights Commission. Organise workshops, seminars and religious revival in human rights and values...close the gap and the river between [sic] that exists between a number of racial groups between young people.” Mnisi’s *heroic* appearance before the Ermelo workshop affirmed the divergent, contradictory foundations of the TRC: re-making the South African subject would require both the state’s use of force and discipline, as well as an affirmation of the nation-building discourses of community, human rights, and religious instruction already being instrumentalized by the Commission.

I argue in this chapter that the Commission and the genre of the bildungsroman both provide infrastructures through which the subject has been imagined and produced; they often share and deploy the same set of demands, expectations and pathways that allow for the subject to be granted entry into the nation. Both require a knowable, confessing subject who provides an account of the self before an awaiting public, a public that ensures the values of a society have

been effectively internalized and reproduced by the subject. They operate infrastructurally, too, in the sense that both lay out a path toward a specific conception of freedom, a series of expectations, a path that allows for the actualization of the subject. It is a path that has outlived the duration of the Commission itself, and it exceeds the boundaries of the novel: these are subject-making infrastructures that are now ingrained in the very notion of the South African individual.

My reading of Nadia Davids' *An Imperfect Blessing* (2014) explores the homologies between the genre and the Commission. Set mostly in 1993 and 1994, it tracks the final months of South Africa's interregnum between the end of apartheid and the country's first democratic election through the development of the teenaged protagonist Alia and the delayed development of her uncle, Waleed. I argue that the novel demonstrates the ways in which the normative, liberal foundations of the TRC now dominate the possibilities for imagining the young post-apartheid subject. In Davids' coming-of-age narrative, the *bildung* plot can only be made legible through the nation-building ethos set out by the TRC; to become a normative subject in contemporary South Africa, the novel demonstrates, requires an internalization of a reconciliatory, non-racial, national project. Contestations around race and the political conflicts that continue after the end of apartheid, the novel insists, can and indeed *must* be resolved through a national coming-of-age narrative.

Yet the genre also provides a means of challenging the normative assumptions of the state and the TRC. Its proximity to the TRC allows for it to be subverted, used to reveal and critique the foundational structures of power that shape the young protagonist. I argue that K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000) mimics the genre expectations of the bildungsroman as a means of exposing the necropolitical structures that underpin state power in contemporary South

Africa. While the genre has traditionally affirmed the state's generative, life-bestowing powers, *Thirteen Cents* offers a *bildung* plot in which violence and death operate as a means of entry into the society of adults. Whereas the normative bildungsroman works to *obscure* these constitutive structures, *Thirteen Cents* demonstrates the ways in which violence provides its own infrastructure of development for Azure, the abject child at the centre of the text. Unsettling the relationships between the state, the subject, and death, the novel operates as an anti-bildungsroman, one that refuses to be incorporated into the project of the TRC and remains, to borrow a phrase from Paulus Mnisi, instinctively violent and irretrievably delinquent.

2.1: The Bildungsroman and the National Project

There is no genre more closely tied to the development of the nation than the bildungsroman. It is unsurprising, then, that the genre dominates the literary landscape of so many postcolonial states. In keeping with this pattern, South Africa's own list of post-1994 bildungsromane is significant, and the positive critical reception many of these texts have received suggests the ways in which they conform to the expectations of the postcolonial, post-apartheid, coming-of-age narrative.⁴⁹ It is unsurprising, too, that the TRC adopts and co-opts the narrative trajectory and the disciplinary functions of the genre in an attempt to remake the nation *through* the young subject. Mnisi's declaration before the Ermelo workshop brought together the overt disciplinary functions of the state (criminal law, increased policing, carceral punishment) with the cultural

⁴⁹Notable English-language bildungsromane of the post-apartheid era often saw white writers return to the young subject negotiating the guilt and masculine violence of apartheid (see, for example, Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1993) and *Embrace* (2001), or the auto fiction of J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002) and *Summertime* (2009)). Writers of colour have often turned to the bildungsroman to interrogate the shifting class and race categories of South Africa after the end of apartheid. Achmat Dangor's *Kafka's Curse* (1997), Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007), Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007), and Nedine Moonsamy's *The Unfamous Five* (2019) all engage with the uncertainty of racial identity after the end of apartheid.

and narrative processes of subject-making (art, culture, sport, public workshops). The proximity of these forms of discipline reveals an easy slippage between the state's monopoly on force and punishment and the generative, modern techniques of subjection, in which the individual willingly adopts the norms and values of the new South Africa. This proximity was essential to the TRC's work, as the looming threat of criminal prosecution was used to produce the confessing, reconciliatory subject, even though prosecutions were limited. Providing an account of himself and of the community he represents, Mnisi uses the workshop—a form of soft state power—to remind those in attendance of the necessity and inevitability of state discipline, even in the new, liberal South Africa. He reminds the state of its full range of abilities, even as it insists on rhetorics of unity and healing through the TRC. The *bildung* plot, we are reminded, is one underscored by a sovereign right to violence.

In its most elemental form, the *bildungsroman* tracks the maturation of a young protagonist into a fully realised adult subject within the formal realms of society. It is a genre that emerged in reaction to the uncertainty induced by modernity. Franco Moretti in *The Way of the Word: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987) writes that early European *bildungsromane* developed in the wake of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, and represented a “transition point” between the bourgeoisie and aristocracy, providing “the encounter, and in fact the ‘marriage’ of the two classes [as] a way to heal the rupture, and to imagine a continuity between the old and the new regime” (viii). In these transitory historical moments, the category of *youth*—which had been of little import in stable, traditional communities—became central to the future of the nation. In South Africa's own uncertain and transitory historical moment after the end of apartheid, the TRC's focus on the role of the youth, a demographic credited with hastening the end of apartheid and expected to build the South

Africa to come, casts the young subject as both essential to the new nation *and* a problem to be remedied. Meanwhile, Mikhail Bakhtin's "The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)" (1986) locates the genre in real historical time, where we witness the subject emerge "*along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other*" (23, italics in original). The process of the subject's development is no longer a private affair; the subject emerges in and constitutes the *public*. As Bakhtin continues, this subject "is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. *What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man*" (23, italics my own). It is this dynamic process of emergence—one that sees the subject brought into being and disciplined by the state, while the state simultaneously forms an image of itself through that ideal subject—that positions the bildungsroman as crucial to an investigation of the ways in which the new South Africa has been imagined and contested through the infrastructure provided by the TRC.

The proliferation of postcolonial bildungsromane has often been attributed to the genre's ability to stage a rejection of colonial power and assert an independent *selfhood* that is easily allegorized as an assertion of *nationhood*. Ericka Hoagland's "The Postcolonial Bildungsroman" (2019), for example, argues that the genre works "as an act of subversion and inversion, a political act of counter-colonisation, a reimagining and reinvention, a process of becoming through the act of unmaking its predecessor and unmasking the [b]ildungsroman's ideological flaws" (225). Relatively little has been asked, however, about how the genre has been incorporated within the ideological structures of the postcolonial nation itself. As the bildungsroman has been mobilized to critique a past colonial regime, in what ways does it reify

and affirm new forms of state power in postcolonial societies? Frederic Jameson's framing of the "third world" bildungsroman is useful in determining its multiple and ambivalent functions in newly independent nations. Jameson's "On Literary and Cultural Import-Substitution in the Third World: The Case of the Testimonio" (1996), draws on Benedict Anderson's theorization of nationalism as a modular technology that allowed for the expression and imagining of national communities. Jameson proposes a similar trajectory for the bildungsroman. It is not simply a remnant of colonial influence or a celebration of postcolonial resistance, he writes; rather, the genre represents a form of *literary and cultural import-substitution* in a globalized world market, where cultural forms are "surely among the more obvious commodities transferred by caravan or fax machine" (175). The bildungsroman, he insists, ought to be thought of as the "import of new technology—which is to say, not merely the object... but also a production process" (176). In this formulation, the production of a corpus of bildungsromane is akin to the establishment of an automobile factory or film studio, not simply an imitation of a Western cultural product. In this sense it functions as the ideal literary companion to the TRC, as both genre and Commission accompany societies undergoing large-scale political change, and both work to induce norms and subjectivities that govern a new political dispensation. Through these twinned processes, the knowable, confessing subject is, supposedly, transformed into the national citizen; the TRC and the bildungsroman hold the revelation of the self as the means through which the subject is incorporated into the new nation.

Furthering the entanglement of the TRC with the bildungsroman is a shared investment in human rights discourses central to the establishment of post-apartheid South Africa. As Joseph Slaughter has argued in *Human Rights Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (2007), the bildungsroman shares a "narrative homology" with the human rights regime that

dominates both global and local conceptions of the modern subject (93). The bildungsroman, he continues, has become the prototypical literary form through which discourses of human rights take shape; through the narrative demands of the genre the individual subject is incorporated into formal society, internalizing the bourgeoisie norms of the nation. Human rights law, he argues, adopts the same “conceptual vocabulary, deep narrative grammar, and humanist social vision” as the bildungsroman, imbricating the genre and the law within a shared narrative and ideological structure to produce the modern subject (4). In the South African case, the TRC’s reliance on a legible, narrativized account of the self before the nation makes the bildungsroman not only useful but *essential* to the creation of the new South African subject; this human rights vocabulary allowed for the production of the national “personality [that] becomes legible to the self and others in fiction and fact” (Slaughter 23). As my reading of *An Imperfect Blessing* contends, this is not a unidirectional process: elements of the bildungsroman are evident in the TRC’s conception of its subject-making project, while the TRC continues to inform the genre long after its conclusion.

The wide-spread adoption of a human rights framework that binds the bildungsroman and the TRC in the new South Africa was itself a result of political compromise and negotiation. As Saul Dubow writes in 2012’s *South Africa’s Struggle for Human Rights*, South Africa’s anti-colonial efforts often appealed to the notion of human rights rather than the quest for sovereignty that animated anti-colonial struggles elsewhere.⁵⁰ In the 1980s, Dubow writes, the ANC largely embraced a human rights-centered political vision that would become central to negotiations

⁵⁰Samuel Moyn notes in 2010’s *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*, that leaders like Ho Chi Minh “rarely invoked the phrase ‘human rights’ or appealed to the Universal Declaration of 1948 in particular, though decolonization was exploding precisely in the moment of its passage and after” (85). For most independence leaders of the age “the rights of man and the nation-state had long been inseparable” (85). South Africa, he acknowledges, was an exception to this anti-colonial relationship between sovereignty and individual rights.

with the apartheid state, partly in response to the increasing influence of labour-based movements active in South Africa such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and trade unions. There was the recognition, too, that centering communal rights along ethnic or racial lines would only reinscribe the logic of apartheid; from “the ANC’s perspective, majority rule in a unitary South Africa could be most effectively advanced by supporting *individual* rights” (Dubow 103, italics in the original). This insistence on individual rights was shared by the apartheid regime, who feared the marginalization of Afrikaners in a democratic South Africa, while also concerned that the ANC would threaten “the sanctity of private property and white vested interests,” a fear we now know was misguided (105). The adoption of a human rights regime as the natural, inevitable, and incontrovertible framework through which the South African subject has been imagined shares with the bildungsroman a narrative of becoming, of self-disclosure, of confession, and of incorporation that would eventually be central to the TRC. The “narrative homology” shared by human rights law and the bildungsroman is essential to the Commission: an account of the self is instrumentalized as a process of *bildung*, one that reaffirms the human rights regime that has come to define the new nation-state. This process has seen the bildungsroman recast as a means of continuing and broadening the work of the TRC. The narrative expectations of the genre—the trials faced by the young subject, the entry into adult society, the rejection of the past as a means of conjuring the future—have become essential not only to the production of the subject, but also to the production of the nation itself. The process of *bildung* we witness in *An Imperfect Blessing* can only be completed through the internalization of the TRC’s demands for the legible, reconciliatory, non-racial, human rights-bearing subject.

2.2: “Coming of Age *with the Country*”: *Bildung* as Reconciliation in Nadia Davids’

An Imperfect Blessing

Nadia Davids’ 2014 debut novel, *An Imperfect Blessing*, tells the story of a Cape Town family negotiating the rapidly-changing landscape of South Africa in 1993 and 1994, a particularly violent time in the transition from white-minority rule to a non-racial, multiparty democracy. Davids is better known as a playwright; *At Her Feet*, *Cissie*, and *What Remains* have all been performed and celebrated internationally, while she has also served as the president of PEN South Africa since 2017. The Umuzi paperback edition of the novel comes with an impressive collection of praise from South Africa’s most celebrated writers, all of whom single out the novel’s location in historical time: JM Coetzee’s blurb locates the novel in “the tumultuous years between the end of white rule in South Africa and the Mandela presidency,” Gabeba Baderoon praises its portrayal of “the subtleties of coming to consciousness in the days of change and loss in two in-between periods in South African history,” while Zoë Wicomb describes the novel as a “poignant evocation of Cape Town in the last of the apartheid years.” The relationship between the bildungsroman and national historical time is clearly central to the novel’s appeal. Set in the midst of the formal negotiations that dismantled apartheid, but before the existence of the TRC, the novel deploys the bildungsroman as a narrative structure through which the incorporation of the young subject into the new South Africa can be staged. Through this use of genre, *An Imperfect Blessing* demonstrates the ways in which the normative South African bildungsroman has been adapted to serve the norms and expectations of the new South Africa, norms named and enacted through the TRC.

The novel depicts two processes of *bildung*, both of which must be resolved within the historical trajectory of the nation-state’s turn to liberal democracy. The primary narrative

concerns the development of teenager Alia Dawood, a precocious child desperately grasping for an adult identity within the uncertain racial, religious, and class complications of Cape Town in 1993. Without the teleological impetus of the struggle against apartheid “it didn’t feel like she and the country were in this together” (19). The young subject, at the beginning of the novel, has yet to be incorporated into the grand sweep of national history. “She had been born too late,” the narrator explains; “[t]oo late to be a part of the graffiti and the chanting and the defiance. Too late to know what it felt like to lend flesh to a crowd, to spit at the police, to gather in secret corners at school. Too late for all that” (19). Alia’s complaint suggests the zenith of history had already been reached and that she would be entering into its slow denouement—the end of history, where those grand conflicts have been resolved. Although she feels excluded from the flow of national history, Alia’s process of *bildung* tracks her entry into the new South Africa through a process of reconciliation rather than the activist struggle of prior generations. Her *bildung* plot requires the internalization of a new political order, one that works to confine opposition to the state, and political contestation over the nature of that state, to South Africa’s apartheid past. The conflicts that divide her family, her small community, and her elite private school are no longer incidental to national history, as they might have been during the apartheid-era; rather, the resolution of these personal conflicts become through the bildungsroman essential to the establishment of a liberal, reconciliatory framework that sustains the post-apartheid nation. The development of the young subject becomes the “all that,” Alia fears she has missed out on.

The novel’s second *bildung* plot tracks the delayed development of Alia’s uncle, the family’s radical son, Waleed. An aspiring academic in 1993, Waleed’s youth had been spent on the fringes of the anti-apartheid movement. The novel introduces him walking amidst the remains of District Six, searching for inspiration in order to “finally write something about it all,

arrange words that would speak to... what? Some sort of homage? A rant? (Maybe. He spent most days with one eye on the past; focused fury could easily be reached.)” (41). Waleed’s political fury, his academic and artistic pursuits, and his white girlfriend all mark him as an outsider, a roguish figure whose activism creates violent schisms in his family. His *bildung* plot demands a transformation of his youthful radical politics—no longer appropriate in the democratic South Africa being formed—into a narrative account of his life and his community. It is this process of transformation, through self-representation, storytelling, and disclosure, that will become essential to the South African project envisioned by the TRC and the creation of the new South African subject. In *An Imperfect Blessing*, genre works *through* both Alia and Waleed to turn political conflict into a historiographic project, clearing the contemporary as a site of ongoing contestation. Their narrative arcs come to share an eventual resolution, I argue, because of the text’s engagement in the parallel infrastructures of development established by the genre and the Commission.

2.2.1: The Trials of Non-Racialism in the *Bildung* Plot

In the 1993 plot, Alia must negotiate the political and racial tensions of Cape Town in her story of development. However, the novel reminds us that while the end of apartheid is near, the social structures of colonial rule remain firmly in place. The middle-class, Muslim, Dawood family lives in Walmer Estate, a predominantly coloured neighbourhood formed after the destruction of District Six, while Alia and her sister Nasreen attend St. Michaels, a recently desegregated private school that caters to Cape Town’s elite. Alia begins a formative Saturday with a complaint: “[She] knew what sort of room she wanted and it wasn’t this one. It was as if the room, like her personality, was something she couldn’t quite get right. She had only just moved

out of her pink phase and had been trying on this new image, but it was a thin, fragile garment through which, or so she thought, everyone could see” (33). The discrepancy between her internal concept of the self and the world is, she fears, always visible. In this teenage longing, for an image of the self that is coherent, whole, and autonomous, and for social recognition, is a vision of individual freedom that is instructive for thinking through the subject of the bildungsroman. There is a disjunction between the familial expectations imposed on Alia, and the idea of a future, adult self; it is a disjunction that forces the young subject into the public to establish a “new image” of herself, one recognized by a community of peers beyond the confines of her family. Coming of age after the political fervour of the 1980s, Alia’s inability to get her personality “quite right,” is not only a question of personal development, but also of national development. The development of the individual personality will not, and cannot, remain a private affair for long in a changing South Africa: the emergence of the public subject—or the subject *in public*—will soon become central to TRC proceedings. Buttressed by the liberal human rights framework that spurred the creation of the TRC, this process of self-representation does not simply ask the young subject to accede to the demands of society. Rather, this becomes the mode through which freedom in South Africa is imagined—through a claim to the rights afforded to subjects by the state, rather than the struggle for sovereignty fought by earlier anti-colonial movements.

Alia’s entry into the public sphere is told through an adaptation of the classical heroic trial—here staged at a dingy nightclub, HAL’s, named after Stanley Kubrick’s futuristic, villainous cyclops in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The gesture to Homer via Kubrick returns us to Mnisi’s appearance before the Ermelo workshop; the young subject is elevated to the status of a young hero, the appearance before the public is a challenge to be surmounted in order to be

recognized by an awaiting adult world. Inspired by “Kubrick’s message of a new spiritual frontier,” and seemingly ignoring Kubrick’s anti-humanist vision of the future, the founders of the club envisioned a utopian space that only discriminated on aesthetic grounds: “[n]othing dark and dingy. Nothing that referenced the outside world. No fucking policy about who could come and who couldn’t. Open to everyone. ‘Well,’ Noordien [one of the club’s founders] interjected, ‘everyone who dresses right’” (39). The novel explains that HAL’s had long functioned as a rite of passage for local coloured teenagers; by 1993 it “held inter-generational memories. Alia’s uncles and aunts had all come here and told her how they had bowed at the altar of disco. A decade later her older cousins had pumped their fists in the air to Afrika Bambaataa and Run-D.M.C., imagining a link between themselves and the ghettos of New York City” (39). Simultaneously futuristic and nostalgic, HAL’s still operates as an entry point into the unknown for Alia, a space defined by unspoken codes of behaviour that she must internalize as part of her journey to adulthood. The “first and often hardest lesson,” for example, “was *never* to be the first to admit to knowing someone, or even to having met them,” the narrator reminds the reader (37, italics in the original). Recognition, in this world, must be earned.

The subtleties of these codes are soon put into context by Alia’s awkward negotiation of questions around race, however. While she is expected to pass through the same testing grounds that generations before her had, the world into which she is entering is about to be radically different, the novel recognizes: it is made clear that the horizon of her development can no longer be limited by the segregated community of Walmer Estate. The introduction of Black characters into Alia’s narrative becomes central to her *bildung* plot, an arc in which Alia must learn to see Black South Africans as participating in a shared a national identity if she is to become a viable subject in the new South Africa. We see the first example of this uneasy

relationship between the formation of Alia's identity and Black South Africans at HAL's.

Watching her fellow young coloured Capetonians dance, Alia feels as though she was in "one of those rooms filled with mirrors where an image is replicated in a dizzying ad infinitum" (46).

She sees in this moment only repeated representations of herself, a claustrophobia that alerts the reader to the unsustainability of spaces like HAL's, but also more broadly the unsustainability of a parochial coloured identity. The repetition of the familiar image is broken when the narrator turns to the presence of Black teenagers: "[c]onfined to a corner, as if the dance floor was an abstracted grid of the city and they were still obeying a now abolished law [...] they danced with their backs to the rest of the club, their movements a seamless blend of American music video sequences and 1950s kwela" (46). Their presence—limited and segregated as it is—provokes panic in Alia, who "realised with gathering dread that not even her beetle-crushers could make up for the Gothic whiteness of her get-up" (46). Having spent hours preparing for this excursion, the mere presence of Black peers provokes crisis, and with it a recognition that the trappings of adulthood Alia had adopted were constructed through signifiers of a whiteness she only now recognizes as inappropriate for her entry into the adult world. These Black teenagers introduce different codes, gestures, and movements into this otherwise homogenous space, references to a country beyond Alia's limited experience of Walmer Estate. Their presence functions as a reminder, to both Alia and the reader, of the broader national context that will supersede the concerns of this small coloured community; Alia must learn that the language of HAL's will not be sufficient for her process of development in the country being reinvented around her.

This brief crisis of racial identity raises a familiar concern over the construction of colouredness as an intermediary identity in South African history. As Mohamed Adhikari writes in his 2006 article "Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration: Continuity and Change in the Expression of

Coloured Identity in White Supremacist South Africa, 1910-1994,” coloured identity during white minority rule was “remarkably stable” due to the “assimilationism” associated with colouredness, which “spurred hopes of future acceptance into the dominant [white] society” (467). As the end of apartheid was being formalized in 1993, this proximity to whiteness would no longer grant the coloured subject legitimacy, authority, or privilege. Zoë Wicomb writes in her 1998 essay “Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa,” that the spectre of miscegenation remains central to conceptions of a coloured identity. “Miscegenation, the origins of which lie with a discourse of ‘race’, concupiscence, and degeneracy,” formed the basis of a “*shame* used by the apartheid regime in the naming of a coloured race,” she writes, “and [is now] recurring in the current attempts by coloureds to establish brownness as a pure category, which is to say a denial of shame” (92). Commenting on the ANC’s acknowledgement that coloured voters in the Cape would likely vote for the National Party in the first democratic elections in 1994, Wicomb notes that questions remained about “whether the 1980s had indeed created non-racialism, acceptance of African leadership, and a sense of common nationhood,” in the coloured communities of the Cape (99). Based on the eventual result of that vote—the Western Cape was the only province to re-elect the National Party—the answer was no. The coloured subject remains, in this historical moment, but also in Alia’s own journey of development, on the precipice of two racial orders, but also on the precipice of two historical epochs. Whiteness is presented here as inauthentic, an outmoded outfit that no longer suits the society Alia hopes to join. Blackness remains foreign, other, drawing on a global diasporic culture and a local one simultaneously. Where does this leave the young, coloured subject, attempting represent herself before the new nation?

The novel answers this question by transposing Alia's racial identity crisis onto the recognizable discourses of national politics; the complex questions of identity, race, and belonging are ones the TRC, the electoral process, and judicial system will be able to negotiate, this transposition seems to suggest. This deference to the institutions of the state will become a central motif in the novel, a deferral that affirms the state's claim over the *bildung* plot. In this instance, Alia's friends gather to parrot the pressing debates in the country: one is embarrassed by his parents' continued support for the National Party, one has parents who have been ANC supporters for decades, while "this one had a mother in the UDF, this one had a sell-out uncle in the Tri-Cameral Parliament, this one had a cousin who had been in solitary" (56). Cape Town's coloured community, the novel insists, represents the full spectrum of South African politics. Alia who "had not really considered which party her parents would support," suspects that her mother will vote ANC while her father—who feared their communist connections—was more likely to vote for the Democratic Party (57). The mention of the white, liberal organization is met with brief disdain before the conversation ends and one of the interlocutors turns to rewriting the lyrics of the song on the loudspeaker: "'Jou ma en pa is [Your mother and father are] Ninja Turtles! OW! Mandela skop vir [kicks] Buthelezi! OW!'" (58). This pastiche of school yard non-sequiturs, pop-culture references, and political commentary makes it clear that Alia's entry into political discourse has only limited consequences for now. The nightclub has served a function not dissimilar to that of the *bildungsroman* itself: it has offered a means of bringing together the contradictions and complications of identity and belonging in a fast-changing nation, and it has affirmed new discourses of multiparty democracy as a means of resolving the residual conflicts of the apartheid era. As Alia is driven home from HAL's, "she watched the hills of her neighbourhood rise up as if for the first time: something she could not yet name had shifted,

changed, been made anew” (59). What she cannot name is the development of her own national, adult subjectivity—one that must acknowledge the divisions of the past as she forges a new path toward a South African future.

2.2.2: The Bildungsroman and Reconciliation in Historical Time

The novel provides a second *bildung* plot through the character of Waleed. His development has been stalled by apartheid and the drawn-out process of its dismantling. Much of Waleed’s story takes place in 1986 through a series of flashbacks which track his political awakening, one that eventually leaves him adrift in the new South Africa. An itinerant writer and academic, much of his struggle to come to terms with the changing world is captured in “the realm of agonised imaginings,” his six year-long doctoral thesis on “[h]ow political trauma limits creative output,” is now an “uneasy obsession” (67, italics in the original). It is an autobiographical obsession, as Waleed “felt his life and his work had been royally fucked by apartheid; he was convinced that the conclusion of the research was dependent on the end of the system” (67). This thwarted development bleeds into his strained family relations. With his nieces he assumes “an expression of interest but he felt as though he was mimicking something he had once seen on a sitcom” (67). His relationship with his brother Adam is contentious, and the narrator references the many long-running feuds between the two. Waleed’s academic and artistic frustrations stem from the same place that his familial conflicts do: it is apartheid that has interrupted his coming-of-age narrative. It is only through the establishment of a new nation and a new subjectivity that these tensions can be resolved.

The anti-apartheid movement in Cape Town has not offered a path towards Waleed’s normative development; his forays into direct political action are complicated by his class status

and educational background, but more significantly his distaste for the violence deemed necessary in the fight against apartheid. During a nighttime foray into the Black township of Crossroads in 1986, during which Waleed and his friends attempt to provide support for those displaced by state evictions, they are ambushed by counter-revolutionaries and flee in the Dawood's Mercedes Benz. "It is one thing to sit with friends and chatter with grand and stoned reverence about Martin [Luther King Jr] and Malcolm [X] and Patrice [Lumumba]'s sacrifices," the narrator explains, "it is another to think about black men in white bandanas taking Judas coins and wielding knobkerries and pangas at four-year-old girls and old men too slow to move. [Waleed] asks Yusuf to stop so he can vomit" (164). References to radical Black heroes only provide abstract, academic engagement with the realities of racial subjugation for Waleed; the fight against the apartheid regime cannot be romanticized in the same way. His emetic reaction suggests that the non-racialism of the UDF, or the broadened categories of race offered by the Black Consciousness movement, provide little succour in his confrontations with the complexities of the anti-apartheid struggle. Waleed's coloured identity, and his class position, mark him as liminal, unable to truly engage in the dirty work of fighting apartheid. Unlike Alia, whose racial reckoning begins mere months before the 1994 democratic elections, Waleed's identity crisis cannot yet be neatly narrativized into the arc of a national history. That narrative arc, his *bildung* plot, demands a national transformation before it can be completed, in the logic of the novel.

The nadir of Waleed's thwarted apartheid-era *bildung* plot comes in June 1986 when he agrees to shelter an activist on the run from the state. He is shocked and angered to find that the activist is a teenager, Firoze, "thin and lissome, the form of a delicate woman" (184). Waleed's anger at this revelation once again reveals his softer, unformed, character, and he is dismissed by

comrades as too bourgeois to make the harsh choices required to fight apartheid. Waleed's concern emerges in a confrontation with a friend and comrade Yusuf, who "had [once] been gestural to a fault," in their childhood but now hold his arms "stiffly at his side, as though he is—*Could it be?*—standing to attention" (195, italics in the original). Yusuf, it seems, has understood the requirements of adulthood under apartheid's brutality and emerged as a militant anti-apartheid activist, while Waleed still mourns their lost childhood and the lost youth of Firoze. Now "words like 'discipline' and phrases like 'isolate him' have replaced words like 'friendship' and memories like 'We were once six years old together. We picked green figs together from Mrs Williams' tree'" (196).⁵¹ Apartheid has provided a *bildung* narrative that produces only stoicism and violence in figures like Yusuf. This is the only viable posture under the twinned pressures of apartheid and the fight against it, but it is one that Waleed cannot adopt.

He ultimately agrees to hide Firoze in the basement of his brother Adam's home. Firoze never speaks during this brief, tumultuous entry into the Dawood family. What we know of him is told through Waleed's anxious speculation: he "pictures jungles and Firoze's slender build... he hears the insistent rhythm of a training song...[h]e layers the imagery with stories of ambush... [h]e agonises... He allows the questions to take the place of action" (198-199). In this process of speculation, Waleed turns to fiction as a means of providing a resolution to the uncertainty that awaits Firoze. This series of narrative leaps—his attempt to imagine a life for Firoze beyond the contemporary moment—will become Waleed's strategy for resolving the political questions he cannot address through activism, and will also come to serve the resolution of his *bildung* plot.

⁵¹As discussed in Chapter 1, nostalgia after apartheid remains a contentious idea. As Eric Miyeni wrote in a 2011 criticism of Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia*, even the *notion* that those oppressed by apartheid could look back on life in the township with some degree of fondness is "sickening" ("Defining Blacks by Past Misery is Unfair"). Yusuf would, at this point in the novel, agree.

The political crisis of the late-apartheid era, the novel makes clear, cannot provide the grounds for the young subject to emerge in a non-racial, democratic South Africa. Instead, the crucial questions that anti-apartheid activists raised—around the nature of power and subjection in South Africa, about the forms of racial capitalism that produce uniquely violent conditions of inequality, and of the necessity of armed struggle in the attempt to overthrow an unjust system—will be the raw material used to inspire Waleed’s autobiographical writing, the fodder for his narrative self-representation and his eventual emergence as a new subject of the new South Africa. This will be the subject-making procedure that is essential to the TRC, and that the Commission will naturalize: the subject must provide an autobiographical account of the self as a means of dispensing with the past. The nation-state itself provides this *bildung* plot through the Commission, and as such a normative South African subject can be constituted from the violence and struggles of the apartheid era. The novel, tied as it is to a realist, historically-determined perspective, presents Waleed as a subject awaiting the infrastructure of the new South Africa, the TRC, to legitimise a process of development that will become essential to the nation-building project after 1994.

Firoze eventually leaves the Dawood home and South Africa altogether, although his fate remains unknown. Waleed’s decision to harbour him descends into a family argument, one that is resolved by affirming the *bildung* plot for the young Dawood children. Adam admonishes him for harbouring Firoze: “I don’t believe in sending children to do a man’s job. It’s immoral and you know it. I don’t send my kids to work every day. I send them to school” (201). The nature of that private “whitey” school becomes the topic of debate (202). “What are you teaching those girls if you send them there?” Waleed asks, “[t]hey are safe in that clean white world while other schools are burning?” (202). This is a false characterization, in sense: Alia will make her first

Black friend, Lizzie, at this “whitey” school after a series of awkward interactions during which Alia learns to abandon the casual racism of her parents’ generation. The private school does not only allow the Dawood children access to the white elite, but it will also bring them closer to a nascent Black elite. Firoze, meanwhile, remains the unspeaking subject at the centre of the Dawood family’s story; his process of *bildung* forever unfinished. What is made clear, however, is that his entry into the Dawood home provides the impetus for both Waleed’s and Alia’s coming-of-age narratives. Waleed learns that his political action threatens the safety of his family, and the opportunities his nieces will enjoy in the democratic South Africa that, in hindsight, is made inevitable. Alia, meanwhile, learns that the freedoms she will enjoy are premised on the sacrifices of figures like Firoze. Waleed might paint the disagreement with Adam in the same harsh political terms he finds troubling when spoken by Yusuf, but eventually he feels “a modicum of unspoken relief every time he imagines his nieces sitting in the bright calmness of a safe classroom, staring wide-eyed and fearless into the possibility of a different sort of future” (204). This is a perspective only allowed by the narrative’s movement in historical time, which returns to 1986 safe in the knowledge that these conflicts will soon be resolved by the sweep of national history. Through this narrative perspective, and through the structure of the bildungsroman, the reader recognizes that Waleed’s vision of a future for his family, and by extension a future nation, must eschew the kinds of politics his friends practice. While he decries participation in a liberal “whitey” private education, he recognises both its necessity and inevitability in the making of a new kind of subject, one that stands ready for the nation that inevitably awaits.

2.2.3: Rewriting the Nation to Come

Alia and Waleed end their respective *bildung* plots by writing themselves into the new South Africa. Alia writes a letter to Nick, a love interest she met at HAL's, detailing the nation's first democratic election on April 27, 1994. The date represents a new-found maturity, for both Alia and the nation. Having passed through her trials of development, she is now able to reflect on her own journey through the prism of national history:

I think everyone in Walmer Estate registered at my old school, Zonnebloem. I hadn't been back since I left and there was something incredibly weird about walking through those gates again... It was as if there were two things going on at the same time, what I was seeing right then and there and then also what I was remembering (402-3).

Returning to a site from her youth to witness the emergence of the new South Africa allows Alia to claim her place as a subject of history, fully aware of her own experience of the world as it is being formed around, and indeed, through her. Election day also works to resolve remaining family conflicts: "[w]e went down together," Alia explains "my parents, me, Nasreen... Waleed and Anna were registered in Observatory and we picked up my mom's parents and my Mama along the way" (403). The few lingering political disagreements—"Mama got into a fight with her neighbour Auntie May because Auntie May announced really loudly that she would be voting for the Nats, which we now know (sickeningly) is how most of the Western Cape went,"—remain safe within the realm of electoral politics, no longer questions of life and death (403). The letter ends by reinscribing the necessity and inevitability of the TRC, as Alia explains that "'seeing' is one of the things that's going to happen, that's *got* to happen... no one will ever be able to say

again that they ‘didn’t know’” (404).⁵² Alia’s story closes with her firmly embedded within the language of reconciliation; through storytelling and through the act of witnessing she can claim a place in the new nation. The language of the TRC has become the language of the *bildungsroman*—a means of making the development of the subject, and the establishment of the nation, legible.

Waleed’s story ends with a public reading of his creative work, which provides the resolution to his *bildung* plot. The disparate figures in Waleed’s life converge at a local bar, in attendance are family members but also “strange faces (friends of Anna’s, people from university, those who populate Waleed’s other life)” (407). This multi-racial audience gathers to celebrate him and his work, which is inspired by the rubble and detritus of District Six that is now available to be transformed into the narrative material that allows for his entry into the community that has gathered around him. This is the writing, we are told, that has freed him from the anxieties of bygone forms of political activism. He has finally stopped raging “against readers assuming the biography of his work, saying that it is a ghettoising tool for women, for people of colour. Always, he’s refused his own life in his work. But now he sees that there is no shame in acknowledgement. *No, none at all*” (408, italics in the original). There is no shame in the biographical—the biographical is, indeed, crucial to the development of the South African subject through the TRC and through the *bildungsroman*. Shame, which Wicomb contends was central to the construction of coloured identity, is similarly displaced by Waleed’s autobiographical representation. By the end of the novel, Waleed has found a way to turn the history of South Africa—the reason for his own stifled development—into the basis of a post-

⁵²This assertion repeats almost exactly the assertion of TRC Deputy Chairperson Alex Boraine in *A Country Unmasked* (2000), in which he claims that one of the triumphs of the TRC was that “in the South African context it is no longer possible for so many people to claim that ‘they did not know’” (289). This is an idea I explore in further detail in Chapter 4.

apartheid subjectivity. His writing is no longer a source of frustration; rather, it allows him to bring together the disparate parts of his life: “the words begin, and with it the walking. Waleed walks across the stones of District Six into the rubble of the West Bank, through the endless sunburnt roads of the Karoo into the caves of Table Mountain, across the deep blue of the bay to the Island, through the groves and orchards of the Cape and up the hills of the BoKaap” (409). Dispossession is now a concept worthy of historical and literary fascination, and Waleed’s concept of the political has transformed along with the country; from the furtive entries into Crossroads to oppose the kind of dislocation that his family experienced in District Six, to a role as a flaneur who catalogs a history of dispossession as a creative and aesthetic expression of an authentic, autonomous subject. Firoze is now a “frail, faint shadow... the ghost boy stands in the doorway saying nothing, offering the silent comfort that the death has been quick, the final hours lasted just a moment;” Waleed’s journey through the city and its history is then able to continue (409). The image of Firoze’s death has been confined to the past, along with the suffering and injustice of apartheid. With that, the future can be claimed by both Waleed and Alia—two subjects ready to join the new South Africa being assembled through their stories.

2.3 Post-apartheid Life and Death in K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*

An Imperfect Blessing stands as a paradigmatic post-apartheid bildungsroman, one that shapes the young subject through the internalization of the values established by and articulated through the TRC. Yet contemporary South Africa, and the forms of postcolonial capital accumulation that sustain it, still requires the creation of an exterior, the non-subject at the periphery of the nation. As the bildungsroman works to incorporate the national subject into the formal realms of South Africa, what becomes of the subjects who cannot account for themselves? What becomes

of the subject who remains on the edges of the formal community that constitutes South Africa? My reading of *Thirteen Cents* investigates the way in which the genre expectations of the bildungsroman are adopted and challenged by the novel in order to critique the subject-making infrastructure of the new South Africa. Duiker's text, an anti-bildungsroman, confronts the processes of subject-making that have come to define the post-apartheid state, revealing the infrastructure of violence that undergirds the normative national project.

Thirteen Cents was published in 2000, five years before Duiker's suicide at the age of 30. It won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Book in 2001 and it has been a widely praised example of Black post-apartheid fiction. Liz McGregor's *Guardian* obituary cites Duiker and Phaswane Mpe as two of "the most promising post-apartheid writers, representing the frontier generation who attempt to transcend race in their exploration of South Africa" ("Kabelo Duiker"). A 2016 *Daily Maverick* editorial by activist Mark Heywood calls for Duiker's work to be made a permanent part of the pedagogical canon: "I'd love his publishers and book-sellers to tell me about how his books sell (or don't) and who they sell to? I'd like those who decide on the set texts to be taught in English literature (should it still be called that) to tell me whether they have ever considered *13 Cents* [sic] or *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* as set-texts, and if not why not?" ("Literature and Identity: Who's Afraid of K Sello Duiker"). It is a puzzling demand, as Duiker's work has already been canonized in the post-apartheid landscape; he is among the most widely analyzed and celebrated South African writers of his generation. A 2011 *Mail & Guardian* memorial by writer Sipiwo Mahala, for example, locates Duiker as a martyr in the national political project: "Duiker is to literature what Steve Biko is to politics," he writes "both having died at the tender age of 30 but leaving indelible footprints in our collective memory" ("Giant in the Making"). These attempts to memorialize Duiker's life and work have taken a

specifically nationalistic shape, which I argue profoundly misrecognizes the ways in which Duiker's work challenges the notion of a new South Africa.

Thirteen Cents has often been categorized as a bildungsroman, though little critical attention has been paid to the deployment of the term. In the 2012 *Modern African Writing* edition of the text, Shaun Viljoen introduces the novel as “a bildungsroman of the boy’s sexuality in formation,” (xii) a bildungsroman “as much about survival and a sense of self on the urban edges as it is about marginalized sexuality in formation (rather than an *assertion* of a particular set sexual identity),” (xiv) and part of a lineage of “South African boy bildungsromans, from Es’kia Mphahlele’s *Down Second Avenue* (1959) to Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* (1995), to *Thirteen Cents* and Michiel Heyns’s *The Children’s Day* (2002)” (xxii). Viljoen’s reading of the novel as a queer coming-of-age narrative centred around Azure’s sexual formation is a troubling one, given the novel’s relentless depiction of rape as central to Azure’s experience of the adult world. Viljoen’s is one among many readings of *Thirteen Cents* in which the notion of the subject is recuperated and rehabilitated to fit within a familiar generic and national structure.⁵³ Londiwe Hannah Gamedze’s 2018 thesis “*Bildung Beyond the Borders: Racial Ambiguity and Subjectivity in Three Post-apartheid Bildungsromane*,” is one of the rare

⁵³See, for example, Fayeza Aljohani’s 2016 article “Magical Realism and the Problem of Self-Identity as Seen in Three Postcolonial Novels,” which argues that the novel’s eventual apocalyptic turn is evidence of magical realism’s ability to “abstract a project of self-making that appreciates a history of colonialism yet seeks to break free from external identifiers. Through magic realism ... [*Thirteen Cents*] demonstrate[s] African literature’s interest in self-making and provide[s] a case for a self-constructed African identity” (73). Ha-Eun Grace Kim’s 2011 thesis “Marginality in Post-TRC Texts: Storytelling and Representational Acts,” similarly, reads *Thirteen Cents* as a subversive bildungsroman, but one that ultimately sees the protagonist gaining “a symbolic power to destroy his predators, and to protect and nurture others” (89). Meg Samuelson’s “The City Beyond the Border: The Urban Worlds of Duiker, Mpe and Vera” (2007) describes Azure as a model for transgressing historical and geographical boundaries, as his “act of walking the streets becomes the very modality through which physical and social boundaries are transgressed” (255). Samuelson does, however, balance the claim that “strolling across physical and social boundaries may suggest the liberatory potential of and within cities,” with a recognition of the “appalling experiences of abuse,” suffered by Azure that represent “the realities of city-space” (255). These readings tend toward a positioning of Azure’s suffering as potentially, or even necessarily, liberatory—the physical, psychic and sexual abuse he is subjected to fits within a process of development that is ultimately transcended, a transcendence that reaffirms the nation’s claim on the genre of the bildungsroman.

instances in which *Thirteen Cents* is read as a *challenge* to the expectations of genre, and as such it is one of the few readings that resists the nationalistic demands for Azure's redemption and recuperation. It is an approach I build on here, as Duiker's text works to critique the genre and its relationship to the nationalist project with which it is so closely associated.

Readings like those offered by Viljoen reaffirm the notion of the bildungsroman as a *generative* expression of the modern political order, in which the state functions primarily as a life-bestowing power. What of the genre's relationship to the postcolonial nation-state and its claim on violence and, ultimately, death? In "Spectral Nationality: The Living on [sur-vie] of the Postcolonial Nation in Neocolonial Globalization" (1999), Pheng Cheah ties the bildungsroman directly to the nation's morbid functions: as the nation allows for the generation of life, it must also distribute death. By the end of the twentieth century, Cheah writes, postcolonial nationalism "ha[d] become the exemplary figure for *death*," not life (1999: 226, italics my own). Similarly, Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" (2003) disaggregates normative accounts of state power in which "the ultimate expression of sovereignty is the production of general norms by a body (the demos) made up of free and equal men and women. These men and women are posited as full subjects capable of self-understanding, self-consciousness, and self-representation" (13). Mbembe describes the romance—perhaps the *roman*—of sovereignty as residing in the belief that "the subject is the master and the controlling author of his or her own meaning...a twofold process of *self-institution* and *self-limitation*" (13, italics in the original). However, the postcolony, Mbembe contends, expresses sovereignty through the "[l]ess abstract and more tactile," categories of life and death (14). A *necropolitical* rather than *biopolitical* conception of sovereignty informs my reading of *Thirteen Cents*, a novel that recognizes the ways in which the new South Africa's adoption of a modern, liberal, and generative mode of producing and

governing subjects remains embedded within a fundamentally violent, death-distributing infrastructure.

Duiker himself spoke about the function of violence in the novel in conversation with Fred de Vries in 2004:

Without wanting to trivialise the seriousness of violence, I think one can say that violence is a culture that communicates a certain message. In *Thirteen cents* [sic] I wanted to explore how violence is not only a way of dominating people, but I also wanted to show that violence is used by people to communicate with each other and to convey a message. The way in which this happens is deplorable. But we are part of a violent culture, and we never knew a period of rest, nor did we receive help to enter into a process of healing after apartheid. (de Vries 23)

Violence, as Duiker theorizes, is not merely an event or a trial that must be passed through in order for the subject to be accepted into the nation and the safety and security it offers. Violence forms the substrate through which information is transmitted, through which relations are formed, maintained, and changed. I argue that violence, in *Thirteen Cents*, produces its own infrastructure of subjection that undergirds official norms, discourses and procedures of the state. For *Azure*, the *bildung* plot cannot be resolved through an ascension into the national sphere; instead, the novel calls our attention to the way in which the South African nation state remains structured through a politics of death, rather than the healing and forgiveness offered by the TRC, which Duiker perhaps deliberately elides in his diagnosis of South Africa's culture of violence above.

2.3.1: “Julle fokken mannetjies moet skool toe gaan”: An Education in Precarity

The novel begins with an assertion of subjecthood: “My name is Azure. *Ah-zoo-ray*. That’s how you say it” (1).⁵⁴ His name, Azure continues, is his only inheritance from his deceased mother. Yet with little more than a name—and an insistence that it be articulated by the reader—Azure is cast as a figure of precarity, a term Judith Butler establishes in *Precarious Life* (2004) to differentiate exposure to violence from a general sense of precariousness, which all living beings experience. The latter term is general and universal, as all lives “can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed. In some sense, this is a feature of all life, and there is no thinking of life that is not precarious” (25). Precarity, on the other hand, “designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (25). Butler defines populations of precarity as those who

appeal to the state for protection, but the state is precisely that from which they require protection. To be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state, so to rely on the nation-state for protection *from* violence is precisely to exchange one potential violence for another. (26)

Azure is offered no protection from violence—his precarity is politically induced, in as much as he exists on the very edges of the *polis* itself. “I live alone,” Azure tells the reader; his solitary existence discounts even the illusion of a protective state as it barely exists in his experience of

⁵⁴My reading of the novel itself is from the 2011 David Philip Publisher Edition.

the world. (1). Living at the very margins of Cape Town, on the edge of the state's institutional structures, Azure precarity is the basis for his supposed process of *bildung*.

While he is chastised by angry fruit-sellers on the street— “[j]ulle fokken mannetjies moet skool toe gaan [all you fucking little men must go to school] ”—formal education has only reinforced his exposure to violence and it offers no entry into the nation-state (2). His parents, we are told early in the novel, were murdered in Johannesburg over an unpaid debt, and “[t]he day they killed them,” Azure explains, “I was away at school” (2). This formative loss, the central traumatic moment of his young life, remains enmeshed in his experience of formal education. As we later learn, the death of his parents was also an entry into a different kind of education, an education in the violence and suffering that will shape him. The physical violence he is subjected to at the hands of Cape Town's adults comes to replace the state's formal education; as his chief tormentor Gerald, who later claims to have killed his parents, explains, these experiences ensure that Azure will learn “to live with fear” (68). Living with fear is what will allow Azure to participate in the necropolitical structure of the city, in the ongoing horror of post-apartheid subjugation. If *An Imperfect Blessing* demonstrates the ways in which political violence would have to be subsumed by the nation-building rhetoric of the TRC, *Thirteen Cents* demonstrates the ways in which violence remains central to the production of the young subject who cannot be incorporated into the infrastructure of the new nation.

Azure's attempts at maturation adopt the same processes of education to which he has been subjected. The nine-year-old Bafana (literally “Boy”) who shadows Azure is subject to the same violent lessons Azure had learnt. While Azure admits to enjoying marijuana, he punishes Bafana's drug use: “whenever I see him smoking that stuff I beat him. I once beat him so badly he had to go to Groote Schuur to get stitched. I don't like that stuff,” Azure boasts (2-3). At the

beginning of the novel, we encounter a subject who has already internalized the cruelty of the city and its inhabitants, one who has learnt that power is unevenly distributed between the adult world and the world of children. He knows that a child like him can be abused by adults “because you’re a *lytie* [kid] and they are big. You see it’s like that. That’s how it works here. You must always act like a grown-up. You must speak like them” (3). These are the conditions of his *bildung* arc: to become an adult in this society, on the margins of post-apartheid Cape Town, requires enduring and reproducing violence.

Azure spends much of the early part of the novel reminding himself, Bafana, and the reader of the rules which assure his survival. Despite his claims to complete self-sufficiency, he still relies on a small cast of adults to support him. In keeping with the nihilistic tenor of the novel, however, these characters are revealed to be a part of the abusive adult world that imposes itself on Azure. Joyce, for example, “understands banks and how they work,” and so is trusted to hold Azure’s meagre earnings and she provides him the occasional meal (11). The bank is yet another adult institution Azure cannot negotiate

Grown-ups ask many questions there. You must remember where you were born and exactly how old you are. You must have an address and it must be one that doesn’t keep changing. Like you must stay in the same spot for say maybe five years and when you move you must tell the bank. They must know everything about your movements... If you ask me they are a bit like gangsters, they want to know everything so that you cannot run away from them. And you must have an ID and a job that pays you regularly. (11-12)

The formal adult world, Azure knows, demands a fixed, stable subject: to belong to the institutions of the nation is to enter the economy, to be traceable, to be known by those who would inflict harm upon you. In Azure's experience there is little to distinguish the legitimate power of the bank from the illegitimate power of the gangsters—both “want to know everything so that you cannot run away from them” (12). Being known and being recognized does not hold the same promise for Azure as it did for Alia in *An Imperfect Blessing*; to be recognized in *Thirteen Cents* is to be threatened with violence, to be exploited. Trapped at the outer limits of the nation, on the cusp of adulthood, between racial categories, he is as far away from the normative conception of the subject as he can be without being cut entirely adrift. We are reminded here once again of Foucault's “ship of fools” which Kalyan Sanyal adopts to describe the conditions of post-colonial capitalism (*Rethinking Capitalist Development* 44). Azure's precarity has left him among those postcolonial subjects “[c]ondemned to a no man's land,” as Sanyal writes, amidst the “outcastes and rejects of the contemporary third world economies” (46). It is a position that locates Azure within a long history of colonial expulsion that continues in different guises after the end of apartheid. The threat of violence that underlies the postcolony is exposed by his liminality, by his wandering through the streets of Cape Town. Azure's education, his *bildung* narrative, has only served to reproduce his exposure to violence. The bildungsroman, in Duiker's text, is immediately positioned as a challenge to the generative assumptions of the genre. Genre, here, works to reveal the necropolitical operations of the postcolony.

2.3.2: “I’ll Give Him Fire”: Death, Excess, and Sacrifice

Azure comes to learn that the city of Cape Town can offer no reprieve from the cycle of violence he experiences. “Grown-ups are fucked up,” Azure declares before being corrected by Vincent, a confidant who had also escaped Johannesburg and who will soon betray Azure: “[n]o, Cape Town is fucked up” (37). Attempting to find the target of his critique, and the source of his suffering, Azure tries again: “it’s Cape Town, not the people,” only to be corrected by Vincent again, “[a]nd the people. Don’t forget about the people. They’re also fucked up” (37). In this diagnosis the city and its inhabitants—its subjects and its infrastructure—are inextricable. In a final attempt to ingratiate himself into the world of adults, Azure turns himself over to his tormentor, Gerald, to be raped and tortured before he finally flees the city for the refuge of Table Mountain. This experience of isolation and torture induces a radical break in what might have been read as his *bildung* plot. Marking the walls of his cell by drawing a cross in excrement he reminds himself “I’m getting stronger,” a dark parody of the becoming plot of the genre (55). Azure attempts to rationalize this experience by telling himself “this is how they teach me to be strong” (47). It is a strength that will soon be directed at the city and the grown-ups who inhabit it: “I take in their light and destroy them with fire” (47). Later, as his psychosis deepens, his process of education begins to disintegrate. The day of his thirteenth birthday arrives, and while this was supposed to signal his entry into manhood, he knows his education is far from over: “One. Three. I must understand that number. I must understand what it means to be a grown-up if I’m going to survive” (66). To survive, he learns with this newfound maturity, he must escape the city.

His escape to the mountain is motivated by his attempt to safeguard the money he has accumulated. Azure attempts to take his earnings, and himself, out of the circulations of the city, breaking the paths he traces between the men who solicit him for sex, the gangsters who surveil

and torture him, and the adults who promise him access to the formal world but exploit him instead. Before he leaves, Vincent warns Azure that “[m]oney is complicated. It’s like people. It keeps changing. Sometimes it’s your friend, sometimes it’s your enemy. Don’t trust money too much. It always lets you down in the end” (98). Azure attempts to resolve these complications by retreating to Table Mountain, “the sleeping mountain above,” and the only remaining place of safety (100). What Azure experiences on Table Mountain suggests a final uncoupling of his subjectivity from the world of the nation-state; he attempts to become a subject outside of the subject-making infrastructure of the state and the adults he fears, a coin no longer in circulation. As Gamedze writes, “his removal of himself from subjection to others in the world, being ‘left alone,’ will also deprive Azure of any possibility of agency” (53). What we see in his escape, I argue, is not only a deprivation of agency, but something altogether more radical.

As he treks up the mountain, Azure enters into what in “The Notion of Expenditure,” Georges Bataille calls “*non-productive expenditure*,” the luxury of the non-essential, the excessive, the abundant (168, italics in original). Jean Baudrillard would in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* go on to refer to this as the anti-economy of death, wherein death takes on “the paroxysm of exchanges, superabundance and excess,” rather than annihilation or pure negativity (Baudrillard 154). We witness, he continues, “death as a principle of excess and an anti-economy,” one in which “[o]nly sumptuous and useless expenditure has meaning; the economy has no meaning, it is only a residue that has been made into the law of life, whereas wealth lies in the luxurious exchange of death” (155-156). “In a system where life is ruled by value and utility,” Baudrillard continues, “death becomes a useless luxury, and the only alternative” (156). On the mountain, Azure engages in this exchange between abundance and death in an attempt to break the cyclical nature of his movements, and his torture, in the city below: “I’ll give them all

destruction, I say and start gathering wood. I take the dead ones, the ones that look grey and white from too much drying in the sun. They will burn easily, I say, and leave the brown ones. It is hard work carrying them up and down and through the tunnel but I enjoy it. I work silently. For the first time I work like I know what I'm doing" (107). These branches, some of which "look like something... arms, legs, bodies, birds, elephants, monsters with many arms and legs and other things," are sacrificed in the fire Azure constructs (108). These sacrifices, "begging for destruction," (109) are transformed by the fact of Azure's labour. In "Necropolitics," Mbembe's reading of Hegel suggests that the "human being truly *becomes a subject*" by transforming nature through labour, and it "is through this confrontation with death that he or she is cast into the incessant movement of history" (14). *Thirteen Cents* provides a different relationship between labour, death and the becoming subject: Azure's labour on the mountain is a form of *sacrifice* rather than an attempt to elide death. This is not the labour that enters him into the movement of the nation he glimpsed in the city. His ritual sacrifice recasts him as a profligate figure, a sudden rupture in the subsistence-based movements that had forced his transit between the beach, Sea Point apartments, and highway underpasses.

Continuing his ascent up the mountain Azure sees only "[t]otal destruction... I just keep climbing, higher and higher. I get excited when I think of this ball of fire growing bigger and destroying everything in its path" (105). His apocalyptic journey marks the final transformation of his *bildung* plot; as he walks past others on the path, he has "nothing to say to them. I'm done with grown-ups. They are full of shit. They want fire. I'll give them fire" (106). He begins to shed the impulse to ingratiate himself into adult society, into the formal economy of value and exchange. Instead, Azure's turn to the mountain sees him enact his own form of ritual violence in an attempt to radically recast the conditions of his subjection.

In feverish dreams Azure encounters a vision of Saartjie Baartman, who shares his experience of exclusion and violence. Initially offering maternal comfort—she has “the lightest smile,” and her “long breasts are like fruit, like fat pears”—it soon becomes apparent that Azure and Baartman are bound in an inescapable cycle of colonial, masculine violence (119). While she appears to aid Azure at first, identifying Gerald as the “T-rex” tearing apart the city, she reveals that she and Gerald are lovers, and that Azure is “going to be big just like him” (122). It is a warning: Azure will eventually reproduce his education of destruction and violence if he continues this *bildung* arc. As his visions of destruction continue, and he claims to set fire to the city beneath him, Azure briefly adopts the right of the sovereign—the adult, the state, the gangster, the police, the right to impose violence, the right to transgress the prohibition on death. He does not transcend his subjection, nor his exposure to death in this moment; instead, this brief reversal only affirms what Duiker identified as the function of violence in post-apartheid South Africa: violence itself works as the medium, the infrastructure, through which the subject is ultimately formed. Violence is infrastructural in so far as it provides the means through which Azure learns to become an adult subject, it shapes his ability to understand his social world. It shapes too the possibilities for his development, and the *kind* of adulthood he is able to enter into. It has defined the possibilities for Azure’s new adult subjectivity, and it has brutally communicated the expectations of the adult world to him. That he now is able to inflict violence on those around him is, in some sense, evidence of his maturation—but Duiker acknowledges that this will only allow him to participate in a society he condemns. His brief re-entry into Cape Town affirms these changes in him, now “stronger and protected by an invisible silence,” but while Gerald has been murdered, the structure of the city remains unchanged (132).

The novel ends with Azure amidst another psychotic episode, this time marked by the refrain: “My mother is dead. My father is dead” (161). After escaping, again, the city for the refuge of the mountain, he watches an enormous wave approach and destroy the city beneath him. “I know what fear is,” he declares, witnessing the devastation, having learnt the cruel lesson Gerald insisted on teaching (161). But Azure’s final revelations do not provide an end to his torment, only an acknowledgement of its source: “I have seen the slave-driver of darkness and he is a mad bastard. I know his secrets. I know what he does when we sleep. My mother is dead. My father is dead,” he repeats (164). His education has revealed the ways in which post-apartheid South Africa, beneath the façade of reconciliation and modernity, retains the same structures that killed his parents and that induced his experience of precarity. Acknowledging the death of his parents at the end of the novel, Viljoen argues, means that Azure can “begin again on the clean slate emerging beneath his feet” (xvii). It is a reading that again attempts to fold this novel—despite *Thirteen Cents*’s subversion of the genre—into a progressive notion of history, one that fits it neatly within the ongoing attempts of the modern nation-state to draw a line under the horrors of the past and also the forms of violence and exclusion that make the nation’s continuation possible. Yet the notion of a “clean slate” can only reproduce the violence Azure flees, for what could possibly lie beyond that clean slate for Azure? His *becoming* is only possible through the excess and abundance of death, a notion that places him at odds with the nation’s claim over life. At the uncertain end of the novel, the end of his purported *bildung* plot, he remains a revelatory figure—one who exposes the limits of the normative subject and the normative sovereignty of the nation-state—and as such he *must* remain outside of the national project, and outside of the trajectory of the *bildungsroman*.

2.4: Conclusions

No literary genre hews closer to the norms of the state than the bildungsroman, the novel that provides the young subject with a narrative arc, a trajectory of development that is recognized and affirmed by an awaiting adult public. It is unsurprising that the TRC would come to adopt the assumptions of the bildungsroman, and that the bildungsroman in post-apartheid South Africa would incorporate the TRC's insistence on healing, forgiveness, and non-racialism as the basis for a new South Africa. The subject-making functions of both the genre and the state work to produce the legible subject, one that has internalized the ideological demands of the post-apartheid state. As the introduction of Paulus Mnisi before the TRC Ermelo Workshop in 1998 demonstrated, the young subject's emergence into the new South Africa was both heroic and necessary in the broader aims of the Commission. Mnisi's statement, however, also worked as a reminder of the unstable generative, healing narratives central to the construction of the post-apartheid order. His moment of self-representation was used to call attention to the death-distribution functions of the state, the necropolitical functions that both the TRC and the normative bildungsroman usually work to obscure.

It is the proximity of the bildungsroman to the state's own disciplinary functions that allows it to work as a means of both reifying and critiquing post-apartheid South Africa's subject-making infrastructure. As Nadia Davids' *An Imperfect Blessing* demonstrates, the TRC and the bildungsroman work in concert to provide not only a means of producing the normative young subject of the future, but also a means of resolving the injustices of the past. In this sense, the present becomes the inevitable, incontrovertible result of the young subject's normative development. In this novel we see the way in which the bildungsroman provides a narrative arc through which the injustices of the past can be shed, but it provides too a historical trajectory into

which the subject can enter, a history that is made essential and necessary by the fact of the subject's development.

This process of becoming alongside and through history is upended in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, which is often still read as a foundational bildungsroman in post-apartheid South African literature. These are readings, I have argued, that attempt to recover the novel as part of a national literature that provides salvation for the young abject subject. *Thirteen Cents*, however, gestures towards the obverse possibilities offered by the national bildungsroman; it becomes an anti-bildungsroman, in which the subject is cast to the margins of a society that can no longer simply kill that which it has rejected. Azure's process of education, an education in the suffering and horror the adult world usually subsumes, is one that exposes the national project to a destructive, radical critique. While excluded from the infrastructures of development exemplified by the TRC and the new South Africa, Azure's *bildung* plot reveals what remains at the core of the relationship of the subject to power: a violence that continues to operate through its own language, its own infrastructure, beneath the veneer of the nation. As such, *Thirteen Cents* offers a *bildung* plot that develops in opposition to the rhetoric of the state rather than in concert with it, exposing in the process the fundamental violence of the subject-making project of post-apartheid South Africa.

Between *An Imperfect Blessing* and *Thirteen Cents* we witness the ways in which the bildungsroman has come to occupy a central role in disciplining the young South African subject. Yet questions remain about the genre's ability to imagine the young subject *outside* the demands of the state and postcolonial capital, outside the modern systems of subjection articulated by the TRC. Even in its most radical form, as *Thirteen Cents* attests, the genre still frustrates attempts to imagine the subject beyond the norms that make the bildungsroman legible

as a genre. The bildungsroman, like the state, must eventually abandon a figure like Azure if it is to retain its power over the development of the young national subject.

Chapter 3: Entering South Africa into History

Please take it easy, control yourself, get calm. Please take your time.

Dr Faizal Randera, TRC Commissioner, TRC Human Rights Violation Hearing: Hawa Timol (1996)

For all my uncertainty about the sacred texts, they had dumped me into history and I had the suspicion that I would never be out of it again.

Ivan Vladislavić, *Double Negative* (2010)

The fact, and ongoing mystery, of Ahmed Timol's death has been the subject of three separate inquiries, each taking place under radically different historical conditions. Timol, a thirty-year-old anti-apartheid activist killed in police custody in 1971 remains among South Africa's most venerated martyrs. A prominent member of both the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC's armed wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), he had studied in the United Kingdom and then in Moscow as part of his academic, and military training. On October 22, 1971, he was detained by the South African Police at the John Vorster Square Police Station in Johannesburg. By October 27 he was dead, having fallen, or been thrown, from the 10th floor of the detention center. Timol's SACP membership provided the state with an easy explanation for his death: magistrate De Villiers claimed that Timol "had been familiar with instructions given by the party to its members, these instructions included to commit suicide rather than betray the Communist Party" ("TRC Human Rights Violation Hearings: Hawa Timol"). His death in detention was deemed a suicide by the apartheid courts and the police officers present at his death were exonerated of wrongdoing.

In 1996 Hawa Timol, Ahmed's mother, appeared before a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearing on human rights violations. Her demands of the Commission, and the audience listening, were plain: "[t]hey arrested him on a Friday and they killed him and said that he committed suicide. I want to know who assaulted him and I want to know who lodged the

complaint about my son. I ask the Almighty that I will not forget what happened and that I need to know who lodged the complaint and what happened. I will not forget what happened, I need to know” (“TRC Human Rights Violation Hearings, Hawa Timol”). Her demand fit within the ambit of the TRC’s mandate, which aimed to establish “as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights” between 1 March 1960 and 10 May 1994, and to make “known the fate or whereabouts of victims and [restore] the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims, and by recommending reparation measures in respect of them” (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 4). In video footage of her appearance in the Johannesburg Methodist Church Hawa Timol is comforted by her son Mohammad, and her Gujarati is translated by an unseen male as she struggles to retell the story of her son’s murder. Between scenes of her weeping the camera cuts to images of the audience: Chairperson Archbishop Desmond Tutu has his head in his hands at several points, an Indian woman in white cries as she listens to Hawa Timol relive the experience of police officers invading her home. The day’s hearings end with a statement from Tutu: “Mrs Timol and your sons we are all very deeply touched with the story that we have heard of the suffering of your family which is repeated in the sufferings of other families. We thank you very much for coming to share with us and helping us as a nation to cry over things that happened in our nation” (“TRC Human Rights Violation Hearings, Hawa Timol”). He promises to consider renaming the Indian township school where Timol taught in his honour, which would be done in 1999. But Hawa Timol’s more substantive requests, in spite of their specificity and the powers of the Commission, were not met.

After reopening the case in 2017, a South African court formally acknowledged that Timol had been murdered by the apartheid police, and that João Rodrigues, a clerk present when Timol died, had perjured himself during the 1972 inquiry. Rodrigues's lawyers argued that prosecuting him in 2017 would infringe on his right to a fair and dignified trial, coming nearly half a century after the crime in question. Rodrigues also argued that he ought to qualify for amnesty, having committed a politically motivated murder during the historical period under investigation by the TRC. He had not, however, applied for amnesty while the TRC was in existence. He was eventually charged with Timol's murder, but never faced trial due to a series of long, unresolved appeals. Rodrigues died in September 2021.

The Timol case remains an open wound in the national imaginary, one that has been returned to under radically different historical conditions over the course of five decades. Its role in the South African imagination has been supplemented by Chris van Wyk's 1979 poem "In Detention," which casts the death of Timol and fellow detainees killed at John Vorster Square in the absurd language of the state:

He fell from the ninth floor

He hanged himself

He slipped on a piece of soap while washing

He hanged himself

He slipped on a piece of soap while washing

He fell from the ninth floor

He hanged himself while washing

He slipped from the ninth floor

He hung from the ninth floor
He slipped on the ninth floor while washing
He fell from a piece of soap while slipping
He hung from the ninth floor
He washed from the ninth floor while slipping
He hung from a piece of soap while slipping. (45)

Central to van Wyk's poem is the relationship between repetition and change, a tension between the cyclical fictions of apartheid propaganda and its terminal ends. The subject is limited here to a series of simple acts; he fell, he hanged, he slipped, he washed—the banal language of a police report. Each line repeats a simple structure that offers a simulation of order; yet each predicate introduces a new contradiction to that order, a series of incongruities that only emphasizes the inability and unwillingness of bureaucratic language to communicate its own brutality. The cyclical, repetitive statement comes to obscure its own meaning; the death at the centre of the poem is transformed into a series of simple statements that bear no relation to the literal death of those killed in detention. As J.M. Coetzee writes in his 1986 essay "Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State," van Wyk's poem suggests the ways in which one "can go about one's daily business in Johannesburg within calling distance (except that the rooms are sound proofed) of people undergoing the utmost suffering" (362). Van Wyk's parody of apartheid's language mimics that which allowed for the violence of Timol's death to be made invisible as part of one's "daily business." It is also the unresolved, infinite repetition of the fall, the hanging, the slip, that forces this violence to erupt into the national consciousness with such frequency. Van Wyk's repetitions, the way in which each develops a language of absurdity and

yet remains constrained by the limits of state discourse, offers a premonition of the Timol case and its recurrence in the nation's attempts to reckon with the persistence of apartheid's violence as it wends its way into the present.

The Timol hearings are temporal ruptures in the notion of a progressive, linear national history. The TRC hearing calls attention to the ambivalent, mediating role played by the Commission; its infrastructural influence extends, I argue in this chapter, to the ways in which South Africa has been remade as a modern nation-state that imagines itself moving through time in a rational, sequential order of events. The TRC's attempt to mark a caesura in the nation's history is essential to the central claim of this dissertation, that the Commission established an infrastructure that continues to shape the South African subject, the nation, and its literature. I begin this chapter by exploring the competing notions of time deployed in the modern post-apartheid nation. I argue that a normative, progressive conception of temporality is crucial to the nation's—and the TRC's—conception of itself, in spite of the multiple, radical temporal ruptures that underlie it. I go on to argue that South African literary criticism has often struggled to account for the question of temporality in debates over national literature, which I attribute in part to a naturalization of the state's claim to modernity and time. I turn then to Imraan Coovadia's *Tales of the Metric System* (2014) and Ivan Vladislavić's *Double Negative* (2010), two novels that contest the nation's conception of linear, progressive time. While mimicking the idea of the nation moving through homogenous, empty time, they also punctuate that linear movement with gestures to radical alternatives that emerge to challenge the nation's claim over temporality and history. I argue, however, that the radical interruptions in national time presented in both novels are ultimately foreclosed by persistent structures of race and capital that undergird the South African project.

3.1: The Empty Present of Post-Apartheid South Africa

The Timol case provided stark evidence of the kind of violence meted out by the apartheid state. It is a brutality commonly understood as pre-modern, a system that relied on overt demonstrations of force rather than the more insidious, modern regimes of disciplinary and biopolitical power. The modern state enacts laws not only to command obedience and to maintain order, but to enable or disable populations in the reproduction of dominant structures of power. In step with the logic of colonial domination, the apartheid state adhered to a strict racial matrix in its disciplinary calculations; race determined the populations able to enter the formal realm of the nation, and those deemed peripheral. The apartheid system of Bantustans and townships was most visible in its racial and spatial discrimination, but it operated temporally as well. As Peris Sean Jones writes in 1999's "To Come Together for Progress: Modernization and Nation-Building in South Africa's Bantustan Periphery," the "political and racial frontiers between the homelands and the 'white'-defined Republic of South Africa was premised upon the 'failure' of [B]lacks to absorb western and modern values" (583). The structure of apartheid's system of racial capitalism was cast in the language of modernity and an uneven distribution of linear historical development, where "white," "western," and "modern" formed the core of social, political, and economic achievement. The multiple temporalities of Black, Indian, and coloured social formations, cultural and political expressions, and traditional and religious practices were placed by the apartheid state in relation to a colonial notion of temporality and development. Difference, in this system, was cast into another *time* as much as another *space*. These multitemporal tensions—intrinsic as they were to apartheid's rule—continue through into the post-apartheid era, in spite of the efforts by the TRC to incorporate them into a national present. As Derek Hook writes in *(Post) Apartheid Conditions: Psychoanalysis and Social Formation*

(2014), temporality in South Africa is “typified not only by its bi-directionality, but also by its vacillation between periods of stasis—as in the view of the interregnum characterizing the end of apartheid—and sudden shifts in the chronology of imagined progress” (6). The relationship between stasis and progress is central to my reading of *Metric System* and *Double Negative*, but essential more broadly to how the nation positions itself, and the novel, in the movement of historical time.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson’s theorization of the rise of nationalism centres around the nation as a construct that subjects imagine themselves belonging to; in this process of imagination, subjects share an experience of time with the millions of strangers that constitute the nation. Anderson’s concept of a community bound in the same progressive, linear, and unidirectional notion of time is foundational to understanding the TRC’s mission. Embedded in the TRC’s project was an attempt to establish the new South Africa through shared experiences of narrative, and the dissemination of personal and national histories through radio, television, and print media. Media was central to the development of nationalism, according to Anderson: the explosion of print capitalism in 16th century Europe produced reading publics that were bound together through language and narrative. The experience of reading the novel produced the idea that fellow citizens exist in the *meanwhile* of one’s experience of reading as well as the *meanwhile* of a novel’s plot. This is an experience of time that can only exist in what Walter Benjamin described in “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1968) as the “homogeneous, empty time” (261) of historicism, a time that “cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition” (262). This idea of progress underwrites a materialist conception of history within the fabric of modern social thinking. In this notion of time, the “progress of mankind itself... [is] something boundless, in keeping with the infinite perfectibility

of mankind... irresistible, something that automatically pursued a straight or spiral course” (260). The “homogenous, empty” time Anderson adopts from Benjamin is that which forms the basis of the notion of “progress” Benjamin critiques. In Anderson’s use, homogenous, empty time forms a “concept of simultaneity” connected to the development of the secular sciences, one that moved European societies from a medieval “simultaneity-along-time” and into modernity, that is “transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar” (Anderson 24). Anderson identifies in the modern nation-state a cynical employment of this notion of progress, one that is relentless in its forward movement. For Benjamin this idea of progress is entirely unable to contend with both the past and the present: “[h]istory,” he insists, “is the subject of a structure whose site is *not* homogenous, empty time but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]” (261, italics my own). Benjamin offers homogenous, empty time as a *critique* of materialist positivism, but for Anderson the dominance of the nation has made homogenous, empty time a *fait accompli*, and as a result literature’s own radical temporal possibilities are at put at risk in Anderson’s theory of nationalism. If South African literature is to be read as capable, in any meaningful sense, of social and political critique, then the temporal schisms offered by the literary must be recognized and read as such.

In “The Nation in Heterogenous Time” (2005), Partha Chatterjee critiques Anderson’s appropriation of homogenous, empty time by reminding the reader that this is also “the time of capital... that allows us to speak of the reality of such categories of political economy as prices, wages, markets and so on” (925). Capital “allows for no resistance to its free movement. When it encounters an impediment, it thinks it has encountered another time—something out of pre-capital, something that belongs to the pre-modern” (926). As a result, by “imagining capital (or

modernity) as an attribute of time itself, [Anderson's] view succeeds not only as branding resistances to it as archaic and backward, but also in securing for capital and modernity their ultimate triumph... because, after all, as everyone knows, time does not stand still" (926). As Chatterjee puts it, people may *imagine* themselves in homogeneous, empty time, but they do not and cannot *live* in it (927). Moreover, it is precisely the creation of a normative, utopian "time" of the nation that allows for the differentiation of populations who are to be held outside—or, more accurately, at the precipice—of the formal life of the nation. It is this notion of time, progress, and history, however, that has been uncritically adopted and made infrastructural to the post-apartheid nation through the TRC.

This entry into the time of capitalist modernity is characterized by a profoundly ambivalent experience of the present, an ambivalence rooted in the knowledge that the horizons of freedom have dramatically narrowed. As David Scott writes in 2014's *Omens of Adversity*, the acceptance of homogenous, empty time as the normative time of the postcolonial nation has made mechanisms like the TRC a necessary response to the disappointments of the present. Whereas the future was once sustained by the anticipation of a revolutionary freedom, those liberatory drives have been transformed into a present marked by uncertainty and futility. The past no longer works to bind communities together, Scott argues, rather it is pathologized, a history that must be remedied. This relationship to the national past necessitates "the rise to prominence of the idea of *reparatory* or *restorative* justice," as well as "the techniques of 'truth and reconciliation' and political forgiveness" (13-14, italics in the original). The postcolonial emphasis on programs of truth and reconciliation, he argues, means

victims and their persecutors are urged to adopt an attitude of *reconciliation* toward each other; they are urged to reconstruct the past in such a way as to enable them to conjure a reasonable, shareable, *modus vivendi*. Reconciliation is the *summum bonum* of reparatory justice. To put it another way, because the present can no longer be overcome for a future of emancipation, there has to be an *accommodation* with the past. Truth and reconciliation and its central idiom of ‘forgiveness’ are the names of a moral politics for an age characterized by being stranded in the present. (14, italics in the original)

The TRC, in Scott’s argument, emerges in an attempt to ameliorate the nation’s political and temporal frustrations; it is an acknowledgement that the nation can no longer be imagined otherwise, and that the past must be made to fit within the nation as it is (and can only be) *now*. The horrors of South Africa’s past, but also its heterogeneous temporalities and radical potentials, are subsumed in this process. This is a universalizing process, one that allows for the disparate, divergent temporalities of the past to be smoothly entered into a concept of history that acts as a simple accumulation of events necessary to produce the present. The TRC’s self-conscious historiographic project is best encapsulated in the image of the Commission as a “historic bridge” that moved subjects from a “past of suffering” and toward a “future of peace and freedom” (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995, 2). In this image the TRC’s infrastructural understanding of itself elides, entirely, the present. In the empty, homogenous time of the nation, the present is merely a placeholder for a future to come.

Hawa Timol’s hearing ended with a discussion of reparations for the Timol family.

Hlengiwe Mkhize, a commissioner, concluded:

I would believe that in the South African struggle there have been families who lost loved ones and actually became very destitute and if those families ask for reparations in the form of financial assistance from the State I think I go along with that. But as a family I believe that what we would like to have, and I am sure many, many South Africans would like to have, is that their loved ones should never, ever be forgotten, and the only way that one could bring this about is through some sort of—something in their memory and we believe in Ahmed’s case, the fact that he was a schoolteacher that a school in his name would be appropriate. (“TRC Human Rights Violation Hearings, Hawa Timol”).

Hawa Timol’s very concrete demands—“I want to know who assaulted him and I want to know who lodged the complaint about my son”—have been transformed by the Commission into a means of memorializing the past, fixing it in place. Mkhize’s closing remarks perform what Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe* (2000) described as the “desire on the part of the subject of political modernity both to create the past as amenable to objectification and to be at the same time free of this object called ‘history’” (244). The fact of Timol’s murder has been subsumed by the desire of the Commission to objectify the past as a means of moving away from it, forward through time; this was the means through which it aimed to free South Africans, if not Hawa Timol, of history. The tension Hook identified between stasis and imagined progress is central to the TRC’s relationship to both the time and the history of the nation as it purportedly moves away from the past and into the future.

3.2: The Problem of Temporality in South African Literary Criticism

The complications of the post-apartheid South African present have troubled South African literary criticism over the last three decades. The list of terms describing South African literature in relation to temporality is extensive and seemingly in need of constant update: South African literature has been described as broadly postcolonial, but more specifically the terms *anti-apartheid*, *post-apartheid*, *post post-apartheid* and *post anti-apartheid* have been deployed to account for the literature of the nation's present. More recently, debate has focused on the concept of transition and the "post-" prefix deployed to indicate a movement through and away from apartheid. As mentioned in the introduction to my dissertation, Ronit Frenkel's and Craig MacKenzie's "Conceptualizing "Post-Transitional" South African Literature in English" (2010), is a particularly instructive example of how the focus on the temporality of South African literature has proved an epistemic blind-spot. To reiterate, they proposed the capacious "post-transitional" to mark a national literature "often unfettered to the past," but one that also "may still consider it in new ways. Equally, it may ignore it altogether" (2). Post-transitional literature, they continue, foregrounds "politically incorrect humour and incisive satire, and the mixing of genres with zest and freedom. All this often renders nugatory traditional markers like nationality, race or ethnicity" (2). The post-transitional, in Frenkel and MacKenzie's argument, is rendered profoundly apolitical. As Aghogho Akpome writes in 2016's "Towards a Reconceptualization of '(Post)Transitional' South African Cultural Expression," the post-transitional provides a "limiting conception of South Africa's contemporary sociopolitical history and transition in terms that are inevitably linear and teleological" (39). Akpome rightly notes that the question of South Africa's literary temporality must account for "a broader historical and socio-political framework that includes anti-colonialism, decolonization, postcolonial nation-building, and the

increasingly protean nature of social change,” phenomena largely absent from Frenkel and MacKenzie’s deployment of “post-transitional” (48). In the decision to adopt a “post-TRC,” temporality, Akpome cites a waning interest in the Commission as an explanatory framework for South African writing since the mid-2000s, and he looks instead to texts that “engage keenly with transition without necessarily making direct references to the spectacles of the TRC” (51). In doing so, Akpome only reaffirms the centrality of the TRC in establishing a national temporality, and the continuing influence it exerts on narrative in South African literature. As I have argued in the course of this project, while the TRC employed spectacle as a means of inducing a new national consciousness, it continues to operate *infrastructurally* to produce the norms of the subject and the nation itself.

I return here to Ashraf Jamal’s 2010 “Bullet Through the Church: South African Literature in English and the Future-Anterior,” to consider more radical ways of delinking temporality from the claim made on it by the nation-state. Jamal insists on a “future-anteriority—the *will-have-been* that invokes a utopian and an actual moment that bypasses linearity and its concertina of historical phases” as the necessary frame through which to encounter post-apartheid South African literature, an approach that demands further investigation of both the literary and statist claims to time (19). Jamal intervenes in “the assumption that South African literature in English has elected to sanctify and memorialize its intent, producing a literature informed by a messianic, liberatory, or reactive drive, hence a struggle literature (which precedes liberation from apartheid) and a post-apartheid literature (which establishes a democratic state of play)” (11). He identifies the same impulse in the post-apartheid novel that we witness in the TRC’s Timol hearing, the impulse to turn the past into an object that can be contained within the progressive movement of history. Jamal’s diagnosis, however, remains limited by his practices

of reading. His identification of two novels (Vladislavić's *The Folly* and J.M. Coetzee's *The Life and Times of Michael K*) as the only "holes in the symbolic order of English South African literary history," (13) and his lament that "magical realism has not taken root in the South African imagination," (18) suggest an incomplete account of both the production and the experience of time. Andrew van der Vlies also turns to the affective experiences of temporality in 2017's *Present Imperfect: Contemporary South African Writing*. Bringing together a concern with the temporality of Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* and affects of disappointment, he argues for a reading of contemporary South African literature that recognizes this ambivalent relationship to time and the experience of stasis in the present. Both van der Vlies and Michael Titlestad's 2017 article, "Contesting Teleology as Literary Interpretation," turn to David Scott's rejection of the Enlightenment teleology that binds Marxism and liberal democracy, and both look to the complications of the present as a means of reading contemporary South African literature. Titlestad's article offers a more direct critique of the teleological basis of literary *criticism* than Jamal's focus on literary *production*, an ultimately more productive approach when considering the relationship of the state, the TRC, and narrative. "Teleological commitments have not only hobbled our efforts to come to terms with postcolonial societies," Titlestad argues, "they also established the register in which those societies have endeavored to shrug off the yoke of colonialism" (81). While Titlestad's reading is limited to two novels that negotiate the future of white identity in South Africa, he offers an important reckoning with the ways in which time and teleology have been imagined in South African literary criticism, and the ways in which a linear notion of time has come to "inhibit creative ways in which the past may be recovered and different futures imagined" (87).

This chapter builds on these approaches by returning to the material conditions through which a national time has been imagined and considering literature's ability to disrupt the time of capital articulated by the TRC. Coovadia's *Tales of the Metric System* and Vladislavić's *Double Negative* both centre on the relationship between the normative, progressive time of the nation and the lived, heterogeneous times of the postcolonial subject. These texts interrogate the "post-apartheid" designation, and in doing so complicate and resist reading practices that rely on an indexical relationship between national history and the novel. Both challenge ideas of transition and transformation imposed by the TRC, and in doing so resist the objectification of the past as a means of determining the present. These are novels, I argue, invested in the relationship between the rational mechanisms that ought to induce homogenous, empty time, and the limitations, gaps, and contradictions that undermine the nation's claim on South African time and its history.

3.3: "The World Changed with the Units of Measurement": Objects of Equality in an Unequal South Africa

Imraan Coovadia is the author of several celebrated novels, in addition to *Tales of the Metric System: The Wedding* (2001), *Green-Eyed Thieves* (2006), *The Institute for Taxi Poetry* (2012), and *A Spy in Time* (2018). He is the director of the University of Cape Town's Creative Writing programme, and has also published a collection of essays, *Transformations* (2012). *Tales of the Metric System* is a self-consciously grand historical novel that spans five decades in South African history and follows the interlocking narratives of disparate characters: a petty thief, a township informant, a radical white professor, an Indian family's business empire. In a 2016 interview with Ronit Frenkel, Coovadia adopts an Andersonian description of the novel's concern with "South Africa as it just advances people progressively across time, across large

quantities of time, as well as across all the different spaces of society” (“Imraan Coovadia in Conversation with Ronit Frenkel” 103). Beginning in 1970, the same year the metric system was officially introduced to the country, the novel progresses by passing familiar signposts: a 1973 chapter concerns a stolen pass book, a 1979 chapter describes the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement on Indian activists in Durban, 1985 takes readers to negotiations between the anti-apartheid movement and Soviet diplomats in London.⁵⁵ In 1990 readers encounter unrest in Tembisa, witnessing a “necklacing” and the fear of a “third force” thought to be covertly destabilizing the nation’s political transition. We land in 1999 with a belated reflection on the TRC through a theatrical restaging of public testimony. We also witness two World Cups—the 1995 rugby tournament and the 2010 football competition. The novel ends with a return to 1976, in the wake of the Soweto uprising, to witness the death of Neil Hunter, an academic killed by state security forces—a reference to the real-life assassination of philosophy professor and activist Rick Turner in 1978. Familiar news items from the post-apartheid era make their way into the text as it progresses through time: a character dies slowly of AIDS as a Mbeki stand-in relies on the nutritional advice of a German doctor instead of antiretroviral drugs. Meanwhile, a wealthy Indian businessman—a Shabir Schaik reference—is involved in a shady international submarine deal on behalf of the government. It is a novel that appears, at first, to merely catalogue familiar historical markers—a world cup here, a corruption scandal there—as its cast of characters proceed through the narrative. What is revealed, however, is the fraught relationship between the subjects of South African history and the ways in which they are incorporated into, or excluded from, the national project of homogenous, empty time. I consider

⁵⁵Although particular figures are not named—save for iconic ones like Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo—there are thinly veiled references throughout to Thabo Mbeki, Essop and Aziz Pahad and others throughout.

here the implications of Coovadia's mimicry of that national time, as well as his ironic subordination of the novel to the nation's project of modernity.

3.3.1: The Problem of Modernity

The introduction of the metric system to South Africa works as a means of bringing disparate elements into a coherent system of standardization and evaluation. It functions, in that sense, much like the explosive meeting of capitalism and print technology Anderson identifies as a precondition for the development of modern nationalism. The metric system seemingly provides a means of binding otherwise disparate publics in the same experiences of weight, volume, distance, and speed. Any faith in this homogenizing force's ability to produce a more just society is parodied through the ironic voice of the narrator who claims that the

world changed with the units of measurement. There were no more inches and yards, no more distances in miles on the road signs, no more pound notes fetched from the drawers of the cash register, no more pints and gallons as defined by the Imperial System. (60)

The metric system, the narrator continues enthusiastically "simplified division and multiplication and therefore exposed any confusions in existing arrangements" (60). The reduction of the apartheid state's horrors to mere confusions of measurement, and the faith in modernity's promise of enlightenment, is reflected in Coovadia's comments in the Frenkel interview.

Mimicking his narrator, he claims the metric system is:

obviously part of modernity. It's part of the bigger idea that all units are going to be equal, and ultimately all people are going to be equal, where that sense of equality is built into the idea of the metric system [sic]. The French Revolution was the first time it became a national project, so there is a strong connection between political equality and measurement; and yet, paradoxically, it was only authoritarian regimes, apart from France, that introduced it in the twentieth century successfully. (Frenkel 2016, 104)

The paradox Coovadia acknowledges here, one concealed in his narrator's belief in metric measurement, reveals the twinned nature of modernity itself: underpinning the French Revolution's call for *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* were concurrent, constitutive regimes of racial slavery and colonial rule. This tension was not lost on historians like CLR James, whose 1938 opus *The Black Jacobins* begins with a chapter entitled "The Property," a chapter that deliberately prefigures the same slippage between the human subject and measured objects that Coovadia echoes. James's heroic narrative of Touissant L'Ouverture's slave rebellion begins in 1789, emerging not only from the French Revolution but also its morbid, constitutive other: Europe's encirclement of Africa in its ongoing pursuit of slave labour. The slavers of Europe, James writes

scoured the coasts of Guinea. As they devastated an area they moved westward and then south, decade after decade, past the Niger, down the Congo coast, past Loango and Angola, round the Cape of Good Hope, and, by 1789, even as far as Mozambique. (6)

Intrinsic to European modernity, its democratic and republican ideals, James insists, is the horror of chattel slavery and racial capitalism. As both Coovadia and James recognize, the global circuits formed by these processes did not remain within the domain of colonial power. James demonstrates this by engaging apartheid-era South Africa directly: in a 1980 foreword to the British edition of *The Black Jacobins*, James writes that he met “some Pan-African young men from South Africa,” who had “typed out copies, mimeographed them and circulated passages” (vii). Within the history of a racialized modernity, an alternative infrastructure of circulation works in opposition to the colonial European claim to modernity’s power. As James reflects, he “could not help thinking that revolution moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform” (vii). While Frantz Fanon argued in *The Wretched of the Earth* that “colonialism is incapable of procuring for colonized peoples the material conditions likely to make them forget their quest for dignity,” both Coovadia and James share a recognition of the ways in which the tools of the colonizer (print-capitalism or the rationality of the metric system) may be sharpened and turned against their makers (147). Coovadia’s novel draws on this often contradictory notion of modernity, one that both promises a certain vision of order and equality while also demanding violent subjugation: the infrastructures shaped by colonial exploitation can also be remade through global forms of solidarity and resistance. As it brings a wide, multigenerational cast of characters into the time of the modern, homogenous nation-state, *Metric System* enacts Chatterjee’s critique of Anderson’s national time as much as he does Anderson’s own formulation of it. As such *Metric System* challenges a reading of temporality in contemporary South Africa and the systems of representation it has engendered, complicating the demands of the nation-state through the same mechanisms that have produced it.

3.3.2: “God Doesn’t Love a Young Thief”: Theft and Messianic Liberation after Apartheid

The novel’s concern with units and systems of measurement revolves around the interaction of objects and subjects within the changing spatial and temporal systems of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Forms of circulation do not merely take place in the homogeneous time and space of the market, as Chatterjee suggests; they also move between the legal, formal realms of the country and the criminal underworld that sustains it. Bottles of cheap brandy are found in a schoolboy’s locker, contraband copies of Marx are hidden from apartheid police, a stolen cellphone plunges a wealthy teenager into Cape Town’s gang culture. These objects enter into the world of the novel through clandestine circulations, accumulating meaning beyond their original material forms, inducting their owners into an underworld that is not troubled by the supposed transition of apartheid South Africa into democratic South Africa.

The figure of Mr Shabangu, introduced in the second chapter, models these modes of circulation. As the caretaker of a Natal worker’s hostel in 1973, he “stood for a system, fixed in place, in which you knew how to measure who and what was important” (52). A police informant and a petty tyrant, his grasp on power in the small world of the hostel is increasingly tenuous in the post-metric world. In a pique of jealousy, he steals the passbook of a young object of desire, Victor Moloi, and his careful balancing act begins to fall apart, not simply because of the act itself, but because of his overt exercise of power that was, before this moment, only assumed. It is a decision that exposes the multiple, simultaneous operations in which he is engaged. By the time we encounter Shabangu again in 1990, he still operates as a thief, a role made easier by his new job as a locksmith. He laments “hoarding the remainder of his days. But to what purpose? He had forgotten how to measure his own life” (168). His certainty—about the world and his role in it—had been founded in the supposed stability of the apartheid regime, and

rooted in the racialized order that determined every aspect of life under its rule. His complaint in 1990 echoes the “zone of occult instability where the people dwell,” a phrase Homi Bhabha lifts from Fanon in his essay “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation” (218). It is a zone between “fixed and stable forms ...[the] theories of the horizontal, homogeneous empty time of the nation’s narrative,” and the “incommensurable act of living,” Bhabha identifies with the postcolonial subject (Bhabha 219). While the structure of Coovadia’s novel seemingly repeats the indexical nature of a crude historicist reading—that list of historical signifiers that move the reader through familiar points in sequential time—it also offers a glimpse at the instability produced by the multiple temporalities operating beneath and in spite of the imposition of national order and national time; the boundaries crossed by objects and subjects in the novel introduce, too, their own temporal worlds. In “The Necklace,” formal authority has been displaced, entering Shabangu into the morbid symptoms of a Gramscian interregnum. Now if you were caught stealing “[n]obody was going to come and lay a charge against you at the police station” (166). “Since Mandela walked out of prison, in any case,” we are told, “the police had been remarkably passive. They refused to intervene in disputes” (166). By 1990 the authority of the state to exercise its basic functions no longer holds, and non-state justice operates through ad hoc violence fueled by rumour and suspicion. For Shabangu, this historical moment marks the dissolution of the strict boundaries he had once maintained and subverted in the world of the hostel, while for others in the novel it is a historical moment full of liberatory potential. In this zone of occult instability, Nelson Mandela has come to signify both Messiah and Benjamin’s “messianic” time, the opposite of “homogenous, empty” time. Whereas homogenous, empty time is continuous, uninterrupted and ultimately meaningless in itself, messianic time is disruptive, fleeting, full and immediate, imbued with meaning and emotional

energy. The narrator is convinced of Mandela's ability to introduce this heterogeneous time: "The black pimpnel, Nelson Mandela, was free to lead all the people to freedom. Soon it would be Mandela Day" (189). The coming of Mandela, as with the coming of the Messiah, would bring these temporal disjunctions into view, clarifying and unifying the detritus of the world at the end of history. Shabangu is more reticent, acknowledging the impossible job of salvation; when advising a neighbour to leave the township to avoid police questioning over vigilante justice, his neighbour responds "[t]heir time to ask questions is over, Mr Shabangu. Mandela will stop them," to which he replies "Mandela can't be here and there and over the hill. We depend on ourselves for the time being" (178). Whereas the interregnum between Mandela's release from prison in 1990 and his election in 1994 offers the potential of a radical new notion of time and order—a Messianic notion of simultaneity—Shabangu recognizes its limitations in Mandela's human frailty, and the largely unchanged nature of life in post-apartheid South Africa for many of its subjects.

Shabangu, as we now know, is the more prescient voice. The novel allows itself to dwell in the weak Messianic power that haunts every generation, which holds that the past has predicted our arrival and thus "our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of our redemption" (Benjamin 254). The present holds the unfulfilled promise of those past generations and continues to look to the future for salvation. Mandela Day—perhaps the date of the first democratic election, April 27th, 1994, or the date of Mandela's inauguration, May 10th of the same year—comes and goes in both *Metric System* and in South African historiography, indexed among other points in history's steady march. Shabangu's refusal to find salvation in any promise of futurity stems in part from his history of operating at the threshold of both the homogeneous and heterogenous temporalities that sustain the nation-state. It is the promise of a

messianic time that threatens this threshold, which Shabangu correctly identifies as essential to the infrastructure of South African time.

3.3.3: Filling Absences: The TRC and Temporal Possibility

Coovadia's mimicry of the temporal index of the past, the historical list of significant, linear moments imbued with a false redemptive power, comes to a head in the 1999 "Truth and Reconciliation," chapter. The novel again offers the possibility of a radical temporal and national rupture before closing those possible caesuras in the onward march of time. Tied to the millennial and millenarian panic around Y2K, Coovadia's narrator opens the chapter with a diagnosis of the TRC and its conflation of confession and redemption: "[e]verybody wished to confess, not to admit anything. The sins they remembered, before the end of the world, were general rather than particular" (245). The narrator echoes the criticism that the real-life TRC worked to both individualize the victims of apartheid, while generalizing the responsibility for its sins. Mahmood Mamdani's 2002 critique, "Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC)," for example, asks how a crime against humanity that "involved a targeting of entire communities for racial and ethnic cleansing and policing," could be addressed through the TRC's focus on the individual victim (34). Individualizing the victim, he writes "obliterated this particular—many would argue *central*—characteristic of apartheid" (34, italics in the original). Meanwhile, Mark Sanders notes in *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (2007) that the shifting legal and historical ambit of the TRC was a result of the fact that "perpetrators would not come forward en masse to make good for what they had done," and thus the TRC "generalized responsibility across the body politic by making itself a proxy for the perpetrator

vis-à-vis victims whose testimony it solicited. The proxy would, of course, demonstrate unequivocally its willingness to make good the wrongs of the one it represented” (9). By individualizing apartheid’s effects and generalizing its causes, the TRC insisted on a kind of moral simultaneity that worked to construct a national community through shared guilt and responsibility. It is in this milieu that Coovadia’s narrator complains “[n]obody even knew how to tell the time” (245).

The chapter follows Ann, the former wife of murdered activist academic Neil Hunter, following her return to Johannesburg after years of high-level anti-apartheid work in exile. Her son, Paul, is a playwright who has been mentored by Polk,⁵⁶ the same man who took Victor Moloï under his wing in 1973 and in doing so enraged Shabangu, drawing together the disparate timelines of the novel through the institution of activist theatre, but also through a simulation of the TRC. Ann tells Gert, her ex-husband, of Paul’s new play in which she performs a key role: “[t]omorrow I am playing my part for Paul,” she begins (265). Her role involves reading “the transcript of the inquest into Neil’s death. I don’t understand the reason to repeat things on stage that have already been heard in a public commission. When does it become an actual play?” (265). This demand to repeat the performance of an inquest is, by now, commonplace—another reminder of the repeating Timol case. Under the direction of Polk, “wearing the same outfit, along with an indestructible Casio digital watch, since 1970,” a group of strangers congregate to retell, verbatim, their TRC testimonies (269).⁵⁷ Gert’s assertion that the exercise would, at the

⁵⁶Polk, a liberal white theatre director seems another historical reference—to Robert Kavanagh or Malcolm Purkey, perhaps—both of whom formed the activist Theatre Workshop ’71.

⁵⁷The play is reminiscent of Duma Khumalo’s *The Story I am About to Tell*, which saw survivors of apartheid violence deliver, again, their TRC testimony on stage. Khumalo, who spent years on death row under the apartheid regime, took his own life in 2006. As Loren Kruger writes in *A Century of South African Theatre*, both the play and Khumalo’s death raise questions about the experiences of “survivors caught between testimony and trauma or in an unstable triangulation of testimony, theatre, and trauma” (161). Coovadia further complicates these unstable relationships by staging a fictionalized version of the play in the novel.

least, “be a record for people in the future,” seems at first a bizarre mischaracterization of the process (265). TRC testimonies are already a matter of historical record; they have been transcribed and translated, broadcast on television and radio, and hosted in online sites and in dim archives around the country. Instead of acting as a record for the future, the repetition of testimony in Paul’s play comes to produce a record of the present.

The other participants, Ann notes, would not warrant a second look “on the road, or through the window of a city bus, or behind the cash register. As witnesses, however, they were more than ordinary. They bore the truth in their faces” (272). What they bore witness to was absence—standing in for those who had been “subject to detention, torture, poison, murder, and disappearance” (272). The real Commission would eventually be asked to find and exhume at least 250 bodies, although according to the TRC’s *Final Report* “200 cases have not been finalised” (*Volume 2* 543). At the behest of deponents who believed their relatives had disappeared because of their political activities, the TRC worked alongside the police to cross-reference the claims of relatives with those of apartheid security force members who had applied for amnesty. The attempt to address the absences of the dead through exhumation was, as Sanders writes,

an invitation to the commission and its audience—those present at the hearings, as well as those following them on television and radio, or reading the transcripts after the fact—to enter into mourning and condolence... [b]y seeking the commission’s help in laying their next of kin to rest, witnesses in effect testified that apartheid was a formation that denied the right to mourn and proscribed condolence. (2007: 10)

In Sanders's discussion of exhumation—involving the literal re-membering of deceased activists—the TRC allowed for this process of retrieving what was previously absent, reconstituting families and communities in mourning in a process extended through popular media to the spectating nation.

In *Metric System* we encounter a more uncanny return of the absent. The women who bear the truth of their faces are “mostly African... also a coloured woman with a headscarf... and a mouse-faced Indian woman wearing a green sari” (270). Ann, acknowledging the racialized and corporeal nature of their bearing witness, asks if she “bear[s] the same truth” (272). She “had her own absences. Very few of the facts concerning Neil’s case had been uncovered... In cases that came before the commission there had been a lot of forgiveness and confession, a considerable output of tears and shame, and no practical consequence” (272). Absence, here, takes the form of a historical ledger: “[s]ubtraction, loss, disappearance were final,” she notes (272). In this reproduction of TRC testimony, in the simulation of the absent, something new briefly emerges among the participants. The play, performed in front of a small audience, seems to have a transformative effect on Ann’s relationship to her own history. As the participants read back their testimonies, Ann watches as “[t]heir histories shimmered into the room,” and the stories of the unnamed women “seemed to come out of the same dream time in which she had passed her own life” (273). It is a brief image of the formation of a national-consciousness, between what Bhabha calls the “lonely gatherings of the scattered people, their myths and fantasies and experiences,” that undergirds the idea of the modern nation, which promises to fill “the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor” (139). In this dream time Ann recognizes the temporary experience of community

with the women surrounding her, a possibility afforded by the space and time of simulation that Paul's play provides. The language of metaphor extends to Ann seeing her fellow witnesses as

people who had been rubbed clear of particularity until the stone inside was revealed...

They were parting with their stories, admitting to their losses, admitting they were the kind of people who could be mistreated, exchanging stories and finding equivalents. (274)

For Ann, the same dream time that allows for the emergence of a new proto-national community is also the time that initiates the erasure of difference and particularity, allowing for equivalents to be found and exchanges to be made, instituting the same equality promised by modernity and the market.

The metaphor echoes Jacques Derrida and F.C.T. Moore's central image in the 1974 essay "White Mythology," in which they track the wear and tear of language that makes the circulation of metaphor possible, the erosion that eases the transit of the coin in circulation, its meaning now taken as a given by the fact of its effacement. An *ad hoc* community is formed on the stage through the repetition of testimony, this time outside of the state-sanctioned performance of the TRC. However, in this process the difference that brings these strangers together is erased and reduced to the same notions of equality that also enters these figures into the homogenous time of the nation and of the market. As the novel demonstrates time and again, in a post-metric South Africa, possibilities for heterogeneous time emerge in unlikely spaces, yet they are continuously enveloped by homogeneity, the time of capital that must cast out as archaic anything it cannot account for. The stories these women tell open small windows into alternative communal formations after the end of apartheid before they too enter into the "unlimited surplus

value,” of an absolute loss of difference (Derrida and Moore 9). The esteemed figure of Polk claims that in “real life, a tragedy is a waste, a cancellation, a third-degree burn” (278). He contrasts this to the experience of seeing loss represented on stage: “[a]fterwards, when you come out of the theatre, you have a sense that life cannot be brought to an end. Life, in general, is inexhaustible” (278). The novel demonstrates that this may, indeed, be true for the audience, but only because those sharing their stories are reduced to the providers of goods that are sampled, purchased, and circulated in a parody of community and equality. As they testify to their losses, their absences are reinscribed in the process of circulation, a circulation that demands its own effacement. Paul’s play thus mimics in a few short pages both the promise of the TRC to heal the wounds of the past and form the new publics of the future, along with its contradictory investment in the homogeneous, empty time that constitutes the nation-state and the time of capital. In Coovadia’s telling, however, it is a time that is always slightly misaligned, a temporality that never quite allows for both history and the lived experience of alterity to exist simultaneously. The restaging of witness testimony in the novel serves to only raise further questions about the linear and progressive nature of a national history and the production, too, of those subjects forever out of step with the continuous forward movement of the nation.

3.4: “These Black and White Boxes Weighed on Me”: Temporality and the Anxieties of Race in Ivan Vladislavić’s *Double Negative*

Ivan Vladislavić is among post-apartheid South Africa’s most celebrated writers. His most widely-read texts—*The Folly* (1993), *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996), *The Restless Supermarket* (2001), *The Exploded View* (2004), *Double Negative* (2010) and *The Distance* (2019)—are concerned with white South African men who stand slightly outside the historical

moment in which they find themselves. His texts chronicle and parody the wry observers of an urban, middle-class South African malaise. Vladislavić, a professor of creative writing at the University of the Witwatersrand, was awarded the Windham-Campbell prize for fiction in 2015. *Double Negative* was published in concert with *TJ*, a retrospective by the celebrated photographer David Goldblatt, “who documented with a cool fury the oppressive racial dynamics of his native South Africa,” according to a *New York Times* obituary (Genzlinger). In an interview with Bronwyn Law-Viljoen, Vladislavić describes a tenuous relationship between Goldblatt’s collection, with images dating back to the 1950s, and his novel: many of the reference images Goldblatt had provided Vladislavić did not make it into *TJ*, but Vladislavić acknowledges they “shaped [his] texts unconsciously in crucial ways” (“About Those Photographs” 37). This tangential relationship between image and text is essential to the novel’s exploration of the uncertain temporalities that structure contemporary South Africa. *Double Negative* has largely been read as a novel that explores the temporal complexity of the photograph in the uncertain historical eras bracketing the end of apartheid. In addition to van der Vlies’s *Present Imperfect*, Stefan Helgesson’s 2015 “Johannesburg Sighted: *TJ/Double Negative* and the Temporality of the Image/Text,” and Kirby Manià’s 2017 “Writing the Urban Interregnum: Teleology and Transition in Ivan Vladislavić’s Johannesburg,” are also invested in the temporal instability introduced by Vladislavić’s photographic ekphrasis and the consequences of this instability in the national present. In contrast to these readings, Minesh Dass’s 2017 article “‘Wishy-Washy Liberalism’ and ‘The Art of Getting Lost’ in Ivan Vladislavić’s *Double Negative*,” is one of the few articles that positions race as central to Vladislavić’s text rather than incidental to it. *Double Negative*, Dass argues, “exposes the limits of feeling a sense of disquiet with one’s whiteness,” as an ethical good; the novel favours instead

“uncontrollable loss of self and property,” as the protagonist Neville Lister moves from an ineffectual liberalism to a disengaged conservatism over the course of three decades (10). My reading aims to bring these disparate approaches to the novel into conversation. I ask how the photograph’s ability to pierce the viewer, to transform and transcend the historical present, is an ability induced by an acute racial anxiety that haunts both Neville and the novel itself. The liberatory moments offered by the novel, in which the material conditions of racial violence are briefly suspended, are only made possible through the often unspeaking, spectral presence of the racial other. The photograph becomes a means of moving Neville *out of time*; they invoke the radical temporalities that rupture homogenous, empty time, but do so through an uneasy relationship to race.

3.4.1: The Racialized *Punctum* of the Photograph

A photograph, *Double Negative* contends, carries with it a temporal ambiguity that threatens to unravel, if only momentarily, normative national time. As such, Vladislavić builds on Roland Barthes’ description in *Camera Lucida* (1981) of a photograph’s referent, which “is not the same as the referent of other systems of representation;” it is not “the *optionally* real thing to which an image or sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph” (76). Unlike writing or speech, a photograph confirms the presence of the subject. Barthes identifies photography’s *noeme* as the “[t]hat-has-been,” or “the Intractable,” or the Latin “*interfuit*: what I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (*operator* or *spectator*); it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred” (77, italics in the original). Barthes distinguishes the *studium* of the photograph—the culturally learned meaning of “the

figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions,”—from the *punctum*, that which “will break (or punctuate) the *studium*” (26). The photographs that merely “please or displease,” he writes, “are invested with no more than *studium*,” whereas the *punctum* is the “sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice,” a play on words that invests the finality of the *cast of the die* with an element of chance (27).

Double Negative's ekphrastic passages, in which the puncture is filled with Neville's meditations on presence (and the attending temporal *present*), share with Barthes an uneasy relationship to race. As Shawn Michelle Smith writes in “Race and Reproduction in *Camera Lucida*” (2011), Barthes' conception of photography, and in particular its power to *pierce* the viewer, “is laden with anxieties about race and reproduction” (243). Barthes' limited interest in the *studium* of a 1926 James Van Der Zee portrait of a Black family—Van Der Zee's own—is racially coded. This image, Barthes writes, “utters respectability, family life, conformism, Sunday best, an effort of social advancement in order to assume the White Man's attributes” (43). Barthes, Smith writes, “asks readers to view racist paternalism as natural or beside the point rather than as a culturally codified part of the *studium* that can be put under examination” (244). The *punctum* emerges with an attendant fear of miscegenation and moral degeneracy—it has “no preference for morality or good taste,” and can be “ill-bred” (43). For Barthes the *punctum* of the Van Der Zee photograph emerges from “the belt, worn low by the sister (or daughter)—the ‘solacing Mammy’—whose arms are crossed behind her back like a schoolgirl, and above all her *strapped pumps*” (43, italics in original). These details recall a deceased aunt and ultimately enclose Barthes, Smith writes, in a “solipsistic reverie,” in which he “obfuscates the presence of other historical subjects” (246). The *punctum*, in this sense, also obscures the “that-has-been” of the photograph, reducing the presence of the Black subject to a means of accessing Barthes' own

memory. For Barthes the photograph's dual signifying system is, in this penetrative moment, transformed into a single point that turns inwards, moving him backwards in time. In this racialized act of looking, the white French male extracts from the photograph of a Black family the memory of a lost aunt, in a process that creates a "blind field" (57). "Ultimately," Barthes insists, "in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes" (53). Confronted with racial difference that approaches too close to his own family, his own genesis, Barthes moves quickly to occlude the doubleness of the image via the invocation of the *punctum*. The photograph's potential to violently rupture the homogenous, empty time of progression is, it appears, premised on obscuring its own relationship to racial difference. As Yvonne Vera reminds us in her 1999 essay "Thatha Camera," the camera has long been understood in an African context as a technology of racial domination. It "has often been a dire instrument," she writes, "part of colonial paraphernalia together with the gun and the bible, diarising events, the exotic and profound, altering reality, introducing new impulses and confessions, cataloguing the converted and then hanged" ("Thatha Camera"). Does the *punctum* emerge because or in spite of this history? *Double Negative* enters this fraught relationship between the photograph, time, and race by joining Neville during three distinct historical moments: the urban violence of 1982, the national euphoria of 1994, and the fading optimism of 2009. Like *Metric System*, *Double Negative*'s characters are seemingly swept along in the progressive movement of national history, but Neville's movement through time is continuously interrupted by a series of imperfect doubles—prophecies, predictions, and presentiments that do not quite align with the normative present. Meaning comes briefly into view in these doubles, but is also deferred by each slight difference introduced, differences that reveal the complex temporal orders that lay just outside of the nation's claim over history and time.

After dropping out of university Neville feels as though he has “slipped sideways,” in his attempt to avoid military conscription, compulsory for white men aged 16 or older between 1967 and 1993 (17). He is a familiar figure in Vladislavić’s oeuvre: cynical, thoughtful, and ultimately detached from the political metanarratives swirling around him. As Teju Cole notes in his introduction, there is an imbalance inherent in his last name, Lister: Neville “pitches forward” (11). Patrick Flanery writes in his review of the novel for *The Guardian* that “lister” is also an “arcane synonym for ‘reader;’” Neville, Nev, is a “New Reader,” one who seeks alternative ways of interpreting the world around him (“*Double Negative* by Ivan Vladislavić—Review”). While he avoids *enlisting* in the apartheid army, he is enlisted to accompany photographer Saul Auerbach—a Goldblatt stand-in—on a journey into the city, one meant to shake Neville from his late adolescent malaise, which stems from his complicity in apartheid and his sense of political impotence. He begins the narrative in 1982 claiming he “wanted to be in the real world, but [he] wasn’t sure how to set about it” (17). Working himself “into a childish temper” he retreats to his upper-middle class family home to argue with his parents about “wishy-washy liberalism and the wages of domestic workers,” while Paulina, a Black servant who “had been with [his] family before [he] was born, clattered the dishes away,” a troubling irony Neville acknowledges but feels he is unable to address (17-18). Dass writes that the presence of Paulina in the background of this early scene indicates that Neville is, first, “aware that his espoused politics is at odds with the material conditions of his life, and secondly, that he finds it difficult to navigate this contradiction” (11). This contradiction leads to Neville, from a relatively well-off English-speaking family, choosing to work as an assistant to Jaco Els, an Afrikaner who “painted lines and arrows in parking lots” (19). Working in a record store “seemed so bourgeois. [Neville] wanted to get [his] hands dirty” (18). Els and Neville construct a “library of unambiguous signs,”

in newly built shopping centres (19). These are the malls that will come to dominate the urban landscape of Johannesburg, marking a shift in spatial segregation from the overt, state-imposed violence of apartheid to the subtler exclusionary modes of consumption that structure inequality in Johannesburg today. Their stencils are “Books of the Law... Turn left, turn right, go straight” (21). When Neville moves too slowly, Els takes pleasure in spraying “a stripe of red or yellow,” over his wrist, a crude example of the racial mimicry Neville seems to desire (17). He relishes his *performance* of the kind of labour usually reserved for Black subjects in the logic of apartheid:

Working alone, in silence, I sometimes thought I was achieving something after all. In my jackson-pollocked overalls—I had to stop Paulina from washing the history out of them—in a clearing among the cars defined by four red witch’s hats, I was a solitary actor on a stage: a white boy playing a black man. In a small way I was a spectacle. Yet I felt invisible. I savoured the veil that fell between my sweaty self and the perfumed women sliding in and out of their cars. I flitted across the lenses of their dark glasses like a spy. (22)

This desire to play-act as a Black labourer is his first attempt to negotiate his complicity in apartheid’s inequalities, a complicity continually displaced onto a series of visual signifiers—the paint on his overalls, the lines on asphalt—that combine to make him both a spectacle and invisible. He becomes a “spy” in this process, moving between racialized manual labour and the comfortable existence of women who frequent the malls, women not unlike his mother. Occluded in these moments are the Black labourers displaced by Neville—Els complains that they could not “take the punch,” and that he employed Neville because he needed the company of a

white companion more than he needed the labour of Black workers (20). Neville silently corrects him: what Els wanted was “a witness,” a role Neville is eventually unwilling to play (20).

Occluded too is the presence of Paulina in this performance. It is Paulina who threatens the “history” in Neville’s paint-splattered costume: washing his overalls would erase his attempt at an imperfect doubling, through which he may sublimate his guilt through a performance of racialized labour (22).

Double Negative’s relationship to *TJ* further complicates this performance. The novel, published in 2011, recalls two Goldblatt portraits from 2000, while the narrative, set in 1982, precedes them. A portrait, in colour, “Erikson Ngomane, tiler, Linden. 17 February 2000,” is paired with an image of an advertisement painted in white on a rockface: “Erickson Ngomane’s advert, Republic Road, Darrenwood. 17 February 2000.” In the portrait, Ngomane is kneeling atop wet concrete, making direct eye-contact with the camera. His black, striped trousers are “jackson-pollocked,” his hands covered in a white powder, recalling the hands of Els, who had acquired “chalky fingertips in the line of duty” (19). The advertisement consists of the words “THE BEST TILER CALL ME 888 3883,” on one face of a flat rock outcropping, and on the other “ERICKSON IS THE BEST MAN AND GOOD WOR-.” The end of the message is cut off by the edge of the frame. On the next page of *TJ*, a second diptych: first, “Corrie Jacobs’s advert, Fourways. 27 November 1999,” and then, “Corrie Jacobs, painter, Rivonia. 12 April 2000.” Jacobs wears a yellow polo shirt and green trousers. He stares at the camera in front of bright orange and purple walls—his portrait is as vibrant and colourful as Ngomane’s is dull. His clothes are, like Ngomane’s and like Neville’s, “jackson-pollocked.” All three men share this signifier of their labour, but there is no photograph to confirm the “that-has-been” of Neville’s work: it is ephemeral, a costume that can be removed or put on at will. These two diptychs offer

a series of imperfect mirrors, dubious doubles: the cellphone number on Jacobs's sign is reflected in the cellphone on his hip but half a year earlier, Erickson's name is painted on a rockface, and when the page is turned his face and name are brought into close, but not perfect, alignment. The two adverts are printed on either side of the same glossy page. Both men are mirrored—in the past, in text, in fiction—with each reflection adding a layer of abstraction. They are mirrored again in Neville's performance of their labour, while he is mirrored in the sunglasses of the indifferent white consumer.

Before the photograph and the camera enter the narrative, ideas around performance, labour, and witnessing are introduced as a means of contending with the unsettling presence of Blackness in Neville's peripheral vision. He will soon have a similar experience in which the self is dislodged in time by the act of looking—looking *like* and looking *at*—the photograph. Before meeting with the photographer Saul, Neville looks at one of his photobooks and finds the images contained both “familiar and strange” (38). He locates himself in them: “I kept looking at a hand or a foot, a shoe, the end of a sheet turned back, the street name painted on a kerb. Have I been here? Is this someone I'm going to meet? I turned the pages with the unsettling feeling that I had looked through the book before and forgotten” (38). “These black and white boxes weighed on me,” he complains (38). In this series of doubles, substitutions, and presentiments, Neville can imagine a simultaneity of the self in multiple temporalities, the times of different South African orders. Contained in the photograph is a different way of seeing, a vision of himself that accelerates him out of the time of apartheid. If Neville cannot abide by the *studium* of South Africa, then it is through the possibility of the *punctum* that he will come to find a means of unsettling, perhaps even momentarily transcending, the homogenous emptiness of South African time.

3.4.2: Race and the Double Time of the Portrait

A turning point in Neville's development comes in 1982, when he witnesses two photographs taken by Saul on a journey through Johannesburg. Neville's father, concerned after Neville gets into a scuffle with a conservative neighbour (a racist judge who may also ask why Neville is neither in university nor on the frontlines), arranges for him to accompany the photographer on a day of shooting in the city. While waiting for Saul to finish running an errand, Neville invokes the presence of the Angel of History, the famous avatar of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," at his side—although the reader's ability to see the Angel is made tenuous by the narration. *Had* the reader been present, Neville remarks, we "could *not* see Benjamin's Angel—Klee's Angel, strictly speaking, memorably captioned—leaning beside [him] with his wings folded across the bonnet" (51, italics my own). Benjamin saw *Angelus Novus* as a powerless witness, one swept into the future while looking back at human history as "one single catastrophe," rather than a series of discrete events (257). "The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed," Benjamin laments, "[b]ut a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them" (257-258). The storm of progress seems, in this moment, to have calmed. The Angel of History is now a casual companion rather than a horrified witness.

Neville and Saul are joined by Gerald Brookes, a boorish British journalist covering life under apartheid with a barely concealed glee at the moral failings of white South Africans. Standing atop a hill overlooking the city, Brookes suggests they choose three houses in the valley below to photograph, an act in which the men are "chillingly evoking snipers," van der Vlies writes (*Present Imperfect* 118). It is an attempt by Brookes to disrupt Saul's relationship to the subjects of his photographs. In Saul's telling, his specific impulse to *make* the image is fraught

with the same temporal ambivalence that Neville experiences when viewing them: “[t]he subject draws me, I don’t have words for it really, something strikes a chord, rings a bell,” Saul explains, “[s]ometimes it’s as if I’ve found a thing I’ve already seen and remembered, or imagined before” (56). The photograph is not evidence of some easily apprehensible truth, he insists. A photograph can “right the balance” of an internal disequilibrium: “[t]he photograph—or is it the photographing?—restores order” (56). As Neville, named for disequilibrium, had earlier remarked, watching the mimetic work of street portraiture artists sketching faces from reference photographs, a “photograph was the presentiment of a portrait, stilling an expression, freezing the blood... Or so I imagined. Perhaps it was the other way round?” (48). Saul’s photographs make this distinction impossible, or rather, they make the idea of the real and the representation exist simultaneously, a different simultaneity to that held by the nation.

Erich Auerbach⁵⁸ describes in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946) the relationship of events in the Old Testament being fulfilled in the New, as an example of Divine Providence: he offers the unfulfilled sacrifice of Isaac prefiguring the eventual sacrifice of Christ by way of example. The connection between those events is “impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension,” they can only be “vertically linked to Divine Providence,” and not in a series of events in progressive, secular time (73-74). The “here and now is no longer a link in an earthly chain of events,” he writes “it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future” by the presence of an “omni-temporal,” God (74). This *was* the idea of simultaneity that has been usurped by the nation’s insistence on homogeneous, empty time, Anderson argues in *Imagined*

⁵⁸Erich Auerbach and Saul Auerbach are another set of imperfect doubles, as are Saul Auerbach and David Goldblatt. The Biblical Saul also had double name, the Roman Paul. Saul was eventually succeeded by David, while in the relationship of *TJ* to *Double Negative*, David (Goldblatt) precedes Saul (Auerbach).

Communities. Vladislavić, through Saul, asks how that archaic structure of time, a vertical simultaneity, still interrupts the present through the ambiguities inherent in the photograph. Saul's images link the past and the future—or, rather, *a* past and *a* future, neither of which are necessarily those we recognize in our national present—in a non-linear, heterogenous fashion. It is here that we glimpse Benjamin's messianic notion of history as "time filled by the presence of the now," *Jetztzeit* (261). Brookes, who takes snapshots of apartheid's unambiguous signs, "WHITES ONLY benches, separate entrances, a uniformed servant eating her lunch on the kerb," challenges the ambiguities of this notion of simultaneity (55). He reminds both Neville and Saul of the context in which these images are made: "[h]ow could you go on writing poetry, was the gist of his argument, when you had the wherewithal to take down an affidavit? Any minute now, [Neville] thought, he'll be quoting Adorno, misquoting Adorno" (54). Poetry after apartheid is barbaric; perhaps, the novel counters, there is no "after." Where Anderson juxtaposes Erich Auerbach and Walter Benjamin, Vladislavić has them (or, at least, their imperfect doubles) sharing a car ride through Johannesburg.

The first property the men choose appears vacant until a Black woman emerges from the servant's quarters in the backyard. Veronica, a domestic worker living with her two infant children, only speaks to Saul briefly, answering his inquiries "so softly" that her words do not carry to Neville (66). She agrees, we presume, to be photographed by Saul, but Neville wonders

What had he told her? Perhaps she thought we were officials of some kind: Brookes could have passed for a municipal inspector, especially now that he had taken out his notebook.

What would she make of me, though, with my long hair and ragged jeans? I must spoil the

picture. Then again, it hardly mattered whether she grasped what we were up to. Who we *were* was clear. We were white men. We would do as we pleased. (67, italics in original)

Neville is embarrassed by this invasion. He recalls, once again, Paulina, who when approached in her own quarters on the Lister property, “came out of her room and pulled the door closed behind her, drawing the only line she could” (68). Whereas the shame of his relationship to Paulina (and by extension Black South Africans) had earlier led him to play the role of the Black labourer, the photograph now allows him to condense these anxieties into the image.

The photograph depicts Veronica holding her two infants, but in the background of the frame is a “snapshot of the triplets,” which attests to a third child who died having suffocated on smoke in their tiny dwelling (71). Once this snapshot is seen within Saul’s portrait it “looms larger, or you wish it would. It makes you bend your head to the paper, trying to get closer, although you know this distance cannot be altered” (72). The third child in the snapshot “persists in that smaller frame like an echo,” and in “the circle of your eye, they all go on, living and dying, then and now” (72). We witness Neville’s attempt to enter into the photo—a reversal, of sorts, of the directionality of the *punctum*: the image does not puncture Neville so much as he wishes to puncture the image. Helgesson argues that this ekphrastic moment “disrupts the flow of Neville’s narrative,” or rather it asks, “how the picture described—which of course only exists precisely as a description—presents *another narrative and temporal possibility* than the one we have just encountered” (“Johannesburg Sighted” 57, italics in the original). It does, indeed, suggest the opening of a different temporal system within the text, one made possible by the image. Yet the photograph does not exceed its *studium*. The ekphrasis takes on an authorial voice located *elsewhere*: the photograph is, we are told “one of Auerbach’s best... it is singled out by

the experts too. You can look it up on the internet” (71). This ekphrastic voice speaks from a critical distance, “[t]hey say,” Neville assures us, “it embodies those apparently contradictory qualities you read about in the dust jackets of his books” (71). He, again, defers and displaces his own complicity in this moment of exploitation. The photograph’s historical significance allows Neville to convince himself that “the embarrassment [he] felt on her behalf was entirely misplaced” (72). The shame that accompanies the invasion of Veronica’s home, her inability to refuse these white interlopers their right to her image, the story of her loss, the recollection of Paulina who lives behind the Lister home—these are all projected onto the photograph, or rather, a description of the photograph. The image told the world about apartheid’s *studium* and thus carried with it a moral weight that justified the conditions of its making. In the 2009 section of the novel, “Small Talk,” we learn that Veronica is Veronica Setshedi, that the sons in the photograph are named Amos and Joel. Amos has died, but Joel, Saul informs Neville, has “done bloody well for himself,” and works in banking (236). Saul plans to visit and photograph Veronica again, he tells Neville. Only Saul, it seems, can bring the temporal *otherwise* of the photograph into alignment with a real-world ethical commitment to the real-world Veronica Setshedi, now given a full name. It is Saul who can bridge these temporal and ethical disjunctures through the photograph, not Neville.

The second photograph taken on that day pierces Neville more than any other in the novel. The white, lower-middle class Mrs Ditton welcomes the men into her home in a way that would have been impossible for Veronica to do. Absent is her son, who narrowly escaped death at war in Angola. There are signs of this enlister scattered around the house (a “Kawasaki poster on the door and Farrah Fawcett-Majors above the bed”) but Neville does not meet this parallel self (83-84). Instead, Auerbach’s act of photography spares him a confrontation with this

pseudo-doppelganger. Awaiting Saul's capture in Mrs Ditton's living room, Neville fantasizes a series of inverted openings and possibilities: he "imagined the door opening, [he] imagined the room opening rather than the door, the door standing still while the house swung away on small hinges and closed into the eye of the camera with a bang" (86). It is the presence of the camera that allows for these possibilities to coexist in the same dingy living room, and that allows Neville to briefly contemplate his own death, one evoked by the miraculous escape of Jimmy Ditton.

Being photographed has a transformative effect on Mrs Ditton in a way that it did not for Veronica: "you can see the relief on Mrs Ditton's face as she drops from the fulness of life into a smaller, diminished immortality. She looks grateful to have the air knocked out of her. Anticipating a paper-thin future, she floats free of the fat-thighed cushions and the sticky shadows, she levitates. It is there in the photograph, you only have to look" (86). There was no comparable description of the moment in which Veronica was photographed, there is no reading of her face or her notions of immortality. She was readable, the novel acknowledges, within the *studium* of apartheid's visual schema. Mrs Ditton, on the other hand, can be invested with the full potential of the medium; even with her diminished immortality, space and time are bent around the lens of the camera. Whereas Neville felt embarrassed and out of place before Veronica, there is none of the same self-consciousness in the presence of Mrs Ditton. He can identify a version of himself in this home, he can imagine himself as a son who narrowly escaped the death march of apartheid. The *punctum* of this moment affirms a racial solipsism that places Neville at the centre of the frame, even if he is nowhere to be seen.

There is no accompanying information about the photograph of Mrs Ditton; Neville does not offer an indication of how it was received, nor its critical reputation. Unlike the portrait of

Veronica, this image has a double in *TJ*: “A Woman in her Parlour, Bezuidenhout Valley. November 1973.” As van der Vlies writes, the image “differs only in minor degrees,” from what we read in the novel (*Present Imperfect* 118). The paper-thin future that awaits is not apparent in the glossy pages of Goldblatt’s *TJ*. The cushions are modest, and the woman does not levitate, nor does she look grateful—I can read only a sense of distaste on her face. The closer Vladislavić gets to a *real* photograph (which, supposedly, leads us closer to the *real* subject), the more readily apparent the gaps between the image and text become. Both photographed women recall the Angel of History. Veronica has hair fluffed “into an astonished halo” (70), while Mrs Ditton has “two destinies now. One of them she still occupied, the other had stepped away from her; it was receding into the past, but with its face turned to the future” (86). Where Benjamin saw the Angel propelled “into the future to which his back is turned,” Mrs Ditton’s other destiny, created by the imperfect doubling of the camera, fades into history.

As Janie, an unkind critic who interviews Neville in 2009, complains, Saul’s images can be reduced to people “standing around in their gloomy houses like pieces of furniture” (189). The “whites are the worst,” she adds, condemning Neville to that same movement as Mrs Ditton, receding into the past but with his face turned to the future (189). Janie’s critique of Saul’s photography mirrors Jamal’s critique of Goldblatt, who he dismisses as a practitioner of a documentary realism that “informs the naturalism, indeed the will to a nineteenth-century (Zolaesque) scientism” of apartheid-era writing, tying together Goldblatt’s images and the work of Nadine Gordimer (“Bullet Through the Church” 18).⁵⁹ Although Jamal admits Goldblatt has since found his way out of a “pointed racialized index,” this has been only achieved “*within* received forms, so that what we get are variations on a theme overdetermined by the ideological

⁵⁹The two have, indeed, collaborated several times, including the 1986 *Lifetimes: Under Apartheid*, while Gordimer wrote an essay included in Goldblatt’s *On the Mines* in 1973.

imperatives of history—and its overweening teleological drive—rather than by the immanence wrought from an ungrounded mind” (18, italics in the original). Vladislavić, who Jamal celebrates in the same essay, has both invested Saul’s photography with the temporality of vertical simultaneity while acknowledging through Neville the limitations of the medium itself. By placing a crude version of Jamal’s criticism in the mouth of Janie, who takes photos out of a car window, “as if she were tapping ash off a cigarette,” he suggests a generational divide in the understanding of the photograph as affidavit (186). Through Neville’s apathetic narration, it appears that this divide cannot be bridged under the conditions of the contemporary moment. “It was a different time, you know,” Neville responds to Janie’s criticism (189). In hindsight, the photograph had returned to its two-dimensional representation, a flat retelling of South African history.

3.4.3: “Even the Angel of History Can Hardly Bear to Look”: Losing Sight of the Present

The final section of the novel finds Neville a well-regarded commercial photographer and an emerging artistic voice. He has established himself as the “frozen moment guy” of advertising, specializing in “things falling, spilling, flying apart” (97-98). The homogenous, empty time of the nation is the time of capital we are reminded. His work is, in several ways, the antithesis of Saul’s. Furthermore, his artistic practice is concerned with surfaces and barriers; as he explains to Janie, he takes pictures of the many walls that enclose almost all of Johannesburg because he prefers to avoid “poking around in the pitiful contents of strangers’ lives” (193). The shift from the “frozen moment” to exteriors, Dass writes, indicates that “whereas he once concerned himself with conserving things, with preventing their imminent and unavoidable destruction, his primary concern now is for those things that keep the world out” (18). Having been allowed

access into Saul's practice, his ability to enter into a divine simultaneity that connects past, present, and future in a single moment, Neville has retreated from the ethical questions raised in those images. In his middle age he is reduced to documenting the newest iteration of the settler colonial laager, now transformed in the post-apartheid era into a non-racial infrastructure that binds South Africa's middle classes in paranoia. As van der Vlies writes, by the end of the novel we have entered "the territory of the reduced copy," and Neville is now only a "pale imitation of [Saul] Auerbach" (*Present Imperfect* 121). Neville is closer now to his first job, painting arrows on shopping mall parking lots, than he is to the *punctum* of photography.

There is one image in this series that suggests the possibility of something other than a blank edifice. He photographs Antoine K, a refugee, in front of the walls of his home, "made of old garage doors, five of six of them patched together with sheets from bus shelters and billboards" (190-191). Janie describes the wall breathlessly: "one shack made of ten different materials—iron, hardboard, scraps of lumber, you name it—but the whole thing's been painted eau de Nil. It's an artwork" (193). The post-apartheid subject, or Vladislavić's glib approximation of one, sees only aesthetic innovation in Antoine's precarity. Having been forced to sell even "the watch off his wrist," to escape to South Africa, Antoine jokes that he was so poor "he did not even have the time," and Neville complains that he "wanted [Antoine] to look at the camera, to look at [him], but he kept looking away down the street" (192).

In the photograph he takes, Neville recognizes in Antoine the Angel of History who has accompanied him over the decades: "[h]is face is not turned squarely towards the past. He watches from the corner of his eyes. Even the Angel of History can hardly bear to look" (194-195). Whereas the Angel once rode alongside him, a casual observer of apartheid's atrocities, he now refuses to make eye contact with Neville and his camera. For Neville, the photographic

punctum once held the potential to transcend the *studium* of South Africa. The *sting* may have been (in spite of Barthes' protests) coded within discourses of race, the dominant visual schema of South African history—but it was for that very reason a means by which Neville could imagine a different temporal reality, one that displaced his white guilt. Now the photograph no longer punctures Neville's field of vision. Manià argues that Antoine's association with the Angel of History and the loss of his watch make him a "detemporalised figure" ("Writing the Urban Interregnum" 52). If anything, the novel locates Antoine quite precisely in time and history, having escaped both the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 1996 and 2003, and the xenophobic attacks in the township of Alexandra in 2008. I read Antoine's refusal not as evidence of his "detemporalised" subjectivity, but as an indictment of Neville's narrowing ability to contend with the temporal complexities of a country he can now only see for its indifferent, securitized infrastructure. Antoine's refusal to look at Neville casts the photographer as *out of time*, outside of the possibilities Antoine glimpses in the corners of his eyes.

The novel ends with Neville acknowledging he had "unlearned the art of getting lost" (245). He recalls a childhood game played with his father: Neville would be driven around the city, lying down on the backseat so as to obscure his view of the world outside, and his task was to correctly guess their destination based on an internal sense of direction. Initially finding the task impossible, he eventually becomes a "compass needle," so adept is he at tracing the car's movements (245). His ability to see, or more accurately to *know*, is once again contextualized by the present absence of Paulina: during a game played after she is driven to a bus stop, Neville "could not go wrong," and feels certainty settle over him "like a blanket" (244). It is a sense of certainty established only once Paulina leaves his field of view, a certainty that will calcify into a cold indifference over the decades to come. Neville's ways of seeing, his forms of knowledge,

and his attempts to transcend the historical moment in which he finds himself, are all premised on a South African construction of race that haunts him, and the novel, through its many temporalities. The novel echoes, again, Jamal's claim that "South Africans, it seems, cannot lose themselves" (18). The photograph once presented Neville with a means of deferring his guilt and anxiety about his role in apartheid's violence, it allowed for him to enter into a different temporal order than the one that sustained the knowable world; by the end of the novel, however, Neville has come to recognize the limitations of his relationship to the photograph. Yet his return to this moment in his childhood eschews the possibility for the temporal schism that was once essential to the photograph. It is a return that mirrors Barthes' experience of the *punctum*, a way of eliding his complicity in favour of a solipsism that moves him backwards in time, receding into the past, but with his face turned to "a streetlight on a tall pole, the jigsaw undersides of oak leaves, pieces of sky between branches" (245).

3.5: Conclusions

The insistence with which the nation returns to the death of Ahmed Timol betrays the temporal contestations that underlie the nation's movement through homogenous, empty time. With each reopening of that national wound, the possibility of a new order is glimpsed: what happened behind the opaque facade of John Vorster Square on October 27, 1971 will surely be revealed with each inquest and with that revelation a different kind of history, a different kind of time. The possibility of entering into a different order of national time is also what has brought *Metric System* and *Double Negative* into conversation in this chapter. The novels take the rational, objective technologies of the metric system and the photograph as analogues for the progressive time of the nation, but they are also technologies undermined by their own making, their own

inherent limitations and ambiguities, their functions within colonial and racial systems of domination. The tension between their histories, their explanatory functions and their ability to mask other possibilities are central to both novels. It is a tension I recognize, too, at the core of the TRC, an infrastructure that betrays its own failures within its construction; it has been imagined as a means of righting a history gone awry, but in doing so it only reproduces the failures of a prior order under the guise of the new. Its efforts to construct a historic bridge between past and future have left the ongoing present perpetually out of grasp. I am reminded in this grasping of the vernacular deployment of *now* in South African English: *just now* indicates *later*, while *now now* promises an imminent arrival. Where in this deferral are we to locate the present? Neither *Metric System* nor *Double Negative* can hold open the gaps and fissures of the *Jetztzeit* for very long; the relentlessness of the storm called progress blows their characters and narratives towards conclusions that ultimately foreclose, or delay, the possibility of imagining other times.

Chapter 4: “The Self Was Already a Mended Structure”: Telling the Truth at the Threshold of the Nation

I think that your problem is that you are, you are dissecting, you are, you are, you are mutilating my history.

Thlamedi Mfalapitsa, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing on the COSAS Four (1999)

I hate the sort of writer’s babble that says, “Oh but you must write the truth.” I found myself saying it now. The thing about that is that I don’t believe that it really will hurt.

Zoë Wicomb in Conversation with Hein Willemsse (2002)

The final chapter of this dissertation returns to the TRC to interrogate the relationship between truth-telling and subject-formation in post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that the TRC made parrhesia—telling truth to power and putting oneself at risk in the process—fundamental to the establishment of a national history, a violent and often deliberately obscured one. The act of self-disclosure, I argue, has become the means through which the new South African subject has been imagined since the end of apartheid. As an infrastructure of nation- and subject-making, the TRC insisted on the ability of the subject to speak the truth about themselves before the Commission and the public. This demand was one conditioned and shaped by race, which ultimately interrupted and frustrated the TRC’s attempt to produce a normative, legible subject through practices of truth-telling.

I begin this chapter by contextualizing the deployment of the concept of “truth” by the TRC. It is a term central to the Commission’s work that remained ill-defined, but eventually accounted for a wide range of testimonies heard by the Commission. I ask how the Commission’s instrumentalization of truth engages with the risk inherent in parrhesia, in which both subject and state are momentarily made vulnerable to the other. Through a reading of the

testimony of Thlamedi Mfalapitsa, a former *askari* for the apartheid regime, I argue that we witness the complex and contradictory ways in which parrhesia was made essential to the logic of the TRC, while the conditions under which truth could be told made free-spokenness an impossible task for the confessing subject.

I turn to two novels that engage with the Commission's production of truth-telling in order to explore the impasses of truth at the threshold of the new South Africa. Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000) and *Playing in the Light* (2006) both contend with the ways in which the historical construction of coloured identity continues to determine the nature of a true practice of self-representation. *David's Story* tells of the writing of an autobiography by an anti-apartheid guerilla, David Dirkse; what emerges is a dense and knotty consideration of what voices are silenced in the new South Africa, and what forms of violence remain unrepresentable in both fiction and history. *Playing in the Light* centres on Marion Campbell, a white, upper-middle class Cape Town woman who learns that she had been raised as a "play white" when she was, in fact, from a coloured background. Common to both novels, I argue, is a skepticism around access to "true" coloured identity and the expectation that the subject is able to account for that identity. As Wicomb asked Hein Willemse in an interview, "[w]hat is this business about finding out who you are? Why have we turned this into a problem? When is it not a problem then? When you've got 'pure blood'? Isn't it replicating the old identities of apartheid?" ("Zoë Wicomb in Conversation with Hein Willemse" 147). Wicomb's refusal to participate in the stable representation of the coloured subject, I argue, offers a critical rejoinder to the expectation of the new South African subject as truth-teller.

I end this chapter with a coda, of sorts, by drawing on debates over Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998), a text that has often been read as a metonym for the TRC itself.

Accusations of plagiarism and appropriation, I argue, invite a consideration of the ways in which notions of truth are shared by Krog's text and the Commission. *Country of My Skull* and the TRC, I contend, have worked in tandem to reinforce a particular conception of truth, and the truth-telling subject, in a way that continues to shape South African literature.

4.1: The Truth-Telling Subject and Parrhesia in the Postcolony

4.1.1: Constructing Truth Through the TRC

The concept of truth was central to the work of the TRC and yet remained elusive, eventually taking on variegated and overlapping forms during the Commission's lifespan. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995, which created the TRC, made the revelation of truth by individuals a prerequisite for addressing the nation's past, which in turn would allow for the establishment of a liberal, democratic future. It did so through a series of interconnected axioms that affirmed the necessity of the Act itself:

SINCE the Constitution... provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex; AND SINCE it is deemed necessary to establish the truth in relation to past events as well as the motives for and circumstances in which gross violations of human rights have occurred, and to make the findings known in order to prevent a repetition of such acts in the future; AND SINCE the Constitution states that the pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the

reconstruction of society; AND SINCE the Constitution states that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimization; AND SINCE the Constitution states that in order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction amnesty shall be granted in respects of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives committed in the course of the conflicts of the past. (2, emphasis in the original)

Envisioned as part of the infrastructural bridge between an apartheid past and a democratic future, truth was deployed as a means of objectively conveying past events, ascertaining individual motivations, preventing a repetition of apartheid's injustices, and allowing for a process of reconstruction and reconciliation to be established. As Stéphane Leman-Langlois and Clifford Shearing argue in "Transition, Forgiveness and Citizenship: The TRC and the Social Construction of Forgiveness" (2008), the Act "specified a set of structures and processes through which truth-telling would take place, but left it to the Commissioners to work out the details: the format, the process and, more importantly, the construction of a narrative or discourse explaining how, when and at what cost truth might lead to reconciliation and national unity," were yet to be established (208). Deputy Chairman of the TRC Alex Boraine writes in *A Country Unmasked* (2000) that the TRC's approach to truth secured "information far beyond what any trial could have elicited," because victims could "in their own languages, in their own styles, at their own pace, and without cross-examination, tell what happened to them," while for perpetrators "full disclosure was part of the demand," made of those seeking amnesty (286). In Boraine's telling, history and truth are mutually reinforcing: "it is a fact," he asserts "that a commitment to history

involves a search for an objective truth,” while, as evidenced by the Act quoted above, a commitment to truth was thought to necessitate the creation of a national history (287).

The first volume of the *Final Report* of the TRC acknowledged, in retrospect, the vague language around truth in the Commission’s establishment and provided a taxonomy of how truth came to be understood during the Commission’s hearings; it distinguished between factual or forensic truth, personal or narrative truth, social truth, and healing and restorative truth (110-114). This taxonomy attempted to account for the variegated nature of testimony that emerged during the proceedings. Reflecting on the production of forensic truth, Boraine writes that it made ignorance of apartheid’s nature impossible and demonstrated the systematic cruelty of the regime rather than allowing for the idea that “only a few ‘rotten eggs’ or ‘bad apples’ committed gross violations of human rights” (289). He writes that personal truth worked as an “affirmation of the healing potential of truth-telling,” and acknowledged that “the conflict of the past is no longer a question of numbers and incidents; the human face has shown itself, and the horror of murder and torture is painfully real” (289-290). The act of sharing one’s subjective experience of apartheid assisted in the creation of narrative truth. As the *Final Report* claims, this notion of truth allowed testimony to “contribute to the process of reconciliation by ensuring that the truth about the past included the validation of the individual subjective experiences of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless” (112). Thirdly, social truth was recognized as a means of acknowledging “the importance of participation and transparency,” to the Commission according to the first volume of the *Final Report* (113). This, the *Report* claims, includes the “constant public scrutiny and critique,” to which the Commission was subjected (114). The final notion of truth proposed by the *Report* was healing truth, “the kind of truth that places facts and what they mean within the context of human relationships—both amongst citizens and between the state and

its citizens. This kind of truth was central to the Commission” (114). This notion of truth was also embedded within the self-affirming logic of the TRC: “[t]ruth as factual, objective information cannot be divorced from the way in which this information is acquired; nor can such information be separated from the purposes it is required to serve” (114). The occasion for truth to be spoken was provided by the TRC, as was the purpose that truth was required to serve.

The multiple definitions of truth offered by the *Final Report* make clear the Commission’s reliance on the truth-telling subject as a means of establishing a broad, *national* conception of truth. In this construction, variegated, multi-dimensional truths beget larger truths, which in turn beget a national history; these truths beget forgiveness which begets reconciliation. Truth came to take on an enormous number of definitions, of functions, of possibilities even as it remained incomplete and limited, as both the *Final Report* and Boraine acknowledge. In keeping with the nation-building ambition of the TRC, this taxonomy incorporated an enormous array of utterances—displays of grief, storytelling, forensic reports, and even criticism of the Commission itself—into a definition of truth. In the TRC’s attempt to establish the ways in which truth could be spoken, made comprehensible, and made part of the nation-building project of the new South Africa, we recognize once more the infrastructure through which a new national subject has been imagined. While broad and multiply defined, truth was positioned as a means of achieving a particular set of ends in the definition offered by the Commission; what is able to circulate through the Commission, and then in the archives of a national history, is a particular kind of speech, a particular kind of subject, that affirms the TRC’s methodology and the ideological project in which it participates.

The TRC’s conception of truth was often in conflict with the Commission’s attempts to elicit testimony from perpetrators of gross human rights violations. As established in the

Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, amnesty was offered to perpetrators of abuses who made “full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a *political objective*” (1, italics my own). To qualify for amnesty a perpetrator needed to divulge both the forensic truth of his past violations, but also convince the Commissioners that the violation had a specific political cause. This admission would allow for the sins of the past to be reconciled with the future to come and allow for the establishment of a new consensus on the nature of South African society. As Allen Feldman writes in *Archives of the Insensible* (2015), by tying disclosure to political intentionality, the TRC “acted as if all parties in the conflict originated in a preexisting liberal consensus (hegemonic outside of the country and belatedly represented internally by the TRC itself) who had then deviated from this norm, for which they owed an apology and an amnesty application in order to return to a South African liberal contract that had not existed until 1992-94” (240). The establishment of this liberal consensus required the creation of a transparent, legible account of the self, a process of subjectivation that cannot be divorced from a South African history of racialized colonial violence, a history that continues to determine the possibilities for truth-telling before the nation.

4.1.2: Parrhesia and the Telling Subject

I read the relationship of the truth-telling subject and the state within the tradition of parrhesia, free-spokenness, as set out in Michel Foucault’s first lecture at the Collège de France in 1984, published in *The Courage of the Truth* (2011). His focus concerns parrhesia and the “conditions and forms of the type of act by which the subject *manifests* himself when speaking the truth... thinks of himself and is recognized by others as speaking the truth” (2-3, italics in the original). “[I]n his act of telling the truth,” Foucault argues, “the individual constitutes himself and is

constituted by others as a subject of discourse of truth” (3). Parrhesia is a form and venue of speech that brings with it the possibility of bodily harm: “the subject must be taking some kind of risk [in speaking] this truth which he signs as his opinion, his thought, his belief, a risk which concerns his relationship with the person to whom he is speaking,” Foucault notes (11). “For there to be parrhesia, in speaking the truth one must open up, establish, and confront the risk of offending the other person, of irritating him, of making him angry and provoking him to conduct which may even be extremely violent. So it is the truth subject to risk of violence” (11). The risk inherent in parrhesia is most obviously apparent in the conditions of amnesty imposed by the Commission, which also marks it as a fundamentally *political* form of speech. Risk is present in the testimony of victims, as well, who risked reliving loss, and trauma. Both perpetrators and victims also shared the risk of reprisal from communities or actors who took issue with their public pronouncements. Foucault argues that by examining “the notion of parrhesia we can see how the analysis of modes of veridiction, the study of techniques of governmentality, and the identification of forms of practice of self, interweave” (8). This interweaving is nowhere more apparent than in the operations of the TRC, which provides a paradigmatic example of how these forces may be mobilized in the creation of modern forms of state power, bringing together techniques of discipline with liberal notions of self-fashioning into the realm of public performance.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2003), Judith Butler considers the conditions under which an ethical self emerges from the social and political structures that produce the subject. Foucault, she writes, locates “the practices of the subject as one site where those social conditions [of subject-making] are worked and reworked” (133). These possibilities of new modes of subjectivity do not emerge from the individual subject, but rather they are “produced

when the limiting conditions by which we are made prove to be malleable and replicable, when a certain self is risked in its intelligibility and recognizability in a bid to expose and account for the inhuman ways in which ‘the human’ continues to be done and undone” (133-4). The TRC’s attempt to intervene in the construction of the intelligible, recognizable post-apartheid subject made the act of truth-telling the basis of an ethical subjectivity, but as the Mfalapitsa testimony I consider below attests, the act of speaking the truth about oneself also induces an instability in the subject, placing him at risk of being “done and undone,” before the power of the state. In Butler’s argument is a reminder of the *relational* nature of the subject constituted in the encounter with the other through language. It is also a reminder of the relational nature of infrastructure itself. What we witness in the TRC testimony I explore in this chapter is the way in which the encounter of self and other becomes embedded in the relationship of the nation to its subjects in the aftermath of the TRC. The requests and ripostes of the exchange offer glimpses at what I argue are the possibilities, and the limitations, of the relationship of the nation to the subject that are tested in the novels of Zoë Wicomb. It is also in the moment of being *undone* before the power of the state that we see the opening of a mode of critique, in which the techniques of subjectivation practiced by the state are brought into question. As Butler writes, this moment of recognition may also “mark a site of rupture within the horizon of normativity... the normative horizon within which I see the other, or indeed, within which the other sees and listens and knows and recognizes is also subject to a critical opening” (24). What sites of rupture, what critical openings, are provided through the demand of parrhesia? These are ruptures, I argue, that must be contextualized within the particular context of postcolonial forms of power that disrupt normative relationships of state to subject, the personal and the general.

The relationship of the subject to power takes on a multiplicity of forms in the postcolony. South Africa's relatively late emergence from violent minority rule marks its postcolonial identity with a self-consciousness that is most visible in the creation and operations of the TRC. If the postcolony is "chaotically pluralistic" as Achille Mbembe writes in his 1992 essay "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," he argues that we must reckon too with its internal and often subversive coherence (3). Mbembe's diagnosis of the postcolony centres on the complexity of the relationship between postcolonial power and resistance; both, he argues, operate through the unofficial, underground seams of laughter, ridicule and excess that run parallel to official discourses, emerging in the ruptures of spectacle and public mockery. Mbembe's argument about the structure and exercise of sovereign power in the postcolony offers a way of contextualizing the work of the TRC as an attempt to *negate* that underground seam of excess that threatens power; it operates more broadly as an infrastructure that redirects and reframes resistance to the new nation as antiquated or outside the nation itself. The TRC in this sense both introduces the possibilities of a parrhesia that undoes the subject while it also attempted to corral and tame the radical, divergent subjectivities of a South African past by determining the conditions under which the self could be represented. Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli's 2018 article "Confessional Subjects and Conducts of Non-Truth: Foucault, Fanon, and the Making of the Subject," further complicates the question of who is able to speak the truth about themselves before sovereign power. They argue that Foucault's work on subjectivation and parrhesia, while enormously influential, speaks only of the constitution of the Western subject; they turn to Frantz Fanon's articulation of colonial subject-formation to ask how colonial forms of power centre *race* as the crucial determining structure in the process of subjectivation. The colonized subject, as Lorenzini and Tazzoli read Fanon, "is a subject

incapable of truth” (76, italics in the original). This inability speaks of a subject “who is eminently said, labelled, and interpellated,” but also one that “constantly tries to escape any definition, any fixation imposed by the categories and the languages of the colonizer” (76). As I argued in Chapter 3, the TRC attempted to negotiate the movement of South Africa from a colonial past toward into a postcolonial future, eliding the present. But what becomes of the formerly colonized subject “*incapable of truth*” when hailed to speak in a manner that allows for that incapability to be shed, while at the same time explicating the conditions imposed by colonial force, colonial force that rendered truth-telling impossible?

To grapple with these questions that mark the threshold of the post-apartheid nation, I draw on Dina Al-Kassim’s 2010 article “Exposure, Biopolitics and Radical Parrhesia in Postapartheid Literature and Culture.” In it she argues the exposure of the subject to the other induced by parrhesia “lays bare a prior inscription of social relations or reveals a network of desires and attachments occluded by political affiliation and social naming” (151). I ask too what “conditions of possibility and impossibility,” can be said to emerge in the relationship of the truth-telling subject to the TRC, and how those possibilities and impossibilities have been staged and contested both within the structures of the Commission and in Wicomb’s troubling of a racialized notion of truth in post-apartheid South Africa (151). Al-Kassim reads Wicomb’s *David’s Story* as a novel that emerges from “*narrative failure*,” offering a “‘radical parrhesia’ of a diminished truth that refuses the universality of the ready-made form—testimony or novel—to argue that failure and refusal are the constitutive properties of the true, the now and, indeed, the local” (153, italics in the original). I attempt in this chapter to investigate the relationship of parrhesia and narrative failure in the testimony of Mfalapitsa, which I argue fails to affirm the TRC’s construction of truth and in so doing exposes the limits and exclusions of the Commission

itself. Set alongside *David's Story* and *Playing in the Light*, we see how frustrating and frustrated attempts at truth-telling come to offer a critique of the way in which the post-apartheid state both institutes new conceptions of the subject while allowing colonial processes of subjectivation to remain intact. In the testimony of Mfalapitsa, the relationship between the conditions of possibility and impossibility comes into focus. Through the complex of confession, race and history that are called upon by the TRC's reliance on parrhesia, the subject can be seen to both attempt to participate in the "ready-made form" of truth while simultaneously speaking to its limited ability to actually address the questions it set out to answer, and the historiographic mission it aimed to undertake.

4.1.3: Mutilating History

On 4 May 1999, Thlamedi Ephraim Mfalapitsa offered his testimony at an amnesty hearing of the TRC ("Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing on the COSAS Four").⁶⁰ Mfalapitsa had joined uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC), in exile in 1976. He was eventually stationed at the ANC's military headquarters in Zambia where he participated in the torture of suspected traitors and witnessed the murder of a comrade accused of betraying the organization.⁶¹ Disillusioned with the increasingly violent methods of the ANC, he returned to South Africa in 1981 and turned himself over to the South African Police's (SAP) Security Branch (*Final Report Vol. 6 221*). In January 1982 Zandisile Musi, the son of Mfalapitsa's neighbor and a young activist with the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), asked Mfalapitsa to shepherd him and three fellow students

⁶⁰All quotations from the Mfalapitsa testimony are from this source.

⁶¹Mfalapitsa would also apply for amnesty for his role in the torture and death of ANC comrades in exile. Hearings were held in 2000.

into exile to join the ANC. Working with the SAP, Mfalapitsa led Musi and three other youths to an abandoned mine rigged with explosives under the pretense of assisting their escape: Musi was severely injured, the three other men were killed. They became known as the COSAS Four. As David Forbes writes in a *Daily Maverick* article about the reopening of the case in 2021, without Mfalapitsa's amnesty application, "[n]o one would ever have known who killed the youths," and that it was Mfalapitsa's application that forced the white Security Branch officers to whom he reported to appear before the TRC ("Former Apartheid-era Security Branch Officers Charged with Crimes Against Humanity"). Jacob Dlamini notes in *Askari* (2014) that Mfalapitsa was "possibly the only person to apply to the TRC for amnesty for crimes committed both as an MK operative and as an askari" (43). In that sense Mfalapitsa may in fact be considered the ideal subject of the TRC's mission, one who demonstrated a willingness to accede to the ritualized confession of the TRC, while also exemplifying the Commission's decision to decontextualize the causes of political violence: violence in the struggle against apartheid and the violence of apartheid itself were treated, largely, as equivalent. As Feldman describes, in "morally and juridically detaching the counterinsurgency waged in defense of apartheid from the structural violence of the racialized economy itself, the TRC did little to explore how the material violence and violent ideologies of the racial economy had contributed to the etiology of state violence" (240). Both insurgent and counterinsurgent, Mfalapitsa's application for amnesty revealed the *forensic* truth of the attack on the COSAS Four and indicted the apartheid officers to whom he answered. Yet, the taxonomy of truth imposed by the TRC, as well as its narrow conception of the historical and the political context that produced the violence Mfalapitsa disclosed, also marked him as a subject unable to fully participate in the kind of truth-telling demanded of him.

The crucial factor in an amnesty application—the political motivation behind a human rights violation—remained beyond Mfalapitsa’s truth-telling ability. After detailing the financial benefits accrued by Mfalapitsa as an *askari*, and in particular the R1000 bonus he received for orchestrating the bombing, Advocate Leah Gcabashe raised the question of Mfalapitsa’s political commitment to apartheid, to which Mfalapitsa admits that the “forces that motivated them [the white officers of the Security Branch] are forces that did not motivate [him].” Pressed to identify those forces, Mfalapitsa confesses that he “was one person... one person who had fear.” But Mfalapitsa also attempted to place his experiences and decisions within the irresolvable tension inherent in the process of truth-telling imposed by the TRC

I said the broader context of this issue should also be kept in mind. It was between the conflict context of the past and as I said it is not something that I went to become criminal as for indulging in in criminal indulgence [sic]. It was something that has a history.

Actually, here I’m setting straight a history which was my part, which began as political history and which meant where and which gone terribly wrong [sic]. And its not my own problem alone. There are many people in South Africa who have this historical problem with their past, some being leaders in this country. Even though perhaps they might be exonerated in terms of their status. But in a sense, we all to grapple with this history and this history we didn’t invent it, invent it somewhere in the ghettos or in the backyard of my mother. It was invented in the arena of politics in South Africa [sic].

This “historical problem with the past,” Mfalapitsa refers to is the inescapable material reality of South African life, already embedded in its subjects before they were segregated by apartheid

laws, before they were part of a family, before they learnt about the world in the “backyard” of a township home. To speak of a personal history, Mfalapitsa insists, is impossible if divorced from the historical conditions that produced him: he did not “invent” his history, that history was invented for him. The historical problem with the past, in that sense, permeates the fabric of both nation and subject—it formed the ideological firmament that produced not just the South African subject but the *possibility* of the South African subject. Mfalapitsa’s insistence on this historical context speaks to a broader uncertainty and slippage around the relationship of truth-telling and subjectivation in the postcolonial state, and particularly in the public-facing and public-making aspects of the TRC. As the TRC attempted to transform the past into a historical object that could be settled in order to be shed, Mfalapitsa’s testimony questioned the construction of that national history and the place for subjects like himself within it.

Not only is the ability to tell the truth, or more accurately, the ability to tell a truth *legible* to the structures and deliberations of the TRC, brought into question, Mfalapitsa fears too the psychic and ontological consequences of attempting to account for himself before the Commission. Asked whether failing to report Musi’s request would have put him in jeopardy with the SAP, Mfalapitsa admits that it would have. Gcabashe concludes from this admission that Mfalapitsa was “subjectively apolitical and forced to do particular things because of [his] objective circumstances. That again spells to me self-preservation... it doesn’t say to me that you were doing this because you were committed to a particular political cause.” The implication of Gcabashe’s determination is that, had Mfalapitsa been *more* ideologically committed to the crime against humanity that was apartheid, his amnesty application would have been stronger. Enmeshed within the question of his political commitment is a racial determination: Mfalapitsa, a Black apartheid collaborator, must prove beyond doubt his commitment to the project of

apartheid for a second time—he had already done so in the attack on the COSAS Four, and now in an attempt to confess his sins, he must reaffirm his commitment to an apartheid ideology that is in the process of being confined to nation’s the past. Mfalapitsa responds with a tentative, stuttering quality that critiques the Commission’s understanding of the construction of the subject and of historical truth: “I think that your problem is that you are, you are dissecting, you are, you are, you are mutilating my history.” Gcabashe interjects to tell Mfalapitsa that “[it’s her] job to do that,” and another examining Commissioner intervenes to remind him that the “problem is that if it’s not dissected... [he has] no chance of getting amnesty.” As the dissection turns to mutilation, Mfalapitsa reminds the Commission that the demands made of him have far-reaching, irreparable, consequences for not only his amnesty application, but also for his ability to maintain the complex of relationships that constitute his conception of self. He has provided forensic truth but accuses the Commission of not only of ignoring the historical conditions that inform his personal truth, but of mutilating that history, rendering it incomprehensible in relation to the demand for “healing” truth, at the same time.

Near the end of his testimony, Mfalapitsa was asked if he would address Musi, who was in the audience; “I’m a black man, you’re a black man,” he begins, before again asking for a consideration of the historical context within which his actions took place. “I was caught up in this situation in which the youth of South Africa were finding it difficult to make sense of their character,” Mfalapitsa explains. Dlamini writes that Mfalapitsa attempted to “make an argument for complexity,” and that his references to the “broader conditions” that informed his crimes “tried to elevate his actions away from the personal to something more general” (45). I understand Mfalapitsa’s appeal to the context of South African history differently: he insists that the personal cannot be understood as distinct from the general. In both his reference to the

broader context of South Africa, and his reminder that he shared a Black identity with Musi, Mfalapitsa reminds the watching, national, audience, that his ability to speak the truth is conditioned by a racial identity imposed upon him that the TRC is unable to account for in its taxonomy of truth. Mfalapitsa reminds the Commission that race remains the determining factor of South African life at the same time as South Africa's purportedly non-racial future is being established.

The Mfalapitsa case highlights an asymmetry in the four notions of truth established by the TRC, an asymmetry Mark Sanders discusses in "Truth, Telling, Questioning: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, and Literature after Apartheid" (2000). While the concept of forensic truth was privileged above others, the Mfalapitsa case is an example that shows how "personal and narrative" truth, which Sanders argues bears most on literature, remained inaccessible to perpetrators like Mfalapitsa who attempted to speak both of his violations and his victimization in the same hearing. As Sanders notes, when the first volume of the *Final Report* explained that by "telling their stories, both victims and perpetrators gave meaning to the multi-layered experiences of the South African story," the report in fact was referring to a subsection of the Promotion of National Unity Act that only mentioned the telling of *victim's* stories (19). The Commission, Sanders writes "reserves its hospitality for victims. It does not greet perpetrators with the words 'we welcome you here today,' such words typically being the greeting made at hearings to victim witnesses. Yet when its report discusses the stories of victims, it treats them as it would the statements of perpetrators" (20). In the example of Mfalapitsa's testimony, the fact of his Blackness—which he attempts to call attention to in his gestures to historical context as well as his identification with and of Musi—works to further distance him from the TRC's normative account of truth. As quoted in the *Final Report Vol. 1*,

Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote in the *Sunday Times* in his capacity as TRC Chairperson that through the TRC

[m]illions have heard the truth about the apartheid years for the first time, some through daily newspapers but many more through television and, especially, radio... Black South Africans, of course, knew what was happening in their own local communities, but they often did not know the detail of what was happening to others across the country. White South Africans, kept in ignorance by the SABC [the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the state media] and some of their printed media, cannot now say that they do not know what happened. (353)

The racial dichotomy of knowledge imposed by Tutu breaks down around testimony like that offered by Mfalapitsa, who attempts to tell the truth about his knowledge of himself, and the conditions that produced him, that cannot be recognized. Mfalapitsa's amnesty application was denied by the TRC. The recommendation that he be prosecuted was not taken up by the National Prosecuting Authority until August 2021, by which time three of his co-accused Security Branch handlers had died, leaving Mfalapitsa and Christian Sierbert Rorich the only two remaining culprits of the attack on the COSAS Four to be tried for their actions.⁶²

⁶²Forbes among others, have detailed the influence of the ruling ANC over the National Prosecuting Authority, which was tasked with taking recommended cases to trial ("The Secret 'Pact of Forgetting' and the Suppression of Post-TRC Prosecutions"). Over 300 cases recommended for trial by the TRC were left unaddressed between 2003 and 2021. Forbes has written extensively on the reasons for this delay in prosecutions, which include a series of negotiations between the ANC government and remnants of the apartheid state's South African Defence Force ("The Secret 'Pact of Forgetting' and the Suppression of post-TRC Prosecutions"), as well as a broad unwillingness to pursue prosecutions primarily to protect ANC members who had been involved in past human rights violations ("Long Road to No Justice for TRC Victims"). It was only when lawyers for the families of victims threatened to take the Minister of Justice to the High Court in 2019 that cases were reopened.

At stake in Mfalapitsa's testimony is a broader question of the subject's ability to constitute and represent the self through the practice of truth-telling, a practice both essential to and limited by the demands of the TRC. As I argue in the next section of this chapter, Zoë Wicomb's *David Story* and *Playing in the Light* both betray a deep suspicion of the ways in which the racialized figure has been made to account for themselves in post-apartheid South Africa; in both novels the impasses and impossibilities of truth-telling are brought to bear on the uncertain construction of the new nation so reliant on the disclosing subject.

4.2: Zoë Wicomb and the Limits of the Truth-Telling Subject

In a 1993 essay that predates the creation of the TRC, "Culture Beyond Color? A South African Dilemma," Zoë Wicomb considers the task awaiting the writer in the new South Africa.

Reflecting on the demands to participate in the creation of "common nationhood and national pride," she fears the production of a new literature that "is already inscribed in a description of writing from the old South Africa, to which the exciting new writing would be diametrically opposed" (27). Black writing, she writes sarcastically, will now feature "no protest writing, no stereotypes of idle madams lounging at swimming pools and attended by flagging servants, no missionary English, no patronizing publishers or critics waxing lyrical about our least attempts, and much experimentation with new forms" (27).⁶³ The new South Africa she laments, "is too much like the old and is therefore a necessarily racial affair. Our new society remains umbilically linked to the matrix of apartheid so that parturition is a slow affair. Since we are shaped by race-specific conditions, the protracted and bewildering weaning from the old is radically different for different racial groups" (28). I read both *David's Story* and *Playing in the Light* as engaging the

⁶³Wicomb uses the term "Black" in the essay in the tradition of the Black Consciousness Movement, to signal a shared *political* identity between Africa, Indian and coloured South Africans rather than a racial marker.

problematic Wicomb identifies in this essay—a demand for the *new* that cannot help but carry with it the *old*. The intervention of the TRC, and its reliance on parrhesia, further complicates what Wicomb describes in “Culture Beyond Color?” as the compulsion to shed the past in the writing of the new South Africa. Both novels stage the TRC’s demand for the racialized subject to tell the truth about themselves in a legible, narrative form but in doing so they reveal the impossible task of speaking through constructions of race and gender that remain unassimilable in the national project.

4.2.1: “Truth, I gather, is the word that cannot be written”: *David’s Story* and the Impossible Writing of Truth

David’s Story is largely set in 1991, in the midst of the “transition” between the apartheid and democratic states, immediately following the unbanning of liberation movements. The novel “is and is not David’s story,” according to the preface from the narrator-amanuensis tasked with writing his narrative (1). David, she continues “was unwilling or unable to flesh out the narrative. I am not sure what I mean by *unable*; I have simply adopted his word, one which he would not explain” (1, italics in the original). In a text centered on the futile search for stable origins, the *adoption* of “unable” in this opening signals Wicomb’s investment in narrative failure, a failure inherent in the attempt to give a true account of the self. It is a failure compounded by David’s inability to tell the truth of the absent, haunting presence of a fellow liberation fighter, Dulcie. The outset of the novel positions David through an intermediary recording and reporting voice who restates his glaring inability to represent himself—the very presence of the narrator-amanuensis provides a metafictional comment on both the struggle to speak for one’s self, and for the other. The narrator’s comment that David may in fact be “unwilling” to represent himself

raises parallels to the example provided of Mfalapitsa's inability to account for his political intentions before the TRC, and the way in which that failure of truth was immediately cast as a refusal to accede to the broader project of reconciliation.

The novel tells of David Dirkse a former operative of "the Movement" now unable to locate a stable sense of self as apartheid is being dismantled and his commitment to the righteousness of revolutionary violence is no longer required to forge the new South Africa. He, like Mfalapitsa, embodies the concern Wicomb expresses to Hein Willemse: "[o]nce people [who] have imbibed military values and violence have been legitimated, then what do you [do] now?" (152). David resolves to trace the formation of his subjectivity—now unmoored from the teleological arc of the liberation struggle—through the fragmented history of his Griqua forebears. In a pilgrimage of sorts, he attempts to trace the movement of the Griqua separatist project of the late 19th century from the Cape to the town of Kokstad, at the foot of the Drakensberg in the eastern interior of the country. Why he travels to Kokstad is unclear to David himself: a staunch and disciplined guerilla fighter, he is embarrassed by his pursuit of his ethnic origins and yet feels compelled to locate his own story in a history of coloured nationalism.

He is introduced in the text in the style of an intelligence briefing: "David Dirkse, alias Dadzo, or rather Comrade Dadzo... Race: 'Of no consequence.'" (11). What text is being quoted in this description is unclear, although we hear echoes of the ANC's non-racialism and the frequent invocations of "Comrade" mark David as part of a broader political struggle that erases differences of race and gender. Disowned by his father for his political allegiances, the narrator notes that the elder Dawid⁶⁴ has fought to escape the racial stereotypes of "the coloured condition—drunk, lawless, uncivilized" (22). Theorizing his motivations for his investigation,

⁶⁴The consonant shift between father and son standing in for the Anglicization and assimilation of coloured identity.

David recalls a conversation with his father, who accused him of turning his back on “decent, respectable coloured people,” and branded him a “bladdy windbroek [bloody coward] Griqua” (24). It is this accusation that ironically “fired [David’s] interest in [Andrew] Le Fleur, the Griqua chief who succeeded Adam Kok and founded the settlement in Namaqualand” (24). Dawid may be caught in the colonial logic of apartheid’s racial classification with his insistence on claiming allegiance to “decent, respectable coloured people,” but David’s search for his origins offers no obvious solution to a history of racialized subjection. In the Willemse interview, Wicomb argues that positioning the idea of an uncertain coloured origin as a “problem” can invent only a solution rooted in the myth of “pure blood” held dear by colonial racism; David’s search for his origins is clearly doomed to restate that which he has fought to overthrow (147). The full extent of his motivations remains opaque to David. Telling his wife, Sally, of his plan to travel to Kokstad, he is met with disbelief: “[d]on’t try to fob me off with nonsense about roots and ancestors,” she chastises him before offering a version of Wicomb’s complaint to Willemse, “[w]hat do you expect to find? Ours are all mixed up and tangled no chance of us being uprooted, because they’re all in a neglected knot, stuck. And that I’d have thought is the beauty of being coloured, that we need not worry about roots at all, that it’s altogether a good thing to start afresh” (27-28). For David starting afresh is impossible; the history that produced his racialized subjectivity holds only a false promise of a stable identity caught in the “neglected knot” that he feels compelled to prise apart.

As the unnamed narrator-amanuensis writes in her preface, “David’s story started at the Cape with Eve/Krotoa, the first Khoi woman in the Dutch castle,” but she omits this history to focus on Saartje Baartman, for “one cannot write nowadays... without a little monograph on Baartman; it would be like excluding history itself” (1). The exploitation of Baartman, during her

life and her death, and the erasure of her voice from the annals of history, comes to stand in for the nearly unspeakable figure of Dulcie.⁶⁵ Dulcie was tortured and likely murdered by assailants who are never identified but just as likely to be ANC comrades as apartheid assassins. Her presence, her absence, runs through David's writing; he tells the narrator he thinks of her as "a kind of—and he has the decency to hesitate before such a preposterous idea—a kind of scream somehow echoing through my story" (134). The names and stories of the occluded Eva/Krotoa, Baartman, and Dulcie become knotted within his search for his own origins and his place in the order of the new South Africa. And yet this "scream" that David identifies is not Dulcie's scream; it is the *echo of a scream* that is Dulcie—she is continually displaced in the narrative David constructs and yet central to it. The narrator mocks David's attempt to cast Dulcie in the abstract: "there is only a point to screaming if you can imagine someone coming to your rescue... a scream is an appeal to a world of order and justice," that clearly does not exist (134). In Al-Kassim's 2008 "Archiving Resistance: Women's Testimony at the Threshold of the State," she argues that *David's Story* presents "the figure of a woman's subjection, even in the service of freedom," as "both exterior to and intimately folded within the narration of subjective and state history" (174). As she writes, the TRC could not conceptualize of the testimony of women as anything other than evidence of gendered violence that must be spoken as an act of national healing and mourning:

[t]heir subjection is not a matter only of stigma and inhibition, but of the demand that they play the role of woman, stubborn exteriority at the border of public discourse. In essence, when the women are figured *as representing* the limit of the social and when this

⁶⁵Another historical figure is carried in the name Dulcie, that of Dulcie September, the ANC guerilla assassinated outside the liberation movement's offices in Paris in 1985.

representational burden is enjoin [sic] upon them as the necessary condition of the advent of the new state, the subjectivity that is thereby enforced is one that presumes her exclusion from that state as an unincorporated remnant. In this labyrinth of interpellative demands, resistance constantly supplements the constructions underway. (184, italics in the original)

David's attempt to represent Dulcie, the "scream" echoing through his own history, locates her in a long history of violence and dispossession that must be accounted for in the foundation of the new South Africa, while remaining fundamentally exterior to it. And yet the task of representing Dulcie (or Dulcie's absence) is also what is expected of David in his process of disclosure—this, he assumes, will unburden him of his responsibility to her.

David acts as both the subject and agent of historical inquiry. As such he mimics the expectations of the TRC: the subject who divulges his own history automatically participates in the creation of the nation's history. His bid to find his origins, and his attempt to represent the story of Dulcie, however, thwarts this drive for a "true" picture of the past, which is revealed to be unwritable. When he finds a list left in his hotel room in Kokstad containing the names of assassination targets, including his own and Dulcie's, David "scores her name out with a pen, repeatedly, so that it can no longer be recognized... When the name is completely obliterated, he shudders at what he has done. Has he, the intended, been directed into acting, into becoming the agent for others?" (117). David obliterates her name as a means of protecting Dulcie from a would-be assassin; he is not dissecting a history in this moment but *mutlating* it in a misguided attempt to exclude her from the violence of inscription in South African history. Having rejected the strictures of apartheid, and now freed from the military discipline of the Movement, David

remains the agent of others: he can only allow Dulcie to remain on the list or fulfill the threat of violence himself.

When the narrator later discovers a discarded attempt by David to write about Dulcie, she notes that “there are beginnings scattered all over, and at various angles that ignore the rectangularity of the paper” (135). He writes not the truth, or even the word “truth” but rather “the palindrome of Cape Flats speech—TRURT, TRURT, TRURT, TRURT” (136). The narrator then adopts a second person address:

You pass by the austere figures sitting erect in their chairs, but their faces dissolve with the first movement of your lips. You hold up a board on which the question is written, but the disembarking figures that file past do not read it... You find the place where questions are asked, a vast sports hall with no windows, flooded in electric light. Your words break down into letters that bounce around the hall, chasing each other until they fall. (136)

This dreamlike passage implicates David, but also the reader, in the inadequacy of language. Are we in the chamber of a TRC hearing or in what J.M. Coetzee called the “dark chamber” of the torturer (“Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State”)? Both demand parrhesia, but the audience “dissolve[s]” as the confessor starts speaking. A gymnasium provides a semi-public setting for the extraction of truth, but there are no windows to allow for the gaze of onlookers. “Who, dear reader, would have the patience with this kind of thing?” the narrator asks (136). What *is* this thing, I might add, what attempt at telling the truth is undone in “the place where questions are asked?” (136). The impossibility of telling the truth, or even its distorted twin “TRURT,” is the impasse faced by both David and his amanuensis. David cannot speak of

himself without implicating Dulcie, Dulcie who must remain outside the narrative for she threatens to destabilize the possibility of representing both the self and the other who is entwined with the self. The frustrated appeal of the narrator attempts to elicit a sympathetic response in the reader—this search for David’s true history, his search for Dulcie’s place in that history, is continually dissolved in the vicissitudes of language, in the postmodern play of signifiers as they break down and lose their referential power. Are we not *all* losing patience? the novel asks. How are we to adjudicate the truth of this account? I am reminded of the obvious frustration expressed by Advocate Gcabashe in hearing Mfalapitsa’s testimony: “Mr Mfalapitsa, it’s not that broad history, you know, that I’m looking at,” she reminded him as he attempted to explain his actions, “I’m really trying to understand, you know.” Perhaps, alongside the narrator, we act as the supportive voice of Gcabashe’s colleague, Advocate Chris de Jager, in his scolding of Mfalapitsa: “listen to her questions and don’t interrupt her because she is asking you cardinal questions that could affect your amnesty, that it may be because of your answers that you wouldn’t get amnesty or you can get amnesty.” These are the conditions under which a moral community is founded, these are the relations of truth that we as readers, as listeners, as fellow subjects must negotiate in order for the new nation to be brought into being. In Wicomb’s telling, the conditions imposed on the truth-telling subject cannot help but move the location of historical truth into an ever-shifting *elsewhere* that displaces David’s search for his ability to account for himself.

The novel ends with David’s death, marked by “the tyre marks of a screeching halt,” on the mountain pass of Chapman’s Peak, a screeching halt to end his unfinished, unfinishable narrative (211). As the narrator contemplates the fragments of his story that remain, a bullet “explodes into the back of the computer. Its memory leaks a silver puddle onto the desk, and the

shrapnel of sorry words scuttle out, leaving behind whole syllables that tangle promiscuously with strange stems, strange prefixes, producing impossible hybrids that scramble *my* story” (212-213, italics my own). The promiscuity of this language, the hybrids that are produced that destabilize history, invoke the spectre of miscegenation in the logic of colonial power, but for Wicomb (and the narrator) this destabilizing ability fails to live up to Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity. The novel instead ends with a poem that affirms the narrative failure of David’s story, a shift in form that reflects the adoption of the inability that lies at the centre of the truth-telling subject

My screen is in shards.

The words escape me.

I do not acknowledge this scrambled thing as mine

I will have nothing more to do with it.

I wash my hands of this story. (213)

It is with the return of violence that David’s story ends, with a bullet tearing through the mediated, electronic memory of the computer. It appears to allow the narrator to absolve herself of the impossible task she has been left to complete. But while the text of David’s story is lost—an acknowledgement by Wicomb of the limitations of language’s ability to produce a true account—Dulcie remains a spectral figure not only in David’s story but now in the home of the narrator. As the narrator inspects “the very manageable borders,” of her garden she sees in the “black-eyed Suzies,” not “the apparent protrusion of a fleshy cushion of stamens and stigmas,” but only “a dark hole, an absence burnt into that bright face, an empty black cone that tapers

towards a dark point of invisibility, of nothingness” (212). Dulcie appears in this garden, “her sturdy steatopygous⁶⁶ form on the central patch of grass, where she has come to sunbathe in private” (212). The narrator takes this as an affront, an invasion: “[is] this no longer my property?” she asks (212). “Is this no longer my house... Will I never know what’s going on?” (213). The frustration she had with David’s story, with Dulcie’s story, is now embedded in the private spaces of her property, an invading force that threatens any ability to narrativize truth. The decision to wash her hands of the story, it would seem, is an attempt to avoid being asked again to do the impossible work of telling the truth about a history now embedded in the architecture of the everyday, both frustrating and foundational.

4.2.2: Misrecognition and the Self in *Playing in the Light*

Like *David’s Story*, *Playing in the Light* centres on what remains unrepresentable and irrepressible in spite of the demands made by the new South Africa for the production of the legible, truth-telling subject. Erupting into the consciousness of the protagonist and into the narrative of the novel is the figure of another woman who has been imperfectly erased from the memory of a protagonist. The visage of Patricia Williams, “[a]nother TRC story,” haunts Marion Campbell, a woman who discovers that she was raised into a family “playing white” under the strict designations of apartheid (49). Set in Cape Town during the TRC hearings, Patricia’s face emerges from the fringes of the text to open a rupture in the consciousness of the protagonist, placing Patricia directly in conversation with Dulcie in *David’s Story*—she too has been victim of horrific torture and sexual abuse, but unlike Dulcie she attests to that violence before the nation. Her face has “something arresting” to it, with “eyes that look directly into [Marion’s],” from the

⁶⁶This reference to Dulcie’s body once again locates *David’s Story*, and Dulcie’s story, within the gendered and racialized history that persists in the new South Africa and in the wake of the death of both Dulcie and David.

pages of a newspaper (49). Photographed speaking of her “ordeal at the hands of the Security Police,” Patricia represents at first only a minor annoyance to Marion, she is but one of the “endless stories of people’s suffering in the bad old days” (49). But Marion keeps the newspaper, which she had casually lifted off a coloured employee’s desk, and finds herself drawn to the image: “[t]he eyes of the stranger hold hers accusingly, *calling her to account*; for what, for the callous fold across the face? But no; it hisses a command to remember, remember, remember...” (54, italics my own). In this encounter Wicomb subverts the moment of interpellation, the moment in which the subject is hailed into the ideological infrastructure being delineated through the TRC. In Louis Althusser’s famous example from the 1969 essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” a friend knocks on our door and the answer to the question “[w]ho’s there?” is “[i]t’s me” (172). Opening the door to reveal the friend affirms the truth of that statement: both the self and the other already exist as subjects, both are already incorporated and made legible to each other through a shared ideological substrate. In this moment, recognizing the truth of the statement “it’s me,” also recognizes the ways in which both parties are “‘concrete’ enough to be recognized, but abstract enough to be thinkable and thought, giving rise to a knowledge” (172-173). Who, or what, is being recognized when Marion is “arrested” by the image of Patricia?⁶⁷ Who is it that does the recognizing? Who is called into being by whom? For Marion this unidirectional moment of recognition becomes a moment of *mis*recognition: it is not Patricia Williams she recognizes but Tokkie, her family’s domestic servant.

Despite the efforts of the TRC to fix her subjectivity, through testimony, through mass media, the face of Patricia Williams, with “full lips, from which a story has freshly issued,” makes demands not only of her abusers, the state, or the Commission, but also of Marion, who

⁶⁷The use of the word “arrest” also brings to mind Althusser’s related example of a police officer shouting “Hey, you there!” and the hailed individual turning around and thus becoming subject (174).

attempts to avoid the “tired old politics of this country” (48). Marion reads of the “unspeakable” abuse Williams suffered and imbues the image of her face with “a hint of asymmetry, of distortion, as if the marks of a fist lie as a trace just below the healed features” (54-55). When she misrecognizes Patricia as Tokkie, Marion finds that she is no longer able to answer the call of interpellation with the expected with “it’s me,” the uncanny moment of seeing Tokkie in the face of Patricia disrupts that possibility. Later, gazing at the dark ocean Marion sees “an enlarged face floating on the water, a disfigured face on the undulating waves, swollen with water... Tokkie, it is Tokkie’s face on the water” (55). Marion’s elderly, ailing father John still calls Marion a mermaid, a pet name that prefigures (or, reflects on) her racial transformation. In the body of the mermaid, “the mother-of-pearl skin graduates slowly, imperceptibly into the real thing” (46). It is a fantasy of change that her mother rejects: it is “[n]o good being half woman and half fish,” her mother complains, “half this and half that; you have to be fully one thing or another, otherwise you’re lost” (46-47). Marion, the travel agent who hates travel, is “not one for landscape,” and “she is not convinced of the notion of *experiencing* the land” (80, italics in the original). Finding Tokkie in the dark waves of the ocean may offer the comfort of “one thing,” but in the “undulating waves,” that identity remains uncertain. Tokkie, Marion had been told, was her family’s domestic servant, but the crisis of misrecognition sparked by Patricia’s face eventually reveals her to have been Marion’s grandmother, and with that the truth of her parent’s decision to “play white.”

In Ludmila Ommundsen’s 2010 article “‘Once I was White, Now I am Coloured’: Outside the Dark Closet and Through the Looking-glass in Zoe Wicomb’s ‘Playing in the Light,’” the encounter with the face of Patricia in the newspaper is presented as merely a “plot device setting in motion a machinery of recuperation of history—a history beyond Marion’s own

beginning” (85). The fact of Marion’s *misrecognition* of the face in the newspaper, and the continuous, haunting confusion of Patricia/Tokkie suggests precisely the impossibility of the project of recuperation. Marion is, with the discovery of her genealogy, suddenly unable to answer that knock at the door, unable to complete the circuit of recognition of self and other as subjects that are mutually-constituting and bound together in a shared ideology. Delivered by the TRC via the print media, this crisis is partly due to the slippage that occurs between the faces of Williams and Tokkie—a slippage rooted in phrenological concepts of race. As Williams is recognized before the TRC, Marion’s misrecognition of her as Tokkie suggests the ways in which the ideological construction of the self in South Africa is always already within the language of racial categorization.

Like David, Marion’s attempt to come to terms with this foundational crisis is through an ultimately unsatisfying investigation of her racial origins, although in this novel it takes on a narrower, familial focus rather than the nationalism of David’s inquest. A second scene of (mis)recognition confirms Tokkie’s identity as Marion’s maternal grandmother, and the lie of her whiteness. Travelling to Wuppertal, Tokkie’s hometown in the desert north of Cape Town, Marion finds herself in the home of an elderly contemporary of Tokkie. Nursing Marion’s suddenly swollen foot, Mrs. Murray “gasps loudly and drops the foot as if it’s on fire...Her eyes are wide with recognition” (97). Marion is “the spitting image if Mrs Karelse [Tokkie’s last name]” (97). This second moment of (mis)recognition dislodges Marion’s relationship to herself, embedded in the fixed nature of the whiteness she has understood as an inherent part of her identity. Marion’s coloured colleague and travel companion Brenda McKay forces her to confront what is now apparent to both of them: “[s]o it turns out you’re coloured, from a play-white family... So what?... It’s not such a tragedy being black, you know, at least you’re

authentic” (102). In Brenda’s estimation, Marion had, until this point, been inauthentic, a colonized subject “*incapable of truth*,” to return to the phrase offered by Lorenzini and Tazzoli. Now, Brenda enthuses, Marion is free to “be noisy, free to eat a peach, a juicy ripe one, and free of the burdens of nation and tradition” (102). The paralyzing indecision of Eliot’s Prufrock need not define Marion’s engagement with the world through the now defunct values of middle-class white South Africa, Brenda suggests. Marion resents the reduction of the “terrible emptiness” she feels to a mere performance of race (102). Was it possible for Marion to speak the truth about herself when she thought of herself as white? Does the fact that she is from a coloured family lend her the authenticity to speak the truth? She remains skeptical.

At the end of the novel, Brenda reveals she has been writing the story of Marion’s family. Wicomb asks, once again, who gets to narrate the coloured subject into post-apartheid South Africa, where coloured identity is both symbolic of the hybridity of the new nation and a colonial construction out of step with the non-racialism of the new country. As in *David’s Story*, the novel turns to the question of representation and storytelling not as a means of resolving these contradictions but as a gesture toward the ongoing process of subject-making and power in the writing of South Africa. Brenda, more “authentically” coloured and thus better positioned to speak with authority of the new South Africa, attempts to commandeer the story Marion is unable to tell: “[w]hy don’t you write your own fucking story?” Marion asks Brenda. “Writing my own story,” Brenda admits “is what someone like me is supposed to do, what we all do, whether we know it or not” (217). The expectations and requirements of the nation are cynically deployed by Brenda in this confrontation: what is required in the new South Africa, Brenda insists, is an account of the self that emerges through a recognition of race as the fundamental

arbiter of the authentic, true subject. If Marion is unable to write that story, Wicomb suggests, it will be written *for* her by Brenda, by the TRC, by the nation as it remakes itself around her.

4.2.3: Reading and Writing as Ethical Acts in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Wicomb's metatextual turn in *Playing* reflects the inherent uncertainty of language in representations of the self; the novel offers a recognition of the always shifting relationship of the South African subject to acts of historical inscription. I want to consider the ways in which Wicomb unsettles the desire for the truth-telling subject through a depiction of her characters as imperfect readers and writers. Marion Campbell is a reluctant reader, who turns to fiction at the end of the novel as a means of locating herself in the new South Africa. Brenda, meanwhile, is an enthusiastic, and ultimately exploitative, storyteller. Both women, I argue, reflect the TRC's reliance on personal narrative—its production and its reception—as essential to the national project it inaugurated.

Like *David's Story*, *Playing* calls upon real and imagined textual archives as a means of questioning the ability of the writer to represent the subjects suppressed in, or excluded from, normative national histories. David, for example, travels to Kokstad to investigate the archives detailing the nationalist project of Andrew Le Fleur, and the “grandeur of the word *research* appeals to him, helps him to chatter, to fantasise” (*David's Story* 109). Marion, skeptical of the TRC's promise of truth and absolution, turns to a family archive to investigate her origins—the remnants of her mother's photographs are in the “Black Magic box,” with a “few photographs of Marion: as a baby, as a toddler, school photos, one in the garden with another child, but the photograph has been damaged, the other child's face scored” (*Playing* 116). Even the family archive, Wicomb demonstrates, is subject to erasure and misrepresentation. Both David and

Marion are poor readers, however. Whereas the narrator of *David's Story*, has, according to Carli Coetzee's "The One that Got Away": Zoë Wicomb in the Archives" (2010), "read her postcolonial theory, and she is not alarmed by lack of closure" (566), the narrator casts doubt on David's talent for textual research. He is someone who "believed in shortcuts," and "would surely have quoted the existing texts," had he read them (*David's Story* 2). Similarly, Marion is a reluctant reader who "cannot bring herself to read the article," about Patricia Williams, and eventually only "skims the first paragraph of the report" (54). As she gets closer to the truth of her origins, she retains a distrust of getting too invested in practices of reading and with them the stories of other people.

Marion is, according to Andrew van der Vlies's "The Archive, the Spectral, and Narrative Responsibility in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*," (2010), "a singularly under-qualified and inept reader" (593). She appears to fear the idea that reading offers a way of understanding the lives of others, concerned that she might be drawn too close to what she imagines as the sociable coloured lifestyle, where people "live so closely together in the townships, bodies packed into cramped rooms;" reading is clearly too intimate an act for her (162). Her aversion to travel and to reading suggests a comfort in the privileges afforded by her upper-middleclass white identity. As that notion of the self begins to disintegrate, Brenda "harangues" Marion over her "failure to understand human relations," which she attributes to Marion's failure to read "good novels or poetry" (162). How, Marion wonders, "does one know whether a novel is good or not? Why spend time on something that may turn out to be no good?" Marion asks. To get oneself into a stew about fabricated lives sounds distinctly unhealthy to her" (162-163). She eventually reads Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* at the suggestion of a bookstore clerk. She finds the plot incomprehensible, but this incomprehensibility "doesn't stop

the tears... [a]t the end she is racked with sobs” (190). Wicomb had previously admitted to being “not a great fan of Nadine Gordimer,” suggesting an ironic deployment of *The Conservationist* as the text which elicits such an overwrought response from Marion (“Zoë Wicomb in Conversation with Hein Willemse” 150). Marion draws a series of tenuous connections between the novel and her own life and family, flashes of identification and empathy. *The Conservationist* works on Marion as it ought to, allowing her to imagine herself as the girl in the novel: “[i]s the girl not, at some level, a version of herself? Of her mother?” (190). Had the clerk at the bookstore perhaps “recognised Marion as Mehring’s girl?” (190). She “wonders how many versions of herself exist in the world,” and then revises the question to ask, “how many versions of herself exist in the stories of her country?” (190-191). Reading Gordimer is an exercise in solipsism for Marion, who cannot help but see herself reflected in the text. The movement from “world” to “country” allows *The Conservationist* to function as a national text; it allows Marion to participate in the formation of an imagined community, to return to Benedict Anderson’s argument for the centrality of the printed word to nationalism.

Marion is taken by the title of J.M. Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country*, which promises her an affirmation of a South African national identity she grasps for after discovering the “truth” about her racial identity. But the novel frustrates her, and she finds the characters impossible to map onto the specificity of her own life.⁶⁸ *In the Heart of the Country* offers her far less in the way of identification than *The Conservationist* had: Marion “started reading greedily, eager for the story that kept on sidestepping just beyond her grasp, but the voices at the end are

⁶⁸In contrast to her mention of Gordimer, Wicomb has often praised Coetzee’s work. In an interview with van der Vlies, she describes Coetzee as “one of the first to look at settler culture, and through naming take responsibility for the colonial enterprise and its violence—all brave moves in the face of the various orthodoxies of the time” (“Intersectionality Seems So Blindingly Obvious a Notion”). She is even more effusive in a 2006 piece in *The Scotsman*, in which she is paraphrased discussing her love of teaching “nothing but the very best, like Coetzee. And she sighs, just at the thought of his so-beautifully constructed sentences” (“Under the Skin of Lies”). Coetzee’s praise for *David’s Story*, meanwhile, adorns the book’s cover.

too hard, the words are indeed in stone... she does not identify with Magda; that father is not her father” (202). The coldness of Coetzee’s prose and his opaque characterizations do not live up to the promise of his title. Marion waits for the protagonist to “crack open to reveal meaning in pearly, red pomegranate seeds” (202). *In the Heart of the Country* is not mentioned again, and one can assume Marion finds no satisfying resolution to the text.

In staging these two divergent readings of South Africa’s most celebrated, white, authors, Wicomb offers in miniature a comment on the concept of a national literature. Looking to understand South Africa, Marion can only find *herself* in *The Conservationist*. As she delves deeper she still weeps but she eventually learns to “put up with [the crying] as one does with a headache... and finds herself smiling at the multiplication of words” (191). This, Wicomb demonstrates, is how Marion learns of South Africa’s past, of her place in it. Marion’s response to *The Conservationist* mimics the expected response of the audience to the stories of victims testifying before the TRC. I am reminded of Archbishop Desmond Tutu thanking Hawa Timol for “coming to share with us and helping us as a nation to cry over things that happened in our nation,” as I discussed in Chapter 3 (“TRC Human Rights Violation Hearings, Hawa Timol”). In Marion’s process of weeping and identification I am reminded too of Antjie Krog’s description in *Country of My Skull* of her somatic response to the stories of apartheid’s horrors; told by a counselor that journalists will ““experience the same symptoms as the victims. You will find yourself powerless—without help, without words,”” Krog is “shocked to be a textbook case within a mere ten days” (51). Both Krog and Marion learn to “lesson the impact,” of these stories in their own ways, but the process of identification, weeping, and the eventual incorporation of these sympathetic responses to narrative is the same (*Country of My Skull* 51). The production and reproduction of “nice audible crying,” is essential to the TRC’s attempt to induce a new

national consciousness through the truth-telling subject, through narrative and emotional identification (*Country of My Skull* 45). What of the stories one hears, or reads, in which Marion cannot locate herself? What of the narratives that produce no tears, no easy analog for her father? Those may promise to reveal to her the “heart of the country,” but they only disappoint, as they cannot be used to build a national identity that Marion finds a comforting replacement for a racial one. Van der Vlies notes the irony in Marion’s lack of identification with Coetzee’s text, pointing out that *Playing* shares with *In the Heart of the Country* “a focus on white and coloured interactions and the domestic imbrications of white and coloured lives in the Cape” (593). While van der Vlies positions Marion as only a failed reader, her intense identification with *The Conservationist* and her distaste for *In the Heart of the Country* suggests that she might, in fact, be the ideal national reader in the making.

Brenda, on the other hand, is presented as a sophisticated reader and writer of the new South Africa. Armed with an Honours degree and a course in Contemporary South African Literature she is fluent in the changing dynamics of the country; she acts at times as an authentic guide to coloured identity for Marion. Brenda helps interpret Marion’s dream early in the novel, she scolds the old-school racist Afrikaner in the office, she invites Marion to her family’s home where her employer is able to encounter a *real* coloured family. Brenda, van der Vlies affirms, is a good reader and, in his argument, she becomes the eventual authorial voice in *Playing*—it is Brenda who listens to the story told by Marion’s father, John. It is Brenda who is a “more willing auditor than Marion” (van der Vlies 2010: 594). For all of Brenda’s authentic coloured-ness, her sophisticated reading practices and education, she ends the novel in a way that challenges van der Vlies’s reading of her, alongside the narrator in *David’s Story*, as a character who “bear[s] witness to the ghosts of the archive,” in service of the authorial responsibility to represent the

other (597). Brenda, he writes, “becomes the agent of such ethics, delightfully playing in the light of another’s archive, hiding her artifice in the plain light of the reader’s view, finding her own voice... and giving voice to stories to which Marion remains deaf” (597-598). Brenda’s description of Marion’s father as a man “with his pale skin as capital, ripe for investment,” complicates this idea of giving voice, however (218). For Marion, other people’s lives are too sordid to enter into; for Brenda they are potential sites of exploitation.⁶⁹ While Brenda had insisted to Marion that living “vicariously through other people’s words, in other’s people’s worlds, is better than not living at all,” it is made clear at the end of the novel that her vicarious living relies on extractive practices of reading and writing (163). Brenda will not tell her own story, because she is “no Patricia Williams, with adventures under [her] belt. [Hers] is the story of everybody else in Bonteheuwel [a coloured township in Cape Town], dull as dishwater” (217). The torture and rape of Williams is, in Brenda’s telling, part of an adventure story rather than a true account of apartheid’s cruelty. Her testimony is now a text like any other. The nation demands a story, the novel reminds us, and it will extract and produce it whether Marion consents or not. John Campbell’s story is a commodity ready to be entered into the circulation of great South African narratives, along with the horrors experienced by Patricia.

What we see in van der Vlies’s reading of the novel is the reproduction of the TRC’s demand for the disclosing subject. He includes Wicomb in a cohort of writers whose work “can be seen as cognate with the TRC’s complex understandings of ‘truth,’” a characterization I disagree with, given Wicomb’s aporetic depictions of the truth-telling subject (584). For van der Vlies this storytelling impulse eventually results in an ethical communal practice; Wicomb’s writing is “such an important contribution to post-apartheid literature” because it stages

⁶⁹This tension is one staged, too, in Ivan Vladislavić’s *Double Negative* between Neville and Janie, as discussed in Chapter 3.

“occasions in which narrative plays host to the stories of others” (598). Similarly, Carli Coetzee identifies Wicomb’s insistence on “reading as a practice that inevitably leads to fragmentation rather than closure” (569). Ultimately, however, she also affirms Wicomb’s “model of reading and writing as one that encourages texts to circulate freely, and not always to return to the self-same place they came from” (569). Both of these readings affirm a naturalization of the telling subject, one who accounts for the self and the other, as the foundational subject of post-apartheid literature even in the work of a writer who, as I have argued, challenges the demand made for confession, disclosure and parrhesia as the necessary and desirable modes through which the subject is recognized.

Wicomb’s insistence on narrative failure, to return to the description offered by Al-Kassim, is most keenly witnessed in an encounter the two women have with Outa Blinkoog on their journey to Wuppertal. He appears with a “ramshackle cart decorated with outlandish shiny things and streamers of coloured cloth” (86). Blinkoog, who is illiterate, challenges the interpretive skills of Marion and Brenda, offering them an uneven, contradictory account of himself. He challenges the demand for truth-telling in the act of representing the self, remaining a figure who cannot be assimilated into the national project by Marion and Brenda. Blinkoog is a reference to the real-world Jan Schoeman, van der Vlies notes, an artist and activist who referred to “himself as Outa Lappies, the cloth man” (586). There is a clear parallel to Blinkoog (“bright eye”), who carries “shiny tins, decorated bottles, shards of coloured glass that wink in the sun,” rather than Schoeman’s embroidered cloth (*Playing* 87). His story is told in a “narrative that has no end, each fragment leading to another” (88). While van der Vlies reads this as an evocation of “the TRC’s project of narrative collection and collation,” I understand Blinkoog as a storyteller who resists being incorporated into the national archive (586). Blinkoog draws a personal history

in the sand for the women, an impermanent account of the self that provides little evidence of “truth.” He makes “Pragtige Goetes,” Beautiful Things, glass and metal sculptures made from found objects that dazzle onlookers who are “struck dumb and given headaches” (88-89).

Blinkoog, the novel makes clear, traffics in fiction, in the play of light, reflections of cobbled together stories that seem uninterested in truth in any of the four configurations provided by the TRC. He is a “man out of a storybook,” and entirely apathetic when asked about autochthonous practices of foraging for food or Bushman cave paintings, of which Brenda and Marion assume he has some innate knowledge (90). As much as both women attempt to cast him as a wise primitive, Blinkoog insists that “people must make new Beautiful Things” (90). In David Hoegberg’s “Building New Selves: Identity, Passing and Intertextuality in Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*” (2018), Blinkoog “presents to Marion an alternate concept of identity, not as something fixed at birth but as continually in process of being made and re-made, shaped by the agency of self but also by others” (491). In Abdulrazak Gurnah’s 2011 “The Urge to Nowhere: Wicomb and Cosmopolitanism,” meanwhile, Blinkoog represents the possibility of “experience as a fulfillment in itself... [he] who is tied to the land, who is thrifty and selfless, who has no economic function, who has no information to impart” (273). In the 2010 article “The Struggle over the Sign: Writing and History in Zoë Wicomb’s Art,” Dorothy Driver attempts to hold on to Blinkoog’s alterity without condemning him to some mythical past, as Marion and Brenda do. He, Driver writes, is “a figure both historical and atemporal,” and offers “pieces deemed valueless in a bourgeois, utilitarian economy” (534). Blinkoog’s appearance, in these readings, challenges the archival impulse of the TRC; he suggests a form of self-representation that exists outside the Commission’s insistence on accounting for the self before the nation.

To Marion, Blinkoog represents access to a different kind of language, outside of the production of her racialized identity, in which words “are fresh, newborn, untainted by history; all is bathed in laughter clean as water” (90). It is a fantasy of a kind of speech that makes no claim on history and is not claimed by it either—the precise opposite of the appearance of Tokkie’s face in the dark, threatening waves of the Atlantic. But the lantern Blinkoog gives the women is eventually returned to the same struggle over meaning and representation that he briefly interrupted. It is the lantern that has “brought good luck,” to Brenda (216–217). She lights it as part of her writing ritual, as she begins writing the story of Marion’s father. This gift, made of abandoned, useless things, is what allows Brenda to produce a narrative of John, his story and skin “as capital, ripe for investment.” It is no longer simply a Beautiful Thing, it is now also a tool of extraction.

Driver characterizes Wicomb’s writing as “the pursuit of an aesthetic and political order that creates its own freedom [that] is always in process; the goal is never achieved. [Wicomb’s] protean poetics is also a protean politics, a politics that is attentive to the history of its own complex construction through discourse” (542). Both *David’s Story* and *Playing* end with a sense of narrative failure, a goal never achieved. The narrator washes her hands of David’s story, Brenda is kicked out of Marion’s car. All three women have had encounters with the *truth* of self-disclosure, their own or that of another, and yet all are ultimately frustrated by the task of entering those truths into the national discourses created by the TRC and the new South Africa. Inherent in this frustration is a recognition of the continual request made of the subject to perform and account for the self in the making of the nation. Through John, Wicomb presents the reader with a subject who has wrestled with this attempt for decades. By the time he had chosen to “play” his white identity, “the self was already a mended structure; it was a matter of mixing

as best you could your own mortar with which to fill in the cracks that kept on appearing” (123). Wicomb continually offers a deconstruction and a mending of the self through language, through writing and reading, imperfect as they may be. It is the protean nature of this process that allows her novels to offer a critique of the TRC rather than function as mere expressions of its subject- and nation-making infrastructure.

4.3 Coda: Disseminating Truth Through Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull*

In the more celebratory readings of Wicomb’s work I have engaged with, which attempt to locate her narratives in a nationalist project, we see the way in which the TRC’s construction of the legible, truth-telling subject has become naturalized in the reading of contemporary South African literature. In this final part of my chapter, I pause to consider how the truths of the TRC—its functional and operational definitions, but also the testimonies it elicited and disseminated—are imbricated within *Country of My Skull* and vice versa. It is a relationship which has allowed Krog’s text to occupy a central place in understanding and reading the Commission itself. The accusations of plagiarism and appropriation levelled against Krog and *Country* are, I argue, not incidental to the way in which the text has come to speak on behalf of the Commission. What is shared by Krog’s text and the Commission is a mutual, unstable construction of truth, a construction I argue that reveals the TRC and *Country* as essential to the national imagination, which is also why it is imperative to disaggregate the multiple notions of truth disseminated by both.

As detailed in Catherine Cole’s *Performing South Africa’s Truth Commission* (2010), Krog’s text reproduces the testimony of Black South Africans in troubling ways. In one particularly striking example, Cole details the discrepancy between Krog’s retelling of Cynthia

Ngewu's appearance before the Commission and Ngewu's complete testimony. Krog presents her testimony as a story of a mother discovering her son's death in a manner that "highlights victimhood and grief," and Krog's account of the testimony ends with Ngewu asking a series of plaintive questions about the cruelty of the apartheid state (83). Cole, however, notes the far more detailed and complex testimony offered by Ngewu, who was "stern and forthright, faltering at only a few moments," rather than the grief-stricken figure presented in *Country* (83). An entirely different picture emerges in Cole's account, a story "about much more than the broken heart in the title of Krog's chapter," "Then Burst the Mighty Heart" (Cole 83). Cole details, too, the complaint of Henry Yazir concerning the use of his testimony in *Country*, which is presented through a series of elisions and edits unacknowledged by Krog (81, 151).

Kate Highman's 2015 article "Forging a New South Africa: Plagiarism, Ventriloquism and the 'Black Voice' in Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*" furthers this critique. Authorship in *Country*, she writes, "is highly unstable—words are repeatedly re-ascribed away from their contexts and re-assigned, and there are elements of 'ventriloquism' and 'forgery', as well as plagiarism, in the text, for Krog sometimes places her own words, or those of others, into the mouths of others" (188). Highman details a number of accusations of plagiarism made against Krog as well as Krog's "unconventional" methods of acknowledgement (189). Most striking in this discussion is Highman's interrogation of the ways in which Krog has aspired to forging, in both senses of the word, a "Black" national voice. Highman investigates Krog's use of the first person as a reflection of Krog's positionality as a white Afrikaner and her "desire to respond to, and converse with, what she calls 'the [B]lack voice', a voice that is construed as other" (202).

As Highman writes

While Krog argues that her engagement with ‘the [B]lack voice’ necessitates her writing *non-fiction*, her precedence of the ‘I’—as the ultimate site of accountability and an exceptional terrain of free invention—arguably compromises this project of transcultural engagement and accountability. This is particularly so as Krog not only invents her own story when need be, but, as is clear from her reworkings of TRC testimonies, sometimes changes the words of others, ascribing to them her own sense of the ‘real’. (203, italics in the original)

Highman reads these controversies of plagiarism and Krog’s “Black” voice as part of a broader attempt at establishing a new *national* identity, which is particularly instructive given the fact that *Country* has been widely taken up as an account of the TRC itself.

Laura Moss’s 2006 article “‘Nice Audible Crying’: Editions, Testimonies, and *Country of My Skull*,” investigates the ways in which the text has been read as a historical document of the TRC via the differences in its American edition, which allow for it to be “misread as documentary,” because it “smooths over some of the troubling of genre and voice that Krog accomplishes in the South African edition” (88). The way in which *Country of My Skull* has been presented and taken up outside of South Africa, Moss argues, has allowed for Krog’s voice to become an authoritative representation of the TRC itself. Abetting this positioning of *Country* as a representative of the TRC and the new South Africa is again the question of Krog’s treatment of the stories told by Black subjects before the Commission. Krog, Moss writes, “simplifies the testimony of the victims as she repeatedly turns their individual stories either into singular metaphors or extended allegories,” that can function as national narratives, divorced from their individual, and racialized, specificity (90). Read alongside the critiques of Krog’s method

offered by Cole and Highman, we see the way in which *Country of My Skull*'s personal and poetic register has come to occupy a definitive place in South African and international understandings of the TRC.

These critiques of Krog's misappropriations and elisions point to a broader fault line in how the TRC constructed and disseminated truth as a foundational, ethical good in the making of post-apartheid South Africa. If the Mfalapitsa testimony exemplified the way in which parrhesia was both demanded and deferred by the operations of the TRC, *Country* has come to exemplify the ways in which testimonies, the narratives of the other, have been entered into the discourses of the new South Africa, free to circulate as goods or objects in a textual marketplace created, in part, by the TRC, but also by the media coverage offered by the SABC, a crucial part of the state's narrative infrastructure, and for whom Krog worked. We saw this parodied at the end of *Playing in the Light* when Brenda self-righteously threatened to appropriate the story of the Campbell family because the act of *telling* had become an end unto itself. Similarly, we see this when Brenda attempts to reframe Patricia's act of disclosing the abuse she had suffered before the TRC as merely an account of her "adventures." Through Brenda Wicomb provided a critique of the way in which the archive of stories elicited by the TRC have been readily accessed and reproduced in contemporary South African discourse. The *truth* of what was attested to before the TRC has, in the celebration of the telling, disclosing subject, been rendered secondary to the fact of attestation itself.

What is the relationship between Krog's treatment of testimony, her technique of presenting herself as an unreliable, suffering focal point through which the voice of the racialized other, in particular, is communicated, and the text's generic relationship to truth? Both victims and perpetrators placed themselves at risk in speaking before the TRC. Victims faced the fear of

reliving trauma on a national stage. Hawa Timol risked her pleas for justice being ignored, as they would be for decades. Perpetrators like Mfalapitsa faced the possibility of prosecution and vilification. *Country's* generic play—between memoir, poetry, reportage and historiographical account of the TRC's own historiography—allows the text to eschew these risks; it is the act of *disclosure* itself that has become most valuable to the South African national project, rather than the risk taken by those who offered the truth before the Commission and the watching nation. In the voice of her semi-fictional narrator, Krog writes that “[t]he word truth makes me uncomfortable. The word ‘truth’ still trips the tongue” (50).⁷⁰ Truth is distorted in her telling in a manner that predates *David's Story* but strikes a familiar chord: “[e]ven when I type it, it ends up as either *turth* or *trth*. I have never bedded that word in a poem. I prefer the word ‘lie’” (50). In a similar vein, the acknowledgements section at the end of the text is written, we might presume, from the perspective of the “real” Krog (who signs off as “Antjie”). She offers these as the final words of her acknowledgements: “I have told many lies in this book about the truth. I have exploited many lives and many texts—not least those of my mother and my family on the farm. I hope you will understand” (388). While truth was required of the subject appearing before the Commission, it was not required of Krog, we are reminded: the text is *not* reportage, it is *not* an attempt to write the history of the Commission. Krog insists that a journalistic or juridical practice of truth-telling is outside the scope of her ambitions and capabilities. And yet *Country* is also embedded in the definitions of truth-telling as it has been positioned as coextensive with the TRC.

As is evidenced by the critical debate around Krog's citational practices, in her use of actual testimony and her responsibility to those she represents, the stakes of *Country* are

⁷⁰My quotations are all from the American edition of the text.

significantly different to those faced by Wicomb or Imraan Coovadia in their clearly fictional representations of the TRC. Krog's closeness to the establishment of TRC and her dual roles as journalist and poet raises questions about how and why it is that *Country* has come to be understood as representative of the Commission, and more generally understood as a *true* representation of South Africa in transition. Having joined the ANC as a member after its unbanning in 1990, Krog would continue to be closely tied to those in power in the new South Africa.⁷¹ Anthea Garman has detailed in "Antjie Krog and the Accumulation of 'Media Meta Capital'" (2007) the way in which Krog became the pre-eminent literary and journalistic voice in South Africa after the end of apartheid, so much so that her poem "Land van Genade en Verdriet [Land of Grace and Sorrow]" was used to close Thabo Mbeki's State of the Nation address in 2002, and in 2003 she was appointed to a panel "to advise President Thabo Mbeki on appointments to the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities" (2). Krog served, too, as the Afrikaans translator of Nelson Mandela's biography *A Long Walk to Freedom* (1994). Krog appears to have been the writer of choice for the ANC when a poetic phrase was needed to lend gravity to a historical moment. Her identity as a white Afrikaner woman also helped affirm the diversity of voices celebrated by the new South African government. As a radio journalist for the SABC, she worked within the state's own media corporation, part of the infrastructure that would disseminate the TRC hearings and establish a liberal, democratic South Africa. While covering the proceedings for the SABC, Krog also contributed to the *Mail and Guardian*, an anti-apartheid English-language newspaper, from 1996 onward; it was her reflections on the TRC published in the newspaper that formed the basis of *Country*. Krog is also cited twice in the first

⁷¹I do not mean to suggest that Krog is an ANC zealot; she has written critically of the party in the years since 1994.

volume of the TRC's *Final Report*. Firstly, in a section discussing the media coverage of the Commission, the *Final Report* notes that the "*Mail and Guardian* regularly carried probing material on the Commission, including incisive commentaries or editorial features by the poet Antjie Krog" (356). Krog is the only individual cited in the summary of newspaper coverage of the TRC; the only other individuals mentioned in the entire 11-page section on the media are Archbishop Tutu, and the TRC Commissioners Fazel Randera and Denzil Potgieter. As instructive is the description of Krog not as a journalist but as a *poet*. Secondly, Krog is cited in the *Final Report*'s discussion of "personal or narrative truth:"

By providing the environment in which victims could tell their own stories in their own languages, the Commission not only helped to uncover existing facts about past abuses, but also assisted in the creation of a 'narrative truth'. In so doing, it also sought to contribute to the process of reconciliation by ensuring that the truth about the past included the validation of the individual subjective experiences of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless. The Commission sought, too, to capture the widest possible record of people's perceptions, stories, myths and experiences. It chose, in the words of Antjie Krog, a South African writer and poet, 'the road of... restoring memory and humanity.' (112-113)

Krog is again described as a writer and poet rather than a journalist who once again invokes the language of infrastructure to describe the mission of the TRC. The quotation from Krog is taken from *The Healing of a Nation?*, a 1995 collection of essays that predates the start of the TRC hearings, and was produced by the think-tank IDASA founded by Deputy Chairman of the TRC

Alex Boraine, who also served as an editor for the collection.⁷² Krog is presented in the *Final Report* as a poet with a particularly sensitive relationship to truth, and but also as instrumental in the TRC's own conception of truth, which *Country* will later go on to entangle with *turth* or *trth*, or with the "lie" that the narrator prefers. *Country* and the TRC work in a circular, mutually affirming manner: the text is embedded within the TRC, which looks to Krog to provide the language necessary to define its mission; the TRC is embedded in the text as well. While Al-Kassim has argued that *Country* provides a "version of history in lock step with the most conservative demands of state," we see too the way in which *Country* and the TRC are in lock step in the construction of *truth* ("Archiving Resistance" 182).

Country of My Skull has come to function as a metonym for the TRC, a stand-in for the messy, incomplete, compromised work of the Commission, a stand-in that has done the work of naturalizing many of its underlying assumptions. It may also be understood as a text that helps address one of the key criticisms of the Commission offered by Mahmood Mamdani in "Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC)," mentioned earlier in this dissertation. Again, it is important to note the tension Mamdani identifies between the TRC's definition of apartheid as a "crime against humanity," while it sought at the same time to individualize victims (and, I would add, also perpetrators) (33). *Country of My Skull* continues to allow for the circulation of these individual testimonies that operate as stand ins for decades of apartheid rule, and the centuries of colonial violence that preceded them. As I write this in December 2021, the website of South Africa's Department of Justice has been the target of a cyberattack, and the online depository of TRC testimonies held by the Department has been made inaccessible to both the Department's

⁷²It is cited as *Healing of a Nation* in the *Final Report*, the omission of the question mark functioning, perhaps, as evidence of the resolution to the question.

staff and the public (Toyana). *Country of My Skull* is, at this point in history, a more readily accessible source for TRC testimonies than the South African state's own infrastructures of dissemination. *Country* has transformed from a complex text centred on one writer's uncertain relationship to the TRC into an archive of memory, an account of the Commission that speaks of behalf of it: it is a text that performs what Jacob Dlamini understood as Mfalapitsa's attempt to use the personal narrative of the individual as a means of illuminating the general. That it is "misread as documentary," as Moss notes, extends beyond the wide circulation of editions and copies; it is also reflective of the mutually re-enforcing construction of the text and the Commission, and what has come to be a shared conception of truth. In this mutually reinforcing relationship, what are the possibilities for parrhesia, for a free-spokenness that risks both self and other? In the close relationship of Krog and *Country* to the TRC, what is placed at risk? Is it possible to glimpse a critical opening, to return to Butler, a process of doing and undoing, in this text, given its proximity to the Commission itself?

The testimonies of the racialized subjects who appeared before the TRC were shaped by a complex, evolving set of criteria established by the Commission. Those testimonies edited and reproduced in *Country* now occupy a central place in the historical picture of the Commission itself; they attest to the power of a *narrative* truth that evokes in the narrator *personal, social and healing* truth. What remains occluded is the racialized truth-telling subject's account of the self, demanded by the state at the inauguration of the new nation, now transformed into narratives that enjoy the freedom of the new South Africa, narratives that can be circulated, remade, and transformed in the construction of the new nation. This complex of truth, race, and the subject established by the TRC reveals the infrastructural systems that continue to produce and shape the subject in the present. How are we to recognize the idealized post-apartheid subject? What are

the criteria they must fulfill to be granted entry into the formal realm of the nation and economy? Why and how are some subjects elevated to positions of power within the operations of postcolonial capitalism, while others are condemned to be exploited by it? These determinations are made, in part, through the procedures, expectations, and decisions of the TRC, an infrastructure that continues to allow for some kinds of subjects to be rendered legitimate while others are cast as extraneous in the new South Africa.

4.4: Conclusions

In my research for this project, I found my own name and half-remembered words returned to me in a manner I found unsettling. Erica Lombard's 2015 PhD dissertation "The Profits of the Past: Nostalgic White Writing of Post-Apartheid South Africa," includes a reference to a Goodreads review I had written of Shaun Johnson's 2006 novel *The Native Commissioner* in 2012. The review is no longer available online (I must have deleted my account in the intervening years) but it reflects what I remember of the novel. Lombard offers my review as a dissenting voice in a sea of generally favourable responses to the text. I dismissed Johnson's novel as an example of the "white English speaking South African voice... so disproportionately well represented, it now seems an act of deliberate and troubling rewriting of apartheid history" (quoted in Lombard 145). For Lombard my review spoke to a "particular attentiveness to the politics of identity in South Africa," and having found my (also defunct) Google+ profile she writes that "he [I] may identify as an Indian South African [I do], a fact which positions him outside the ideological bounds of WESSA [White English-speaking South African] discourse" (145). My racialized criticism of *The Native Commissioner*, Lombard continues "confirms that reading and sense-making practices depend on the reader's subject position—those within the

epistemic frame of English South African whiteness are more likely to identify with nostalgic writing, and be blind to a text's insularity, while those outside are more likely to take a critical stance towards it" (145-146). My initial reaction to this characterization was one of frustration: when I wrote the review in September 2012, I was enrolled in an Honours course in South African literature at the University of the Witwatersrand; I was well aware of the discourses around white, English South African literature. When Lombard submitted the dissertation in 2015, I was a MA student at the University of British Columbia, a fellow literary scholar participating in practices of reading and interpreting literary texts, rather than only a racialized outsider. More careful Googling would have confirmed this educational background. What were the conditions under which I could offer a critique of Johnson's novel and not be read as representing a racialized outsider to what is, ostensibly, also the literature of my homeland? What qualification would allow me to read a text for its ideological presuppositions? What if my Google+ account had a profile picture that did not confirm my Indian South African identity? My suspicion is that I would no longer be representative of "those outside," and my review would thus be rendered unremarkable.

In the course of writing this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate how deeply embedded the call for the racialized, self-representing subject remains in the infrastructure of post-apartheid South Africa, in its literature, and in its literary criticism. How is it possible for the racialized subject to speak of and for themselves if their speech can only be understood as affirming their racialization? Simultaneously, the TRC worked to establish speaking for oneself as a national *good*: a moral imperative and commodifiable product. In the establishment of a non-racial society, the racialized figure is compelled to account for themselves as a means of

ushering in the new South Africa and confining apartheid to the past. It was, as articulated by Thlamedi Mfalapitsa, a demand that was also impossible to satisfy.

David's Story and *Playing in the Light* both demonstrate the ethical, linguistic, and political consequences of holding parrhesia as sacrosanct in the creation of the new South Africa. In both novels Wicomb demonstrates the fraught nature of the production and reception of a “true” account of the self after the end of apartheid. This attempt to account for the self, to represent the other, and to ascertain a true picture of the past is continually displaced and challenged, ultimately undermining the nation-building project of writing and reading the subject into the nation set in motion through the TRC. There remains, however, resistance to recognizing the way in which writers such as Wicomb challenge the foundational assumptions of the subject embedded in the new South Africa. By turning to *Country of My Skull* at the end of this chapter, I aimed to demonstrate the nature of this nationalistic reading as one exemplified in Krog’s text but also, perhaps more significantly, allowed for by the positioning of her text as metonymic of the TRC itself. It is the text’s foregrounding of personal truth—through its postmodern flourishes, its self-absorption, its self-absolution, its play with testimony and history—that has allowed for its wide circulation, for its ability to speak on behalf of the Commission. If we are to read South African literature as capable of illuminating anything other than the fact of the nation-building project of the TRC, our reading of South African literature must be grounded in a troubling of the impulse to accede to a national order, rather than a confirmation of it.

Conclusion: Infrastructures on Fire, or: the Rediscovery of the Incendiary

Wednesday afternoon, mid-winter, finds me at the counter in the United Building Society (Hillbrow), minding my own business, making a cash withdrawal, when my hands burst into flames.

“When My Hands Burst into Flames,” Ivan Vladislavić
(1989)

2022 began with the South African Houses of Parliament on fire. Zandile Christmas Mafe has been accused of starting the fire in an act of terrorism. He has been summarily diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and placed under observation at the Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital; Mafe disputes the diagnosis (Guerandi and Cruywagen).⁷³ This is the latest in a series of devastating fires that have torn through the infrastructure of the country. In April 2021, large parts of the University of Cape Town’s Jagger Library and its immense archive of historical documents were destroyed by a fire that started on Table Mountain; wildfires in the region continue to grow more devastating as climate change brings longer and more severe droughts to the Cape. In 2016, the University of KwaZulu Natal’s Howard College law library was set on fire amidst the fervour of the #FeesMustFall protests. Charred books provided a malleable visual metaphor for political commentators: it was *either* evidence of anti-intellectual barbarism, *or* it signalled a radical questioning of the production of knowledge in South Africa’s educational institutions. More easily narrativized were the fires set in July of 2021 in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in response to the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma. Homes and businesses were looted and burnt in an outbreak of violence that killed over 300 people. President Cyril Ramaphosa called the destruction evidence of a “failed insurrection,” a characterization contradicted by his Minister of Defence (Gifford).

⁷³There are obvious parallels to be drawn with Dmitri Tsafendas, who assassinated Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd in 1966 and was deemed, almost immediately, mentally unfit to be considered a *political* actor.

With each fire I am reminded of Ivan Vladislavić's short story "When My Hands Burst into Flames" (1989). In *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011), Neil Lazarus identified in this story the "obsessive, willed tranquility of the surface that hints at, and intermittently breaks apart to reveal, an inner core of hysteria and repressed violence" (74). For Lazarus the narrative brings into question the concept of "South Africa" itself, what it "is and has been, and to what extent what it has been continues to determine what it is and what it might be capable of becoming" (74). Initially, I read the story slightly differently to Lazarus, who identifies a radical, subversive potential in the narrator. Vladislavić's story did not, in my reading, reveal some deep, repressed well of violence operating *beneath* the surface of South African society. Instead, his firestarter demonstrated the violence always inherent in the ordinary exchanges that constitute the everyday. This quotidian violence is evident in the voice of the narrator, who only briefly registers shock when, as the title tells us, his hands burst into flames in the middle of an errand. He is entirely passive in the opening of the story: "Wednesday afternoon, mid-winter *finds*" him "minding [his] own business" (99, italics my own). His hands catch fire in the exchange of currency with a bank teller, and he reacts "predictably," throwing himself to the floor and trying to beat out the flames (99). But he is soon calmed by employees of the bank who see no fire, only a man sprawled on the floor. He eventually collects his money and carries on with the rest of the day, browsing the stores of downtown Johannesburg, his hands "setting fire" to the merchandise on offer; the fire and its effects are invisible to everyone but the narrator. The eruption of fire is quickly made ordinary, subsumed into the unremarkable traffic of the city. The narrator ends the day watching television in his apartment, his hands still ablaze. He threatens to set a local park alight, but until then he is "content to play with fire" (103).

Lazarus describes the narrator at the end of the story as a representation of “the [apartheid] state’s nightmare” (75). He is an avatar of violence, joyfully spreading destruction in the centre of the country’s financial hub, just as the regime begins its slow, painful dissolution. A white man realizing his capacity for violence in Hillbrow (and not in Angola, a township, or a Bantustan) would, indeed, signal a nightmare: the terror of apartheid has come home to roost, the war machine is malfunctioning in the glass and concrete shopping plazas of the inner city. In my own encounter with Vladislavić’s narrator, he initially seemed less a threat to the state and more like a premonition of the way in which violence and the paranoia it induces would soon be thoroughly naturalized, made quotidian, in post-apartheid life. Contemporary South Africa is marked by the pervasive violence of crime, which often takes on a random, opportunistic form, making it one of the few truly non-racial institutions in the country. The private security infrastructure that has been constructed in response⁷⁴ only contributes to an atmosphere of violence: linger too long outside a building, drive too slowly down a residential street, stop to take a photograph, and you will likely be met by a suspicious armed guard who will hurry you along as though your hands, too, have caught fire.⁷⁵ The stakes of this atmosphere of violence are higher if you are a poor, Black mine worker striking for a living wage: the future President of the country may call on the Minister of Police to kill your colleagues en masse, as was the case in the Marikana massacre in 2012.⁷⁶ In the paranoid imaginings of contemporary South Africa,

⁷⁴To say that this paranoid infrastructure has been built only in *response* to rising crime levels in post-apartheid South Africa is somewhat misleading. Security infrastructure is deeply embedded in settler-colonial notions of property and ownership. While the notion of a *laager* mentality once referred to the anxieties of Afrikaner settlers trekking inland, the idea of the *laager* now seems to permeate through South Africa’s property-owning classes.

⁷⁵The guard might explain, if asked, that he too is being monitored by the security camera he observed you through, and that he will be questioned by his superiors if he is not seen to be questioning you.

⁷⁶More broadly speaking, policing in post-apartheid South Africa is enormously violent. Between 2014 and 2019, South African police killed an average of 452 people a year, a rate twice that of the United States and eight times that of Canada (Clark).

large swathes of the population are seen as already criminal; suspicion structures so many of the movements and exchanges that comprise the ordinary experiences of South African life.⁷⁷

Rumours about Zandile Mafe, who lives in a shack in Khayelitsha and must occasionally sleep on the streets near the Houses of Parliament when he cannot afford to travel home, have circulated on social media: he must be a foreign operative for Russian or Chinese interests, or perhaps he is a disaffected uMkhonto we Sizwe veteran with bomb-making expertise (Evans). In his own words he is neither a foreign spy nor a domestic saboteur: he is simply a “poor person who found himself at the wrong place at the wrong time” (Evans). The truth about the initial cause of the Parliament fire is still uncertain, but what is known is that the building’s fire-prevention sprinkler systems had not been serviced since 2017 and they failed to activate when the blaze began. As a BBC News report notes, the “alarm system did not work and doors supposed to help block the fire from spreading were kept open by latches” (Schenck). The systems designed to protect the infrastructure of the state, the literal and symbolic seat of government, have been misused or allowed to fall into disrepair. As many South Africans have come to be understood as inherently criminal, the threat of fire only seems to grow as the conditions that produce these spectacles of destruction—environmental degradation, extreme inequality, and failing infrastructure—are left unaddressed.

In the years since the conclusion of the TRC in 2003, the state has, seemingly, given up on the grand ambition of nation-building and abandoned attempts to reorient the relationship between itself and its subjects. The South African state no longer intervenes in the creative realm

⁷⁷As noted in Chapter 1, the generation of “born free” South Africans has been described as a “social time bomb.” In the words of Paulus Mnisi, whose appearance before the TRC was discussed in Chapter 2, South Africa’s youth at the end of apartheid was pathologized as “instinctively violent and irretrievably delinquent.” As the state’s response to the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, it is far more capable of exercising punitive force—using water cannons and rubber bullets to disperse people lining up for food during the 2020 lockdown, for example—than it is of protecting the country’s poor from the devastating effects of the virus and its economic impacts (Cotterill).

of the nation as it once did through broad measures like TRC; the last effort may have been Thabo Mbeki's plan for an "African Renaissance," an idealistic vision quickly discredited by his administration's refusal to address the AIDS crisis, Mbeki's eventual ouster, and the scandal- and corruption-ridden Jacob Zuma presidency that followed. Lurching from scandal to scandal seems to have put an end to the state's attempt to articulate a new national mantra, a new ideological vision for the country. The state seems to be no longer interested in, or capable of, imagining a long-term project for a *different* kind of "new" South Africa. Instead, it seems to mostly operate in a cycle of crisis management: fires are put out, protestors are punished through obscene police violence, things calm down briefly, the next fire is set. In this context, Vladislavić's pyromaniac no longer feels like a threat to the order of South Africa, he seems more like an avatar of the prosaic, pervasive nature of violence in South Africa, a recognition that what was once revolutionary has now become ordinary.

Reading the Old Infrastructures and Recognizing the New

That the TRC continues to influence the narrative and imaginative possibilities of contemporary South Africa reflects the fact that it stands as the most recent, and perhaps last, large-scale effort to explicitly reorient the way in which the South African subject is imagined, the last effort to shape the trajectory of South Africa's future. This effort, as I have argued throughout this project, was often in service of cynical aims: to protect the vested interests of the ruling class, to stave off calls for truly radical change to the structure of South Africa itself, and to provide the ideological cover that allowed for postcolonial and racialized capital accumulation to continue, largely unabated, into the present. The TRC operated pre-emptively to delineate the kinds of subjects and narratives that would be necessary in the establishment of post-apartheid South

Africa. Part of why the TRC remains an object of fascination for scholars from a broad range of disciplines is that, in sense, it *worked*: South Africa is somehow both radically different thanks to the intervention of the Commission, and yet fundamentally the same.

Any attempt to account for the relationship between the determining structures of South African life and the lived experience of the subject is always fraught with contradiction, ambiguity, and uncertainty. This is an attempt that draws on and participates in the imaginative realm of fiction. Fiction becomes a crucial mode of thought that allows for both the grand movements of history and the ordinary experiences of the everyday to be brought into view and articulated in the same moment. To stretch this notion further, fiction acts like the patch in the centre of a camera's rangefinder, bringing two disparate, unfocused images of the world into alignment, allowing for what lies before us to come into focus, even if only temporarily. In the course of writing this dissertation, I often understood the TRC as engaged in, and at times even infringing upon, the realm of the literary. Through the Commission the new South African state participated in the interior, private domain of its subjects' lives, in the relationship of the self to the past, in the act of imagining the self in the future, in mourning, in the vulnerability of telling a story before an audience of strangers.⁷⁸ The TRC attempted to occupy the mediating role played by fiction, that uncertain zone between what has been, what is, and what might be, and in doing so it served as a reminder of the inherently fictional nature of the national project itself.

As I have argued, through this process the TRC provided an infrastructure through which the new South African subject could be imagined, through which specific narrative forms could circulate and be apprehended, transformed, and contested. To think of the TRC as an infrastructure that continues to allow for the movement of specific ideas and norms asks us to

⁷⁸It did so, of course, with the backing of the arsenal available to the modern liberal state, policy and legislation, violence and coercion.

hold the material and the imaginative possibilities of South Africa in close proximity, to think of the TRC as infrastructure asks us to recognize the ways in which the material and the imaginative are both engaged in the construction of meaning in contemporary South Africa.

The fact that the state no longer participates in the construction or maintenance of these infrastructures of meaning has not meant that its influence over how the South African subject is imagined has ended entirely. It would be a mistake to frame contemporary South Africa only through *lack*—through the lack of a national metanarrative, or through the lack of a coherent ideological state project. The operations of power and capital in the country have only taken on more complex and diffuse forms, and as a consequence to speak of the South African subject requires the continued renewal of our conceptual and critical vocabulary. This is not to say that every new theoretical approach must be foisted upon South African literature in order to see what sticks in an effort to ensure that South Africa does not fall out of the privileged position it occupies in the study of world literature. Instead, the uncertainty of the present demands more from our practices of reading South African literature, more in the way of historicizing and analyzing what national infrastructures remain in place and what emerges when elements of those infrastructures break down. As some aspects of the infrastructure that has shaped South African literature decay, what is made from that rubble, what new paths are constructed to circumvent the old? What alternative infrastructures of meaning are being constructed outside of official discourses, and what insurgent, temporary, and improvised networks arise in the absence of sanctioned ones? Glimpses of an alternative infrastructure were provided by the Fallist movement when protestors developed their own radical curricula and communal reading practices within the concourses of universities. How might their radical (and, in the eyes of the

university and the state, criminal) acts of reading inform the way in which South African literature is read and theorized in the future?

As I have noted, at times, in this dissertation, efforts to rethink the study of South African literature in the post-apartheid era have too often downplayed the inherently political practice of critique. Questions of power, race, and class have often been treated as though they were simply remnants of an old order that would be resolved in time, rather than critical to reading practices in the contemporary. In the process of conceptualizing (and reconceptualizing) this project, it has become increasingly clear to me that the task of reading South African literature requires a recognition of the ongoing transformations of power and subjection in the country. It also requires a recognition of the possibilities for disrupting those transformations, possibilities staged through fiction, staged in protest, and staged in the everyday practices of ordinary South Africans. Recognizing these changes and possibilities, perhaps counterintuitively, may require an embrace of the ways in which the South African subject has been rendered *criminal* by the post-apartheid state through the privatization and securitization of so much of South African life. If the state views its subjects as always capable of violence, if our hands are always already on fire, then perhaps our task lies in the rediscovery of the incendiary in South African literature.

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