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**PhD Dissertation**

*Tarred with the nastiness of uncovered history*

**Interrogating Social Class in Zoë Wicomb's Fiction**

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## 1. “Colouring the truth”: Introduction

The analysis of social class in the literary analysis of postcolonial literature seems to have been overlooked by scholars, whose focuses highly resonate with the racial issue – Fanon, Said, Spivak (along with the gender issue), Bhabha, etc. Thus, this dissertation derives from the apparent gap that exists in South African postcolonial studies due to “the understandable national obsession with race” (Seekings, 2003: 53). Zoë Wicomb, a South African writer and scholar living in Scotland, encapsulates in her oeuvre the intricacies of South African Apartheid and the post-Apartheid years, particularly through coloured female characters striving to navigate a racialized, castrated country<sup>1</sup>. By examining five of her works, this dissertation aims to explore the extent to which social class has been beneficial or unfavorable for each character and thus determine whether the ethos of discrimination is based that much on skin colour or gender, or on socioeconomic presumptions. My argument is – as Wicomb’s oeuvre demonstrates – while race is marked by class (class differences exist within racialised communities), class does not necessarily seem to be that marked by race. The intra-communal social classes and the shift from race to class as the main social marker during Apartheid not only demonstrate the relevance class has in the social structure, but also the insufficient research done in terms of class in the South African sociological field. Furthermore, the fact that Zoë Wicomb’s fiction has not been exhaustively analyzed from this perspective benefits the originality of the topic. Thus, this originality lies in the limited exploration of Wicomb's fiction from a class perspective. As most South African literature has been predominantly

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<sup>1</sup> The Apartheid racial classifications will be elaborated in Chapter 2.



analyzed in terms of race<sup>2</sup>, this study would contribute to Wicomb scholarship, adding a new perspective to her writing.

### 1.1. Overview of the research

Before European communities started their expansion and colonization around the world, class was considered the hierarchical method to organize societies, understanding ‘class’ as “a system of ordering society whereby people are divided into sets based on perceived social or economic status” (Oxford Dictionaries). Still, with the rise of the ‘White Man’ as the symbol of supremacy during the height of European colonization, social minorities, especially non-whites, started to be marginalized from communal decisions and social life. Despite the class analysis of this thesis and its undeniable relation to race, gender inequity cannot be forgotten as one of the first forms of exclusion in which men took advantage of their position for domination, since “most national governments are headed by men. Their schemes ignore women, [...] and did not recognize that their schemes harmed women until [...] 1970” (French, 2008: 351-2). Even before colonization, women were seen as dependent on men and thus as second-class citizens, as Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman assert in their *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*: “women are constituted as a group via dependency relationships *vis-à-vis* men, who are implicitly held responsible for these relationships” (2015: 202). Thus, while initially it was the economic situation of each individual what positioned them in their community, both interpretations of man’s superiority and white supremacy gradually devalued women’s and non-whites’ social engagement. Nowadays, issues of class, race and gender have been deeply studied and analyzed through diverse

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the use of the term “race” in this dissertation it is not, on any occasion, accepted as a valid category.

fields (including literature), although never resolved. Because of this, much work is still needed to understand the different changes and processes that communities have undergone to generate such an unequal global society, which initially categorized individuals based on their economy and production. Indeed, “to be classified as “European” [in colonial times] was based not on skin color alone but on tenuously balanced assessments of who was judged to act with reason, affective appropriateness, and a sense of morality” (Stoler, 2002: 6). Literary intellectuals of new generations specialized in ethnic studies such as Homi K. Bhabha (1994), Kwame A. Appiah (2006), Avtar Brah (1996) or Frantz Fanon (1986, 2001), and in gender studies like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) or Julia Kristeva (1991) have shed light on the inconclusive topic of social categorization and have helped to reach a better understanding of it. Among these literary intellectuals there is Gayatri C. Spivak, who coins the term “subaltern”. This subaltern figure is always in a subordinate position. This subaltern figure is usually, according to Spivak, ambiguous, irretrievably heterogeneous and never adopting a dominant point of view because of this liminal space (1988: 79). Furthermore, Spivak’s study explores the way in which the hegemonic power challenges the notion that human individuals are sovereign subjects with an autonomous agency over their consciousness. Thus, their discourses of power situate us here and there in particular positions and relations. What Spivak suggests here is that the higher spheres aimed to stratify society, relegating a significant part of the population to a weaker economic position, to a lower education, or to access to poorly paid jobs. In this way, what the higher spheres achieve is convincing the population that it is their right place in society, making them unable to decide about their way of living or to ascend in the hierarchical structure. This idea relates to the ‘essentialism’ Spivak introduces, which proposes an unchanging nature that secures their membership in a category so the individual’s identity is relegated to a specific place

in a system of differences. In this sense, there is an attempt from the outside – the hegemonic power in this case – to establish a collective speech, that is to say, the western authority is determined to speak for the subaltern figures rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. Subsequently, what Spivak aims to clarify are the ethical problems of investigating a different culture based on universal concepts and frameworks. The usual practice of white men talking about non-whites and how they cope with cultural clashes is, for the author, not objective enough and distorts the real situation of the subaltern figure (1998). Despite the attempt to establish a common theory, communities around the world differ in so many ways that it seems difficult to find a common solution to disparate contexts.

The case of South African society is one of the reasons for this disparity, firstly because of colonization and, secondly due to Apartheid, when a new in-between racial categorization termed as ‘coloured’<sup>3</sup> was introduced, which included those who were neither white nor black enough, usually a product of miscegenation. Thus, in many ways, the complexities involved in the construction of the coloured category were based on racial ideologies engendered through religious beliefs and historic and scientific “truths” created with a white supremacist mindset. In the discussion of the complexity of establishing a fixed meaning of the term “coloured,” Wicomb, who was classified as coloured, explains, it “exemplifies postmodernity in its shifting allegiances, its duplicitous play between the written capitalization and speech that denies or at least does not reveal the act of renaming—once again the silent inscription of shame” (Wicomb in Attridge and Jolly 1998: 93-94). Then, because of the Apartheid era, South Africa remains an exclusive case study of social classification centered on race, considering that class

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<sup>3</sup> Coloureds: “population group that emerged in the Cape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a result of contact between Africans, Malaysians and Europeans. Despite partial European heritage [they were] subjected to most Apartheid legal restrictions” (Clark et al. 2004: 13).

was absorbed into racial categories. As a consequence of this singular situation, Alexander reminds us that “the large area of overlap between “race” and “class” in South Africa makes this approach possible” (2007: 102).

In opposition to the racial discrimination non-whites received since colonization, the ANC (African National Congress) was established in 1912 to oppose segregation legislation and to protest against racial discrimination (Clark et al. 2004: 24)<sup>4</sup>. After the British victory over the Afrikaners, formerly Boers, at the beginning of the twentieth century, seven out of eight black South Africans lived in rural areas and usually worked as small farmers. However, the Natives Land Act of 1913 prohibited blacks from owning or renting land, except in the black reservations. In 1948 the National Party won only thirty-nine percent of the votes, but became the largest party in Parliament. They received support of two-thirds of the Afrikaners and twenty percent of English-speaking South Africans, without whom they would not have won (Culpin, 2000: 32). The party’s victory was based on their policy of Apartheid, and over the next years, they implemented a huge number of laws to enforce racial segregation in South Africa; “in fact, apartheid laws emerged over the course of four decades in response to the increasing contradictions inherent in the system and the intensification of opposition from Africans, Coloureds and Indians” (Clark et al. 2004: 49). South African studies have focused on racial terms precisely because of the racial fixation. However, this preoccupation has created a shaky ground for researchers, as “the problem of linking questions to race is not that researchers should [...] afford race no meaning. Rather, it is that race is *so loaded* with meaning that it may distort people’s views” (Erwin, 2012: 103; emphasis in original). Therefore, intellectuals such as Mohamed Adhikari, Laurel Baldwin-Ragaven or Saul Dubow have

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<sup>4</sup> The African National Party is a South African political party established in 1912 to advocate for the black South African’s rights. After 1948 the ANC’s main objective was to revoke Apartheid. However, it was banned from 1960 until 1990, when the negotiations to end Apartheid commenced.

participated in the project of discovering the intricacies of South African society based on racial foundations and giving voice to those oppressed people (non-whites, women or members of the low-class population) who have been silenced.

Analyses of South African society should include a balanced mixture of both the racial issue that obviously shapes this society, and the issue of class, which seems immovable from society for many theorists or anthropologists such as Thomas Eriksen (1998: 110). Despite the class approach this thesis aims to give to Wicomb's oeuvre, this research does not attempt to undermine the strategic importance of race as an essential factor of this study. Because of this, I would like to introduce the term *clethnicity* coined by Felicity Hand in her *The Subversion of Class and Gender Roles in the Novels of Lindsey Collen (1948-) Mauritian Social Activist and Writer* (2010). In her study, Hand determines this new word that could include both elements as influence for social formation, overcoming the contradictory labels that sometimes appear between class and ethnicity. The creation of a society must include melding elements from both factors, since there are many socio-cultural components shared by these two factors. In light of this, this study aims to analyse South African society through both elements together – class and race – without neglecting other socio-cultural markers such as gender roles – taking into account that one cannot be studied without the other. One of the main reasons for including race in a class study is well exemplified by Balibar who states:

The modern notion of race, in so far as it is invested in a discourse of contempt and discrimination and serves to split humanity up into a 'super-humanity' and a 'sub-humanity', did not initially have a national (or ethnic), but a *class* signification or rather (since the point is to represent the inequality of social classes as inequalities of nature) a caste signification (Balibar, 1991: 207; emphasis mine).

Thus, this study seeks to analyze the ambiguous issue of South African class in the Apartheid and Post-Apartheid era represented in the work of Zoë Wicomb, and its importance to the subsequent formation of racialized and gendered behaviours. The main

academic reason to analyze South African society in depth through Wicomb's literature arose precisely due to the lack of class analysis on its own (and not as part of a race study) in the South African literary field. Although it is true that class, race and gender tend to be studied together as inseparable categories, race and gender scholars commonly study their fields as already created categories (despite their constant changes), but seldom as derivations of an earlier existing classification. For instance, the Nigerian writer Catherine Obianuju Acholonu asserted that it is economic status what determines power hierarchies in Africa (in Shirin, 2016: 49). As a literary-based project, this dissertation aims to fill the gap in postcolonial literary research, which despite its focus on colonization and, due to the national fixation with race, has not adequately explored class as one of the main influences on the individual's social status.

South African fiction writers have also shed light on how their society works and revealed the hidden aspects of an almost unknown world which has faced racial stigma. Well-known authors such as Breyten Breytenbach, John Maxwell Coetzee or Njabulo Ndebele are just a few examples of contributions that brought a new insight into the South African situation. However, literary studies have shown how "the majority black population is denied the leisure to write, and the educational opportunity to practice or to read standard English literature. They also lack the financial stability to produce over time a long work of art" (Wicomb, interview, 1990: 93). Moreover, the writer's situation worsens with female writers in the South African literary panorama. Writers such as Bessie Head, Laurreta Ngcobo or Amelia House left South Africa to pursue their writing careers, likewise Wicomb moved to Scotland due to the limited opportunities for non-white women. These writers, along with other female writers who will be mentioned later for different purposes, share topics such as racial oppression, frustration, female independence, personal identity or social power. Travelling is, for example, a common

trope in the South African context, as it interrogates and surpasses the notion of ‘nation’ by presenting transnational relations between Africa and Europe. Additionally, after the Apartheid government introduced travel policies, identity documents became compulsory as a means of controlling the migrant flows and thus, creating obstacles for people with lower incomes: “successive governments targeted first Asians and ‘coloured persons’, then poor Europeans” (Macdonald, 2014: 160). By the mid-twentieth century, transnational movements between South Africa and Europe were mainly categorized into four main lines: “labour, education, forced migration and family joining” (Claudine Attias-Donfut et al., 2012: 65). Moreover, the constantly changing hierarchy must be examined due to the upward mobility that the Apartheid government allowed, offering opportunities for those relegated to lower racial categories. This means that class was still a powerful social marker in Apartheid society, despite its racial basis:

The fierce political uprising against apartheid of the 1980s led to a political and economic crisis that the ruling class sought to head off through a negotiated political settlement. [...] The apartheid regime surrendered political power but the capitalist economic relations – and privilege – that had shored it up remained unchallenged (Heywood, 2015: 259).

The Apartheid conditions that hindered non-whites’ linguistic development and perpetuated the inequity should be taken into account when considering education as one of the determinants for *clethnic* position. In her novels and short stories, writer Zoë Wicomb addresses all these issues, including those published during Apartheid (*You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987)) and after Apartheid (*David’s Story* (2000); *Playing in the Light* (2006); *The One That Got Away* (2008) and *October* (2014)).

Wicomb’s writing unveils the obscure segments of the racialized identity while challenging the readers’ capacity for empathy by placing them in uncomfortable, sometimes contradictory situations. Her oeuvre encapsulates the fundamental principles

of postcolonial theories exploring characters who aspire to imitate whites (Bhabha's theory on mimicry, 1984), the limited agency granted to individuals subordinated by social standards (Spivak's theory on the subaltern figure, 1988), the futility of utopian cosmopolitanism (Appiah and Derrida's theories on cosmopolitanism, 2006 and 2005 respectively), the shame of colouredness or the significance of education for upward mobility for previous generations. Literary researchers such as Samuelson, Driver, Ritcher, Gurnah, Baiada or Van der Vlies have recognized Wicomb's achievement in portraying a social reality by drawing on, though not explicitly using, historical events. Driver succinctly summarizes Wicomb's contribution to the South African literary field:

Wicomb's writing allows us to re-imagine the nation as open and fluid, receptive to change and exchange even in the matter of racial identity, and then also as existing prior to the invention of race and ethnicity. *David's Story* presents a Griqua history that speaks of the vernacular and the cosmopolitan combined, before the separation into an opposition between nationalisms and the relegation of the idea of the cosmopolitan to the European outside Africa (2011: 104).

The entire body of Wicomb's work offers the reader a glimpse into the fragmented realities of the Apartheid and post-Apartheid years. However, as seen throughout this thesis, the racial issue in South Africa has been extensively examined from both sociologically and literary perspectives. Nevertheless, this dissertation is founded on the belief that "the consequences of class in a wide variety of areas needs to be probed [because] despite the long history of Marxist analysis of and in South Africa, the study of class in South Africa remains in its infancy" (Seekings, 2003: 55), resulting in a research gap in postcolonial studies. By concentrating on this specific author, who encapsulates both the essence and the complexities of South African society, and considering class as an influence on racial and gendered formations, this study does not seek to assert the superiority of class over race but to explore the extent to which social class has been beneficial or unfavorable for each character as presented in the literary work of Zoë



Wicomb; and thus determine whether the ethos of discrimination is based that much on skin colour or gender, or on socioeconomic presumptions. Furthermore, the limited analysis of Zoë Wicomb's fiction from this perspective opens up a new approach to Wicomb scholarship and South African literature in general. However, the deciding factor for this investigation was that Wicomb's literature has been explored through the lens of race – as is the case with most South African literature – so this study would contribute to critical studies on Wicomb's oeuvre, adding a new perspective to her writing. Thus, I make no attempt to survey what has become a massive field, but instead steer my selection of these issues and debates in the direction I see Wicomb's fiction taking. Finally, her latest novel *Still Life* (2020)<sup>5</sup>, will not be included in the analysis considering that it is set in pre-Apartheid South Africa and it is a departure from the issues she deals with in her previous works.

## 1.2. Theoretical framework

During the Apartheid era in South Africa, the political situation garnered increased attention as white supremacists exploited their position and oppressed those beneath them on the social ladder. This led many scholars specializing in ethnic studies to recognize the need to explore and examine the consequences of Apartheid. However, due to the militant suppression of non-whites' rights under Apartheid's "Whites Only" policy, analyses of South African society primarily focus, as noted before, on racial issues. Nevertheless, this thesis aims to re-read South African stratifications since both class and race are entwined, particularly through the in-between racial category of "coloured".

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<sup>5</sup> *Still Life* tries to construct a biography of the poet Thomas Pringle, better known as "the father of South African poetry", through the characters of Mary Prince – a West Indian slave – and Sir Nicholas Green – a time traveler – by travelling across time and space. By doing so, Wicomb provides the reader with a long-term analysis of colonial history.

Numerous intellectuals have made significant contributions to the field of South African studies. One example is Mohamed Adhikari, whose paper “Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration: Continuity and Change in the Expression of Coloured Identity in White Supremacist South Africa, 1910-1994” in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* (2006) questions the transformations of coloured identity and highlights the persistence of its expression despite some changes in identity (473). The significance of this observation lies precisely in the “consistency” maintained regarding race as an enduring social imposition, seemingly impossible to dissolve or deconstruct. It suggests that South African society became racialized early on, leaving no other way to categorize the population. This last suggestion applies to all races, as even whites consistently occupy a higher social position, although in Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light* it can be seen how whiteness is defined “in terms of what it is not” (2006: 121)<sup>6</sup>. Although Adhikari primarily focuses on racial concerns, his perspective provides a global understanding of South African society, addressing various social aspects relevant to this investigation. Still, as Kira Erwin asserts “race is not *always* an important identity in South Africa” (2012: 95). She postulates that present-day South Africa still associates race with culture, language or income despite the disconnection that exists among them now. This interpretation implies that it is not that there is something inherently more important than race, but rather that people assign greater importance to race than it truly warrants, even after the demise of Apartheid. In fact, Ronit Frenkel asserts that “in the present, coloured identity is both contested and embraced across class, religion, region and culture” (2008: 151) by mentioning Zimitri Erasmus’ idea that “coloured identity today is not based on racial syncretism but on creolization” (ibid). Additionally, other scholars that have been committed to the study of South African society, despite their different focuses, can be

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 5 for a more detailed analysis of what whiteness signified.

applicable in this dissertation. Whether they come from the sociological field such as David Attwell, Christopher Culpin, Jacob Dlamini, Zimitri Erasmus, Sol Plaatje or John Orman; or the literary field such as Derek Attridge, Gabeba Baderoon, Rita Barnard, Elleke Boehmer, Njabulo Ndebele, and Breyten Breytenbach and Albie Sachs – for their jail memoirs during Apartheid –, all offer insights into a South African social analysis, despite their differing eras and backgrounds, and collectively, they shape a sample of the country’s social situation since Apartheid.

One of the main reasons for this dissertation was precisely the isolated voices of South African female writers on the global scene. Despite the fact that non-white female literature is gradually reaching global audiences, there are still many invisible literatures that should have space on the international arena. Specifically dealing with South African female writers, apart from Zoë Wicomb and the Nobel prize winner Nadine Gordimer, there are other writers such as Jean Marquard, who focuses on the ordinariness resulting from the fact that “English-speaking South Africa is quintessentially a society without heroes” (Marquard, 1978: 17). Like many other South African female writers, Marquard accentuates the complexities of South African divided society through the lenses of racial, religious or economic beliefs that have fragmented the country into small minority groups, likewise she explores those minorities’ situations. Alongside Marquard, other South African female writers will be considered for the similarities shared with Wicomb’s writing, such as Farida Karodia, who addresses the problems resulting from the ethnic labelling in South Africa. These writers, along with the ones aforementioned in the overview of this research - Bessie Head, Laretta Ngcobo or Amelia House – and other African writers can be helpful in the exploration of Wicomb’s work for the ethnic socio-cultural approach all these writers share. For instance, the Mauritian Ananda Devi displays similar diasporic individuals and explores their alienation after leaving their land

(in fact, she moved to Paris as Wicomb moved to Glasgow). This suggests that, despite South Africa's uncommon social structure, most of the problems showed in Wicomb's oeuvre are the problems of other African countries. In light of the number of authors within the African continent, and particularly in South Africa, I found it necessary to limit the scope of the analysis to a select few to provide the reader with a general understanding of the general themes shared by these authors.

In addition, the work of renowned theorists who have addressed global social issues, rather than solely focusing on the South African social structure, can also provide valuable insights. Thus, intellectuals such as Kwame Appiah with *The Ethics of Identity* (2005) or *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), Frantz Fanon with both his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001), Zygmunt Bauman with his "Modernity, Racism, Extermination", "Social Issues of Law and Order" or *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (all of them written in 2000) or Stuart Hall have dealt with more universal dilemmas regarding race and social structure such as the opposition between the privileged and the deprived, and all of them offer perspectives on race and social structure that may be relevant to this dissertation. Moreover, the concept of cosmopolitanism is

not the name for a dialogue among static closed cultures, each of which is internally homogenous and different from all others; not a celebration of the beauty of a collection of closed boxes. What I want to make plausible is, instead, a form of universalism that is sensitive to the ways in which historical context may shape the significance of a practice (Appiah, 2005: 223).

So, following Appiah, it will be explored for its relevance to this investigation. Jacques Derrida's analysis of incompatible universal hospitality and the increasing nationalisms (2005), along with Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) and Paul Gilroy's idea of the "Black Atlantic" (1993) as a

dialogical intellectual system of discourse between the United States and Europe about the nature of modernity concerning cultural and national identities [...] Gilroy excludes Africa and Latin America [to reflect] Gilroy's political understanding of the dynamic structure of the black world within the maelstrom of modernity (Masilela, 1996: 88).

His study of institutionalized racism, cosmopolitanism and democracy in South Africa (2005), can importantly assist in this dissertation. Other scholars such as Robert Holton or Martha Nussbaum, who have delved into cosmopolitanism, offer guidebooks that could enhance the understanding of cosmopolitanism for this investigation. Furthermore, theories such as Ben Pitcher's on contemporary racism in Britain stemming from multiculturalism, Robert Fine's on human rights and crimes against humanity or Ann Stoler's analysis of racism and colonial power will also be considered due to their relevance to the South African social context and the similarities they share. By drawing upon these theorists and their works, this dissertation can expand its scope to address broader issues and connect the South African social structure with global debates on race, cosmopolitanism, human rights, and power dynamics.

Furthermore, a theory that could be restrictive for the study of South Africa is Bhabha's 'binarisms'. In his *The Location of Culture* (1994) he claims the binaries white/coloured and colonizer/colonized are the basis for racialized attitudes. However, the case of the South African 'coloureds' breaks this binarism, which can be applicable in many other multicultural contexts. While Homi Bhabha's theory of binarisms may have limitations in the study of South Africa, other aspects of Bhabha's work, such as his theory of colonial mimicry, will still be considered and examined for their applicability to the research. Although gender is not the primary focus of this dissertation, its significance as a social marker cannot be ignored. Therefore, researchers in feminist studies like Judith Butler, Laura Hamilton, and Julia Kristeva will be consulted not only to gain insights into

gender dynamics, but also to explore the complexities of the female writer since: “women remain outside of the networks which facilitate the production of literature... They must be given the opportunity to express or present their works without feeling that there are few women writers around” (Interview to Manoko Nchwe, 1986).

Global theories on class will also be taken into account to gain a better awareness of the role of class in society, and how these global theories can be applied to the South African literary context. Thus, critics such as Antonio Gramsci – whose theory of cultural hegemony of capitalism resonates with the basis of the dominant classes imposing the public norms as social domination weapons to maintain the constructed hierarchy (1971) –, Aijaz Ahmad with his study on capitalism’s impact in developing countries (1996), the American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, or Etienne Balibar along with his philosophical approach to class and racism (1991) can be valuable resources for the purpose of this research. Additionally, Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory on how the ruling classes preserve their power and privileges (1979), and different social class works such as David Cannadine’s *Class in Britain* (2000), Simon Charlesworth’s *A Phenomenology of Working Class Experience* (2000), Patrick Joyce’s *Class* (1995) or Max Weber’s *Economy and Society* (2005) will be also taken into consideration for the class insights they provide. These studies, along with Erik Wright’s theories on class as the main factor for social discrimination (1997, 2005) can be used as an historical source of statistics that can contribute to the understanding on class dynamics. In the latter study, Wright considers the ways in which race and citizenship status impact on social reproduction and concludes that domestic employees are less considered because they tend to be socio-spatially isolated (they share the site of production and the site of reproduction), and these are usually coloured and black people and women, grounded in the master-servant and husband-wife relation of historical slavery (2005). Specifically in the South African

sociological context, Jeremy Seekings carried out a study on South African social stratification which shows that class position is primarily determined by wealth and skills (working positions) and not necessarily by race (*Class, Race, and Inequity in South Africa*, 2005). Furthermore, Charles Fenstein delves into the economic history of South Africa and how this has evolved into discrimination (2005). In addition, the Intersectionality theory – which defends that the individual’s identity is shaped by various social factors –, will be analyzed in depth in the subsequent section for the relevance it has for this investigation. By incorporating these theories and studies, this dissertation aims to develop a comprehensive framework for analyzing the intersections of race, class, and gender in the South African social context as portrayed in the literature of Zoë Wicomb.

### **1.3. Zoë Wicomb criticism**

Zoë Wicomb is a well-known South African writer born in the Western Cape in 1948. Her oeuvre, categorized as creative writing, delves deep not only into the difficulties non-whites had to cope with in the pre-Apartheid and Apartheid era, but also into her own experience as a non-white woman striving to carve out a space for herself in the academic literary field. Wicomb directly encountered the negative impacts Apartheid brought, as for instance, the migratory translocations when she moved to the United Kingdom after feeling the oppressiveness of an unfair hierarchical society in the late sixties when the anti-Apartheid resistance movement was still nascent. Throughout all her novels and short stories, Wicomb explores the various social barriers that coloureds faced under Apartheid, including the impact of language. In Apartheid South Africa, society was divided into four major racial categories, with whites occupying the upper social category, followed by coloureds and Indians (Asians) and finally natives (blacks).

As a coloured woman born and bred in South Africa, her writing is a suitable connecting link to achieve a broader understanding of the experiences of coloured individuals during this period. In addition to her fiction, Zoë Wicomb has widely contributed to the discourse on coloured identity through articles and interviews. Thus, contributions such as “Shame and Identity (1998), “Culture Beyond Color?” (2003) or her approach to race and nation (2018); along with some interviews conducted by Eva Hunter or Ewald Mengel, can hopefully be convenient for the analysis of her work.

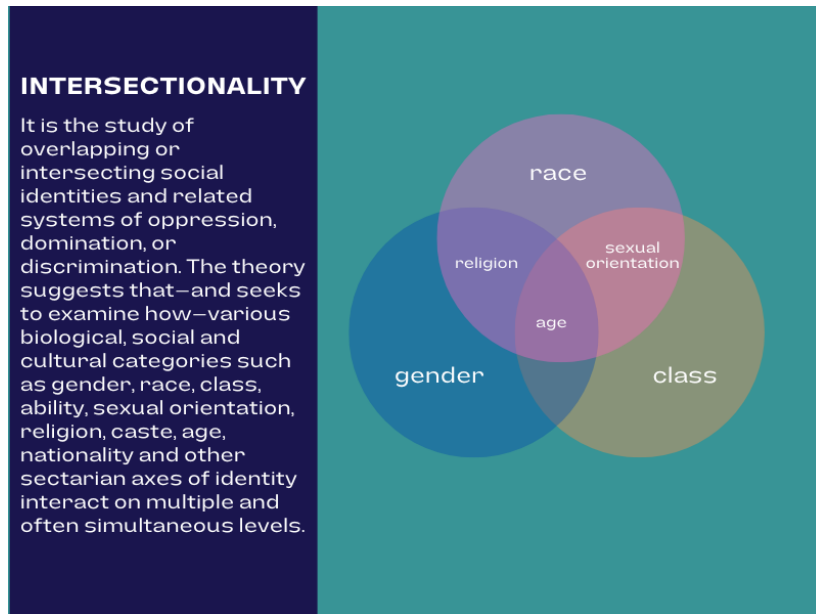
Zoë Wicomb’s fiction has garnered attention from various critics who have approached her work from different perspectives. Therefore, feminist critique, uncanny translocations or queer studies can be applied to her works in separate analyses. Christa Baiada’s “On Women, Bodies, and Nation: Feminist Critique and Revision in Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story*” (2008), Virginia Ritcher’s “Zoë Wicomb’s Ghosts: Uncanny Translocations in *David’s Story* and *The One That Got Away*” (2011), Andrew van der Vlies’ “Zoë Wicomb’s Queer Cosmopolitanisms” (2011), Derek Attridge’s “Zoë Wicomb’s Home Truths: Place, Genealogy and Identity in *David’s Story*” (2005), Ken Barris’s analysis of realism in *David’s Story* (2010), are just a few examples of Wicomb research focused on either one topic or a Wicomb novel. However, the number of scholars who have conducted in-depth analyses of Wicomb’s narratives remains relatively small. Dorothy Driver, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Meg Samuelson are among the few who have undertaken an in-depth analysis of Wicomb’s narratives. Driver focuses her research on the social constructions that have derived from Apartheid, narrowing the scope to race and gender. She has delved, among other issues, into Wicomb’s representation of Cape cosmopolitanism and its history. Gurnah’s primary emphasis is on issues of displacement, homesickness and belonging. Although he was born in Zanzibar, his work represents the commonality shared by many African countries: belonging, which is in fact one of the



topics he analyses in Wicomb's fiction (2011). Finally, Samuelson who, despite being focused on postcolonial studies, stands out for her noteworthy contributions to oceanic studies including Africa and Asia. Her contributions to Wicomb's work are numerous and with disparate focuses, from the women of the guerrilla (2007) to the surge of the sea in Wicomb's fiction (2010). Nonetheless, their approaches have been associated to the non-decreasing racial problem in South Africa, that is to say, their analyses of Wicomb's imagery and techniques have been used to reexamine the racial issue. Accordingly, this project seeks to reconsider the South African case on the basis of class or *clethnicity* rather than solely focusing on race, which has traditionally been the primary focus of social and literary investigation in South Africa.

By exploring Wicomb's imagery of xenophobia, travelling or linguistic development in her fiction, this study aims to analyze the different interactions and their following reactions among classes, races or genders, since the density and complexity of Wicomb's novels may reveal a new angle from which the issue of class could be profoundly explored as a crucial category – despite its relation to other forms of categorization. Furthermore, despite the fundamental studies by Marxist theorists such as Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson or Antonio Gramsci, there is a dearth of literary critics expressly specialized in class as a categorization as a means of social grouping. Once again, Seeking's timely remark about “the understandable national obsession with race” (Seekings, 2003: 53) allow a social analysis in literature that may have been overlooked specifically in the South African literary field. Drawing on a range of theories, including those aforementioned, this dissertation aims to fill the gap in Wicomb's literary criticism by examining, not whether class is – or is not – more significant than race, but rather the extent to which social class has been beneficial or unfavorable for each character as presented in the South African literary field.

## 1.4. Intersectionality

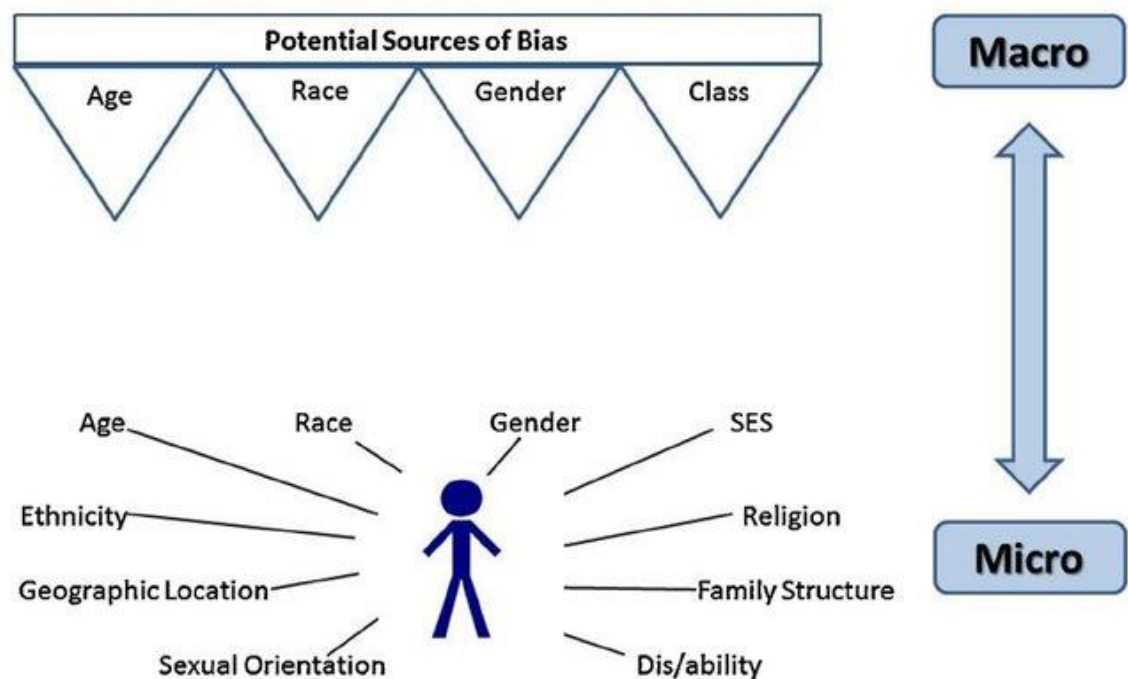


Intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics (Cho et al. 2013: 787).

According to intersectionality, which first appeared within gender studies and was properly coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Phoenix et al, 2006: 187), inequality never happens due to a single factor but to a set of aspects that finally position a person or a community in a subordinate position. This theory then, defends the idea of social categories such as race, class and gender as inseparable groups when analyzing a specific social group. As this project is mainly dedicated to the representation of class in literature, it is important to recognize that the individual's hierarchical position cannot be studied without acknowledging the importance of his or her race and gender, which usually gains more relevance than it may have had at the beginning of the analysis. The academic reason to explore the work of Zoë Wicomb comes precisely due to her witty portrayal of this interconnection that exists between class and other social factors that shape her

characters. As explained by Yochay Nadan et al. (2014) intersectionality can be used as a tool to understand how both the individual and the others' sociocultural factors reciprocally influence each other to position the individual in a specific position in society. They claim that intersectionality is also useful to comprehend how individual factors such as culture or ethnicity are determined by larger social factors.

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how multiple identities such as gender, race and socioeconomic status *simultaneously* shape human experience at the individual level through interlocking systems of bias and inequality that exist at the macro social-structural level (e.g., sexism, racism, and classism) (Nadan et al. 2014: 43).



\*Nadan et al. (2014) Intersectionality theory.

The understanding of intersectionality has multiple viewpoints in which the different critics highlight the aspects they consider more relevant for the analysis while they argue others' examination of the concept. In this section I will deal with a number of authors who explore intersectionality to provide an overview of how this concept is

addressed. Thus, many scholars have already dealt with this strategy despite the different interpretations that surround the concept of intersectionality. Matsuda (1991) defines her interpretation as follows:

The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call “the other question”. When I see something that looks racist, I ask “Where is the patriarchy in this?” When I see something sexist, I ask “Where is the heterosexism in this?” When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask “Where are the class interests in this?” (1991: 1189).

Along with this interpretation, Helma Lutz (2015) proposes three different levels of analysis. First, partiality, “the differences in situatedness between two people [that] can include class, race/ethnicity, age gender...” (2015: 40). In second place, she assumes that “the identity category that is used in the first place [...] is not necessarily the most important one” (2015: 41). And third, she reminds us of “intersectionality on the level of power relations” (2015: 41). With this interpretation, characters in Zoë Wicomb’s novels should not be studied through a single social category but through a set of them, that is to say, women should not be analyzed only through the lens of gender; class and gender must be taken into consideration to achieve a broader comprehension of the character’s personality. In other words, “intersectionality theory proposes that analyses that focus on gender, race, or class independently are insufficient because these social positions are experienced simultaneously” (Nadan et al. 2014: 43).

Stewart and McDermott, for example, propose three basic principles of intersectionality. Firstly, that sociocultural groups are heterogeneous; secondly, that each individual could identify themselves with more than one societal group and thirdly, that “power differentials are a frequently neglected but an influential implication of social structure” (Stewart et al. 2004). Baukje Prins’ analysis, moreover, distinguishes between two different types of intersectionality, the systemic and the constructionist, claiming the

latter to be more accurate than the systemic, which neglects some forms of identifications (Prins, 2006). MacKinnon (2013) explores the concept of intersectionality as method, which “explicitly names systems of domination as well as the outcomes and structural realities resulting from their convergence”, that is to say, it does not only focus on the relation among class, race and gender, but also highlights white male supremacy as the main reason behind these forms of subordination. Furthermore, he claims that intersectionality focuses on the “social hierarchy [that] creates the experiences that produce the categories that intersect” (MacKinnon, 2013: 1024). It is worth mentioning here Alice Ludvig’s approach, as she defends the idea that in the analysis of gender, it is important to take into account not only the intersectional axes but also how place and time influence a specific subject (Ludvig, 2006). Crenshaw – mentioned above – has one of the earliest works on intersectionality (1991), with a focus on black women’s lives. She divides the intersectionality framework into three different segments: structural, political and representational. Structural intersectionality argues that black women’s experiences differ from those of both, white women and black men and, “despite the distinctions, Black women’s lives are confined to the lenses that privilege the experiences of White women and Black men” (Haynes et al. 2020: 6). Political intersectionality deals with the fact that black women have been left aside and voiceless in politics, claiming that gender-focused political programs center on white women and political programs for race focus solely on black men (Crenshaw, 1991). Finally, representational intersectionality refers to the idea of black women being misrepresented in discourses and how these discourses reinforce the stereotype of black women as violent, savage or hypersexual and so perpetuate the racist and gendered speech against this community (Patton et al. 2018).

Intersectionality has been used in literary analysis as an approach to consider how the character’s different sociocultural factors such as class, gender, race or age interact to

shape his or her life experiences. Sue Nichols and Garth Stahl conduct an analysis on how the general literary review sometimes overlooks factors that should be taken into consideration and decide what should be included and excluded. However, they argue that “there is nothing in principle stopping structured literature review from including a wide range of methodological approaches” (Nichols et al. 2019: 3). They provide the reader with an example of how literary criticism on disability studies, despite the amount of literature based on this issue, usually fails to create an accurate intersectional methodology that includes all the sociocultural factors that affect the individual. Finally, it is worth mentioning their approach to the intersectional relation among class, race and gender for the purpose of this thesis. In the analysis of the relation among them, they highlight, for instance, how class has been a decisive element for gender in the United Kingdom. However, in terms of literary criticism, Hamilton argues that the relation between social class and sexuality has not been exhaustively examined despite a large part of the male population who believe that wealth is “gender complementarity” (Hamilton, 2014: 247).

In considering how intersectionality is used, we learn that when gender is emphasized as intersecting with ethnicity, scholars often draw on additional frameworks e.g., multi-racial feminist discourse (Ramirez 2013) [and they also] show how gender is racialised as well as how race is gendered (Nichols et al. 2019: 6).

Moreover, different scholars have pointed out both the lack of intersectional identities and the neglect of intersectionality in literature. Ange-Marie Hancock, for instance, claims that one of the main projects of intersectionality has been largely disregarded in literature, that of “how intersectionality demands a rearticulation of the relationships between what are traditionally perceived as conceptually distinct analytical categories of difference” (Hancock, 2016: 122). Furthermore, she adds that “even if an “intersectional identity” is not represented in the literature, it can certainly be included as

part of this broader analytical arena” (Hancock, 2016: 196). Wicomb provides the reader with a meaningful number of intersectional characters that confront and/or overcome the socio-cultural gaps they encounter, at the same time that she reshapes the socio-cultural relationships that exist among different communities.

Hancock’s study on intersectionality and gender is inspired by the feminist works that emerged from social activism, but it resonates with Wicomb’s work in the way they understand postcolonial theory. Although Hancock’s analysis is focused on the research community, both texts deal with the incongruities of segregation and the sometimes-hindered communication between communities and thus, both can be identified with

literary theory arguments made by postcolonial feminists like Gayatri Spivak (“Can the Subaltern Speak?”) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (“Under Western Eyes”). That these intellectual communities spoke more within themselves than across disciplinary boundaries as the ideas emerged makes it all the more remarkable that the concerns and ideas were so similar (Hancock, 2016: 31-32).

Despite the multiple viewpoints intersectionality has generated in the literary field and despite all the criticism that the literary field has received for its inaccurate representation of intersectional identities, the role literature plays in the process of acknowledging “the material, aesthetic, emotional and spiritual experiences of people of color” (Crenshaw et al, 1995: 314) is undeniable for the majority of scholars, as its fictional form allows the writer to represent the appalling conditions of those who have been silenced by history.

Thus, despite the numerous approaches intersectionality has generated in the different fields of study (gender studies, politics, sociology...), there are some prevailing aspects that almost all approaches share – and the ones this thesis aims to apply to Wicomb’s oeuvre. One of the main shared points is the analysis of power systems, meaning the ways states establish regimes of identity, family or reproduction; as well as

how these state organizations create strategies to design specific agendas. Concerning the social aspect, intersectionality methods must consider the socio-cultural space and time to which the individual belongs, likewise the ways race and gender interact with class in the labour market. In summary, the fundamental idea that builds intersectionality is to acknowledge that a character's personality is not shaped by a single axis but by multiple axes. The analyst should not depend on one socio-cultural factor but on a combination of them. Patricia Hill's and Sirma Bilge's book *Intersectionality* (2020) provides an overview of the concept of intersectionality, claiming that identity categories "are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division [...] but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality, as an analytical tool, gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves" (2020: 193).

Moreover, Hancock highlights the interventions in the Black Feminist movement of Crenshaw and Collins, "who articulated a race-gender analysis that meaningfully included sexuality (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Harris 2009) and class (the inclusion of the latter was also due to the efforts of the National Welfare Rights Organization, NWRO)" (Hancock, 2016: 30). Precisely because of its race-gender basis, intersectionality has been recently criticized for rejecting class, but still, some critics attach this neglect to the fact that "it has instead fallen out of the discussion of intersectionality among the interpretive community, a different dilemma worth wrangling with on its own terms" (Hancock, 2016: 44). The originality of this thesis lies precisely on the premise of the omission of class from recent social research and how it should be revised as a crucial factor in further literary analyses.

Thus, as I will contend throughout this dissertation, social class will indeed be wrangled with. It plays an essential role in the social structure, class being one of the strongest social markers that shape not only the South African population, but the global



population. Wicomb's work would serve as an example of this idea. While it is very much focused on the race-gender basis that intersectionality agrees with, she gives space to class in her oeuvre. Thus, Wicomb displays in her work the importance of a stable economic position for both upward mobility and social position by providing the reader with coloured female characters that come from different socio-economic backgrounds. What Wicomb does then, is give her female characters the power for upward mobility despite the fact that they do not belong to the highest social class. This idea resonates with Shah's perspective on intersectionality:

Women of color have added to this perspective by introducing the particular ways they are oppressed, and their goal is to build power among women of color. The special powerlessness created by the economic servitude of women also leads to a recognition of the need to build power among poor, working-class women (Shah, 1997: 43).

From the collected data, the problem of intersectionality lies in the researchers' aim to prove one social marker as more relevant than others. However, what intersectionality precisely argues is how all the social markers together can shape very different social positions depending on the individual's race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation... But neither of them should be considered as the only shaping marker for the individual. Because of this, researchers focused on either one social marker or another believe in their studied social marker as the main socio-cultural problem, arguing that:

although women are racist, when men disappear and no longer rule, racism will not be a problem. It's very analogous to people who are Marxists who say 'Well, when class oppression and racism end, definitely the oppression of women and lesbians will end.' What lesbian separatists are saying is that when we get rid of men, sexism and racism will end too (Beverly Smith 1980, in Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983: 122–123).

Despite the fact that some critics claim to have solved the social gap through the suppression of a social marker (for example, the gender issue must be solved by the

disappearance of men or the racial issue must be solved by the suppression of whites), the class issue seems trickier for the higher classes' necessity of an existing lower category: "the middle class never understands the poor because they always need to use them" (Morgan, 1970: 361). This thesis, however, does not aim to prove class as the main social marker in South Africa on the contrary, to prove the fact that class must not be overlooked by researchers in the South African literary field, as has happened in the past years.

In some emerging market economies such as South Africa, intersectionality plays an important role for the analysis of the social gap, South Africa being on the list of states contending with the complex reality of violence. "The efforts of advocates and like-minded policy makers focus on protection, prosecution, and prevention" (Montoya, 2013: 8), but there remains a tension between the responsiveness of government in terms of new laws and policy initiatives and the on-the-ground effectiveness of such efforts (Weldon 2002; Montoya, 2013). The delicate social situation of South Africa sometimes impedes a proper socio-economic study of its society. This, along with the fact that social divisions have different organizing logics (Skeggs, 2006) – that is to say, race cannot be analyzed in the same way as social class – hinders an accurate social representation of the country, and even more if this representation relates to socio-economic positions.

Furthermore, another fact that minimizes the impact of intersectionality is the understandable categorization "to name intersectional positions shared by groups (e.g., 'Black women professors')" (Nichols et al. 2019: 9-10). Although these categorizations are meant to explain how the members of each group experience the different social policies, they can be restrictive for some individuals that may belong to a specific social group but still do not fit in some aspects. In fact, Wicomb's work displays different coloured female characters with a more or less similar background, who travel overseas for professional reasons (which could be considered a social group as specific as Nichols

and Stahl's example). However, each protagonist has a different response to their gender or race, a different life experience and, definitely, each one has a different outcome, and thus, Wicomb's characters would resonate with Buitelaar's perspective on identity development, arguing that identity is the temporary outcome of responses to the various ways in which we are addressed (in Phoenix and Pattynama "Intersectionality", 2006: 191). Both Wicomb's protagonists and their identities' fluctuation throughout their lives show, firstly, the inaccuracy of categorizing population and, secondly, the difficulties that lie behind the socio-economic analysis of South Africa.

Moreover, and despite its Iranian basis, Fathi's analysis of intersectionality brings two great insights for this dissertation: the issues of home and education as part of the intersectionality theory, both highly attached to class. Fathi asserts that "the processes of positioning within hegemonic class relations are spatialised. In other words, we need to make sense of spaces and places in order to identify where we want to make a home or what we call a home, a comfortable place or a hostile place" (Fathi, 2017: 81). The creation of a home, along with the access to education, are remarkable matters firstly, for the social development (for intersectionality) and, secondly, for the individual's position in the social hierarchy (specifically for social class). In her study, Fathi interviewed different Iranian women and "what was characteristic of these women's attempts to make sense of class was the importance of their educational aspiration to become a khanoum<sup>7</sup> doctor" (Fathi, 2017: 85-86). As will be seen later, education has had a deep impact in former generations due to the importance it had for upward mobility. This idea also resonates with Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* (2009) for its analysis of the impact education had in his mother's generation. Dlamini's theory will be referred to in many occasions in this dissertation as it explains how the fight for education varied depending

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<sup>7</sup> See Glossary.

on the social class, and how class differences existed even within the black population: “the colour of a person’s skin did not have much to do with social distinction” (2009: 83). Their studies demonstrate how older generations constructed their lives’ trajectories and their children’s towards the highest level of education as possible.

Chapter one provides an overview of the thesis, its methodology, and introduces the main theories that will be used for the analysis. Chapter two delves into South African social history since 1948 and the concept of class, providing the reader with a class background and the role social class has in South Africa. Furthermore, the Apartheid and post-Apartheid literary context is explored through the main writers and tendencies. Chapter three deals with Wicomb’s first work, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), where she tells the story of Frieda Shenton, an English-speaking coloured woman who, despite belonging to a relatively high class, suffers the negative consequences of being coloured. Section 3.1 is dedicated to language and the relation between Englishness and power. Chapter four refers to *David’s Story* (2000), where the main topic analyzed is the guerrilla movement that took place during and against Apartheid. Despite David’s prominence in the novel, the story is much based on the women of the guerrilla and how they dealt with being women in a man’s world. Because of women’s significance in *David’s Story*, section 4.1 is devoted to the relation between the female figures in the novel and Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi slave who was exhibited around Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Chapter five is committed to her novel *Playing in the Light* (2006). It is the only work with a white protagonist, Marion Campbell, and thus, the class and race prejudices in this novel stand out from the other works. In this chapter, the focus is on both the Campbell’s relation with non-whites and the subsequent Marion’s interaction to non-whites (and specifically with her first non-white employee, Brenda). Furthermore, because of the importance Wicomb gives to the ocean, section 5.1 is

devoted to the oceanic imaginaries of the collection and the meaning the sea has for the different characters. Chapter six deals with *The One That Got Away* (2008) and the stories in this collection are examined in terms of transnational identities, the feeling of ‘unhomeliness’ and the experience of displacement. In McCann’s words: “Wicomb [...] is also concerned with place and “the construction of home as a problematic space” (2010: 55). Because of the fact many of these short stories are set in Scotland, section 6.1 is focused on the representation of non-white cultures in the cultural arena of European countries, specifically on how museums are used as institutional tools to misrepresent non-European cultures. Chapter seven is devoted to *October* (2014), the last work analyzed in this dissertation. Here, the major issues are those of homemaking, exile and return through the character of Mercia Murray, a fifty-two years old woman who leaves Scotland after twenty-five years after her Scottish partner leaves her. Due to the fact that this novel is much based on the intra-familial relations, racial prejudices are not as present as they were in other works of Wicomb. However, classist attitudes are noticeable throughout the whole story. Because of this, section 7.1 is focused on the class inequalities inside and outside the familiar space. Finally, Chapter eight presents the general conclusions of the dissertation and suggests areas for further research that would contribute to the issue of social class in the postcolonial literary field of South Africa. An Afrikaans-English glossary is included at the end of the dissertation to facilitate the reader’s reading.

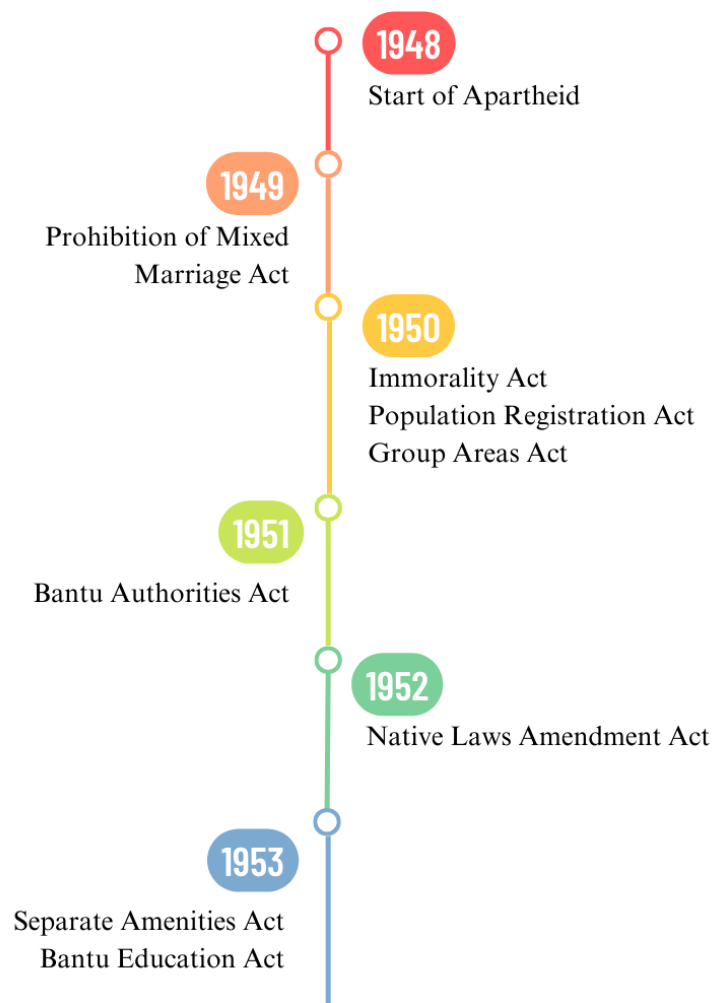
## **2. “A time to be born, a time to die”: South African Social History since 1948**

Before the onset of Apartheid and its official sanction after the victory of the National Party in 1948, inequality was already present in South African lands. White colonizers and rulers, both Dutch and British, already treated black people unequally because of their race. They fought them, took their land, forced them to work, enslaved them and regarded them as inferior human beings. In opposition to this racial discrimination, the ANC (African National Congress) in 1912 was established to oppose segregation legislation and to protest against racial discrimination (Clark et al. 2004: 24). After the British victory over the Boers at the beginning of the twentieth century, seven out of eight black South Africans lived in rural areas working, usually, as small farmers. However, under the Natives Land Act of 1913 blacks could not own or rent land except in the black reservations. These made up only seven percent of the land, and share-cropping was banned. Blacks could only occupy white-owned land if they worked for the farmer. Nevertheless, whites wanted black people to come and work in their mines and factories, and as domestic servants. Thus, Africans moved into towns and particularly to those areas where poor white people lived. Furthermore, there was another racial barrier as regards labour that considered black, coloureds and Asian Africans unable to do any skilled or semi-skilled work. Fenstein notes that “this colour bar is one of the most distinctive aspects of South Africa’s economic history” (2012: 74). There was a single but powerful difference between poor whites and poor blacks: the whites had the right to vote. Thus, it was decided to segregate housing, inside towns, the more desirable areas were allocated for ‘whites only’ housing. However, the Urban Areas Act (1923) was not fully enforced everywhere. In some places, like District Six in Cape Town, black people owned houses or had secure leases- blacks and whites lived side by side (Culpin, 2000:

28). White rulers also imposed one of the most hated segregation laws, the Pass law in the early twentieth century. This law reduced black people's ability to move freely and made them vulnerable to police harassment at any time. Every black person was from that moment a potential criminal. Many anti-pass demonstrations took place over the years, but they did not succeed. However, it introduced many black Africans who had just arrived in the city to political activity. However, it was not until 1948 that the separation of races was enshrined in the South African constitution. Just before Apartheid, in 1946 the government divided the South African population into just four groups: blacks (sixty-nine percent), whites (twenty-one percent), coloureds (eight percent) and Asians (two percent) (Culpin, 2000: 15).

In 1948 the National Party won only thirty-nine percent of the votes, but it was enough to become the largest party in Parliament. Two-thirds of the Afrikaners voted for them, but they would not have won without the support of twenty percent of English-speaking South Africans. They won the election on the basis of their policy of Apartheid and over the next few years they implemented a huge number of laws to make South Africa a racially separated country and "in fact, apartheid laws emerged over the course of four decades in response to the increasing contradictions inherent in the system and the intensification of opposition from Africans, Coloureds and Indians" (Clark et al. 2004: 49). The first ones were the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) which made mixed race marriages illegal; the Immorality Act (1950) made sexual relations among races illegal; the Population Registration Act (1950) which defined which race each South African belonged to. As regards this last law, people could apply to be reclassified through an inspection of skin, nails and hair. More than five hundred coloureds were reclassified white, fourteen whites became coloured, seven Chinese became white, and so on (Culpin: 2000: 46). The Separate Amenities Act (1953) applied for the division of

public services and spaces according to race; the Group Areas Act (1950) separated towns into ‘white’, ‘coloured’ and ‘black’ areas. The Bantu Education Act in 1953 separated the races in schools which were brought under state control. This meant that black people had different curriculums from whites and were taught about white superiority. Finally, the Bantu Authorities Act (1951) granted the rulers the power to designate the tribal chiefs in black reservations, and the Native Laws Amendment Act (1952) controlled the influx in terms of labour and the movement of workers and to give priority in jobs to blacks already in urban areas (2000: 46).



\*Diagram of the Apartheid laws mentioned.



However, even within the National Party there were divergences about what Apartheid was intended for and different ministers had almost opposite perspectives about segregation. While some of them wanted to radically eliminate the black race (the “idealist Apartheid”), others were aware of the socio-cultural reality of the country (the “practical Apartheid”). I would like to highlight here Prime Minister Dr. Malan’s speech in 1950: “total segregation is not the policy of our party. Total territorial separation is impracticable under present circumstances in South Africa where our whole economic structure is based on native labour” (Posel, 1991: 62).

Between 1958 and 1966 Hendrik Verwoerd was elected Prime Minister of South Africa. He supported the “idealist Apartheid” theory and promised his voters that South Africa would be an all-white country by 1978. He proposed the black reserves to be increased in size, transforming them into black ‘homelands’ and, subsequently, they would be able to definitely exclude them from white South Africa: “How can we prevent the swamping of the White community taking place in all spheres of life – politically, socially, and economically [only by making sure] that this increased Bantu population is not accommodated in the White urban areas” (Hansard, 1956: 5296). He imposed the Bantu Self-Government Act in 1959 so eight self-governing homelands were created according to the different ethnic groups such as Gazankulu, kwaZulu, KaNgwane, Lebowa, KwaNdebele or QwaQwa (Culpin, 2000: 55). In this way, and, by splitting the black population, whites could be, at last, the largest single racial group in South Africa. After his assassination, his successor John Vorster pursued the same policy, but the reality of South African society was that many black people continued to live and work outside those states<sup>8</sup>. The Bantustans effect differed significantly depending on the social class.

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<sup>8</sup> On September 1966, Verwoerd was assassinated by Dimitri Tsafendas, a worker from the Parliament who was an activist and an anti-Apartheid militant. Tsafendas was firstly sent to Robben Island and later to Pretoria Central Prison, where he was brutally tortured until he died in 1999.

Accordingly, the rulers of the Bantustans drew substantial salaries and tried to create a black middle class who depended on them for their standard of living. The black ruling class did well out of this but few jobs were created for ordinary workers and thus, life for the lower classes was, full of poverty, diseases and malnutrition and over the years more and more blacks were forcibly removed from the white areas and relocated in the Bantustans between 1960 and 1980. In Verwoerd's words the African should not "desire to become integrated into the life of the European community [but] within his own community, all doors are open" (quoted in Huddleston, 1956: 159). Because of these relocations, from 1980 onwards, one of the main problems the South African population had to address was the overpopulation after urban segregation collapsed, with townships growing from almost sixteen million to more than twenty-four million people (Gibbs, 2019: 1229).

In their homes and local areas, in provincial and national gatherings, on trains and buses, in factories and on the farms, in cities, shantytowns, schools and prisons, the African people have discussed the shameful misdeeds of those who rule the country. Year after year they have raised their voices in condemnation of the grinding poverty, the low wages, the acute shortage of lands, the inhuman exploitation and the whole policy of white domination. But instead of more freedom, repression grows in volume and intensity (Mandela, 1953).

In 1943, Nelson Mandela along with Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo and Anton Lembede formed the Young League to promote the African National Congress (ANC) and win equal rights for the black people in their country, which meant not co-operating with the Indian National Congress (because they were non-Africans) nor with the South African Communist Party (because it was a multiracial party with both whites and blacks). When Lembede died in 1947, Mandela and Tambo created the Programme of Action to completely reject racial segregation, work independently of whites and take

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(<https://www.sahistory.org.za/>). Indres Naidoo, a South African activist, wrote about Tsafendas' persecution in his memoir *Island in Chains* (1982).

non-violent actions such as boycotts or strikes. In Mandela's words: "we explained that we thought the time had come for mass action along the lines of Gandhi's non-violent protests in India and the 1946 passive resistance campaign, asserting that the ANC had become too docile in the face of oppression" (Mandela, 1994: 113). With the beginning of Apartheid, Mandela realized that they had to learn from Indians due to their non-violent protests and from Communists due to their organization of massive strikes and the power of mass support. In 1952 the ANC planned the Defiance Campaign to defy Apartheid regulations. Thus, during the white celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the Dutch arrival, the ANC supporters got into 'whites only' compartments of trains, they queued at 'whites only' counters at post offices and they sat on 'whites only' benches. Thousands of them were arrested but the ANC definitely became the voice of black resistance and the number of supporters rose from seven thousand to a hundred thousand (Culpin, 2000: 67). Despite Mandela's political activism, he was son to the principal counsellor to the King of the Thembu people, and later became a ward at the Great Place in Mqhekezweni, which means he was raised in a relatively high sphere. In fact, he was later sent to a secondary school of some reputation, although he was expelled for joining in a student protest (Badra, 2012). After creating the Young League, he became part of the committee and began a non-violent campaign that, after the years, led to his first arrest in 1962 (Henderson, 1996: 290-291).

After the Defiance Campaign's success, in 1955 they drafted the Freedom Charter, which included some social points such as: all national groups shall have equal rights, all people shall share in the nation's wealth, the land shall be shared by those who work it, all shall be equal before the law, there shall be work and security and the doors of learning and culture shall be opened, promoting peace and friendship among races. When this charter was read out loud, and despite the difficulties, thousands of people managed to

attend the meeting: three hundred and twenty Indians, two thousand thirty coloureds, one hundred and twelve whites and two thousand, two hundred black South Africans. It was the first democratic assembly in South Africa's history and it became the basis of their campaigning right up to the 1994 election (Kane et al. 2010: 5). It is important to mention here that women also took part in this collective social movement. When the government decided to extend the Pass Law system to women in 1952 peaceful demonstrations were held in many parts of South Africa, but it was in 1956 when a group of women of all races asked to meet the government minister responsible for this law. When he refused to attend the meeting, a massive all-women demonstration took place in Pretoria and Helen Joseph – a white, middle-class woman – one of the four leaders of this movement described the anti-pass demonstration:

Four women had been chosen as leaders for the day: Lilian Ngoyi, the African; Rahima Moosa, the Indian; Sophie Williams, the Coloured; and I, the white. We took the piles of protests and left them outside ministers' offices when our knocking brought no response: 'We have not come here to plead but to ask for what is our right as mothers, as women and as citizens of this country...' Lilian Ngoyi asked them all to stand in silent protest. As she raised her arm in the Congress salute, 20,000 arms went up and stayed there those endless minutes. We knew that all over South Africa women in cities and towns were gathered in protest... (Joseph, 1986).

The government's response to all the protests that were taking place in South Africa, which were not only led and supported by blacks, was to harden the measures, which gradually became tougher and tougher until by the 1980s black South Africans had hardly any civil rights at all. The laws were imposed to deal with anyone who opposed the regime. Belief in racial equality, for example, was regarded as 'Communist', anyone could be banned with no need of proof, trial or even a charge. A person's freedom could be restricted in all sorts of ways, for years at a time, for no particular reason. When Nelson Mandela was put under the banning order, he claimed: "I was made, by law, a criminal, not because of what I had done, but because of what I stood for, because of what I thought,

because of my conscience” (Mandela, 1953). Accordingly, the government arrested thousands of people after the Defiance Campaign in 1956, a hundred and five black Africans, twenty-three whites, twenty-one Indians and seven coloureds, some of whom had not even been in the demonstration that day. They were accused of treason and supporting Communism, but as many of them were obviously not Communists, all were acquitted. Thus, it was a kind of victory: the Freedom Charter got a lot of publicity. However, the most activist people from the ANC were disappointed with the lack of success and founded then the Pan-African Congress (PAC) as a completely African resistance movement. From that moment, the ANC and the PAC became rival groups in many senses – for example, the ANC allowed white South Africans to join the party but the PAC did not. In 1960, the PAC decided to hold mass civil disobedience demonstrations at Sharpeville but the police opened fire without hesitation. Sixty-nine people were killed and almost two hundred wounded: “the result of the firing was devastating and the figures which were established later, both at the post-mortem and at the hospital, show that over seventy percent of the victims were clearly shot from the back” (A description by Ambrose Reeves, 2000: 77). After the Sharpeville massacre the non-violent line ended and some time after the ANC was banned.

In 1961, the Umkhonto we Sizwe, meaning “Spear of the Nation” (best known as MK) was created as the armed wing of the ANC. Nelson Mandela travelled around South Africa, organizing MK and looking for members to join the cause. In 1962 the government found out about his trip and arrested him and sentenced him to five years in prison. During the Rivonia Trial in 1963 papers were found linking MK to acts of violence and giving the names of seventeen ANC leaders – including Mandela, who was already in prison (Clark et al. 2004: 62). They were charged with treason, which carried the death penalty, but instead they were sentenced to life imprisonment. They were sent at once to

Robben Island, an island prison off Cape Town. Mandela stayed on Robben Island for eighteen years until he was moved to a prison on the mainland for another eight years. Furthermore, in this same year detention without trial was introduced, this meant an individual could be arrested and held in prison for up to ninety days without being charged with any offence or having the opportunity to defend himself in court<sup>9</sup>.

At this point it is worth mentioning that the fact that the black population was rejected in the socio-political field did not only mean a denial in voting or social rights, but also their exclusion in mainstream sports, literature and many cultural activities. Thus, it was in the arts that new talents emerged. It was in both music and visual arts where most black cultural production was conceived. Wicomb claims that, specifically in literature, this happened, among other things, because of the lack of training and experience among black people in the literary field. “It is no accident that the most vibrant cultural production among black people is in the visual arts, where poorly educated artists, in their mining of low culture, depart from the symbolism of traditional African art” (Wicomb, 2018: 60). Many of the most talented musicians went to Britain in 1961 and never came back. However, for the ones who remained in South Africa (such as Dollar Brand, Kippie Moeketsi and Mankuku Ngozi) the clubs in black townships provided places for black musicians to play black music to black audiences. The Soweto Jazz Festival gave opportunities for black South African musicians to learn from each other. Some of them were also poets, like Dennis Brutus, Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali and Mongane Wally Serote, who wrote for black readers and black magazines carried their work to wide audiences. Later, radical white-run publishers, like Ravan Press, gave opportunities to black novelists and playwrights (Culpin, 2000: 83). The following poem was written by Dennis Brutus, a coloured anti-Apartheid activist, known for his campaign

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<sup>9</sup> This information was provided by the Robben Island guide during my visit, 2022.

against the segregated South African Olympic teams. In 1963, he was arrested for trying to meet one of the Olympic Committee commissioners and sent to Robben Island for sixteen months.

It is not all terror  
And deprivation,  
You know;

one comes to welcome the closer contact  
and understanding one achieves  
with one's fellow-men,  
fellows, compeers;

and the discipline does much to force  
a shape and pattern on one's daily life  
as well as on the days

and honest toil  
offers some redeeming hours  
for the wasted years;

so there are times  
when the mind is bright and restful  
though alive;  
rather like the full calm morning sea (Dennis Brutus, 1973).

By the mid 1960s, Stephen Bantu Biko, a black anti-Apartheid activist, developed the Black Consciousness Movement, a “political philosophy [...] in response to the implementation of Apartheid” (Clark et al. 2004: 73) to fight against the Apartheid claim of not only blacks, but also Indians and coloureds, being inferior due to skin colour. Biko created this sociopolitical movement after the banning of the ANC and the jailing of ANC and PAC (Pan Africanist Congress) leaders. In his engagement against the Apartheid policies, Biko founded some years later the South African Students' Organization in

1969, not only as a response to the general social denigration of the black population but also because of the frustration of black university students regarding education opportunities. “As long as blacks are suffering from an inferiority complex [...] what is necessary...is a very strong grassroots build-up of black consciousness such that blacks can learn to assert themselves and stake their rightful claim” (Biko, 1986: 21). In 1973 there was a worldwide economic crisis. South African workers suffered wage reductions, longer hours and poorer working conditions. This situation led to strikes involving two hundred thousand workers. Trade union organization was still weak but the Natal workers were mostly Zulus, encouraged by their Zulu leaders, united by their ethnic loyalty. The employers were finally forced to restore the previous levels and the trade union activity revived again – trade unions were to play a big part in the eventual collapse of Apartheid. Education was also a significant issue during all these revolts, since black children aspired to be educated the same as whites, but the government spent nearly ten times more on educating each white child than on each black child. In Soweto, there were often sixty or even a hundred children in a class. Then the government announced that half of all the subjects would be taught in Afrikaans, the language of the hated government and spoken by some South African whites and some coloureds. Thus, in 1976, fifteen hundred students held a demonstration in Soweto to fight for a better and equal education. The police used more violence and, by the end of that year, around a thousand students had been killed (Schneidman, 1980: 143-144)<sup>10</sup>. The following quotation is a student’s reaction to the 1976 protests from *A Different Kind of War* by Julie Frederickse:

It was the 1976 experience that made us ask questions, you know, about the poverty of our people, the living conditions of our people. We started questioning why whites live that type of life and we live in these conditions. We began to realise also that the whole education system is a very big lie (Frederickse, 1986).

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<sup>10</sup> Although the government estimated that 176 students were killed, the actual toll could reach 700 deaths. In fact, the 16<sup>th</sup> of June is now the International Day of the African Child.



In 1978, after thirty years, Apartheid seemed safe, despite all the efforts of the rest of the world to remove it. Furthermore, although many black African countries loathed Apartheid and wanted to support the ANC, they were often economically dependent on South Africa. South Africa's neighbours were too poor to think of challenging South Africa, particularly now that it was becoming a military power as well. In 1983, things started to change slowly. There was a new constitution for South Africa where coloureds and Indians were to be allowed to vote for their own representatives in their own parliaments. Blacks were not to take part, but locally elected black assemblies were to take over running some local affairs. Furthermore, the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 was repealed and the local government was encouraged to desegregate parks, shops and other public amenities. Pass Laws were relaxed and eventually abolished altogether in 1986 (Culpin, 2000: 109). Trade union leaders took advantage of their new legal status to win support among black workers and so they began to take militant industrial action. Around 1982, more than three hundred and sixty-five days of work were lost. Striking workers were supported by the black community in total boycotts of the shops or goods of the company the trade unions were striking against. However, with leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu in prison, blacks needed new leaders to speak about their grievances against the flood of white propaganda. Thus, black Church leaders got involved in protest through their concern about the lives of their people and because they saw Apartheid as fundamentally unChristian. These leaders included Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane and Desmond Tutu who, in fact, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. Back in 1976, Tutu wrote to Prime Minister John Vorster:

I am writing to you, sir, because I have growing nightmarish fear that unless something drastic is done very soon then bloodshed and violence are going to happen in South Africa... How long can people bear such blatant injustice and suffering? Much of the white community, with all its prosperity, its privilege, its beautiful homes, its servants, its leisure, is hag-ridden by fear and insecurity. And this will

continue until South Africans of all races are free. Freedom, sir, is indivisible. The whites in this land will not be free until all sections of our community are genuinely free (Tutu, 1994).

The 1983 constitution did not please neither the black population or the coloureds and Indians. For the former, it actually did not offer any improvement at all to the great mass of the black population, they were completely excluded from the new constitution. coloureds and Indians, on their part, knew that the whites would still be in complete control of the country. A new organization was then needed and this was the United Democratic Front, the UDF. During 1983 and 1984, the UDF initiated a boycott campaign with similar ideals to the ANC, but better organized. When it came to voting for the new parliaments and local black councils, the boycott was very successful and in some places like, for example, Soweto, which had a population of two million, just a thousand, one hundred and fifteen votes were cast. As the world watched the events taking place in South Africa, the part of the population who were supporting the government changed their minds. Barclays sold all their banks, the international value of the rand dropped by thirty-five per cent, the South African Stock Exchange was closed, and so on. White South Africans then felt the pinch since their incomes fell sharply, they could not travel or buy goods abroad and, finally, world sanctions began to bite (Culpin, 2000: 117).

By 1989 South Africa was descending into chaos. The ANC had almost succeeded: the South African government could not re-establish control over the black townships, people's schools were set up as black students and children attempted to repair their missing education under the slogan 'Each one teach one'. During that time, it seemed that there was no solution except for war. In 1990 De Klerk, a strong believer in racial separation, became the new President of South Africa. However, in his first speech he unbanned the ANC and the PAC, and he announced the release of Mandela and the remaining political prisoners in his attempt to dismantle Apartheid before the next

elections. Thus, in 1990, and after twenty-six years in prison, Mandela was released after his demand for the release of all his fellows (Clark et al. 2004: 111). He became again the ANC leader and started negotiations with De Klerk. The National Party had to deal with the extreme racist groups who demanded the return of Apartheid and Mandela had to deal with the pro-violence groups of the black population who were not sure if the ANC was militant enough for them. Because of this uncertain situation there was still terrible violence and activists were killed, but so were innocent people and this violence and disagreement continued until 1993, when the country prepared for an election in 1994. Despite the white violence that had taken place in the previous months, the election was peaceful. Twenty million people waited patiently to vote, most of them for the first time in their lives. The ANC won with more than sixty percent of the votes. Thus, Mandela became President with a mixed-race cabinet. In his first speech as President he said: “never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another. The sun will never set on so glorious a human achievement. Let freedom reign. God bless Africa” (Culpin, 2000: 134).

Furthermore, later in 1995, the new government set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was based on two main points: to listen to the stories of both black and white people since the Apartheid government had censored the press and did not report the reality accurately, and to offer amnesty to those who had committed violent acts after torturers faced their victims, killers faced the close relatives of the people they had killed and asked for forgiveness. After two and a half years, they had over 29,000 testimonies (Clark et al. 2004: 96). However, even nowadays the downsides and problems Apartheid left are still present, mainly in terms of wealth and housing. In fact, some intellectuals have considered that the TRC encouraged a clemency that was insufficient to these crimes against humanity. Derrida, for instance, condemns the idea of forgiving

the unforgivable and asserts that the TRC did not follow the guilty-victim duality forgiveness entails as there was an institutional mediation in-between the pardon (2005: 42). Despite the debate that reconciliation has generated, South Africa's transformation into a democracy has allowed its population new ways to relate to one another.

## **2.1. Class background**

Class formations have accompanied, or even dominated, the human social order from almost the very beginning of social organizations. Nonetheless, there are contrasting definitions of it. Max Weber, as quoted in Joyce's *Class* (1995), provides the reader with an extensive and divided understanding of class, which gathers different arguments:

we may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific casual component of their life changes, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor market. This is 'class situation' [...] the mode of distribution, in accord with the law of marginal utility, [which] excludes the non-wealthy from competing for highly valued goods; it favors the owners (1995: 31).

However, the treatment of class has very disparate approaches because it can be associated to diverse aspects of life, such as history, economy, education or politics. Thus, many class researchers and sociologists in general, such as John B. Thompson have understood class as a:

historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and consciousness. I emphasize that it is a historical phenomenon. I do not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships (quoted in Joyce, 1995: 131).

Although it is undeniable that history and class go together (at least because of the dependency of the social organization in the historical context of the moment), these

theories seem to reduce class importance to social formation, comparing it to historical evidence that can influence society but not rule it. Accordingly, there are revisionist theories that think of class as an outdated form of categorization, taking age, gender or race as more contemporary divisions for groups. As Fredric Jameson claims: “Such theories have the obvious ideological mission of demonstrating [...] that the new social formation in question no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely, the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle” (quoted in Driscoll, 2009: 11).

Nonetheless, opposite suggestions have also arisen within the sociological field. Regarding the issues of race and gender, despite the theories (such as the aforementioned one) that recognize race and gender as more contemporary forms of classification, this thesis will support Westergaard’s idea of class as continuing to be the basis for our societies. Westergaard provides examples in which women have fewer rights (such as at the working place) and compares them to racial differentiations, but neither of these “new lines of inequity” (as he names them) have replaced the lines of class inequality (1995: 12). Furthermore, authors such as Slavoj Žižek propose class as the main basis for social organization and so the other identity factors (like race or gender) rely on it: “the social organization of production (the ‘mode of production’) is not just one among many levels of social organization” (Driscoll, 2009: 2). In addition to this assertion, we have Stefan Collini’s notion of class as the invariable element for social formations: “in the frequently incanted quartet of race, class, gender and sexual orientation, there is no doubt that class has been the least fashionable...despite the fact that all the evidence suggests that class remains the single most powerful determinant of life chances” (Driscoll, 2009: 2). This kind of argument highlights the importance of race and class roles but defends class as the main social foundation.

Furthermore, what is suggested with these perspectives is that class is a key point in society because it has *always* been that way; “there has been no ‘fall of class’ at all” (Cannadine, 2000: 1). This approach to class, which maintains its importance for current society, can be supported by the perpetuation of class stratification and class struggle in time:

the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight (Driscoll, 2009: 21).

Later, during the nineteenth-century, there still are historical facts which suggest that class remained the social basis. With the advent of capitalism, social stratification seemed to be at its peak; industrialization and capitalist societies started to emerge to reinforce the differentiation among identities based on economy, education and politics. Edward P. Thompson (in Joyce’s *Class*, 1995), defends the idea that the new nineteenth century’s socioeconomic politics brought huge differences among classes which were even more established with this new social administration, and so class struggle was at the end of this new social process: “class and class consciousness are always the last, not the first, stage in the real historical process” (1995: 136).

All these varied definitions of class taken from different perspectives could be useful for the investigation of the South African context and may give a new insight into the South African class-race struggle or, at least, clarify the importance of class during the post-Apartheid era. Moreover, both language and education must be taken into account. In general terms, Bourdieu attaches the linguistic usages to the different markets, and through the language-market relation he presents the lower classes’ constant attempt to acquire the dominant use of language, that is to say the one used by the upper classes (1995: 102). This then suggests a difference in the use of language depending on the

individual's social position. And this view is directly connected to education. Jacob Dlamini exposes the previous generation's anxiety about education in a very delicate way through his mother's experience. For the people who lived under Apartheid conditions, education was a synonym of freedom. Dlamini shows how the fight for education varied depending on the social class, likewise he exposes the educational divisions that existed within the black community, that is to say, class differences existed even within the black population (Dlamini, 2009: 92).

At this point it would also be appropriate to mention the treatment of class in literature and how critics have dealt with the complications it can carry. Firstly, it is essential to mention the decline of class in literary studies because of the sociological approach it inevitably takes. Critics such as Peter Hitchcock have pointed out this dilemma, claiming that class must also be taken into account by a literary critic to have a complete understanding of the work (Driscoll, 2009: 2). Avoiding the issue of class in literature not only reduces the social perception of the work's context, but also conceals the author's position in society and the different perspectives this can generate. Of course, the author's background and context highly determine both his or her way of writing and the way he or she deals with the socioeconomic situation of the time. Thus, authors and literary critics such as Dominic Head or Erik Wright have proposed the author's class foundations and the class analysis of the novel as more decisive factors than the genre or the form (Wright, 2005: 61). As seen, not only should class as a social construction be examined (which this dissertation intends to do), but also the author's intentions with his or her perspective on class, taking into consideration the author's own particular situation.

All these interpretations support the general idea of social class as still the main basis for social categorization, and all the aforementioned literary authors and critics exemplify how class stands out when in opposition to race and gender. I would like to

give now one last example by Jacob Dlamini which exposes this idea through his own personal experience in Apartheid South Africa: “the colour of a person’s skin did not have much to do with social distinction. After all, many of our social betters were just as dark-skinned as many of us” (2009: 83). As Dlamini notes, skin colour does not prevent an individual from achieving social distinction; in fact, blacks also abound in higher spheres. However, the racial stigma in South Africa consistently connects skin colour to a lower social position.

Global theories on class will be also considered for a better awareness of the role class plays in society, and how these global theories can be applied to the South African literary context. Thus, researchers such as Antonio Gramsci – whose theory of cultural hegemony of capitalism resonates with this dissertation’s basis (1971) –, Aijaz Ahmad with his study on capitalism’s impact in developing countries (1996), the sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, or Etienne Balibar along with his philosophical approach to class and racism (1991) can be useful for the purpose of this dissertation. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological approach on how the ruling classes have maintained their privileges to preserve the social scale, David Cannadine’s analysis on how class has shaped British society (*Class in Britain*, 2000) or Simon Charlesworth’s *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience*, where the difficulties faced by the working class are examined (2000) will also inform this thesis. More universal studies such as Patrick Joyce’s *Class* (1995) or Max Weber’s *Economy and Society* (2005) will also be taken into consideration for the insight into the class-economy relation they provide. These studies, along with Erik Wright’s *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis* (1997) and *Approaches to Class Analysis* (2005) can be used as an historical source of true facts that can be useful and applicable to this investigation, so they will be part of my framework of analysis. In the latter study, Wright considers the



ways in which race and citizenship status impact social reproduction and concludes that domestic employees are less considered because they tend to be socio-spatially isolated (they share the site of production and the site of reproduction), and these are usually coloured and black people and women, grounded in the master-servant and husband-wife relation of historical slavery (2005).

The analysis carried out of the whole of Wicomb's oeuvre and how her fiction provides the reader with the fragmented realities of Apartheid and post-Apartheid years was not meant to prove class to be more significant than race but to explore the extent to which social class has been beneficial or unfavorable for each character. However, as seen throughout this thesis, the racial issue in South Africa has been exhaustively analyzed both sociologically and literarily speaking. Nevertheless, this dissertation is based on the idea that the class issue seems to be blurred by "the understandable national obsession with race" (Seekings, 2003: 55) and that this has created a research gap in postcolonial studies. Thus, I make no attempt to survey what has become a massive field, but instead steer my selection of these issues and debates in the direction I see Wicomb's fiction taking.

It has been seen how class plays a determinant role for society even when the racial matter blurs other social factors. Frieda Shenton, David Dirkse – along with Sally and Dulcie – Marion Campbell, the characters in *The One That Got Away* and Mercia Murray prove firstly, the fact that "an interracial culture is a long way off" (Wicomb, 1993: 28) due to the fact that "shame is still inscribed in the tragic mode routinely used to represent coloureds where assumed cultural loss is elevated to the realms of ontology" (Wicomb, 1998: 100). Secondly, most of them prove how class remains the most powerful determinant of life chances (Driscoll, 2009: 2) as Wicomb provides a wide number of characters, most of them coloured, whose different social positions determine

their lifestyles, lowering thus the importance racial matter has had for the South African society and proving that race is not that relevant when the individual belongs to a higher social position. In the words of Seekings:

Elsewhere we have argued that the basis of social stratification shifted under apartheid from race to class: the privileges enjoyed by white South Africans were increasingly derived from their class positions and less and less from racial discrimination, whilst some black South Africans benefited from upward social mobility despite the lingering legacy of racial discrimination. [...] Now, in the 'new' South Africa, class inequalities are highly visible all around us. The growth of the black elite and 'middle class' is evident in advertising as in real life. At the same time, huge numbers of black people are confined to an 'underclass' of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Most white people have retained the advantages conferred by their class position at the end of apartheid. But, at the same time, a small number of white people are downwardly mobile. The use of aggregate data for racial 'groups' or data on the average for racial 'groups' both obscures the social stratification within racial 'groups' and the extent to which race has ceased to be the key cause of inequality. Indeed, it might be that the emphasis on race, especially in official statistics, serves to obscure even the *possibility* of collecting data on other criteria, such as class (Seekings, 2003: 2).

Here Seekings makes an important point for this dissertation and serves as the backbone for my argument in this thesis, which is the reason why I have quoted it at length. This passage encompasses the two main arguments of this dissertation: firstly, the fact that social discrimination has shifted from race to class and nowadays blacks benefit from upward social mobility at the same time that whites experience downward mobility. And secondly, the fact that race obscures any attempt to analyze society in terms of class.

## **2.2. Dismantling Class in South Africa**

It is essential to analyze the sociocultural context on which Wicomb's oeuvre is based in order to achieve a far-reaching understanding of how Apartheid and post-Apartheid South African society evolved within the inequalities that surround this community regarding social constructions. In order to do this – and just as a source of empirical data – Jeremy Seekings's study on South African social stratification (*Class*,

*Race, and Inequity in South Africa*, 2005) will be used, given the way it explains how class position is mainly determined by wealth and aptitudes (working positions) and not necessarily by race.

We can examine the relationship between race and class as well as the provincial and urban/rural distribution and composition of the different classes. Figure 7.3 shows the composition of each class in terms of race. The first three classes [...] are predominantly white, with white households comprising between 55 and 70 percent of the total in each class. The semi-professional, intermediate and petty trader classes are predominantly African, with African households comprising between 62 and 71 percent of the total in each. The core and marginal working classes and the residual 'other' class are overwhelmingly African. There is therefore a clear relationship between race and class (2005: 258).

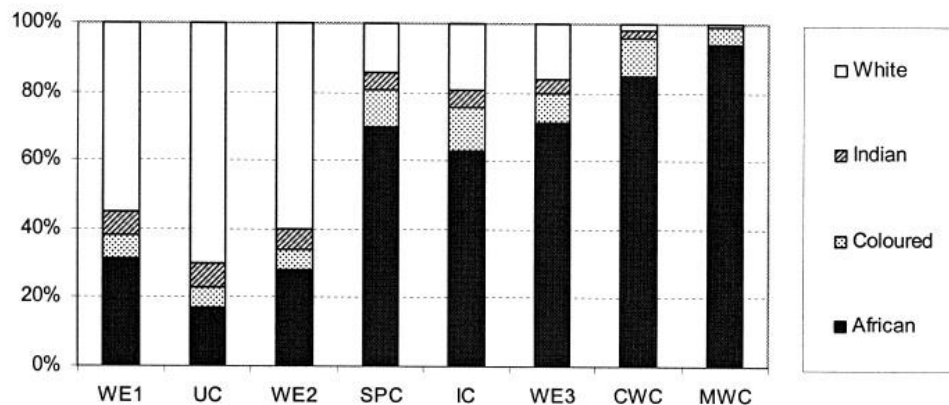


Figure 7.3. Class membership by race, 1993

\*Seekings's chart on class membership (2005).

Neither Seekings's study nor this thesis aims to prove class as the only decisive factor for social discrimination, but rather that class hierarchies sometimes relegate individuals to a lower position because of economic wealth, education or aptitudes. As the quote above suggests, the relationship between class and race is indivisible, but "the basis of social stratification shifted under apartheid from race to class" (2005: 2). This statement advocates an increase in privileges for the white population that come from

their class status and not because of their race. This is because there are also black South Africans that enhanced their class position despite their colour. In present-day South Africa, as Seekings' analysis suggests, the majority of the white population remains in a higher position while the coloured majority still occupies lower social positions. This persists in spite of the fact that there has been an upward and downward mobility that does not correlate with the racial matter. However, the study reflects how "the emphasis on race, especially in official statistics, serves to obscure even the possibility of collecting data on other criteria, such as class" (2005: 2).

Zoë Wicomb also deals with the race and nation relation, highlighting how "the use of the word 'race'... is an aspect of the social construction of reality: 'races' are socially imagined rather than biological realities" (2018: 54). In this sense, race acquires meaning due to ideological needs, a point directly connected to culture and the way whites wanted to represent it. Thus, when one thinks about nation and ethnicity, the relationship between them is usually disregarded and nation is seen then as developed with a sense of unity, while ethnicity is seen as primitive, not valued. But the reality of a community is that ethnicity is part of the nation, where people interact with each other. And here it is important to mention the national language, something that "has always been at the heart of the notion of nation" (Wicomb, 2018: 57). I wonder here whether language is subsumed by the concept of nation or rather the concept of nation is subsumed by language; or, in other words, is language a product of the nation, or is nation a product of language? Despite Wicomb's preference towards the second, I would say the connection between language and nation is mainly reciprocal since both foster each other.

Seekings does not only pay attention to the labour market but to many other factors that can influence an individual: "there is also a clear relationship between where people live and the classes they are in" (2005: 40). His analysis suggests how the working classes

– or specifically the “marginal working classes” – are gathered mainly in rural areas while the higher classes of South Africa remain in urban or metropolitan areas. However, the study shows how some of the semi-professional class (such as teachers) have also been relegated to rural areas. Despite their hierarchical position, the intermediate and lower classes, as the collected data suggest, are the largest classes in post-apartheid South Africa while the largest income come from the upper classes (2005: 38). All these aspects Seekings considers implies a wide inequality that encompasses almost every socio-cultural factor that shapes the individual’s identity: income, working position, residence area or education.

At the beginning of Apartheid – and the end of the Second World War – the South African economy was successfully developing through white agriculture and mining industries. The Apartheid government was convinced that this increase was, in fact, a result of the Apartheid policies. However, “Apartheid did not enable South Africa to grow more rapidly [...] but neither did it prevent a successful performance” (Feinstein, 2005: 146). During the 1970s there was a global economic decline, but despite the fact that many countries started to recover after years of economic downturn, the South African economy continued worsening, and the reason for this unceasing decline was not the international downturn but rather the South African socioeconomic system.

Other symptoms of the worsening economic position included more rapid inflation, soaring unemployment, and a growing problem with the balance of payments. [...] By the end of the Apartheid era there were over 6,000,000 people of working age who were either unemployed or so discouraged that they had withdrawn from the formal labour market because they saw no hope of finding a job (Feinstein, 2005: 148).

The reconstruction of South Africa after the Apartheid years was not straightforward. The racial and class division that was created during the years of segregation was – and still is – present in the South African society despite the

government and the ANC's attempts to establish a more equal and fairer social system. Among the different socio-economic programmes the government proposed, it was the BEE, the Black Economic Empowerment, which was designed to facilitate broader participation in the economy by black people. However, in 2007 the Institute for Management Development presented its annual survey of the world's leading industrialized economies, in which South Africa had fallen from the thirty-eighth to fiftieth place, mainly due to the discrimination towards the black population, which seemed to persist years after Apartheid (Johnson, 2010: 381). It is important to mention here that most European companies settled or working in South Africa viewed the BEE in a negative way or as a threat to their business, so major international companies preferred to disinvest from a booming industry rather than adhere to BEE rules. It must be said, though, that during the following years many companies passed into black hands, what generally satisfied the black population even though the profits stayed in the higher spheres. Even before Apartheid came to an end, there was a constant attempt to create a black middle class, but it seemed an impossible task with the inherited racial inequity and the unbalanced distribution of wealth and income, even within the black population, where the higher spheres, such as politicians, enjoyed a very good position in society which remained out of reach of the rest of the black population. In addition, the BEE executives developed luxurious lifestyles with high salaries.

The new world of BEE was factious and fractious: no-holds battles between black entrepreneurs were common and sometimes revealed hair-raising glimpses of Wild West business practices. That these clashes did not get completely out of hand was due to the fact that the BEE world was that of a tiny elite who were both politically connected and often related to one another (Johnson, 2010: 391).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This is in fact the main topic in Ashwin Singh's play *Into the Grey* (2017). Through the two main characters (an Indian and a Zulu) Singh represents society's anger towards that black elite who seem to have obliterated the lower classes for power and money (Joshipura, 2019: 87).

Nevertheless, the South African Indian population served as a good example for the formation of this non-white middle class. Despite facing racial discrimination throughout Apartheid, their community grew and prospered, producing a wealthy, well-educated professional class. But the creation of a black middle class necessarily required state intervention (Claar, 2018: 108). The main strategies to achieve this common desire among blacks were housing, education and health, but the only improvement was made regarding housing and, the immoral part of this was that the black elite did not seem to worry about such failures. The development of this middle class through better education was too gradual for the most extremist militants, requiring decades before the results were felt.

As regards black business and the BEE again, the main task was to have black-owned equity and considerable control by blacks. Thus, incentives were given to those companies which guaranteed that blacks would play important roles at all levels in the company. That meant financial services for housing or the support for black small businesses. Despite the small black elite, there was an increasing black middle class whose consumers were increasingly powerful. By 2000 and for the first time, black consumers outspent whites and twenty three percent of the rich population was black (Johnson, 2010: 395). For the first time in many decades the black population felt that anyone could afford a high-standard way of living and started feeling that ‘the future is black’. Yet, some part of the black population felt that African leaders were trying to emulate the Western models of leadership, the models they were precisely trying to avoid. Moreover, most African executives depended on the management layer which was mainly white and who took most of the decisions, because African executives did not believe that their fellows were capable of taking decisions, which definitely perpetuated that myth of black Africans’ incapacity in comparison to white brilliance. The fact that they followed the Western method meant that these companies could be transplanted to a Western

country without any apparent change. Thus, this created a kind of 'identity crisis' within the black population.

Apartheid is then a consequence of colonialism, and its laws "emerged over the course of four decades in response to the increasing contradictions inherent in the system and the intensification of opposition from Africans, Coloureds and Indians" (Clark et al. 2004: 49). One of the contradictions Apartheid may entail is precisely class and the fact that the basis of social stratification changed from race to class during those years (Seekings, 2005: 2). What this statement advocates then is an increase in privileges for the white population that come from their class status and not because of their race. Furthermore, when dealing with the relation between race and class, the different social classes within a specific racial community must be taken into consideration, since the black population had its own class hierarchy (Dlamini, 2009: 92). The intra-communal social classes and the shift from race to class as the main social marker during Apartheid demonstrate not only the relevance class has on the social structure but the insufficient research done in terms of class in South African sociological field – something already demanded by some sociological researchers such as Seekings. However, other critics have seen the exclusivity or singularity of South African social classification as an advantage to study "the large area of overlap between "race" and "class" in South Africa" (Alexander, 2007: 102).

### **2.3. Literary context**

Literary criticism started in South Africa during the mid-nineteenth century in a vast number of newspapers focused on science, history or travel, such as the *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser*, in Cape Town or the *Ilanga Lase Natal*, in Durban



(Simon, 2010). This first literary and cultural criticism had mainly a religious discourse, which means that the Bible was the fundamental basis to follow when reading and analyzing a novel. The main reason was that, of course, at that time most of the South African intellectuals were devoted Christians who believed that works of literature could not be as revealing as the knowledge of God. Furthermore, as David Johnson claims:

three further characteristics of South African criticism are evident in the poetry reviews of the period, namely the impulse to promote the work of writers from the Cape (and later, South Africa); the readiness to disagree ferociously over literary judgments; and the urge to quarantine literature off from politics (2012: 819).

Because of this, the majority of works – mainly poetry – were based on nature and its beauty, the aesthetics and imagery rather than political issues. It is also important to notice the English deference in South African criticism of the nineteenth century until 1872 when the Cape government claimed its autonomy from Britain. From that moment, apart from the vast amount of English literature, literature in Afrikaans and African languages started to grow and gained importance in the literary field. Consequently, two new African-language traditions emerged: “an anthropological criticism recording African oral literatures, and a book review criticism passing judgments on new African literary works” (Johnson, 2012: 821), with collections of folklore like Henry Callaway’s *Nursery Tales, Traditions and Histories of the Zulus* (1866), Azariele Sekese’s *Makho ea Basotho le Maele le Litsomo* (1893) and Walter Rubusana’s *Zemk’ iinkomo magwalandini* (1906), along with a new trend of Xhosa literature and newspapers.

The onset of the twentieth century brought new developments in South African literary criticism. These changes did not mean the disappearance of British literary criticism but rather a bigger emphasis on the review of South African writers such as Thomas Pringle, Oliver Schreiner or Douglas Blackburn. This shift in focus was noticed in the number of journals that were created to focus on this issue like *African Monthly*,

*The State* or *Voorslag*. It must be said here, however, that contemporary South African literary critics were considerably attached to the traditional criticism instead of finding new ways of addressing the new literature that was emerging in the twentieth century. In the words of Isabel Hofmeyr:

On the most simple level, this ‘tradition’ is hopelessly selective. It excludes, for example, all the pre-nineteenth-century writing, the most notable exception being oral literature. It ignores all working-class literature, both African and Afrikaans, and it shuns large chunks of white popular literature with vehemence. In total, then, this ‘tradition’ which claims to represent South African literature, quite staggeringly ignores the culture and literary endeavours of the majority of people in this country (Hofmeyr, 1979: 39).

The subsequent development was the display of women writers and the corresponding literary criticism through articles in some of the aforementioned journals and through *The Bluestocking*, “an interdisciplinary journal dedicated to the interests of women, which published a significant amount of literary criticism” (Johnson, 2012: 823).

Concurrently, there also appeared some popular radical journals dedicated to short stories, poems, longer essays or literary reviews which gave authors the opportunity to deal with more socio-cultural and political issues. Some of those journals were *Forward*, *South African Opinion*, *Forum* or *The Critic* – just to mention a couple of them – which not only allowed black South African authors, such as Sol Plaatje or Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo, to write about more updated topics of the South African social situation but also readers to broaden their knowledge, find new perspectives and be more aware of this issue. Thus, although much criticism was still set in Christian values and British principles, the eagerness for an independent South African literature and literary criticism was the beginning for the shift from the European canon. However, the inevitable link between South African society and Apartheid generated a lack of linguistic development of black people, among other things because of the rejection of education and the imposition of European languages (Wicomb, 2018: 59). Taking into account firstly, that

literary criticism enhanced white writing and secondly, the deprivation of the black population, make an interracial culture almost impossible and thus, thinking of a neutral and common writing within South Africa is impractical. Given the beginnings of the history of literary criticism, one must understand literature as a continuous process that must include the cultural factors of all South African communities and classes to understand the writer as part of a larger context that embodies an entire set of social relationships, rather than focusing the critic on a small portion of society: “the ultimate source of the literary text, then, is not the ‘I’ of the author, but the ‘we’ of the social class whose world vision it embodies [...] the complex of ideas, feelings and aspirations that defines the consciousness of a social class” (Mulhern, 1975: 36).

During Apartheid, black South African critics praised the writings of black South African writers despite the negative criticism that surrounded them due to an alleged lack of plot, imagination and technical resources. However, Steve Biko requested the need for an African culture, more caring and united. His black consciousness permeated literature as there was a rejection towards the European literature tradition to give way to more African language literatures, particularly precolonial ones. From the 1950’s onwards, there was also a growth of literary magazines which included mainly articles and reviews which were addressed to different language readerships, for example, *Contrast* was meant for English readers while *Kol* was addressed to Afrikaans readers, dealing, essentially, with critical opinions towards the Apartheid racism and language boundaries (Johnson, 2012: 829). One of the most compelling magazines was *Staffrider* (between the 1970s and the 1990s) with the publication of poems, short stories or photographs of the Soweto rebellion. Additionally, during the second half of the twentieth century there was a rise in the international literary journals focused on South African literature like the *Journal of Commonwealth Literatures*, *Research in African Literature*, *Wasafiri* and, the most

remarkable of all, the *Southern African Review of Books*. All of them dealt with different aspects of the South African literary field as well as literary-critical debates, history or theoretical thinking. Simultaneously, studies on race and gender emerged as a way to deal with the socio-cultural factors that affected the South African population. Good examples of these studies could be Vernon February's *Mind Your Colour: The 'Coloured' Stereotype in South African literature* (1981), J. M. Coetzee's *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988) or Cherry Clayton's *Women and Writing in South Africa* (1989).

In the mid-1980s there was a burst of intellectual and creative writing in South African literature. During the last years of Apartheid there was, as called in literature, an 'interregnum', that established the history of South African literature. Consequently, South African literature was not categorized by the standard literary genres (realism, romanticism...) but rather by its own perspective and versions of 'interiority' (Clingman, 2012: 633). In other words, South African literature was commonly protest literature, entwining politics and fiction since, for a long time, going against the government was not allowed at any level; it was the era of

grass-roots resistance; of major strikes and insistent labour activism; of people's culture, worker poets and union plays; [...] of no education without liberation; of state terrorism, assassinations, dirty tricks and third forces; of people's courts, mass funerals, [...] of the myriad horrific acts of brutality and inhumanity that characterized apartheid in its last throes (Clingman, 2012: 634).

Thus, during the 1990s the reality of South Africa was uncertain, when the nature and future of South Africa became problematic and so reality became doubtful. The former 'representation of history' changed into 'history of representation' precisely because it was not clear for writers how to represent the problematic South African reality. It was Nadine Gordimer with an essay called "Living in the Interregnum" (1983) one of

the first writers to acknowledge the revolutionary change that was almost starting to take place. In fact, she mentioned Gramsci noting that “the old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms” (Gordimer, 1981: 262). J. M. Coetzee, despite having a very different style from Gordimer, shares some similarities in terms of vision and perspective of the ‘real’. Along with them, writers such as Menán du Plessis with *A State of Fear* (1985), Richard Rive with *District Six* (1986) or Rose Zwi with the trilogy *Another Year in Africa* (1980), *The Inverted Pyramid* (1981) and *Exiles* (1984) dealt, at this point, with the problem of reality, detached time and space and the proper way to address the socio-political problem they were living in. In other words, the purpose of this literature was to refuse the former anonymity of blacks during Apartheid through fictional characters who were involved in roles of participation, a way to free the social imagination of the oppressed and so reach different perspective of South African politics (Clingman, 2012: 641). Likewise, Zoë Wicomb represents and explores all these socio-political issues through her fiction, in which she presents the diverse identities within the coloured and black communities and the point of view of a society that was silenced during the whole Apartheid era.

In the context of interregnum narrative, it would be accurate to mention, at least, two Afrikaans writers: André Brink as a novelist, and Breyten Breytenbach as a poet. The former has his novel *States of Emergency* (1988) written in the context of all the political disturbance of the decade by highlighting the Afrikaners’ error: maintain the idea of their community as pure and homogenic (Jolly, 1996: 377). The important aspect of this novel is that it was not supposed to be a novel itself, but some ‘notes towards a love story’ during the 1980s and so there is a division between text and history, the real and the fictive. Brink was proved to be one of the “vocal opponents of the Apartheid regime” but “seemed unsure of [his] role in the new dispensation” (Davis, 2013: 797). Breyten

Breytenbach wrote *Mouroir* in 1983 during his imprisonment, a memoir where he apologizes for his political actions (Graham, 2005: 37). Here, the mirror becomes the essential point, not as a reflection of reality but rather the other way round ‘reality is a version of the mirror image’ (*Mouroir*, 1984: 62) and deals with the real, unreal and surreal in a very different form from the usual South African literature. Notably, the title entwines the French words *miroir* (mirror) and *mourir* (to die) as the way Breytenbach lived his own interregnum in prison.

Now prison narratives have been mentioned, it would be appropriate to delve into this genre based on both the individual’s and also common experiences of being imprisoned shared by the large number of authors who wrote this literature during the South African political context of Apartheid. The fundamental shared point for all these authors was the prison conditions. They lived in small cells, some in communal cells and others individually imprisoned without windows, all of them with shared bathrooms where hot water was scarce. Most of this writing emerged as a resistance to the unfairness of the Apartheid conditions and, specifically, as means to survive the jail conditions, so “from either direction, isolation was the common purpose” (Larson, 2010: 144). The main reason for this shared resistance was the fact that prisons became another universe, detached from reality and without any connection to it, in the words of Breytenbach, a “complete prison universe” (1984: 276). Thus, isolation was not only physical, but the mental isolation of being confined, being constantly tortured and being removed from one’s home and identity. One of the main tasks of prisons was, in fact, removing the prisoners’ sense of identity and belonging, and one of the most effective tactics to achieve that was renaming the prisoners with numbers. Writing about their own personal experiences in prison served to counteract this identity removal and served as a kind of manual on surviving prison.

Doran Larson (2010) claims that there exist two main literary resources to fight against the isolation of prison, shared by these writers

A dissociative turn of voice that allows the “I” of the prison text – even when not opened into an explicit “we” – to represent communities larger than the prison author and *other* than those insisted upon by the prison; and the concomitant associative gesture whereby the prison writer names the contemporary communities among whom s/he numbers him – or herself, and/or names an ancestry in the history of prison writing (2010: 145).

There were three main waves of political imprisonment. The first one took place in the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, the second one occurred during the Soweto uprisings of 1976 and the third one unfolded with the states of emergency between 1985 and 1989 (Roux, 2012: 552). The first writers of prison literature emerged from the detentions that started in 1963 for the activities that could be considered opposed to the government. Connections to the ANC (banned at that time), recruiting people to join anti-Apartheid political parties or participating in protests such as the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 or the Rivonia Trial in 1963. Albie Sachs (*Jail Diary*, 1966), Nelson Mandela (*Long Walk to Freedom*, 1994), Indres Naidoo (*Robben Island*, 1982) or Ruth First (*117 days*, 1965), are just few names of prison writers that took part in the beginning of this genre in South Africa. Their writings, which could be categorized within the life writing – or autobiography – genre, not only delve into the imprisonment experience but also about the political matters that led the writers to that situation (Graham, 2005: 31). Many of these works had the aim not only of denouncing the abuses but to make the courts aware of it and limit the police’s power over the prisoners, what makes the writing not only a political weapon but also a legal record. The main way to address this violence was through metaphors due to the inability of words to express the pain they suffered. Albie Sachs’ *Jail Diary* exemplifies the way the prisoners’ minds started to rave when he comes to explain how he could see his own soul floating to the ceiling and looking down at his

body with the shape “of an owl that stares at me, calmly, patiently, and without emotion. It is my own owl, my own I. It is I staring at myself” (Sachs, 1966: 239). The psychological torture the prisoners suffered weakened their memory credibility and these memory disruptions were used by the government to discredit prison writing. “The materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness” (Eakin, 1985: 56). These prison writings underscore the importance of remembering past events, because those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it<sup>12</sup>. At that time, they served as evidence of the brutal reality of South African prisons, but in the long term they should provide documentation to prevent such atrocities in the future<sup>13</sup>.

Breytenbach’s *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984) also exposes the fight against self-alienation due to “the dissolution of his sense of communal identity as he attempts to constitute an inventory of himself out of the [...] collective responsibility and guilt of his white South African past” (Schalkwyk, 1994: 27), a feature shared by Sachs, as both were white political activists. Indres Naidoo, on the contrary, explains in his *Robben Island* (1982) how, as an Indian South African prisoner on Robben Island, he was better treated than his black companions, even in terms of the amount of food they received depending on their race.

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<sup>12</sup> This famous saying seems to come from the writings of the twentieth-century philosopher Jorge Santayana.

<sup>13</sup> This idea of remembering the past can be directly connected to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. See Chapter 2 for more information.



6. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN B AND C DIETS:

B - Coloureds/Asiaties

C - Bantus

Mealie meal 6oz - breakfast

Mealie meal 12oz:

Breakfast - 6oz

Supper - 6oz

Bread: 4oz lunch & 4oz supper

Puzamandla - lunch

Fat: 1oz daily per person

Fat ½oz per person daily

Mealie rice or soup

Mealies

Meat: 6oz per person

Meat 5oz per person

Jam/Syrup: 1oz per person  
daily

No jam/syrup

Sugar: 2oz

Sugar 1½oz

Coffee: Breakfast - ½oz  
Supper ½oz

Coffee: breakfast 1½oz <sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub>

\*Diets' chart on Robben Island<sup>14</sup>.

South African prisons were very interested in marking this distinction among races, genders or political inclinations to avoid the feeling of collective identity among the prisoners. “One of the functions of the Apartheid prison was precisely to reinscribe notions of separate cultures and discrete races in the face of a mass struggle that attempted to remove these barriers” (Roux, 2012: 556). Sachs and Naidoo’s narratives differ in many ways, despite both being tools of resistance. The main reason why they differ is the amount of time they spent in jail. While Sachs spent five months, Naidoo was on Robben Island for ten years, so not only that the latter is much more summarized, but it also deals much more with the life in one of the worst Apartheid prisons, representing the second main difference between both experiences. What sets *Robben Island* (1982) apart from

<sup>14</sup> Pictures taken during my visit to Robben Island, 2022.

the other works mentioned is the political community and solidarity among prisoners, as mentioned in this book, Robben Island guards saw “the unity we maintained, despite every effort of the Prison Department to break us up” (Naidoo, 1982: 241). It is noteworthy that the use of the word ‘we’ was officially forbidden in South African prisons, precisely to avoid any shared feeling of identity among the prisoners (Roux, 2012: 549). In fact, Mandela, who spent eighteen years on Robben Island, exposed this same idea in his *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) of collective identity and solidarity as techniques of resistance:

Our survival depended on understanding what the authorities were attempting to do to us, and sharing that understanding with each other. It would be very hard, if not impossible, for one man alone to resist. I do not know that I could have done it had I been alone. But the authorities’ greatest mistake was to keep us together, for together our determination was reinforced. We supported each other and gained strength from each other. Whatever we knew, whatever we learned, we shared, and by sharing whatever courage we had individually (1994: 463).

Apart from the institutionalized harassment suffered by the political prisoners on Robben Island, all over the country the police “had perfected their interrogation techniques and grown more willing to use extreme tactics like sleep deprivation and physical assaults” (Graham, 2005: 36). The third wave of political imprisonments during the 1976 uprisings was directly influenced by the Black Consciousness movement and also by the writing of former generations of political prisoners. Works such as Caesarina Kona Makhoere’s *No Child’s Play: In Prison under Apartheid* (1988) or Molefe Pheto’s *A Night Fell: Memoirs of a Political Prisoner in South Africa* (1985) show the increase of the activists’ militancy in the last period of Apartheid. Furthermore, a vast number of South African prison writing was written in English, which was considered the language of political struggle (Roux, 2012: 553) and also because it was a way of internationalizing the South African Apartheid dilemma.

Thus, it can be said that South African prison writing first serves the purpose of recording the Apartheid prison conditions and that of fighting against its policies. Then, the shared plight of writing about individual experiences but at the same time speaking on behalf of a whole community was vital. Finally, the aim of raising the South African prison writing to a global discourse of human rights underscores its importance in the South African canon.

Returning to the 1980s literary premise of dealing with the black struggle and giving voice to those who lacked it during Apartheid, we find the figure of Albie Sachs again, whose paper “Preparing Ourselves for Freedom” in 1989 gave that openness that was about to take place in South Africa. His main idea was “we all know where South Africa is, but we did not yet know what it is’ and claiming that ‘culture is a weapon of struggle [...] a instrumental and non-dialectical view of culture” (Sachs, 1989: 19). One of the main problems he addressed was the fact that South African art in general and literature in particular was governed by their oppressors and so he asked for the freedom of artists and the independence of art. In the last days of Apartheid, when the ANC was unbanned and the release of political prisoners began, South Africa entered into a phase of negotiations about its future, which brought not only a sense of uncertainty about the future but also a transformation of the imagination to something more real. Thus, this was the last phase of the interregnum. These last years of ‘pre-post-Apartheid’ times were an absolute mixture of horror, hope, promises, past, present and future (Clingman, 2012: 647). In these terms, South African literature also changed and raised new perspectives, Lauretta Ngcobo wrote *And They Didn't Die* (1990) addressing the intersections of African culture and Apartheid through the struggle of women. The challenge for women to separate the public and private spheres after being relegated to the home space and being completely controlled outside the home “suggests the difficulties for women of

navigating and transgressing the bounds of home during and after the transition” (Samuelson, 2008: 132). Richard Rive continued his novel *Emergency in Emergency Continued* (1990), Elleke Boehmer wrote *Screens Against the Sky* (1990) dealing with the feminist view of white South Africans. Nadine Gordimer published *None to Accompany Me* (1994), the year when Apartheid finished and dealing with all the transitions that happened, were happening and were about to happen: the exiles, the return home and the abandonment of former roles. Zakes Mda wrote *Ways of Dying* (1995) in the form of magical realism to address solidarity but also with the betrayal of the citizens during the struggle by political leaders (Clingman, 2012). Thus, and as has happened in the all-different social changes, the socio-cultural breach built between the ‘Old South Africa’ and the ‘New South Africa’ was inevitably represented in the national writing. As Wicomb notes, it was “a rupture that must necessarily influence the course of writing” (2018: 53).

However, during this ‘New South Africa’ some literary critics preferred to use the term ‘post-anti-apartheid’ rather than ‘post-apartheid’ literature since the transition was not always positive and brought pro-Apartheid demonstrations, crime and violence. In fact, there was a shared feeling of disenchantment within the literary writers growing in the new millennium, addressing similar topics than before ‘the change’, such as socio-economic inequality, racism, sexism, political transitions, national allegories, domestic spaces or the social space of South Africa, all of which have undoubtedly marked South African writing. However, it would not be accurate to gather all the Apartheid writing as protest literature (Davis, 2013: 798). There is another type of literature that must be considered when dealing with this transitional period of Apartheid, autobiography or life writing, “a genre that merges two of the most marketable forms of postcolonial writing: the *Bildungsroman* and the national allegory” (Barnard, 2012: 656). These works

primarily present the lives of political figures, veterans, writers or, in general, survivors of the struggle during Apartheid, describing their personal experiences of the past as lessons for the future.

The passage of time which brought forth our freedom has given legitimacy and authority to previously silenced voices. It has lifted the veil of secrecy and state-induced blindness... Where in the past the state attempted to compel the oppressed to deny the testimony of their own experience, today that experience is one of the essential conditions for the emergence of national consciousness (Ndebele, 1998: 21)

As exemplified in the quote above, national memory and the way in which it was written, expressed, and preserved became one of the main topics in post-Apartheid literature.

South African life writing has been a very popular genre mostly from the 1990s onwards precisely because of the constant lack of a sense of belonging. However, black life writing was more focused on the communal identity, self-healing and the shared feeling of rejection from land and society, as for example Sindiwe Magona's *Forced to Grow* (1992) or Fred Khumalo's *Touch my Blood* (2006). On the other hand, white life writing was led by the general feeling of guilt, confession and self-reflection, with works such as Karel Schoeman's *Die Laaste Afrikaanse Boek* (2002), Breyten Breytenbach's *Woordwerk* (1999) (Daymond et al 2012: 717) or Antjie Krog's *Begging to be Black* (2009). In this last work, Krog expresses, through the confessional uncanny mode of writing, her "white guilt" (Pujolràs-Noguer, 2023). Identity formations of Apartheid were the reason for the boost of life writing, memoirs and life narrative, with emerging themes that surround the nature of South African identity: race, self-representation or political policies (Driver et al. 2014: 156). To appreciate the differences that exist between both black and white life writing approaches, we can consider, for example, Zubeida Jaffer's autobiography *Our Generations* (2003), which focuses on the anti-Apartheid struggle in

combination with motherhood. Not only does she deal with the racial matter but also with her outrageous experiences as an activist – the overcoming of a friend’s murder – and as a woman who wanted to follow her own path – moving to the United States to focus on her journalism career leaving behind her daughter and her activist work (Hand, 2018). On the other hand, another renowned life writer worth mentioning is J. M. Coetzee, whose autobiographical trilogy *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002) and *Summertime* (2009) tells – in a fictionalized way – the story of his beginnings as a writer. The first one describes his childhood and his not-always-easy family relations, while the second puts under the microscope his relationship with his writing and his first steps and failures as a writer. *Summertime* examines Coetzee’s life through the perspective of five people who knew him.

Furthermore, writers from this period dealt not only with the past, but also with how some traces of the past are still present and latent in South African society. It should also be noted that while works dealt with reconciliation and healing through the previous silenced voices, some writers such as Zoë Wicomb (with her novel *David’s Story*), Lewis Nkosi or Mandla Langa are considered more recalcitrant towards the still existing hegemonic power. In more contemporary South African novels, we can find Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1996), Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light* (2006) or Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2004) where the characters engage in an exercise of reliving the past in order to confront the trauma, though not necessarily using the darkness for healing. In fact, the claim that post-Apartheid literature is focused on the past is not accurate enough. Usually, in this kind of works the reader finds the past, the present and the future quite entwined, which results in complicated narrative structures with multilayered plot lines. One of the reasons for the past to be so present in contemporary South African literature is the cultural, political and economic bond that still exists with the racial issue

in the country. As literature is a cultural practice that serves as a reflection of a particular time and place, contemporary South African literature simply unveils what has continuously been the main country's dilemma: the historical disregard for non-whites, a dilemma that will always be attached to the past. Jane Poyner introduces the idea of dealing with the struggle of the South African population without necessarily focusing on a political or protest basis, claiming that "post-Apartheid, novelists and writers have been enabled to turn their gaze inwards to the private sphere, to reflection and self-questioning, accounting for the proliferation of autobiographies and confessionals during this period" (Poyner, 2008: 103).

It is also worth mentioning the 1996 South African constitution and the banning of the discrimination of sexual orientation. This new law did not end with the prejudicial attitudes at once, but it signified a change in people's minds through the discourse of rights and liberation formerly created for racist and classist attitudes in South Africa. Post-Apartheid literature also addressed this issue, not only as a boost of new gay and lesbian writers but, more broadly, of the literary treatment of sexuality and how the reality of the nation should be represented in literature. Before post-Apartheid times, literature was vastly focused on domestic terms and gendered roles in more traditional ways, and the social change that came after 1994 brought new perspectives to address the issues of feminism, sexual violence or reproduction (Barnard, 2012: 661). The inclusion of new writers, genres and topics in South African literature demonstrates how language allows the formerly 'silenced' voices to speak on their behalf and use their subjectivity to deal with the subordination they have been subdued to: "subjectivity of the oppressed then is asserted through language" (Wicomb, 2018: 56).

While it was commonly argued that South African literature was meant to heal the racial fracture, post-Apartheid literature, in a way, departed from this idea to instead make

connections with different international trends – magical realism, immigrant narrative or more experimental forms. One of them was the short story format, which allows the writer to pay attention to more local and specific ways of meaning, having less pressure on national allegories than the novel. Thus, writing about nation in a time of globalism in terms of economy and culture was a challenging task. This does not mean that the nation disappeared, but rather a new way to represent the nation, where this globalization – the international influx of people and capital, multiplicity, cosmopolitanism, migration or displacement – is also present in contemporary South African literature: “the culture of global mobility is evident, above all, in the spate of writings about urban space that has been such a rich and distinctive feature of post-Apartheid literature and criticism” (Barnard, 2012: 669). Thus, in this context, authors such as A. H. M. Scholtz, Brink, Ivan Vladislavic, K. Sello Duiker or Phaswane Mpe, provide the reader with an optimistical sense of belonging and being, the fact that one can be ‘anybody’ and change themselves in the urban multiplicity and, on the other hand, they explore issues of migration, displacement and discrimination of otherness.

By the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century – post-Apartheid time – literary criticism itself was rather left aside to give way to more cultural debates on the evident social situation that South Africa was going through. Thus, works on Black consciousness, class and gender were at the highest point of interest with journals like *AlterNation* (1994) and *Scrutiny2* (1996). However, and despite the apparent shift in the focus and the target of writing, there was – and still is – a broad sense of conservative basis in terms of cultural or literary criticism, since most cultural authority is still controlled by the government and the high spheres. Moreover, the difference in education among races in South Africa intensifies the rupture between blacks and whites and hinders the creation of a multiracial literary culture. Wicomb also addresses this



problem and claims there is an urgent need for a change in South African literary culture from the ground up: “without a decent, compulsory, multilingual system of education for all, we cannot move toward a national interracial culture” (Wicomb, 2018: 65).

When dealing with post-Apartheid literature, it is essential to consider the depiction of cities in the literary field. As discussed in the previous chapter, the former distribution of areas was based on racial issues, which meant a division between the rural areas for blacks, and bigger cities for whites. The abolition of racial segregation marked the transformation of urban areas, what generated a discussion among the academics of “the urban redevelopment forums and committees that discussed the rebuilding of post-Apartheid cities” (Gibbs, 2019: 1230). Inside the cities, it was common to find dormitory townships for black workers and white suburbs, all of them entwined and coordinated in the city center. Thus, these cities are represented in South African literature as the destination for migrants and black workers, addressing the black struggle to fight for the cities they had been excluded from in former years. Literature representing Johannesburg, for example, usually has a black rural protagonist that arrives in the big city in search for work, encountering an overwhelming but magnetic city where he has to find his own place. This was a pattern throughout the years, from R. R. Dhlomo’s *An African Tragedy* (1928) to Alan Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1949) or F. A. Venter’s *Swart Pelgrim* (1958). However, recent literature has gradually started to deal with housing projects for “poor whites”. *Voices of Resilience: A Living History of the Kenneth Gardens Municipal Housing Estate in Durban* (2018) written by Monique Marks, Kira Erwin and Tamlynn Fleetwood is among the books that analyzes the Kenneth Gardens’ relocation planning for impoverished whites because of the significant percentage of whites living below the poverty line.

By the end of the twentieth century, the literature shifted to more protest work due to the geographical and cultural marginalization of the black population so their townships then became places of resistance. *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981) by Mongane Serote depicts this idea:

From the centre of the Golden City to the centre of the Dark City is a mere nine miles. Where one starts the other ends, and where one ends, the other begins... Everything that says anything about the progress of man, the distance which man has made in terms of technology, efficiency and comfort: the Golden City says it well; the Dark City, by contrast, is dirty and deathly. The Golden City belongs to the white people of South Africa, and the Dark City to the black people (Serote, 1981: 25).

Inside the writing of South African cities is the inherent concept of home – both in the figurative sense and the actual physical space. The Apartheid geographical segregation engendered a sense of ‘homelessness’ among the black population that was forcibly removed from their houses and left aside in outside townships. This did not only mean a change of the physical space but, what is worse, a loss of roots, sense of belonging and identity. As Meg Samuelson wonders: “how does the metaphor of the national home resonate for those who lived within corrugated iron, between cardboard, or huddled under bridges or on doorsteps?” (2008: 130). This concept of home directly connects to the gendered idea of the *domestic(ation)* of women, not only because they were relegated to the household but also because the home space was – and still is – usually the space for gender violence.

It is essential to consider the way in which South African urbanism should be reorganized for a convivial culture based on the intersecting cosmopolitanism (Samuelson, 2008: 133). Now the term cosmopolitanism comes to light, it is important to highlight the common misunderstanding on this concept. People tend to associate cosmopolitanism to the issues of traveling and approaching new cultures, that is to say, a

person is named cosmopolitan after having travelled around the world. However, cosmopolitanism is rather the ability to adapt to a new place, to a different language, to a different culture and to different values. It entails a position of openness and tolerance towards others' ideas or values and thus, travelling does not make a person cosmopolitan, accepting and adapting to a different culture does. In Michael Titlestad's book chapter "Writing the city after Apartheid" (2012) he explores the Africanisation of the South African cities due to the vast influx of migrants from other African countries – Nigeria, Zimbabwe... – claiming Johannesburg has become cosmopolitan (2012: 678). I question here the cosmopolitanism Titlestad alleges. The fact that South African cities suffered a massive migration and a variety of nationalities, races or classes coexisted in the same city, does not make that city cosmopolitan. Considering the numbers of Johannesburg (the city he provides as an example) the reality is that it was "still segregated along race and class lines [...] blacks comprise only 37 per cent of people living in the north" (Tomlinson, 2003: 13). There was a noticeable increase of non-whites moving to formerly white neighborhoods, but the percentage of blacks in those areas remained small. It is not only about the percentages but rather the fact that South African cities were still very much segregated, different races and classes did not coexist nor share the same spaces and thus, I question then to what extent Johannesburg could be considered a cosmopolitan city.

These urban movements were the reason for a new and more complex urban literature. There was a change between the former urban literature in which a rural black person moved to the city, to a more varied literature which could be focused on multiple stories, appropriation, the overabundance of post-Apartheid cities or socio-cultural clash. Many writers adopted this last approach and thus they focused on how society adapted, assembled and dealt with their own and others' identities and sense of belonging. This

diversity of post-Apartheid writing topics is an outcome of the writers' experiences. The same city would be portrayed in miscellaneous ways depends on who, how and why one wrote about the city – depends on one's class, race, gender, personal experience, if he/she is an outsider... – and which was the writer's main concern to write about the urban. Furthermore, it was also an evident discrepancy between former and new academics as regards the Afro-modernity. The "older radical traditions of scholarship seek to emphasise the enduring historical patterns of inequality that are seared into the fabric of South African cities" (Gibbs, 2019: 1231) while new scholars broaden their views on what they refer to as the emerging South African cosmopolitanism. Thus, classifying the writing of post-Apartheid cities in South Africa as a whole category is a very challenging task to do. As Titlestad notes "the post-Apartheid city is too immoderate and unresolved to be mapped" (2012: 680). Some authors who exemplify this variety of topics could be Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* (2001), Niq Mohlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) or K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001). Although the three of them deal with black South Africans' living in post-Apartheid cities, they have very different approaches to this issue. Mpe's novel deals with xenophobia, AIDS or crime through transnational relations in which its characters have to learn how to coexist with others' traditions. *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) paints a more pessimist view of black lives in a constantly changing South Africa, intersecting the issues of poverty, disease, violence or oppression. Duiker's novel, based on the multiple perspectives of young black South Africans, deals with homosexual desire, violence and xenophobia, but its characters offer a final sense of understanding the intersecting realities and their adaptation to them: "perhaps the future of mankind lies in each other, not in separate continents with separate people. We are still evolving as a species, our differences are merging" (Duiker, 2001: 456).

One of the genres that emerged in post-Apartheid cities was the crime novel, primarily because of the undeniable amount of crime and violence that surrounded South Africa in those years. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go further into this, but one widely read author of crime fiction should be mentioned. Deon Meyer's novels such as *Feniks* (1996), *Orion* (2000) or *Proteus* (2003) deal with white alcoholic police-men, black prostitutes and general survivors of Apartheid who ended up as criminals in townships. South African crime fiction is generally focused on the national and international networks of criminality as a representation of the post-Apartheid cities' reality where the restoration of order becomes a complicated task.

To conclude, the representation of South African post-Apartheid cities in the literary field mirrors the country's transformation process: the withdrawal of racial segregation, the migrant movements from rural areas to the metropolis and the general unification of the nation and its emergence on the global scene. Though black and white South African writing might differ in these representations of reality – in terms of how sociocultural factors affected the different communities – there is a common awe as regards the constant and uncertain change the nation was experiencing. Nevertheless, as seen in this section, the class issue appears to have been overshadowed in contemporary, post-Apartheid literature by concerns such as racial issues, urban movements, Apartheid restrictions, gender violence, AIDS, or diasporic migrations.

### 3. “I’m in the wrong bloody hemisphere”

The first Zoë Wicomb collection of short stories, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), displays the coloureds’ way of living during the South African Apartheid era through the development of the main character, Frieda Shenton, who acts as the link for the whole collection. As a kind of *bildungsroman*, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* presents the life of Frieda Shenton from her childhood as a coloured girl in South Africa in the sixties to her return as a woman from England in the eighties. The first six stories summarize Frieda’s life in South Africa until she decides to move to England to become a writer, although this desire is hidden from the reader until she returns home. Despite being fiction, Zoë Wicomb’s writing always brings to light some social and political reality of the time. In fact, I would say Frieda could be considered, in a way, the alter ego of Zoë Wicomb due to the similar progression of their lives, taking into consideration that both moved as young women to the United Kingdom for a personal and professional development (both became writers), and the similar colonial downsides they had to go through for moving to the so-called mother country. Wicomb presents her viewpoint of the situation of Apartheid when the conflicts (riots, segregation, unemployment, corruption or violent crime) derived from the unstable national unity were increasing, and so she reveals the dissociation of South Africa, which explains the reasons for her exile to England to become a writer.

Wicomb’s first book is dedicated to the first years of Apartheid, when the Group Areas Act (1950) was implemented, which meant the classification of the population according to racial categories and thus relegating around 150.000 coloureds to specific areas as well as creating ‘whites-only’ and ‘non-whites only’ places to ensure spatial segregation (2017: 3). For example, in the short story that gives name to the collection, “You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town” the bus in which Frieda is travelling was “fully

occupied with white passengers at the front” (71) while the non-whites’ seats were at the back. This recalls the American activist Rosa Parks’ uprising. Examples of racial segregation in public spaces could also be found in the United States during the twentieth century, and Rosa Parks was an African-American activist known by refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man in 1955. Her action precipitated the civil rights movement in the US during the second half of the twentieth century.

Frieda, the protagonist and narrator of this story, is a young girl of a higher-status-family because, despite being coloured, hers is the only English-speaking family in the village. She comes from a Griqua mother, Hannah, and a coloured father, John, with white blood from his English ancestors. Because of that, Frieda is able to leave her home to attend a renowned school that is forced to admit non-white students. Her father, Mr. Shenton, who is a schoolmaster, always tries to explain to his daughter how important education is to achieve a good social position. Frieda admits, “I am grateful to be going hundreds of miles away from home; there is so much to be grateful for. One day I will drive a white car” (1987: 24). I find this quotation interesting since it can be seen from different angles. On the one hand, it symbolizes Frieda’s eagerness to drive “a white car”, which shows how she has overcome, in some way, class differences and her attempt to build a future of equality where she would drive her own car. On the other hand, it emphasizes the coloureds’ general submissiveness towards whites, which reflects Bhabha’s theory on mimicry, based on the idea that lower social ranks tend to imitate the upper ranks’ manners, language and the general way of life (Bhabha, 1984: 283). Furthermore, it could also be a desire to drive a car that is white, an association with surrounding herself in a white shell.

In a very inventive way, Zoë Wicomb uses this short-story cycle to present the concerns of the coloured community of Little Namaqualand “caught between black and

white, English and Afrikaans, country and city; in part, it is to introduce a feminist perspective into the South African narrative of race, class, language and region” (Clingman, 2012: 642). One of the major concerns of this story is, in fact, to analyze the notion of the ‘real’. Thus, in the first short story ‘Bowl like Hole’, the question of identity is raised and how the narrator, Frieda Shenton, shows her perception of the ‘real’. Furthermore, it deals with language acquisition and the relation between English and power, something interesting taking into account the eleven languages<sup>15</sup> that coexist nowadays in South Africa. However, during Apartheid there were only two, English (the colonial language) and Afrikaans (the language of the new National Party and for many coloureds). However, it must be said that Afrikaans became, in fact, the language of Apartheid, which generated a complicated situation for those coloureds whose first language was Afrikaans before Apartheid. Despite this being a topic I deal with in section 3.1, regarding the language-power relation it is Richards’ statement: “this politicization of [the] English language, however, is not the Shentons’ motivation; mastery of the King’s English is the goal” (2005: 23). What should be extracted from this fragment is not the politization of the English language but the “mastery of the King’s English”. This means an interest in high-standard English, the English spoken by the nobility and high spheres, which is what colonized lower classes aimed to achieve, not simply a British accent (which would highly relate to race) but a high-standard English, which is related to class position. Although the party in power was Afrikaans-speaking, English was still considered the language of elites because the traces of colonialism were much implanted in society.

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<sup>15</sup> The eleven languages in South Africa are: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu.



The short story “Jan Klinkies” presents the reality of racial labeling under the regime of Apartheid and the resistance of the character to it. This story deals with Frieda’s uncle Jan Klinkies and his wife, aunt Truida who, “in spite of her light skin, came from a dark-complexioned family and there was certainly something nylonish about her hair” (24). There is an evident disregard of the family for Truida, believing that Jan Klinkies has made a mistake in marrying the dark woman. In fact, there is a moment when it is said that “they were not prepared to believe everything Truida said” when the hair problem appears. This is a recurrent issue in South African literature (this topic will be brought to light later in the chapter) since having curly, dark hair during Apartheid automatically labelled one as coloured or black. Thus, the suspicion Frieda’s family has towards Truida is confirmed when “the fashion of the French know that Truida so foolishly adopted confirmed suspicions. There was no doubt that the little hairs in the nape of her neck were rolled up tightly like fronds, unfurled by the cautions hot comb” (24). It is well known that this was a common parameter in Apartheid, so whites would not mix with coloureds or blacks. However, what I find striking is how a coloured family can judge a wire-haired person, considering they also have that type of hair. This leads me to assert that Apartheid’s standards were internalized not only by whites, but by most part of the South African population. Bhabha’s *mimicry*, 1984, (a significant approach for this investigation) and its exaggeration of the copying of culture, language and ideas would illustrate this passage. Another physical feature that was considered for racial categorization were nails. Thus, we can find examples of this rejection that many coloureds had towards their own bodies: “Now I look at my hands, at the irrepressible cuticles, the stubby splayed fingernails that will never taper. This is all I have to show, betraying generations of servants” (37). The phrase “betraying generations of servants” is interesting since it explains the duality many coloureds (certainly not meaning all

coloureds earned their living as servants) lived in when they tried to achieve a better position in life; they were leaving their former culture to belong to another and thus they would be, in a way, turning their backs on their ancestors.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Frieda, despite her skin colour, is one of the first coloureds that are able to attend a prestigious white school, in a time when it seemed Apartheid's restrictions started to blur after "a coloured deacon had won his case against the Anglican Church so that the prestigious St Mary School was now open to non-whites" (41). The short story "When the Train Comes" precisely deals with this issue. While Frieda and her father are waiting for the train to arrive at the coloured platform, he insists on the importance of having a proper education: "there is no high school for us here and you don't want to be a servant" (34) or "you can't go to a white school if you're so stupid. Shenton has enough money to give his only daughter the best education in the world" (41). In fact, he boasts about the family's English heritage: "I'm not clever old Shenton for nothing, not a wasted drop of English blood in me" (39), or "we, the Shentons, had an ancestor, an Englishman whose memory must be kept sacred, must not be defiled by associating with those beneath us. We were respectable coloureds" (123), suggesting that he is clever partly because of his Englishness and implying again the importance money has for education, and the relation between being educated and speaking English. This connection to England can be related to the Anglo-Indians who believed "'home' [...] was England, the country they had never seen was the source of all that they valued" (Sealy, 2017: 25). In his theory of mimicry, Bhabha considers the Other as "almost the same, but not quite" (1994: 131), which means the Other is neither part of the colonizers nor part of the colonized, denying full association to any social group. Mr. Shenton's deferential and slavish following of English values recalls firstly

Bhabha's mimicry, and secondly Sealy's idea of the colonized being amazed by and grateful to a mother country they never knew.

Finally, a boy stops at Frieda to ask "You start at the white school tomorrow? [...]" There are people who bury dynamite between the rails and watch whole carriages of white people shoot into the air. [...] Perhaps that is why your train has not come" (43). I would like to highlight the last sentence of the quote and how the train works as a metaphor for opportunity. Thus, it is not about the train delay, but the opportunity delay and how "her own people" (meaning non-whites) could destroy her dreams of belonging to a higher sphere. This does not exactly mean Frieda sides with whites; although she inclines more towards the white community (as her father does, who boasts about his English heritage), she still belongs to that liminal space of coloureds who were relegated in between blacks and whites. The Shenton family feel they are a cut above the ordinary coloureds, which resonates with Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), where he exposes how the black population is encouraged to emulate whites as much as possible in terms of culture and language.

In spite of Frieda's relative privileges for belonging to a well-positioned family, she encounters many situations where she experiences the downsides of Apartheid. In the story 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town', when she is dating Michael, a white man, and she gets pregnant, he asks her to marry him. However, mixed-race marriage was forbidden at that time "there are laws against that. [...] We'll get to England and marry. It will work out all right,' and betraying the source of his vision, 'and we'll be happy for ever, thousands of miles from all this mess'" (82). Despite the Marriage Act (1961)<sup>16</sup> and the laws that banned mixed-race relationships, Frieda and Michael had been together for

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 2 for more information about Apartheid legislations.

two years before the pregnancy, fearless of the police because “they come only by night in search of offenders. We have the immunity of love. They cannot find us because they do not know we exist. One day they will find out about lovers who steal whole days, round as globes” (84). Frieda’s naivety led her to believe that their love is not an offence for Apartheid policies. Forbidden love has been dealt with in many South African novels and stories, highlighting the naivety of the characters who believe their love is harmless. Shamin Sarif, for instance, tells the story of two South African-Indian women who fell in love in Cape Town during the beginning of Apartheid (*The World Unseen*, 2008)<sup>17</sup>.

In fact, Frieda finally decides to abort the child, the offspring of her two-year relation with Michael. There is a two-page passage where the whole appointment is presented from beginning to end, from which this excerpt belongs, specifically when she arrives at the consulting room:

You’re not coloured, are you?’ it is an absurd question. I look at my brown arms that I have kept folded cross my chest, and watch the gooseflesh sprout. Her eyes are fixed on me. Is she blind? How will she perform the operation with such defective sight? Then I realise: the educated voice, the accent has blinded her. I have drunk deeply of Michael, swallowed his voice as I drank from his tongue. Has he swallowed mine? I do not think so. I say, ‘No’, and wait for all the cockerels in Cape Town to crow simultaneously. Instead the servant starts from her trance and stares at me with undisguised admiration. ‘Good,’ the woman smiles, showing yellow teeth. ‘One must check nowadays. These coloured girls, you know, are very forward, terrible types. [...] Not me you know; this is mos a respectable business and I try to help decent women, educated women, you know. No, you can trust me. No coloured girl’s ever been on this sofa (86).

This is a perfect example of the white wealthy sphere’s rejection of coloureds, who are considered “terrible types” of people. Wicomb does not spell this out in so many words, but my interpretation of this passage is that the abortion as a symbol of aborting

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<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, issues of home and belonging in *The World Unseen* have been examined by Esther Pujolràs in her “At the Crossroads of Nowhere and Everywhere. Home, Nation, and Space in Shamim Sarif’s *The World Unseen*” (2018).

the discrimination and prejudices of her home country and thus leaving behind the bigotry that constrains her as a coloured person.

Despite its general view on the socio-cultural matters that happened in Apartheid South Africa, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* is also dedicated to language identity and how British English supremacy forced non-whites to acquire the proper level of English in order to get a better education and, subsequently, a better position in life. During Apartheid, there was an increasing feeling of inferiority among the non-whites also generating a kind of inability to represent their own history, which Wicomb attaches to shame: “shame for our origins of slavery, shame for the miscegenation, and shame, as colonial racism became institutionalized for being black, so that with the help of our European names we have lost all knowledge of our Xhosa, Indonesian, East African or Khoi origins” (Wicomb, 1998: 100). She goes on to say:

That black nationalist struggles gained an unstable popularity amongst coloureds is not simply a matter of postmodern skepticism of grand narratives of emancipation. There is the question of language or the ways in which political discourse relates to the figuration of colouredness in cultural texts. For instance, apartheid education ensured coloureds don't speak indigenous languages, and the Soweto uprising of 1976, characterized as a revolt against Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor, produced a movement amongst coloureds in the Cape to rescue their first language from its association with oppression (Wicomb, 1998: 97).

What this quotation suggests is that racial identity was not only determined by skin colour or culture, but also through the use of language. It should be highlighted that, in fact, Afrikaans – coming from the Dutch colonies in the eighteenth century – was the first language of many coloureds before Apartheid, since it became a mixture of different languages apart from Dutch: African, Asian or Khoikhoi. Thus, it is interesting how, as illustrated in the quotation, by the Soweto uprising Afrikaans was considered the language of the oppressor. Wicomb gives many examples that support the idea of language's relation to racial identity, which directly reveals the importance wealth has in education

(considering good English as an outcome of good education). For example, the “Marram” (76) pronunciation of a servant instead of “Madame” or Great Uncle Hermanus pronouncing “Juropeens” (92) instead of “Europeans”. There is another moment in the story ‘When the train comes’ when Frieda and her father are waiting for the Cape Town train to arrive at the coloured platform, when Frieda hopes

that Pa will not speak to me loudly in English. I will avoid calling him Father for they will surely snigger under cover of the whining concertina. They must know that for us this is no ordinary day. But we all remain silent, and I am inexplicably ashamed. What do people say about us? Until recently I believed that I was envied, that is, not counting my appearance (35).

This passage shows Frieda’s fear as a coloured person to talk in English on the non-white platform, so that the rest of the passengers do not judge them. This again exemplifies the coloureds’ liminal position where they do not belong to the black community nor the white one. By speaking English they stand out among the non-whites, but still they are not “enough” to fit in the white society, which again relates to Bhabha’s “almost the same but not quite” (1994: 131). This reminds me of the Anglo-Indians’ situation during both the Raj and post-independence India. Both communities share this “awkward in-betweenness, despised by the British during the Raj and mocked by the Indians for trying to be “so English”, which actually dooms them to what Sealy calls “a life of imitation” (2017: 25)” (Hand, 2021: 94).

In the story “A Clearing in the Bush” it is made clear how the nation has been politically – and subsequently – divided due to the government’s interest in just one part of the population. Tamieta Snewe, a cook in the cafeteria at Frieda’s university, arrives at the ceremony in memory of the assassinated Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, only to find that the seats arranged for students are empty. Hendrik Verwoerd was stabbed to death by Dimitri Tsafendas on September 1966 in the House of Assembly in Cape Town,

for being considered the architect of Apartheid<sup>18</sup>. She sits alone at the back, with a vast gulf of empty seats separating her from “the Boers” (Wicomb 1987: 66). When Frieda arrives at the cafeteria, the students are animatedly discussing the boycott. Surprised by her friends’ excitement about the assassination, she asks whether any of them feel “any sense of horror or even distaste”. “Dunno,” and Frieda thinks:

My father would call it inhuman, unchristian. But it seems to me as if people harp on about common humanity precisely so that they don’t have to imagine being a particular human being. All I can tell of the human condition is that we can always surprise ourselves with thoughts and feelings we never thought ourselves capable of (63).

There are three points that should be highlighted about this quotation. Firstly, the inhumanity that means supporting an assassination, independent of who has been assassinated. Secondly, Frieda’s mention of her father and the fact that different generations would react differently to this situation and finally, what interests me most, the divergence between a common humanity and a particular human being. Before going into the third one, it must be said that the generational gap is something very present in Wicomb’s works. It is for me, in fact, one of the main differences in society, and even more when talking about Apartheid, considering what older generations had to go through in opposition to what younger generations had to live as, for instance, Soweto uprising in 1976. However, and as mentioned, what appeals to me is the difference Frieda makes between the communal and the individual. What Frieda suggests here is that Apartheid brought, on both sides, a huge sense of community and communal belonging, which it is undoubtedly a positive fact. However, it also implies downsides, and the most basic one is the oblivion of the individual and the fact that, despite the communal sense of belonging, one cannot forget his or her own identity as an individual.

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 2 for more information about his assassination.

Furthermore, the different views Frieda and her mother have as regards the migration movements Apartheid brought in the younger generations should be explored. The young black South Africans had a very different perspective in terms of the barriers of escaping from Apartheid. In the last story “A Trip to the Gifberge” the reader can see how, without experience of travel, her mother is unable to imagine herself from a distance, taking into account the fear of strangeness that invades the human being. For Dorothy Driver the reversal that Frieda’s mother seeks will always be impossible, for it is nothing less than the reversal of history, the “unification of the split self and the fulfilment of desire” (2010: 528). Frieda, on her part, is unmoved by this abrupt limit because she has escaped the Apartheid spatial organization by rejecting the nation to which she belongs, which differs from many non-white South Africans’ contradictory feelings of, on the one hand hating Apartheid but, on the other hand still feeling part of the nation. But her mother did not have the same opportunity, which resonates with Dlamini’s study on how previous generations did not have the educational access that the younger generation can now reach. For Dlamini, this derives in parents’ obsession with high education (2009). Her mother is unable to find her place in the world, clearly produced by the Apartheid restraint on personal freedom. The protagonist’s move to England represents the eagerness of South African younger generations to travel overseas to find a better professional and personal life. However, the truth for the migrants, as presented in this collection, is that they are still out of place, as Frieda’s breakdown in England “I’m in the wrong bloody hemisphere” (120) is shown in the story “Behind the Bougainvillea”. The feeling of non-belonging the individual suffers after leaving the home country where (s)he does not fit and arrives in another one where (s)he experiences marginalization and racial abjection usually derives into an identity crisis uneasy to untie. For instance, Appiah, who deals with the relation between the identity crisis and social categories such as race, gender or



sexuality, asserts that these broad categories cannot represent an individual (1994: 149). And, for Charles Taylor: “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (1994: 25). Frieda’s return home suggested to her mother that a different future may be possible. If she does come back, her mother responds, she might no longer need “to make up those terrible stories” (189). A return to the Cape will, her mother assumes, obviate the need to imagine the Cape, that is to say, the need to create her own image of her birthplace. Frieda’s marginality in the final story is a reminder of her position both inside and outside the local and the global world. For Adhikari, this marginality felt by the coloured community “has made them vulnerable in a society in which race remains the primary form of social identification and therefore of social and political solidarity” (2017: 173). Even with her entry into the world of capitalist modernity, first in Cape Town and then in London, she still retains traces of her colonial past. The most obvious one is the idealization of England, encompassing both its landscapes and social opportunities; an idealization that usually lacks veracity: “imagining the bright green meadows of Hardy’s England, a landscape anyone would love” (98).

The story “Home Sweet Home” deals with Frieda’s preparations for her first journey to England. It starts with “Uncle Hermanus’ letter written in the careful English he never spoke” (91) after he moved to Canada – or “the land for the white man” (91) as he calls it – in search of a better life. Frieda’s journey generates almost opposite reactions in the family, so on the one hand we find for example how Aunt Cissie claims Frieda is “going to a decent place [...] and the journey won’t take long at all. I’m sure there’s some nice coloured person on the boat” (93). Uncle Gerrie, on the other side, is more reluctant to this idea: “so we’ve sent you to college, your very own college that this government’s given you, just so you can go away and leave us to stew in ignorance” (94) and claims

that there is a future for her in South Africa. However, Aunt Cissie counterattacks this thought and defends Frieda's decision: "everybody goes to Canada, so she wants to go to England where there's nobody, not a soul from South Africa. She's stubborn as a mule, always pulls the other way" (94). Additionally, we have Oom David who has a paradoxical opinion on Frieda's journey. "You're home now with your own people: it can't be very nice roaming across the cold water where you don't belong" (102) but the concern here is that Frieda does not have a sense of belonging in South Africa either. And he even reminds her how she has "carried water all your life like the rest of us" (104). However, it is not that Oom David does not want Frieda to move, but the fact that "it's leaders what we need. You young people with the learning must come and lead us" (103) which is in fact a thought I totally agree with. What he suggests is that for an innovative administration new people must take the power, which means new generations, who had more opportunities to have a better and wider education. However, he seems glad his niece is able to travel overseas and finishes the conversation saying "when you get back, come and tell me about the wonderful things across the water. I must tell you about the old days, of how the people trekked from Griqualand' and he stops for a moment, genuinely perplexed, and adds, 'I don't know if the Queen knows about all that'" (103). Oom David's reference to the Queen shows the innocence and lack of awareness many South Africans who had never left the country have towards the empire as the supreme sovereignty that floods the British colonies.

In "Behind the Bougainvillea" Wicomb deals with Frieda's return to South Africa in the seventies after ten years living in England. It starts highlighting the changes the country has gone through in these Apartheid years: "Oh you'll find it very different now. It's not the old business of waiting in the yard; there's even a waiting room for us now

with a nice clean lavatory. Not that these Hotnos<sup>19</sup> know how to use it, but ja man, I think you'll find the Boers quite civilised now" (113). Here, Frieda's father, John, tells his daughter how the medical system has evolved so coloureds have now their own waiting room instead of waiting for the doctor outside. This is again, another example of the Apartheid racial segregation during the seventies. While part of the population (represented by John in this instance) believed the country was moving forward towards a more equal society, the unbiased reality is that South Africa was still at that moment commanded by white colonizers' supremacy. Before continuing the analysis of the passage, I must say that these changes remind me of Frieda's change after her return from England. When she meets her old friend Henry Hendrikse, he does not recognise her: "I am still not sure whether he recognises me: my hair is no longer straightened, my clothes are carefully chosen from jumble sales and I have a vegetarian diet to thank for my not altogether unbecoming plumpness. An alternative bourgeois, European style" (124). This means not only a change in the South African administration but a more substantial change in Frieda, whose development is clear after her return. Her changes – her new hair, her new diet... – represent the Europeanization and colonial mimicry that Bhabha, Fanon and other scholars have addressed. Specifically, the hair issue was a common way to determine the individual's position in the racial hierarchy (Posel, 2001: 59), so the fact that Frieda straightens her hair can be another indication of her efforts to resemble whiteness as much as possible.

However, despite the changes that seem to have occurred in the country (the creating of the Tricameral Parliament in the seventies fostered better conditions for the diminished communities), that feeling of being out of place this story is about is still present in Frieda. "Only now, after years of over-eating, do I see I myself as an enslaved

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<sup>19</sup> See Glossary.

colonial. Still, I ought to challenge this man who stares so unashamedly. Am I not here precisely because I am tired of being stared at in England? Please God, I can bear no more scrutiny” (119). On the same page, she sees her “face bleached by an English autumn, the face of a startled rabbit” (119) and so both accurately represent the feeling of non-belonging either to South Africa or to England. She is looked at in both countries, probably for different reasons but enough to make her feel she should not be there. Wicomb’s use of the word “scrutiny” symbolizes how people have the voice to opine about coloureds as if they had the right to. And I find it revealing how only after living ten years in England she is able to realize her colonial past. Again, the word “over-eating” can be a metaphor of the probable quantity and quality not only of the food products but of the general welfare of England in comparison to South Africa’s in Apartheid times. Later in the story, there is another moment when she has met her old friend Henry Hendrikse and he notices Frieda’s changes after living ten years in England: “surprising that you lose your resistance to the heat so soon. [...] Tell me about the green and pleasant land” (128). Her friend’s words also show the kind of behaviour that contributes to her constant sense of misplacement.

In the short story “Ash on My Sleeve”, social class is very much present. While Frieda is in South Africa, she meets a couple of old friends, Moira and Desmond:

We have a servant. People don’t have servants in England, do they? No ordinary people, I mean’. ‘It’s a matter of nomenclature I think. The middle classes have cleaning ladies, a Mrs Thing, usually quite a character, whom we pretend to be in awe of. She does for those of us who are too sensitive or too important or intelligent to clean up our own mess’ (157).

The description Frieda gives her friends about cleaning ladies stands out. First of all, she mentions the middle classes, in which she later includes herself and changes the word “servant” Moira uses for “cleaning lady”. Furthermore, the sentence “we pretend to

be in awe of” is thought-provoking, firstly because of the word “pretend” as if they were acting, and then “be in awe of” which usually refers to a veneration of the authority which, in this particular case, is actually the opposite relation. This reflects the master-slave relation where the former depends more on the latter to maintain his power. Later in the conversation they talk about how the liquor business goes on expanding:

Why are the booze shops called hotels? Who stays in them? Surely there’s no call for hotels in a coloured area? ‘Search me, as we used to say. Nobody stays in them, I’m sure. I imagine they need euphemisms when they know that they grow rich out of other people’s misery. Cheap wine means everyone can drown his sorrows at the weekends (167).

Wicomb here presents the problematic situation of big enterprises that take advantage of less developed areas to establish their factories, signing abusive contracts and, to top it all in this case, sell the product to the same people they are exploiting. However, the three of them continue talking and Moira connects the liquor problem to the racial problem in South Africa and the new coloured “elite” that was arising:

It’s not surprising that the Soweto kids stormed the liquor stores and the shebeens in ’76. Not that I’d like to compare the shebeen queen making a miserable cent with the coloured “elite” as they call themselves who build big houses and drive Mercedes and send their daughters to Europe to find husbands. And those who allow themselves to be bought by the government to sit in Parliament (168).

In fact, Frieda would belong to that coloured “elite” Moira criticizes. She previously included herself in the British middle class and she, as a daughter, was sent to Europe. Moira refers to the Parliament because there was a Coloured Persons Representative Council in South Africa during Apartheid from 1969 to 1980, which was meant to represent coloured South Africans in the Tricameral Parliament. For many coloureds, those who ascend in the social hierarchy were seen as traitors who sold their indigenous past to the highest bidder. In contrast to the coloured elite there are those

coloureds who fought for the Black Consciousness Movement, such as Moira, whose husband comments: “now that women’s lib’s crept over the equator it would be most unbecoming of me to suspect my wife’s commitment to her black-culture group. A worthy affair, affiliated to the UDF you know” (165). And in the same story we have Martin, another childhood friend, who “has fallen in love with an AZAPO woman, married her and stopped coming around” (159). The AZAPO is the Azanian People’s Organization, founded in 1978 and still active, inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement. This organization was created after Steve Biko’s detention in 1997 in order to provide black people with the strength and tools to fight for their rights and their collective dignity. In order to do this, they created diverse organizations akin to AZAPO, such as the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA), The Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA) or the Azanian-Students Movement (AZASM) until they entered in the General Elections of 1999 (<https://azapo.org.za/>).

In “A Trip to the Gifberge”, the last short story, Frieda returns home after living in England, working as a counterpoint to the short story where Frieda decides to leave South Africa and move to England, “Home Sweet Home”. This short story is mainly dedicated to the landscape and forms of representation as a kind of counternarrative opening then all the angles of the ‘real’. She returns due to her father’s death, but what seems to be a one-time visit ends with Frieda wondering whether she should stay in Cape Town after discovering the downsides of living in England as an outsider.

On her arrival the reader discovers that Hannah, the mother, is alive and has finally a voice, something unusual throughout the book. She asks Frieda to visit Gifberge, a place her husband did not want to visit. Thus, I find it worth mentioning in this same line of Apartheid social restrictions the moment when Mrs. Shenton tries to reach a high spot in the Gifberge to see her house, but she is not able to spot it due to a high fence. This fence

works for me as a metaphorical barrier that impedes Mrs. Shenton from reaching the social status she longs for. “Nothing will do but the complete reversal of the image of herself in the wicker chair staring into the unattainable blue of the mountains” (187). What this excerpt suggests is that Mrs. Shenton tries to reach “the unattainable” and leave behind her current position in which she never felt comfortable. In the words of Dorothy Driver, “in essence, Mrs. Shenton is forced to occupy a world in which ‘a bush is not a bush’, or, to put it another way, in which she cannot reverse history” (Driver, 2010: 528).

In this same passage we find an assertive mother, something, as mentioned, not very usual during the whole short story cycle. However, it seems that John’s death has opened the door for a new world, Gifberge in this case. This world would represent the freedom she did not have with her in-laws due to her coloured complexion, something the Shenton family (a family with English ancestors) would not accept. This assertiveness is also presented in the way Hannah talks to Frieda when talking about the place she was born and grew up in, a world Frieda has been writing about and her mother disapproves of, a world that firstly belonged to Hannah’s ancestors and a world she knows well. Thus, Frieda not only discovers more about her background but also about her mother.

And then you can hoist the South African flag and sing 'Die Stem' [so the mother replies] You who're so clever ought to know that proteas belong to the veld. Only fools and cowards would hand them over to the Boers. Those who put their stamp on things may see in it their own histories and hopes. But a bush is a bush; it doesn't become what people think they inject into it. We know who lived in these mountains when the Europeans were still shivering in their own country. What they think of the veld and the flowers is of no interest to me (189).

Like many of Wicomb’s titles, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* uses irony to reveal the fact that it was impossible to get lost in Cape Town during Apartheid. The segregation rules that commanded what the individual can and cannot do prevented the population from having the possibility of taking the wrong direction. Furthermore, and even if the book is presented as a collection of short stories, it can be read as a novel since

all the short stories are interconnected through the character of Frieda Shenton. Despite the short story cycle form this collection has (implying the beginning-middle-conclusion pattern it follows), the stories frequently lead to Frieda. In fact, Wicomb recognized in the diary *Cape Times* that she formerly thought of it as a novel but later the short story form was subsequently “imposed by my terror” (Wicomb in ‘Chance to Meet Acclaimed Author Zoë Wicomb’, 2000: 9). This terror Wicomb mentions can be attached to different issues. Firstly, to the fact that the short story form allows the writer to portray a larger number of situations, plots and characters’ ethnic identities than a novel. Secondly, her terror could derive from her personal situation as she later admitted that: “material conditions dictated the form for me, with a small child and no room of my own . . . the short story was the obvious choice” (Olver et al. 2004: 185).

One intriguing fact about Wicomb’s works is how she is able to write on political issues while maintaining the fictionality in her whole oeuvre, which it is a frequently better way to address socio-economic concerns to reach a wider audience. In fact, she gave an interview to Eva Hunter where she explains this aim:

I suppose what I’m trying to do (in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*), rather unsuccessfully, is what Toni Morrison now has done in *Beloved*, where . . . she’s not concerned about ‘covering up’, but concerned with exposing, actually uncovering the economic and historical bases of . . . stereotypes (Wicomb, interview, 1990: 87–88).

As mentioned before, when dealing with Apartheid’s racial segregation, one cannot omit the hair issue, which was one of the most basic tests to determine the individual’s racial position. Thus, a pencil was put into the hair to check whether it remained standing or not. If the pencil remained stuck in the hair it meant that person was non-white, hence (s)he was relegated to a lower social rank (Posel, 2001: 59). Taking this into account, Frieda’s colouredness (representing coloureds’ fear for such testing) makes



her worry not only about the frizz coloureds tried to avoid in order to fit in with the fixated “racial aesthetics as to remain a part of the “higher” echelon of the coloured community” (Lytle, 2014: 200), but also about water and the English humidity and what she will do when her hair “matts and shrinks in the English fog” (Wicomb, 1987: 93). This suggests that this fear is so internalized that she is not only worried in South Africa where her hair’s shape matters for social status but also when she is living abroad in England. There is another passage when Frieda worryingly thinks of her hair in England:

What will I do in the damp English weather? I who have risked the bulge of a bathing suit and paddled in the tepid Indian Ocean, aching to melt in the water while my hair had to be kept dry. What will I do when it matts and shrinks in the English fog? Perhaps so far away where the world is reversed an unexpected shower will reveal a brand-new bush of hair (101).

Following how Frieda symbolizes the outsider status feeling coloureds experienced during Apartheid, Zimitri Erasmus is worth mentioning due to her explanation of how coloureds felt that they were “not only not white, but less than white; not only not black, but better than black (as [they] referred to African people)” (2001: 13). Apart from the liminal place they occupied due to their coloured condition, what this classification meant for the community was self-reassignment; many of them inclined towards black nationalism while many inclined towards the opposite direction, white nationalism and Afrikaner ideology, but not many accepted the in-between position of belonging to neither of them (Jacobs, 2008: 2). Some of them, akin to the Shentons, attached whiteness to a higher class. This tendency is in fact the pivotal role for the family to consider themselves white, to reach the utmost social position.

In fact, there is a good example of this black/white binarism coloureds lived in through the character of Moira, Frieda’s friend in the short story “Ash On My Sleeve”: “Just think, in our teens we wanted to be white, now we want to be full-blooded Africans.

We've never wanted to be ourselves, and that's why we stray ... across the continent, across the oceans and even here, right into the Tricameral Parliament" (156). Furthermore, dealing with black and white nationalisms, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* shows the resentment many non-whites generated towards whites. Thus, the reader can find Aunt Trudie's opinion on her daughter Marge dating white men. "Poor whites. She can't even find a nice rich man to go steady with. Such a pretty girl too. I won't have her back in this house. There's no place in the house for a girl who's been used by white trash" (74). This animosity presented in the character of Aunt Trudie firstly represents the link between gender and class violence, referring to "poor whites" as "trash", which is directly connected to the idea of intersectionality. Secondly, Trudie represents the reality of many non-whites who adopted black nationalism and returned the racial hate they formerly received. This imitation resonates with Bhabha's mimicry theory, based on the idea that lower social ranks tend to simulate the upper ranks' manners, language and the general way of life (Bhabha, 1984: 283). There is another example of this resentment in the short story "You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town" when Frieda is on a bus listening to the conversation between two non-white servants. This passage shows how the woman's madam ignores her, eats her food and, in general terms, never expresses her gratitude to her for her work: "Didn't even say, "Thank you, Tiena'. She won't speak to me for days" (77). And she also speaks with that resentment tone we formerly saw in Aunt Trudie: "they never notice anyway. There's so much food in their pantries, in the fridge and on the tables; they don't know what's there and what isn't" (77).

Moreover, a very interesting moment during Frieda's visit to the doctor after coming back from England when she reads a physical description of Jesus should be explored. She takes the book out from her bag and it says: "the right side was browner than a European's would be, yet not so distinctly brown as to type him as Hindu or

Pakistani and certainly he was no Negro, for his features were quite as Caucasian as Edward's own" (119). In fact, in *Playing in the Light*, the protagonist finds a description that "defines whiteness in terms of what it is not" (2006: 121), which recalls this definition of Jesus: "[whiteness] does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person" (2006: 121).

Focusing on the symbolic end this collection has with "A Trip to the Gifberge" there is Frieda, whose personal development at this point has risen to that of an adult, and "has finally become an autonomous being who knows her own identity as a modern Griqua understanding history and rejecting self-hate" (Sicherman, 1993: 119). There is a moment previously in the story where Uncle Gerrie suggests to her that in the veld (the South African steppe *meseta*) there was no space for educated people, but by the end Frieda is able to accept her Griqua roots and her relation to that veld<sup>20</sup>. She has reached this self-acceptance despite the identity difficulties of living in Apartheid South Africa and, of course, despite her own personal and familial stories, which hinders a definitive conclusion. As Rob Gaylard notes:

The stories suggest, however, there is no simple recipe for "being oneself." Through their sustained and penetrating examination of Frieda's attempts to negotiate her identity and find a place for herself, they constitute a most valuable resource for readers of all kinds. In the context of a tradition of black protest writing, which has been primarily concerned to document and indict, they offer something refreshingly different (1996: 187).

Finally, the subtitle of this section, "I'm in the wrong bloody hemisphere", is Frieda's reaction towards the British rainy weather. However, it seems that Frieda has this feeling in both England and South Africa, which represents the dilemmas of cosmopolitanism; "Frieda balances awkwardly, and never successfully, between the local and the global,

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<sup>20</sup> The Griqua roots Frieda accepts also refer to Wicomb's life since she was born in Namaqualand. Because of this, the Griqua identity plays an essential role in Wicomb's novel *David's Story*.

between the experiential and the systemic” (Parsons, 2011: 116). Furthermore, the character of Frieda represents the additional obstacle of being coloured in a country where racial restrictions and prejudices towards her community are the order of the day. This story summarizes the process of acceptance – and self-acceptance – the individual has to go through after repression of any kind. Most people are able to accept their past, but few are able to accept their present, which is, in a way, what happens with Frieda’s *bildungsroman*. Somewhere between this local-global duality one could probably find a balanced cosmopolitanism, but the truth is that, by the end of the collection, the reader still finds a Frieda that is unable to find her particular place in a world that, despite the social development reached in former years, may not be ready yet for a single and united community.

### **3.1. The Figure of the Subaltern in the short story “Bowl like Hole”**

In the study of multicultural societies, language has remained one of the main gaps that exist among the different socio-cultural groups. This gap has been a subject of exploration for a wide number of intellectuals who have dealt with both the linguistic breach and language acquisition. For example, Bourdieu (*Language and Symbolic Power*, 1991) attaches the different uses of language to the different markets, and through the language-market relation he presents the lower classes’ constant attempt to acquire the dominant use of language, that is to say the variety used by the upper classes (1991: 6). This implies a variation in the use of language based on the individual’s social position, a perspective that can be connected to education. South African historian Jacob Dlamini exposes in his *Native Nostalgia* (2009) the previous generation’s anxiety about education in a very delicate way through his mother’s experience. Under Apartheid conditions, education was a synonym of freedom. Dlamini shows how the fight for education varied

depending on the social class, resulting in educational divisions within the black community (2009: 92). During the Apartheid era, the South African population was mainly divided according to diverse racial markers, taking the linguistic gap as one of the most significant divisions that prevailed. Even in the post-Apartheid era, language still prevails among other racial markers. Therefore, an analysis of some characters who seem to be obsessed by the preoccupation of acquiring a perfect level of English will be provided.

The analysis of linguistic issues has widened in South African social research from the colonial times – where South Africa was subject to management by the British colonial power – until nowadays. Scholars such as Rachael Gilmour with *Grammars of Colonialism: Representing Languages in Colonial South Africa* (2006) or Jon Orman with his *Language Policy and Nation-Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2008) deal in depth with the first linguistic divergences faced by non-whites during colonization. Gilmour's study analyzes diverse South African languages (Sotho, Xhosa, or Zulu) in order to disclose how colonial linguistics contributed to the making of the colonial order (2006). Orman's, on the other hand, entwines disciplines such as sociology, politics or psychology to approach the analysis of language and national identity (2008). Both works serve as good examples of how language must still be taken into consideration in current South African society.

This section will analyze the figure of the subaltern in Zoë Wicomb's short story "Bowl like Hole" from her collection *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987). This opening short story presents the language struggle in Apartheid times. While examining the socio-cultural interactions that occur in such a multicultural society as South Africa, it is essential to consider the linguistic gap that may exist between different cultures and how individuals deal with those adversities. Although her oeuvre is based on real social

events, the individuals, their reactions, and interactions are not direct representations of real people. Wicomb thus creates an imaginary literary world in her writing that reflects the experiences of her fellow citizens.

Furthermore, the limited analysis of this particular Wicomb short story (the exception being Abdulrazak Gurnah (2011) and Dorothy Driver (2010)) suggests that critics have overlooked the use of a particular language as a marker of prestige. Furthermore, to my knowledge, there are no authors specifically dealing in depth with language in the short stories of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, which adds to the innovative slant of this dissertation as regards Wicomb scholarship.

Before moving to the analysis of the short story, it would be appropriate to give a brief explanation of what the term 'coloured' refers to according to the South African government during Apartheid. "Coloured, formerly Cape Coloured, [is] a person of mixed European ("white") and African ("black") or Asian ancestry, as officially defined by the South African government from 1950 to 1991" ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)). Thus, this term is commonly used to categorize the population that were racially between white and black, usually as a result of parents from different origins, according to the Apartheid racial taxonomy.

"Bowl like Hole", the opening story of the first Wicomb collection, unfolds the narrative of a coloured family in a South African village during Apartheid. The fact that they are neither white nor black leaves them in an in-between ambiguous position – also regarding class status. The term coloured in South Africa initially identified the mixed-race people but evolved into a politically-imposed ethnicity over time. They, like blacks, were relegated to isolated neighborhoods, required to attend different schools than whites and even hair straightness determined a higher or lower class; all these factors resulted in a huge identity struggle. However, despite the prevalence of Afrikaans as the first

language for many coloureds, the Shenton family can be considered an exception since they are English speakers. Before presenting the characters, it is important to note that we only know the family surname, Shenton, and Mr. Weedon's name, the only native English character in the story and the owner of the village's gypsum mine. The fact that Frieda Shenton, the narrator, is presented in this section with her full name is because she appears later in the collection as an adult, as an individual and complete character. The father, Mr. Shenton, has a fairly decent position as a teacher and he is the only one in the village who has a high level of English. He is the person in charge of helping Mr. Weedon when he comes to see how his mine is progressing, because the Englishman doesn't speak any other language but English. As the narrator is Frieda Shenton, the daughter, there are more details about her parents or Mr. Weedon (the only people she interacts with), than about herself or the mine workers. Finally, the mother, Mrs. Shenton, is obsessed not only with the acquisition of English and its perfect pronunciation, but also with resembling as much as possible English culture and all it entails. The story unfolds during one of Mr. Weedon's visits and deals with the different interactions among characters, the family members and the mine workers.

I aim to explore the extent to which the subaltern figures are allowed to speak for themselves in Wicomb's short story "Bowl like Hole". The characters' agency will be explored through both Gayatri Spivak's theory "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) and an adaptation of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism and monologism theory (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 1975). An exploration of both the three family members and the gypsum miners will be made through the theories above in order to discover who and why they are subaltern<sup>21</sup> subjects.

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<sup>21</sup> From the Latin roots *sub-* ("below"), and *alternus* ("all others"), *subaltern* is used to describe someone of a low rank (as in the military) or class. [...] Subalterns occupy entry-level jobs or occupy a lower rung

Firstly, I examine different points of Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). In her study, the author suggests that the socially marginalized individuals do not have their own voice, it is the voice of a socially higher person. To demonstrate her theory, Spivak formulates a list of the socio-cultural factors that influence or prompt the creation of this 'subaltern' figures unable to speak for themselves. For instance, she suggests the idea that the Western economic interests support their authority through language. For Spivak, one of the drawbacks of this interest is that any relation formed between the white individual and the 'Other' is usually romanticized by the former, and that this relation is articulated with the use of hegemonic vocabulary. Actually, the fact that the reader only knows Mr. Weedon's name (the only Englishman in the story) suggests that Spivak was right to assert that subalterns do not have their own voice but one given by a racially or economically superior subject. Neither the family members – including the narrator, Frieda Shenton, whose name does not actually appear in this opening story of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* – nor the miners have names.

Spivak describes the figure of the subaltern as always in a subordinate position – in the case of non-whites this would be as regards the British, or in the case of women, as regards men. Through this perspective, the figure of the coloured could be analyzed in a Spivakian sense, considering the position they were relegated to in the Apartheid racial hierarchy. This subaltern figure is usually, according to Spivak, ambiguous, irretrievably heterogeneous and never adopting a dominant point of view because of this liminal space (1988: 79). In fact, and this is very related to the other theory used (Bakhtin, 1975): Spivak considers that the subalterns' vocabulary shapes their own identity, as Bakhtin believes that vocabulary, accents or intonations are also a product of an individual's own cultural

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of the "corporate ladder." But the term is also used to describe someone who has no political or economic power, such as a poor person living under a dictatorship (online dictionary).



existence. Furthermore, Spivak's study explores the way in which the hegemonic power challenges the notion that human individuals are sovereign subjects with an autonomous agency over their consciousness. Thus, their discourses of power situate us here and there in particular positions and relations. What Spivak suggests here is that the higher spheres aimed to stratify society, relegating a significant part of the population to a weaker economic position, to a lower education, or to access to poorly paid jobs. In this way, what the higher spheres achieve is convincing the population that it is their right place in society, making them unable to decide about their way of living or to ascend in the hierarchical structure. This idea relates to the 'essentialism' Spivak introduces, which proposes an unchanging nature that secures their membership in a category so the individual's identity is relegated to a specific place in a system of differences. In this sense, there is an attempt from the outside – the hegemonic power in this case – to establish a collective speech, that is to say, the western authority is determined to speak for the subaltern figures rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. Related to the idea of the lower classes accepting what the higher spheres determine for society is Gramsci's study on social domination in his theory of hegemony. He believes there is an "entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (1980: 165). Gramsci's theory aligns with the character of Mr. Weedon, who accomplishes both this dominance and the subalterns' consent.

Subsequently, what Spivak aims to clarify are the ethical problems of investigating a different culture based on universal concepts and frameworks. The usual practice of white men talking about non-whites and how they cope with cultural clashes is, for the author, not objective enough and distorts the real situation of the subaltern figure. Her deconstruction of the self and the Other, the colonizer and the colonized and the majority

and the minority, is exemplified with sati, a Hindu practice where a widow was cremated on her husband's funeral pyre. In this context, gender is also included in the analysis, arguing how white men saved brown women from brown men. This statement repositioned the British again as civilized while the Hindus were depicted as savage. However, it is certainly difficult for white western women to know what those women themselves actually felt about this practice. Sati in Hindi means "good woman", which may signify they felt it was their duty to sacrifice themselves for their husbands' benefit. After the analysis, Spivak concludes that subalterns cannot speak for themselves since there is already an existing voice speaking on their behalf (1988: 104).

Secondly, taking the dialogues and relations among the family members, Mr. Weedon and the gypsum miners, I explore to what extent the single truth pronounced from on high that Bakhtin suggests is articulated by the only white man in the story. Bakhtin introduced two different ways of dialogue: monologism and dialogism. Bakhtin states that "a monologically understood world is an objectified world, a world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness" (*Problems of Dostoevsky*, 1984, quoted in Hays, 2005: 9). On the other hand, dialogism states that "any utterance, whether spoken or written, that people use in communication with each other is internally dialogic" (Bakhtin, 1986 quoted in Marchenkova, 2005: 72). For Bakhtin: "dialogism continues towards an answer. The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction" (Bakhtin, 1975: 280). Monologism defends a single-voice speech, unitary, with a centralized power system and taken as the only truth. This truth is always pronounced from on high, even when the discourses of the speaker and the listener differ in terms of socio-cultural issues. This means that what can be usual for someone may not be for others. What someone sees as a need many others could see as superfluous

or unnecessary, and which can also include jokes or slang that the listener may not understand. This idea relates to Spivak's belief that Westerners tend to speak for those in a subordinate position, and to her thought of the ethical problems that emerge when Westerners try to explain and deal with non-whites' obstacles. Dialogism, on the other hand, supports the idea of two or more voices engaged where the truth is negotiated, debated but never imposed. It implies multiplicity, different points of view and sets of social relations. This second kind of dialogue would be more descriptive of the cultural reality than the first monologic dialogue which supports the idea of a hegemonic use of language.

For Bakhtin, these dialogues are formed through a sequence of utterances, and he proposes three different factors that determine these utterances. The first factor involves the relation that exists between the content of the dialogue and its object and meaning for the speaker. The second factor to consider is the expressiveness the speaker uses, that is to say, if the relation between content and speaker is emotional or axiological. The way the speaker expresses him or herself depends heavily on the connection the individual has to the topic. The third and last factor is the relation between the speaker and the other's utterances, considering both the already existing utterances and the anticipated ones. Thus, the dialogue is primarily restricted to the relations of both the speaker and listener, and the relation they both have with the topic they are discussing. In this sense, the same dialogue can be very different depending on the individuals involved in the conversation (1975: 280).

Within the exploration of the sequences of utterances, Bakhtin includes the study of intonations and accents. As mentioned earlier, his belief is that intonations and accents are highly connected to particular social groups, usually associated to their social position, to their ethnic group or, in other words, to their *clethnicity* (2010). Thus, the struggle with

alien expressions is often derived from the socio-cultural clash among races or classes. Each individual can perform his or her own utterances depending on their relation to the topic discussed, and can pronounce these utterances according to their social group. This opens the door for 'micro-dialogues'. Bakhtin proposes the idea of a micro-dialogue within one word, that is to say, if we are presented with a dialogic conversation, a single word can be pronounced differently by different individuals. Thus, a dialogue on how an utterance should be pronounced is open for discussion. Accordingly, intonations and accents are a relevant part of the study when analyzing class situations, such as the struggle with alien expressions or the relations among the speakers' and others' utterances.

Dialogues, according to Bakhtin, can contain what he calls "double-voiced words", the words or utterances used for irony or sarcasm. These words have, on the one hand, a literal or monologic meaning, that is to say, a definition. On the other hand, they have a dialogic meaning that depends on the socio-cultural relation of the speakers. This means words can be unknown, understood, or misunderstood – among others – by the listener. Finally, Bakhtin's study proposes three different speakers for an utterance: past speakers, present authors and future voices who will interpret those utterances. What this interpretation suggests is that, in a dialogic conversation, there are firstly, different understandings of the matter debated and secondly, an infinite continuation towards a perfect understanding of the utterance, creating the foundation for language learning. Bakhtin believed in dialogism, in the idea that there is always room for arguing because individuals adopt different meanings for a word or a topic. "Every human resists, confronts and makes personal meaning out of social interactions" (2015: 643). With the theories exposed, this section aims to clarify whether the subaltern subjects in this short

story can speak for themselves and whether their discourses belong to either a dialogic or a monologic dialogue.

Focusing now on the analysis of Zoë Wicomb's short story and taking these two theories as the basis of this analysis, we move again to Spivak's study. One of the things she suggests is that the relation the white individual has to the others is commonly articulated with hegemonic vocabulary. This vocabulary can include both disrespectful vocabulary and simply indirect comments that diminish the non-white individual's integrity (1988). In Wicomb's collection, we can find how Mr. Weedon – the only white character in the short story and the landlord of the gypsum mine – includes in the same category “sheeps, goats or servants” (11). However, as Spivak suggests in her study, colonialists often saw themselves as well-intentioned and kind towards the colonized, and an example of this can be found in “Bowl like Hole” when Mr. Weedon tells the miners “I'm very happy with things, marvelous job they're doing” (17) or “how well they looked” (16). Mr. Weedon always presents himself as a kind and sympathetic man despite his indifference to anyone or anything. There is another example of the generosity he boasts about when he gives cigarettes to the miners (18) for the good job done instead of increasing their salaries or offering better conditions after seeing the state of their work place. Spivak also deals in her study with the ethical problems of analyzing different cultures based on universal concepts. This correlates with the idea of a white man talking about the social obstacles faced by non-whites. Although this short story is written by a coloured woman it should be taken into account how Wicomb is able to assume a white perspective – Mr. Weedon's. Thus, at first sight, it could be said that this specific story would not coincide with Spivak's assumptions. However, the reader can find the characters of Mr. Shenton and Mr. Weedon presuming to speak on behalf of the miners. The main voice they have, Mr. Shenton's, could not be considered white but he could be

considered socially superior to the miners. This is because he belongs to a higher social class than the miners, due to both his education, and the fact that he speaks English (with the subsequent position as a teacher that he achieved). Mr. Weedon, for his part, does not only speak for his workers but he also assumes their needs, preferences or desires. These are the ethical problems that arise when a voice is speaking for a totally different part of the population, as Spivak proposes. Those 'universal' concepts she mentions become apparent, for instance, when the miners are provided with cigarettes (18). Mr. Weedon's assumption, taken from the point of view of a first world citizen, is that the miners would appreciate the gift, without considering their more basic needs, such as labor or human rights.

Moreover, Spivak describes the subaltern figure as always in a subordinate position, ambiguous, never adopting a dominant point of view and irretrievably heterogeneous (1988: 79). The whole Shenton family could be considered subaltern in the sense that they are, as Spivak asserts, in an in-between social category between whites and blacks. One of the characters who best represents this notion is the mother. Mrs. Shenton is presented as an introvert, not very self-confident woman relegated to doing the house work. She does not want her family to be associated with Afrikaans speakers, whom she considers to be in a lower position due to the linguistic gap. However, she refuses to accept her family's colouredness, the fact that they belong to an in-between category. She hardly speaks throughout the short story, but every time she does, it is to make a linguistic comment. How Mr. Weedon pronounces words, how her daughter should articulate some words, or wondering about the spelling of a word are just some of her contributions to the story. She praises and imitates the English language and culture and, in fact, Wicomb describes her situation as "the opposite worlds she occupied" (14). Actually, Spivak mentions women's role regarding mainly colonial times, which aptly refers to Wicomb's

representation of the character of the mother: “if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (1988: 83).

Another aspect Spivak mentions in her study is that the discourses of power situate us here and there in particular positions and relations despite her belief in every human as a sovereign subject with autonomous agency over their consciousness. In this sense, we have the character of the father. He is the person selected for the position of ‘translator’ even when he already has a job as a teacher because the Englishman is reluctant to learn Afrikaans (12), his employees’ language, so he is the person in charge of the communication between Mr. Weedon and his workers. In fact, as the story indicates, he is the only means Mr. Weedon has to communicate with the miners, since he “spoke not one word of Afrikaans. For people who were born in England the g’s and r’s of the language were impossible, barbaric” (12). Accordingly, it could be said that Mr. Shenton does not take advantage of the autonomous agency Spivak suggests, instead he accepts what the superior subject has designated for him, despite the fact that his job as a teacher was economically enough for him. The gypsum miners, in this case, are left in a position of relegation and subordination, as for instance, when they are compelled to queue methodically or to speak properly, when the rest of the characters are not asked to behave in a determined way (17, 18). In both Mr. Shenton’s and the miners’ situations, in which hegemony plays an important role, it would be appropriate to mention Gramsci’s theory.

Every relationship of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and worldwide field, between complexes of national and continental civilizations (Gramsci, 1971: 350).

Additionally, he believes that “force and consent are only the endpoints of a continuum that includes such intermediate positions as constraint (e.g., fear of unemployment), co-optation, and perhaps even [Hannah] Arendt's category of authority”

(1980: 243). Thus, that fear of unemployment Gramsci mentions could be applicable to both Mr. Shenton and the miners. The support for western economic interests seems obvious when the mine chief is a white man and actually the only white man that appears in the story. Not only does he not care about the miners or how to communicate with them, but he also displays indifference towards the mine itself and its environment. He says the man-made mountains would be good for the rain, but the fact is that it never rains there (17). The character of Mr. Weedon can also be associated to what Spivak calls 'essentialism', that is to say, the western attempt to implement the collective speech at the same time they impose their hegemonic power (1988). Actually, this idea is also mentioned in Gramsci's study: "What is called 'public opinion' is closely connected with political hegemony, namely with the point at which civil society makes contact with political society and consent with force" (1980: 219).

As regards Bakhtin's two types of dialogue (monologism and dialogism), we could assert that the relationship Mr. Weedon has with the other characters and the impact Mr. Weedon has on others is mainly monologic. One of the reasons is the use of English as the primary means to communicate, and undoubtedly, Mr. Weedon accurately represents English language and culture. As mentioned earlier, the character of the mother is the most concerned with this issue. While dialogism opens the room for arguing, she rejects multiplicity and leans towards a perfect understanding of English, something that Bakhtin connects to the centralized power system. Actually, it could be said that the character of the mother represents what monologic dialogue entails: universal truth statements do not allow any other sort of truth (Bakhtin, 1986: 68). She does not symbolize that 'on-high position' that Bakhtin argues to be the only truth, but rather represents the way of adaptation and assimilation of such oppressive discourse. Mrs. Shenton seems to agree with everything that comes out of a native English speaker, in this case Mr. Weedon, and



trust his assertions: “he must be right” (19). One of the reasons for Mrs. Shenton’s vigour in encouraging the family members to improve their English could be her ambition to seem to belong to the socially highest position possible despite their middle-class status (Fanon’s theory of non-whites internalized inferiority, 1986). She advises her daughter not to be in contact with her coloured friends in case any neighbour could see them, and she depicts the lower classes as impolite, or in need to learn from Englishmen (13). Additionally, Mrs. Shenton believes that “Mr. Weedon being a civilized man might not mind a brown person driving his car” (14). Thus, this fear of rejection by superiors, a concern already considered in the field of socio-cultural studies, is represented in “Bowl like Hole” in the character of Mrs. Shenton.

The people belonging to the power system tend to pronounce the truth from on-high – and seem to have no intention of learning any other way of communication. Thus, there are several situations in which Mr. Weedon imposes his language, for example when, at the mine, he is called “baas” (boss in English) and he requests not be called like that (18). His reluctance to be called “baas” responds to his desire to distance himself from the Afrikaner style and the association of this term with an arrogant position of authority and higher social status, and not because of a matter of disparate spellings – both words are almost spelled in the same way. In fact, he can communicate with his workers thanks to Mr. Shenton, who is always translating for him. However, there are instances when Mr. Shenton refuses to translate because the miners would not have understood what he was even talking about. For instance: “‘For my daughter, [...] a sample of nature’s bounty. She collects rocks, just loves the simple things... [...] Oh Sylvia would love our Brakwater, such stark beauty.’ Father, who could not decide how to translate, called out, ‘Lekker werk, kêrels<sup>22</sup>’” (17). In this context, the social relation

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<sup>22</sup> See Glossary.

that must be embedded in this dialogue does not exist, and thus, the communication – or translation in this case – becomes complicated because, socio-culturally speaking, the miners and Mr. Weedon come from almost opposite backgrounds. Alternatively, Mr. Weedon mentions how the man-made mountains were useful for catching the rain, as previously mentioned, and Mr. Shenton decides not to translate Mr. Weedon’s words because, again, the Englishman’s awareness is still very far from the cultural reality of the South African village: “He had no idea that it never rained more than the surface of the earth could hold, enough to keep the dust at rest for a day or so. Father decided not to translate” (17). These examples could also be included in Bakhtin’s section of sequences of utterances and the relation already mentioned between the speaker, the listener, and their relation with the other’s utterances. Despite Mr. Weedon’s resistance to be called “baas” he also comes across other utterances he is not used to, such as when the miners say “bye Sir” in Afrikaans (18). In this last case, and despite Mr. Weedon’s poor relation with the Afrikaans language, he perfectly understands the utterance and has no apparent objection. One of the probable reasons for these two situations, so similar but with very different outcomes, is what Bakhtin called a ‘double-voiced word’. He describes this concept as a word used for irony or parody, with a literal meaning (‘boss’, for instance) and a dialogic meaning that involves the relation between speakers. This second meaning can transform the understanding of the listener and, in this case, Mr. Weedon could consider that the word ‘boss’ (a word that refers, in fact, to a high power) must be well pronounced to maintain its authoritative meaning. Alternatively, he may consider the farewell as a more assimilated utterance in South Africa with no dialogic or ‘double-voiced’ meaning. Another example for this irony Bakhtin mentions could be Mr. Weedon’s jokes, which he decides not to tell because he “had a deep fear of appearing foolish. What if he told a joke and the men continued to look at him blankly, or if they

with enameled faces said something irreverent, or just something not very nice? How would they laugh later at his blank or smiling face (16).

Moreover, other factors that Bakhtin takes into consideration are intonations, accents, and the struggle with alien expressions. This is closely related to the title, which I will discuss later. Several examples illustrate the different pronunciations the characters have, such as how the little children of the village waiting for Mr. Weedon pronounce “co-omes” (19). This particular utterance is connected to Bakhtin’s idea of how intonations are linked to particular social groups, in this case, probably Afrikaans speakers. As mentioned earlier, Wicomb also highlights the mother’s appreciation of the pronunciation of certain words, especially with Mr. Weedon – who is seen by the mother as “a gentleman, a true Englishman” (12) – noticing the perfect “r” vibration of tongue against the palate of Mr. Weedon (13). Another example could be how Mr. Weedon would remember “the day not one of the miners made a mistake neither stuttered over words” (18), as reason enough to have a day to be remembered. Again, this is connected to the centralized power system that expects the subordinate subjects to follow their standards.

Finally, the three speakers in an utterance as the basis for language learning that Bakhtin mentions in his analysis must be considered. Both Mr. Shenton and Mrs. Shenton would be an accurate example of English learning and the everlasting perseverance towards a perfect understanding of the language. They both managed with the words they did not understand while their daughter Frieda Shenton has already acquired a level of English her parents would never reach. It is beyond the scope of this section to go further into this, but suffice it to say that Frieda’s family is the only English-speaking family in a predominantly Afrikaans community and they feel superior because of that Englishness. Mrs. Shenton seems to live in the past when “colonial” varieties of English and Afrikaans

were deemed to be inferior despite the fact that nowadays that is not the case anymore. As Raja Rao said in the foreword of his debut novel *Kanthapura*, Indian English would "someday prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it" (1938), which is highly connected to Mrs. Shenton's attitude. This idea also relates to the internalization of black inferiority Fanon argues in his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), where he exposes how the black population is encouraged to emulate whites as much as possible in terms of culture and language, and how this attempt is blocked by their skin colour, assuming their blackness and the inferiority that it entails. However, he claims that this assumption is constantly reinforced by the racism that exists in multicultural societies and not because the black population do instinctively feel inferior.

As regards the three speakers in an utterance, it would be appropriate to mention again the figure of the mother, preoccupied with pronunciation. Here, the significance of the title of the story stands out. The last conversation in the story is between Mr. and Mrs. Shenton arguing about the pronunciation of bowl (/ˈbəʊl/), like howl (/ˈhaʊl/) or like hole (/ˈhəʊl/) because Mr. Weedon mentioned the word earlier. The mother, representing the Bakhtinian third and future voice, in spite of her doubts about the word's articulation, concludes Mr. Weedon must be right (19), creating again a monologic dialogue in which there is no space for debate. This relates to the idea of continuously learning a language that Bakhtin proposes and to the obsession the mother has to pronounce everything in correct English. Mrs. Shenton's preoccupation could also be connected to Bourdieu's introduction to language in socio-cultural relations (1991). He is convinced of the constant attempt the lower classes make in order to achieve the dominant language's proper level if they aim to reach a better status in society. In "Bowl like Hole", the figure of the mother represents this anxiety Bourdieu suggests in his study. Thus, this title would

not only symbolize the process of language acquisition, but also of culture, values, ideology, and the submission some of the subalterns have towards the power system and its members.

With the collected information and the subsequent analysis of Zoë Wicomb's short story "Bowl like Hole", it can be said that, regarding Spivak's study, the subalterns cannot speak for themselves. First of all, the character of the mother, whose interest in the English language and manners suggests a subjugation to the English natives, Mr. Weedon in this case. As Spivak proposes, the female figure within the subaltern world has been even more silenced, and the figure of Mrs. Shenton accurately represents this oppression of women because of her limited contributions in the short story. Then the miners, whose only interventions are "baas" and "bye Sir" (18), also align with Spivak's idea of subaltern figures unable to speak for themselves since they already have a superior voice that speaks on their behalf: Mr. Shenton's. In fact, the communication between Mr. Weedon and his workers would not have been possible were it not for Mr. Shenton. Hence, the clearest subaltern figures of this short story could be described as ambiguous, never adopting a dominant point of view, and heterogeneous. Almost every aspect Spivak mentions in her analysis can be observed in the different socio-cultural clashes within the story, mainly with the mother and the mine workers. These include the hegemonic vocabulary of Mr. Weedon towards the mine workers, the western economic interests with the only white man in the story exercising control over the gypsum mine, and the widespread subordinate position regarding the Englishman Mr. Weedon. The idea of Westerners as well-intentioned and romanticising the 'Other' is also presented with the miners and how Mr. Weedon naively describes them and talks about the good work they are doing. This could be considered part of the attempt Spivak mentions of the West to grant a collective speech so the higher hierarchies speak on behalf of the subalterns instead of allowing them to do

it for themselves. Both the characters that represent the concept of the subaltern figure and Mr. Weedon, as the representation of western economic interest in securing their membership in a high category, coincide with Spivak's theory that multicultural societies are stratified due to the combination of all socio-cultural factors and that this stratification is always guaranteed by the higher classes (1988).

Due to the respect and admiration Mr. Weedon generates in others and the fact that the English language is the only means of communicating among the characters of this story because of him, the dialogue in this short story is mainly monologic. Mr. Weedon accurately represents the Bakhtinian monologism with his single-voiced speech, creating a unitary way of speaking the rest of the characters must follow. In this sense, he embodies the expectations of Apartheid and the white society from those lower social classes, that is to follow the imposed rules of imitating and accepting the white standards. It is worth mentioning that in this short story, English is presented as more prestigious than Afrikaans, the other official language in South Africa during Apartheid – and, in fact, the first language of many coloureds – which highlights Mrs. Shenton's adversity towards this language. If we extract his interventions throughout the story, they are only assertions, he does not leave room for discussion at any time or regarding any context, making both himself and the other characters consider his truth as the only one possible. Even when he sees himself as well-intentioned, Mr. Weedon displays his power towards the miners and Mr. Shenton, who sometimes prefers not to translate the Englishman's words due to his awareness of Mr. Weedon's authority. Thus, and as Bakhtin believes, Mr. Weedon represents the centralized power system that controls them all with no regard for the socio-cultural relations that would convolute the communication among them. In fact, the only time in the short story where dialogism can be found is in the last paragraph, with the couple's debate on the pronunciation of "bowl". It is only at this time that a

discussion on utterances is open, but even in this dialogue in which Mr. Weedon is not taking part, the truth pronounced from on high still prevails over Mr. and Mrs. Shenton's thoughts. "He's English, he ought to know" (19) is one of the last sentences in Wicomb's short story, suggesting that the subaltern figure of the mother is still dominated by Mr. Weedon's truth, persisting even in his absence. Accordingly, and despite the situations in which dialogism can be found and analyzed, this text can be considered monologic. It would also be appropriate to say that monologism is also present even in the dialogic conversations that the reader can find throughout the short story.

In relation to the discussed connection between language and social position, and after the analysis of the characters in Zoë Wicomb's short story "Bowl like Hole", it becomes apparent that there is actually a common constant attempt from the lower classes, epitomized through the character of Mrs. Shenton, to acquire the dominant use of language. In addition, this character symbolizes the previous generations' anxiety Dlamini believed in, when education was significantly influenced by the social class of the individual (2009). Consequently, Mrs. Shenton is always encouraging her daughter to speak English and recalling all the obstacles they faced to obtain a proper education. Throughout the short story, the different uses of language correlate with the individual's social class: the higher position, the higher education and level of English. This hierarchy is evident with Mr. Weedon, then Mr. Shenton, followed by Frieda, then the mother, and finally, the miners. Thus, the often-discussed linguistic gap actually manifests as a division within the population based on pronunciations, accents or dialects, which are usually and unfortunately connected to a lower position in society.

#### 4. “You won’t make it to heaven without the AK-47”

Set in 1991, the year of Mandela’s release and the beginning of the end of Apartheid, *David’s Story* (2000) narrates the story of David Dirkse, a South African coloured man, working as a representative in the clandestine world of activists and spies during the liberation movement, a world seldom revealed to outsiders.

Since the official abandonment of apartheid, South Africa has been engaged in debate about the meaning of nation and national belonging. South Africans have been forging new political, cultural and ethnic identities through the opportunities provided by democracy and a new constitution, and also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and amnesty hearings, events with which *David’s Story* is profoundly, if obliquely, concerned (Driver, *Afterword*: 216).

David leaves his life with his wife Sally and their children in Cape Town to search for his Griqua roots in Kokstad. Zöe Wicomb herself was born in Namaqualand and thus, as she states, “grew up amongst Griquas in Namaqualand and so was aware of this history, of the figure of Le Fleur and the stories associated with him, ever since [she] can remember” (Olver et al. 2004: 131).

In the same vein as other works, Wicomb narrates stories of migration, the individual’s interest in the past and the complexity that exists between ethnic shame and pride – illustrated, for instance, by the Campbell family who passed for whites during Apartheid in *Playing in the Light* (2006)<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, “the narrative of Zöe Wicomb’s *David’s Story* (2000) is subject to a master trope of constructedness, starting with the first sentence, “This is and is not David’s story” (Barris, 2010: 31). The opening sentence suggests, on the one hand, Wicomb’s eloquence in her use of figures of speech and on the other hand, the difficulty of narrating traumatic historical events through biographical stories. Despite the biographical significance of *David’s Story*, its fictional characters

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 5 for more information about the Campbell family.



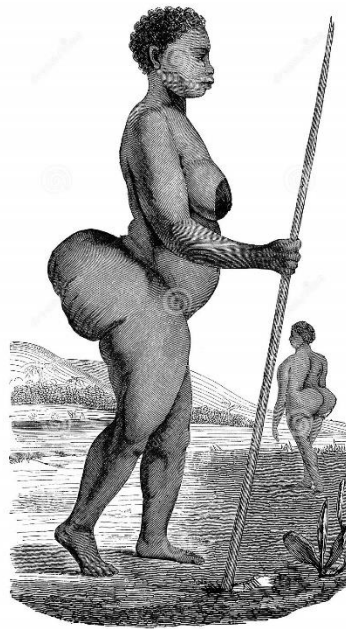
immediately convert this work into a novel. As seen, for instance, in Dave Egger's *What is the What* (2008)<sup>24</sup>, these kind of works “exhibit self-awareness about the various genres [they] draw from and transcend, openly rehearsing their generic complexities: the humanitarian narrative, autobiography, the human rights bildungsroman, fiction, testimony and oral history” (Peek, 2012: 118). Moreover, they create an intersection among the writer, the narrator and the actual protagonist, which allows the reader to decide whose voice is predominant in the story.

In the quest to discover his Griqua roots, David starts a platonic relationship with his fellow comrade, Dulcie Olifant, a black activist who sacrifices her voice and sexuality to participate in the liberation movement. One noticeable fact about Dulcie's narrative is her importance for both the story and the protagonist, but at the same time the limited information the reader receives about her. Because she is the backbone of the story yet unknown, section 4.1 provides an analysis of her, along with other women's, representation and their similarities with Saartjie Baartman. She was a Khoikhoi woman slave who was exhibited by George Cuvier and the doctor William Dunlop in his circus for her rare condition, steatopygia<sup>25</sup>. Dulcie has been considered by some scholars (such as Meg Samuelson, Mike Marais or Shane Graham) as the actual protagonist of the story as she functions as a double victim of colonialism and patriarchy. However, I wonder whether she is the protagonist or a substantial figure – in the literal and literary way – for the development of the story.

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<sup>24</sup> *What is the What* tells the story of Valentino Achak Deng, a seven-year-old, Sudanese boy who has to leave his village along with other children and emigrate to the United States.

<sup>25</sup> A physical condition of having high levels of tissue accumulation on the buttocks and thighs.



\*Portrait of Saartjie Baartman. [www.dreamtime.com](http://www.dreamtime.com)

Despite the prominence of David and his life story, Wicomb incorporates flashbacks to the beginning of the twentieth century telling the narratives of David's ancestors Rachael Susanna Kok (descendant of Adam Kok I, the Griqua's chief during the nineteenth century) and Andrew Abraham Stockenstrom le Fleur. He became the Griqua's chief after his marriage to Rachael, and whose story with the Griqua community started through his father, Abraham, who served Adam Kok III (Edgar and Saunders, 1982: 201).

Thus, the novel is divided into four different temporal sections that could be merged into two main plotlines: Kokstad 1917 and Beeswater 1922, and on the other hand, Cape Town 1991 and Kokstad 1991. To provide the reader with a proper background, a summarized social context of South Africa in those years would be necessary. At the beginning of the twentieth century the South African War had concluded (1902) and the first African People's Organization was established in 1904 by

Abdullah Abdurahman<sup>26</sup>. However, in 1909 the first racial segregation policies began to surface, which subsequently led to more strict policies over the years. In fact, the counterpoint to this racial segregation was the Mines and Works Act (1911), which was the starting point for the later-established African National Congress (1923)<sup>27</sup>.

During the 1990s, on the other hand, Apartheid started to see its end when the President, Frederik de Klerk, unbanned those organizations that had been outlawed during Apartheid, such as the African National Congress and political prisoners started to be released – the most famous release was Mandela’s<sup>28</sup>. Wicomb chose two very different yet parallel moments in South African history (one was the beginning of social restrictions and the other their official end), both known for the uncertainty and the uprising of the nation for a change in the socio-political scene of the country. In other words: “David’s story is a historical document in the most literal sense since it documents two historically fascinating periods, namely, the period just before the first democratic elections and the nineteenth century movements made by followers of Le Fleur” (Dass, 2009: 82). Finally, intertwined with David’s story and those chapters set in the nineties is the story of Dulcie Olifant, whose life and background are only – and still barely – revealed in the last chapter.

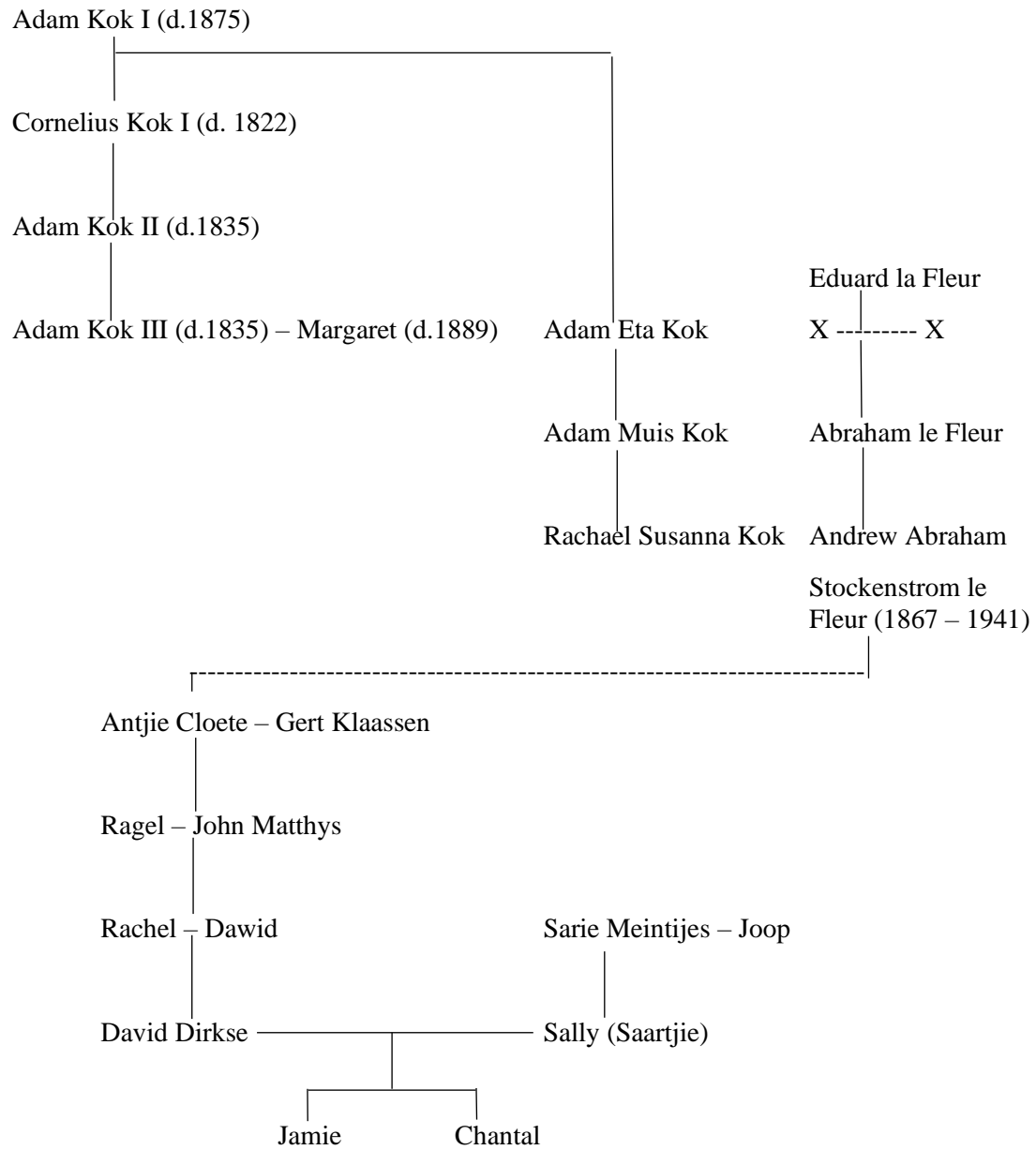
Before delving into the novel’s analysis and due to the complexity and density of the familial relationships in this story, I provide the reader with the family tree Zoë Wicomb attaches at the beginning of her novel, aiming to facilitate the reader’s understanding.

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<sup>26</sup> Abdullah Abdurahman (18 December 1872 – 2 February 1940) was a South African politician and physician. He was the first Coloured city councillor of Cape Town, and the first ever Coloured South African to win election to a public body. He led the anti-segregationist movement African Political Organization established in 1902. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/abdullah-abdurahman>

<sup>27</sup> South African History Online.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 2 for more information about the South African socio-political situation of the 1990’s.



Chronologically speaking, the story begins with Madame la Fleur, George Cuvier’s housekeeper and Andrew Abraham Stockenstrom le Fleur’s great-grandmother.

Madame la Fleur:

chose not to remember those months in London. She had never spoken to an English person before. [...] little did she know that after the standoffish English there would be enforced assimilation at the Cape, where they would have to merge with the Dutch, speak their language, and worship with brutes so hopelessly

deprived of the civilizing influence of European women. [...] That's life, she sighed resignedly, and endless shuttling back and forth between opposing worlds. Besides, who was she to set herself against the making of history and tradition (36-37).

Before commenting on the quote, it's worth noting the subtle change in the family surname from Madame la Fleur to Abraham le Fleur (Andrew's father), which can be considered a masculinization of the surname to subsequently imbue the family surname with more strength. It is also interesting that Madame la Fleur does not appear in the family tree provided at the beginning of the novel. Focusing on the passage quoted above, Madame la Fleur is the representation of Wicomb's main character, that of a coloured woman forced to move abroad and finding herself misplaced in a different culture. In the last part of the passage, she admits two crucial aspects: firstly, the opposing worlds between which she balances, and secondly, that she cannot change her situation. In fact, the character of Madame La Fleur resonates with Fanon's theory on the individual's assimilation of inferiority derived from socio-cultural segregation. In his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), he exposes how the black population is encouraged to emulate whites as much as possible in terms of culture and language, and how this attempt is blocked by their skin colour, assuming their blackness and the inferiority that it entails. However, this assumption is constantly reinforced by the racism that exists in multicultural societies and not because the black population do instinctively feel inferior (1986: 45). This short chapter on Griqua history presents their battle against the world:

The Griqua, who claim as their original language the Khoi language Xiri (not part of the Bantu linguistic group), have not generally identified themselves with the far more numerous Bantu-speaking indigenous peoples of South Africa, and the concerns of *David's Story* stand somewhat apart from the black-white antagonisms often focused on in South African history (Driver, *Afterword*: 216).

On the one hand, Rachael and Andrew represent the Griquas' feeling of superiority towards other coloureds – and the ethnic pride this implies when a young Andrew (called Andries at this point) who, thinking about the “stupidity and laziness” of his donkeys, thinks of

his Khoi ancestors who wandered at will to and from the castle because they would not be enslaved, which according to the Dutch showed that they were lazy, irresponsible, and without ambition. Could it be the mixing with European blood – for he would not allow the knowledge of slaves from the east – that later enslave his people? (43).

On the other hand, they also represent the resentment towards the colonizers' societies that wanted to remove their land from them. As Andrew says to his wife: “Rachael Susanna le Fleur, there is only one thing with which we need concern ourselves, and that is justice. That is our duty. We are Griquas and it turns out that we must fight foreigners for rights in our own land” (52).

The issue of land rights for the Griqua was brought to a head by the move to Griqualand East, which came just before the discovery of diamonds in 1867 in Griqualand West. Griqualand West had by then become part of the Orange Free State, a Boer republic, and in anticipation of this trek, Adam Kok III had authorized an agent to sell his land to the Orange Free State government (Driver, *Afterword*: 221).

Written in Andries Abraham Stockenstrom's diary, Captain Eta Kok claims: “Griqualand for the Griquas and the Natives. This is our land” (42). The eagerness for revenge in Andrew's character undoubtedly performs the violence generated in colonized communities. As Wicomb notes: “colonialism is a context that produces violence; apartheid, from which white people benefited – and with their investable cultural and economic capital continue to benefit – produced violence” (2004: 136).

When dealing with ethnic shame and pride – a recurrent topic in Wicomb’s oeuvre –, there is a moment in Andrew and Rachael’s story that entwines both feelings.

It was around this time that Andries anglicised his name, a process which in spite of his growing Scoto-Anglophobia occurred without a hitch. (The implications were wider than he could have imagined. Not only did it show that Griquas were in this respect indistinguishable from coloureds, but the practice gained momentum until the next century, when parents realised that children could from the outset be christened with English versions of their forebears’ names or even with brand new American ones. Such defiance of tradition in turn discouraged nationhood, so that Andrew came to regret setting a trend that so undermined his own project) (46).

The reasons for Andrew to anglicise his name remain unknown, but what one can extract from this passage is that he renamed himself out of a Griqua sense of superiority, but time eventually proved precisely the opposite. Wicomb mentions Andrew’s project which refers to his plan of converting other coloured communities into Griqua – which, in fact, led him to prison for organizing an uprising. This was supported by his other plan of collecting the bones of Adam Kok I, as a symbol of unity for the community. So, what initially started to show pride, ended up in Andrew’s shame. The “Scoto-Anglophobia” Wicomb mentions should be taken into consideration for its importance to Andrew’s story. On the one hand, the attachment of dominance and supremacy to Great Britain is palpable through the whole oeuvre of Wicomb, and the trend of anglicised names comes precisely from this eagerness to resemble the higher status as much as possible<sup>29</sup>. On the other hand, the Griqua community also shares an opposite feeling of rejection towards the colonizer communities and towards a government that still denies political independence or autonomy. It is in this in-betweenness that Andrew lives. In fact, he is aware of his community’s dependence on the English government:

This world is not the place we thought it was. Who could have imagined that the Commission of Enquiry for which I have fought tooth and nail could be turned into

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<sup>29</sup> This eagerness to resemble a higher status relates to the Shenton family in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987). See Chapter 3.

such a travesty of justice by Standford. Chief magistrate, my foot! No, we shall have to petition the colonial secretary in London (51).

Despite Rachael's thoughts about the fact that "a Griqua chief couldn't possibly go to prison. They wouldn't dare" (54), Andrew le Fleur – as many other revolutionaries who tried to change the rules – was sentenced to fourteen years of prison for uprising and agitation, although he was finally released after five years. His conviction stemmed from his attempts to try to convert other coloured communities into Griquas to fight for their rights in their own land.

Rachael sat hunched over the report in the *Eastern Province Herald*. A widespread hostile agitation was undoubtedly got up by the Griqua agitator, Le Fleur, but has been nipped in the bud by the prompt action of the Chief Magistrate and the patrol of the East Griqua land Mounted Rifles (61).

Later in the story the reader discovers that, in fact, the government tried to get rid of Andrew for his revolutionary movement against colonization and land appropriation. The last sentence underscores the whites' abusive mindset: if the colonized does not follow the government guidelines (s)he is automatically erased.

It was an ugly time, but twice, you know, twice those grand white people from over the waters hired cheap political skollies to kill the Chief. They didn't just understand that he had a vision, that he could see through things and repeat to them their very own words: By hook or by crook Le Fleur must be wiped out (106).

Wicomb's closing paragraph of this chapter is a quotation from Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Stepchildren*, written in 1924<sup>30</sup>:

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<sup>30</sup> Sarah Gertrude Millin was a South African writer, born in Lithuania, of Russian Jewish parents who migrated to South Africa when she was a child. The novel *Wicomb* quotes from tells the story of the missionary Reverend Andrew Flood, who marries an indigenous woman with whom he has two children. His 'sin' – having coloured children – not only drives him to madness but is also inherited by the next four generations. Despite their whiter complexion, their frustration in belonging to white society remains. Millin's message against miscegenation implies her racist attitude.



In other parts of South Africa, among the Zulus, the Pondos, the Swazis, the Damaras, and other such tribes, the people were big, and black and vigorous – they had their joys and chances; but here, round about Griqualand West, there were nothing but an untidiness on God’s earth – a mixture of degenerate brown peoples, rotten with sickness, and affront against Nature (63).

This quotation is intriguing because it precisely works in direct opposition to Andrew’s perspective. Sarah Gertrude Millin was a white South African writer and thus her work fits in the English-speaking, white, South African literature of her time. Moreover, she became a renowned writer for representing racist colonial ideologies (Turner, 2016). However, I wonder about the significance Wicomb attaches to this quote and what it represents. It seems a sort of response to Andrew’s rejection towards any other community except the Griqua. Moreover, it is worth noting the difference between the blacks and “brown peoples” Millin makes. Despite her racialized opinion on Griquas, other black communities are presented as “legitimate” in some way, without considering their skin colour. However, when referring to Griquas, she uses the expression “brown peoples” in a pejorative manner following the word “degenerate”. This quote shows then the sometimes-over-analyzed contempt for non-white communities in South Africa during the last half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Similar feelings can be found in other works: Annalie Botes, a South African writer in Afrikaans, admitted during an interview that she didn’t like nor understand blacks<sup>31</sup>, or Henry Rider Haggard, a British writer famous for his adventure stories, whose novel *Allan Quatermain* (1887) displayed the ideal English gentleman, depicting indigenous people as savages.

However, Andrew’s rejection goes beyond one single community, his pride for the Griqua roots allows him to go against anything or anyone outside of his community. Thus, the novel provides examples of both the resentment he has towards whites, and the

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<sup>31</sup> Hanlie Retief, ‘Hanlie gesels met Annelie Botes’, *Rapport*, 2010.

shame he feels towards other coloured communities. In fact, Adhikari highlights Wicomb's ability "to identify the feelings of shame that haunt coloured identity as tied to the historical mythologising of racial mixture as a product of degeneracy" (2013: 34). For

Andrew, whites are liars:

My dearest Dorie, you are a sweet, innocent, trusting little thing [...] but you know nothing of the world. Where in this country of colonists will one find a white man who is not a liar and a cheat? [...] Such is their contempt; they don't care what Griquas think. [...] What do they care about truth or embarrassment when there is money or land at stake? No, there is no such thing as shame, and that is why I will go on fighting, why their prisons are nothing to me. Rachael said nothing. The years of Robben Island had changed him, though she could not quite say how – except, how like his own description of the enemy he was beginning to sound (84).

And coloureds are pliable:

now God was finally leading them to their rightful place, the cradle of the volk. Kokstad, Kimberley, Leliesfontein, these were places they had been driven to by Europeans, where they lost sight of themselves and followed the foolish doctrines of missionaries. Naturally those early treks had come to nothing, were plagued by droughts and locusts, but this time they would return to the ancestral land of the Grigiquas, the land of radical heat (90).

What Andrew laments, I assume, is the absence of separate communal spaces where the different communities can develop by themselves, with their own authority and rightful voice to govern their own societies. Ironically, what Andrew longs for is segregation. In the words of Dass, *le Fleur* displays "pre-apartheid separatist policies" (2009: 75). This is beyond racism; he allows xenophobia to be glimpsed whereas he represents the nationalist and populist speeches based on utopian and impracticable processes:

But no, he made an announcement to the whole wide world, and his solution to the great coloured question – problem, he called it. [...] Coloured, he sneered, coloured! Let us for a moment do without the name given to us by others. Let us think instead of the Eur-Africans, those through whose veins the blood of European settlers visibly flows, and find our own solutions. Let us leave the Union to the Europeans as a white man's country; they, too, must learn to stand on their own feet and do without labour, make their own arrangements with the kaffirs. Since they cannot look upon their shame, since they must discriminate against their own flesh, we whose very faces are branded with their shame will remove ourselves from their sight. Here good people, is the solution for God's stepchildren: absolute separation. From white and

from black. We shall have our own territory, land in which we as a people can live and develop separately. Let us work together as one nation in our own homeland, where, through work and work and more hard work, we can uplift ourselves. With the help of God we will till the ancestral lands of Adam Kok and build a prosperous nation, a separate Griqua nation (161)<sup>32</sup>.

After the passage above, Andrew focuses on his “fine phrase” (161): God’s stepchildren: “when Mrs. Millin launched her novel of that title only a year after [...] Andrew was thrilled. He saw no reason to read it; he assumed her story would be an endorsement of his ideas” (161). Objectively speaking, both Andrew and Millin actively exhibit their pride in their communities and emphasize the disadvantages of racial co-existence. However, if Andrew had read Mrs. Millin’s novel, he would have realised that Millin depicted coloured communities (Griquas included) as a ‘sin’, as a racial condition that diminishes the authenticity and purity of whiteness; an idea Andrew would not agree with.

His search for Adam Kok’s bones, in fact, intensifies the dream of this ideal isolated community of pure Griquas, all descendants from the great Adam Kok that he pretends to build. There is an example of the populist speeches mentioned earlier, where he interestingly addresses the coloured problem of non-belonging, being nameless and discarded. This actually relates to all coloured communities that have struggled for their own rights, but, ironically, he does not consider himself and his people part of the coloured community:

We did not know, Dear Lord, who we were; we did not know to whom we belonged; we did not know why we were languishing on this earth in sorrow and degradation. We were a motley, nameless people, discarded until we were shown the way from the desert wastes of Namaqualand, from the shanties of the Cape Flats, from the Boland, Free State, and from the lands of Adam Kok to gather here today.

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<sup>32</sup> The long passages are quoted in this chapter because they summarize relevant points related to the discussed topic. Paraphrasing them could hinder some of their meanings.

Never again will we be slaves.

No longer will we stray nameless across the land of our forefathers. Thou has named us. Thou has brought us together under this tree for which this glorious spring day we thank Thee.

We, the Griqua people, will commemorate forever this tenth day of September. We will not forget Thy words: Be a nation for me and I will be a God to you.

Amen (102).

*David's Story* is, above all, a narrative of memory and truth: “the Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard evidence against the ANC security department, but many feel that the truth still has not been fully disclosed” (Driver, *Afterword*: 237). The deceptive connection that links both has been, not only an important field of research, but specifically analyzed by researchers on this novel such as Shane Graham, Dorothy Driver or Ken Barris. A valuable conversation between Rachael and Andrew reflects on their ancestors and on the reason why there is no written testimony of their history, “but that history is one that has failed to imagine the world from another’s point of view, even if the other were, strictly speaking, the hosts” (87). What they know instead

is that they were impossible, ungovernable, that Van Riebeeck<sup>33</sup> found them too lazy to be enslaved, for they both worked and wandered off whenever they pleased, with no regards for the needs of their new master-benefactors, no grasp of the principles at play, and no notion of obedience, so that real slaves had to be imported (88).

This passage proves that certain ethnic groups were, in some way, erased from history, as Wicomb employs “the trope of digging [to] reveal the processes by which certain narrative truths and the perspectives of certain groups and places have been effaced or obscured from history” (Graham, 2008: 138). The chapter ends with a

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<sup>33</sup> Founder and first commander of Cape Town, South Africa. Jan van Riebeeck was an Administrator of the Dutch East India Company (DEIC). He landed at the southern tip of Africa on 6 April 1652 to establish a settlement for the DEIC. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/jan-van-riebeeck>

quotation from Lawrence G. Green's *Karoo* (1955)<sup>34</sup>: "Namaqualand, Home of Strange Tales: Coloured people seldom manage to hang on to their money" (91). These concluding quotes Wicomb introduces definitely perform a counterbalance for the Griqua sentiment the novel seems to celebrate. However, it questions whether this was the actual perspective of other South African communities at the time, or only that of the white, middle-class population. According to Linda Waldman "The wealthiest coloured people have successfully adopted white standards, are educated and have long smooth hair and pale skins. These people dismiss their Griqua and Khoi ancestry while poorer members of Griquatown refuse to abandon their Griqua identity" (2007: 481). Her assertion then suggests, firstly, that the pejorative perspective was not only held by the white population but also by other coloured communities (considering the number of communities that were reclassified as 'coloured' apart from the Griquas). But more importantly for this dissertation, wealth emerges as the significant marker for social upgrading.

In the section set in Beeswater in 1922, the Griqua trekkers, including Chief Andrew and Rachael, arrive in Beeswater when "the enraged Chief waved his arms and thundered: No, it cannot be, there will be no heathenish music, no dancing like savages. The instruments of the devil have to be laid down here – he stabbed his finger into the air – right here by the fire" (92). As the settlement progresses, Ouma Ragel remembers her mother, Antjie Cloete, painting the buildings with other women. Everything from the old decoration had to be removed since "that was what savage natives did and we are no cousins to Xhosas; we are pure Griqua people with our own traditions of cleanliness and plainness and hard work" (94). Also, Ouma Ragel, David's grandmother, admits they

were a hardheaded people with so much to learn. What a job the great man had to civilise us, to get the message through our peppercorn heads. And now they say we

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<sup>34</sup> Lawrence George Green was a white South African journalist and writer.

are drunken people, Ouma Ragel sighed. We Griquas have never been drunken people, not since we became Griquas (95).

It is only in those chapters set in Beeswater where Antjie Cloete and Gert Klaasen are presented. Although the relation between them and Andrew Le Fleur remains unknown to the reader, the couple serves as the nexus between Andrew and David, being David's great-grandparents. In a conversation between Gert and Andrew about the management of the Griqua movement, Andrew pits his working pride against Gert: "you will gain nothing by shouting red flag. The only flag that will save you is your pick and shovel. Plant your seed, and whilst others are carrying red flags and shouting destruction and the rights of the worker, your children will be eating the fruits of your labour" (152). There is a remarkable incongruity in Andrew le Fleur's attitude. Precisely known for his revolutionary movement, he advises Gert to stop carrying red flags – historically attached to left-wing ideologies – and to start working the land. Another incongruity in Andrew's character comes with his visit to Lord Milner where Andrew, seduced by the colonial power he rejects, brings to light the lord's upper class by relating his place to "civilization". The importance of the quotation lies in the fact that later, Andrew "offered [his people] Apartheid, reinterpreted his own words to suit a new belief in separate development (150) and so he became what he criticized – and what he certainly envied:

There he saw [...] the loftiness of civilization realised in a high ceiling and elaborate plaster moulding. An intricate ceiling rose carried the weight of a chandelier from which crystal light bounced in the late morning and decorative thistles bristled along the gilt-edged cornices. The pale blue of the walls was covered with portraits of empire builders. In a recess there was a fine engraving of an early Cape scene with slaves going merrily about their business. [...] It was the great men of power, executed in fine dark oils, with their bright white collars, wearing their grandness on their sleeves (149).

In the last conversation between Andrew and Rachael, the reader finds an argument about the Natives' Land Act (approved in 1913) where Andrew compares it with a "miracle" (163), as he sees this regulation as his "predicted punishment for Sigcau's treachery" (163)<sup>35</sup>. The treachery would refer to Sigcau's alliance with the Apartheid government when he agreed to establish control over the Transkei in return for a higher salary. However, apart from a punishment for the Bantu governor, on the other hand, there is Rachael, who is able to go beyond revenge and foresees the problems these regulations could bring to the Griqua people: "miracle, my arse! It's a disgrace, a sin, a bloody disaster; it's the end of all predictions, the very death of us all" (163). In this sense, the same event works oppositely for both characters, it signifies a dream for Andrew, and a nightmare for Rachael. In other words, the symbology of this conversation equals the novel's overarching theme, it is not about the story – or the event – itself, but about how it is received and thus narrated instead.

In between this flashback, the unknown writer of David's story talks with an older David, who remembers a fragment from an Afrikaner poem called "The Dance of the Rain" but it was "a severely Calvinised version culled from Eugene Marais's poem, that [we decide] is one of the many signs of the Chief's confused adoption of a native voice that was in fact produced by a European" (159)<sup>36</sup>. This accurately supports theories like Spivak's on how the colonial voice operates over the native voice and thus how non-white cultures have been told *for the West by the West* (1988).

Returning to the actual beginning of the novel, it starts with Sally's family – David's wife, written by an unknown author some scholars have named "the ghost

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<sup>35</sup>Botha Sigcau was the President of Transkei and a supporter of Bantu, later paid by the Apartheid government to control the Transkei. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/>

<sup>36</sup> Eugene Nielen Marais was an Afrikaner naturalist, poet, writer and lawyer.

writer”<sup>37</sup> talking about Ouma Sarie and Joop – Sally’s parents. Ouma Sarie wonders “who could have imagined trouble overtaking her like that, one day the children playing ten-stones in the yard and before you blink they’re out there in the terrible world of fighting” (8) as she recalls Sally’s birth

Saartjie arrived like any other baby born in the airless rhomboid of a coloured house. [...] there was so much wooly hair that had to be smoothed and flattened. [...] this was the decade of brave baby girls with tightly bound guerrilla heads, which goes some way towards explaining the little-known fact that the Movement managed to recruit so many coloured women (9).

However, the writer’s witty introduction to Sally’s birth differs very much from that of Ouma Sarie:

in a very particular way: this is no place to start. But let us not claim a beginning for this mixed-up tale. Beginnings are too redolent of origins, of the sweaty and negligible act of physical union which will not be tolerated on these pages and which we all know comes to nought but for an alien, unwilling little thing propelled damp and creaming into this world to be bound in madam’s old, yet still good Terry clothes (9).

At this point I would like to focus on the variations of names that called my attention in this novel. Despite other name changes in other Wicomb books, the flightiness with which names are changed in *David’s Story* makes me wonder about the reasons for such inconstancy. Like many other characters in this story (Andrew as Andries, or Rachael as Dorie), Sally and David are named in various ways depending on their age or who refers to them. Sally then, was formerly called Saartjie by her parents when she was a child. During high school she was Sarah and “since the recruitment by the ANC, the more distinctly English-sounding Sally, clocked into her first clerical job at Garlicks with the

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<sup>37</sup> See Attridge, 2005: 161.



required English accent” (9). Their names were basically anglicised, which was a common practice after colonization:

David Dirkse, alias Dadzo, or rather Comrade Dadzo: Has no illusions about war and so accepts both the acts of glory and the acts of horror, neither of which will be or need to be disclosed by anyone.

Age: 35

Race: ‘Of no consequence’

Training: Angola, USSR, Botswana, Cuba, and, of course, sessions within the country, under their very noses, where nothing untoward had happened (11).

By 1991, the year this plotline of the story is set, “the struggle had made unprecedented progress; despite the government’s bravado, it would not be long before the country would be free, before democracy would reign” (14) and so first David and Sally’s child was “a child of the struggle” (14) as they called Jamie. Later arrived Chantal, who, being born before the end of Apartheid “would be no guerrilla, oh no, she would be a doctor, a lawyer, or even a scientist” (15). In this introduction to David and Sally’s life, Sally’s white comrades’ reaction to her house in the Cape Flats is highlighted: “Sally did not understand the lowered eyes of white comrades who tutted and shook their heads in sympathy” (16). The emphasis on her comrades’ opinion is not due to its importance, but because of the importance Sally gives to the others’ assumptions. This dynamic also happens with her steatopygia, which plays an important role in this story, taking into account that the three main protagonists of this story, Rachael, Sally and Dulcie have the same condition. This topic is further explored and analyzed at length in section 4.1: “Steatopygous Sally [...] presses a buttock into David’s thin hip. [...] Neither does she know of the queens of steatopygia, the Griqua Lady Kok and Saartje Baartman, the Hottentot Venus displayed in Europe” (16).

As seen in the characters of Andrew and Rachael, the ethnic pride-shame dichotomy predominates in the development of this story, and specifically this coloured family's belittling perspective on both whites and blacks. "Nice coloured food. Not the stiff pap with meat eaten by blacks. Not the meagre pasta and pesto favoured in the homes of white comrades" (26). This couple, not having the Griqua sentiment found in Andrew and Rachael, still presents the same resentment towards both cultures, towards whites: "Have we turned white or something that we no longer can speak loudly?" (26), and towards blacks: "she isn't sure of the name of the shop, but one of those tourist places full of kaffir things, oops, and there she's done it again..." (175). When David considers going to Kokstad to know more about that part of his history (27), Sally's at least revelatory reaction collides with David's viewpoint on his trip:

next thing you'll be off overseas to check out your roots in the rubbish dumps of Europe, but no, I forget, it's the African roots that count. What 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. [...] We are what we are, a mixture of this and that, and a good thing too, so we don't have to behave like Boers. [...] And it's not about aping white people; they don't straighten their hair. Straightened hair looks nothing like European hair; it looks only like straightened hair; it's different. [...] We don't know what we are; the point is that in a place where everything gets distorted, no one knows who he is (27-29).

As in other Wicomb works (see Brenda in *Playing in the Light*) Sally here represents coloured pride. While colouredness is usually presented through the coloured characters as a negative condition, something that retains them in an in-between position, Sally demonstrates the goodness of not belonging to a strict racial category. I use the word 'strict' here because the racial category 'coloured' includes a wide variety of communities, while 'white' or 'black' are more constrained. Sally's succinct summary of colouredness proves again Wicomb's ability to rewrite and reconceive traumatic events in such a wry way that is sometimes unexpected. In her own words: "Perhaps writing has

a special place in the post-apartheid context precisely because narrative fiction [...] offers so many possibilities; it doesn't assert a truth or the truth, but rather shows truth to be a complex, many-sided thing" (Olver et al. 2004: 133). Jane Poyner suggests that "for Sally, David's newly revealed Griqua identity is fabricated around political expediency" (2011: 321). However, this is not the only reaction to David's idea, when talking with a comrade he confesses:

"he would do some research on the history of Griqualand East, find about Chief le Fleur and the Griquas.

Ethnic identity, someone laughed, a problem for the comrade?" (65).

Yet, what David's involvement with his past suggests is that he is in search of his own place. In the words of Poyner:

David is embroiled in a movement that, the novel suggests, unwittingly reproduces the ethnocentrism that spawned the apartheid regime. In trying to make sense of the present and his place within it, David looks back to a mythologized past, to his nineteenth-century Griqua ancestry (2011: 316).

Sally's retrospective of the coloured matter shows not only her awareness but also how she has been shaping her personality based on coloured pride, believing herself superior in terms of social status, "having been brought up in a respectable coloured home [and] there was no need at all to compare her with vulgar girls who would certainly end up in service" (117-118). Despite her ethnic pride, in these memories from her childhood there is a mention of the Bible "with the best, most educated English in the world" (118), which suggests then that her disdain for the English was socially created later in her life. However, from the information the novel provides, she changed her name to Sally when she joined the ANC, insisting on the Englishness of her new name. This thus implies that her derision has been developing in recent years. Part of her pride relies on others'

perspective of the coloured condition. She materializes this idea by recalling the times she has read about it “she has had enough of the bodies of black women. [...] And if not about unwieldy black behinds, there is always something to read about the tragedy of being coloured” (117). While the children are in the street chanting “you won’t make it to heaven / Without the AK-47” (119) she recalls that “it was the Movement that offered freedom in the form of loose khaki trousers and a break from reading about the sad coloured condition. And marriage to David, she sighed, that lost her place in MK” (119). The fact that gender is glimpsed in Sally’s speech although she does not seem to give it the importance it has in her life must be highlighted. Despite her awareness of her retirement from the MK, Sally automatically shifts the debate to the coloured issue as the reason for her social confinement.

Before closing the section on Sally, Wicomb reports Sally’s rape by one of her comrades, which recalls *Playing in the Light* and the rape of Helen, who sacrificed herself for a white card<sup>38</sup>. The interesting point of this passage is what it represents, the female body being objectified by men and, while dissolving her previous identity, the male performance erases women’s agency and self-determination to achieve something they, as women, are not supposed to get due to their female condition:

A fuck, that’s what you need, and she saw his bulging shorts and knew that her time had come, as she had known it would come sooner or later, this unspoken part of a girl’s training. And because she would not let him force her, lord it over her, she forced herself and said, Okay, if you want. It did not take long, and she had no trouble pushing him off as soon as he had done, and since she had long forgotten the fantasy of the virginal white veil, it did not matter, she told herself, no point in being fastidious, there were more important things to think of, there was freedom on which to fix her thoughts (123).

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 5 for more information about Helen’s abuse.

Feminist scholars have agreed on how women's experiences during war (and, in this specific case, Apartheid) were closely related to sexual violence. Rayner, for instance, asserts that "there is a set of attitudes, including hypermasculinity, adversarial sexual beliefs, sexual promiscuity, acceptance of violence against women, hostility toward women and sex-role stereotyping, that is correlated with rape and a proclivity for it" (1997: 29). David, on his part, is not obsessed with the coloured matter as Sally is, but with "childhood memories about the Chief, by a sense of mystery surrounding the stories of his own family's relation to the Chief" (144). David's obsession relates to the past while Sally's relates to the present moment, and both share the same obsession with the future and the freedom they expect from it. Furthermore, Sally, working as a counterpoint for David, has this interest for books David does not seem to follow: "No point, David says scornfully, in reading about freedom when we should be playing active roles towards attaining it" (140). Nevertheless, what they both share – as they do with Andrew and Rachael – is this rejection towards coloureds that do not belong to the Griqua community: "you can't buy me off I am no coloured cur we have fashioned ourselves into a proud people a grand Griqua race no coloured nameless bastards. [...] Grateful for being a Griqua rather than a currish coloured" (146). David, following the same lines as Andrew, believes in "a separate homeland for a separate Griqua race" (150) which again leads the reader to think of segregation. Thus, while they ask for equality and "non-racial democracy" (150) for their community, they relegate others to a lower social position, overshadowing their social revolutionary movement. This contempt, in fact, performs the cultural trauma commonly shared by those descendants of slaves:

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion (Eyerman, 2001: 61).

However, Griqua identity pride and the subsequent rejection towards other cultures the ancestors displayed seems to have created a similar comeback. On his trip to Kokstad, when David asks the young receptionist girl whether she is Griqua she replies: “course not, what you take me for? There’s a Griqua church here, just like any other church, but I’m Dutch Reformed. Griquas are from the olden times; there aren’t any left now. We’re all coloured here” (111). Yet, his visit to Kokstad was not only a demonstration of mutual disdain, but an approval of his thoughts. Thus, he finds people who advise him to “speak to the right people. These larnie<sup>39</sup> coloureds you been seeing from Twist Valley don’t know nothing – how can they if they think their shit don’t stink? They tell you a pack of lies tied up with a pink bow and then you go back all mister man with the wrong info” (165).

Wicomb’s works always leave space for the social class issue. The main point here is that, considering that the protagonists actively show disdain towards non-coloureds, their classist attitudes go both ways by considering themselves higher in class status, educated people. At the beginning of David’s trip to Kokstad, the reader finds a flood of comments that refer to class, decency and education. The young receptionist at the hotel: “Class, that’s what he clearly has, not like these cheap white chaps. [...] Like educated people; that’s what they must learn at universities, how to keep formal” (66); or a man he stops by: “Mister is mos from the Cape, hey? He pauses for David to nod. You can tell; all the classy people come from the Cape” (68), “No, Africans, not kaffirs, that’s what decent people say” (69), “we Griquas, man, we’re civilised; we don’t leave a visitor stranded on his own” (71).

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<sup>39</sup> See Glossary.

More examples of the social class display during David's visit to Kokstad could be Ebrahim who claims that "people have degrees, even from the white universities, that there is nothing like education to uplift yourself" (110). The conversation between David and Ebrahim must be highlighted, not because of the language used, but because of the meaning of the conversation. "Nkosi kakhulu, David thanks him. Sir knows our language? The man crows. A little, David smiles. You know how one comes to know a smattering. The man is delighted. Yes, in the New South Africa we need to communicate with each other" (164). What interests me about this passage is the comprehension, empathy and understanding a democratic society is based on. Ebrahim, despite his few lines, plays a very important role in this story. He is the symbol of democracy, not only in terms of inter-communal understanding, but also of education as a symbol of freedom. This idea of communication between cultures reminds me of Bakhtin's dialogic relations:

[it] lives not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness – if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others* (1984: 87-88).

Before his return to Cape Town, David realizes that he meets the same fate as Andrew by risking his freedom for the Movement. Like his ancestor, David, after fighting against the government, has many chances of going to prison.

Things don't look so good for you, ou<sup>40</sup> pal. In fact, it's the end of, shall we say, life as you've known it. Cause why, you been taking on too much, got yourself tangled in politics and now you all wrapped up in barbed wire. [...] You've given your best years to the struggle and now there's nothing left (168-169).

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<sup>40</sup> See Glossary.

David's return to Cape Town from Kokstad leaves the narrator – who is still unknown at this point to the reader – wondering about the reasons for David's change in attitude: "He has developed a peculiar system of hand signals, and seems irritated when I fail to understand" (176). The reasons for this change remain unfolded, Wicomb does not make it clear whether his change derives from his search for his roots or from his involvement in the Movement. One of the last meetings between David and the writer of his story takes place in the Rhodes Memorial, "the kind of place that David does not like to be seen in or perhaps genuinely hates. White-middle-class-moffie-wholefood-places, they are known as" (185). Several points should be highlighted in this conversation – including his visit to Glasgow – which serves as a summary of the diverse ideas developed throughout the novel. "White students, because we are supposed to be particularly receptive to whites who support the Movement. As if everyone doesn't these days. Try and find anyone who voted for Apartheid and you wonder if you've spent your life chasing phantoms"<sup>41</sup> (185).

He tells his writer he has been to Glasgow "as a member of a small delegation of teachers handpicked by the Movement" where the National Intelligence, "rather incompetent [has lost] black people in such a white city" (187). He found "unhealthy-looking citizens who shook their heads and said that Thatcherism and Apartheid were the twin evils of the mother world, that they, oppressed by England, knew exactly what Apartheid was about" (188). What strikes David is that there are "no blacks, no Jews in Kelvingrove. In this friendly foreign city, his visit had become an exercise in recognizing the unknown" (189). The references to other Wicomb works in this specific passage are irrefutable: "there was no danger of feeling lost in Scotland" (188) being a reference to *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, "he remembers entering the People's Palace via its

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<sup>41</sup> Almost the same sentence can be found in *Playing the Light*. See Chapter 5.



Winter Garden” (189) with the flora description as an allusion to the short story in *The One That Got Away* “In the Botanic Gardens”<sup>42</sup>. Certainly, there is a connection to *The One That Got Away*, taking into account that in the short story “In the Botanic Gardens” Dorothy’s son, Arthur, has disappeared in Glasgow, proving that one indeed can get lost in Scotland. As regards his visit, a particular moment must be emphasized as he stops at a painting where:

none of the subjects look like any other. Neither do they look at the objects. [...] The things are there to show their wealth. [...] The painting by Archibald McLauchlin, c. 1767, included a black slave on the left hand, which has since been painted over. [...] But he insists, there was no mention of slavery in the documentation of the city’s economic growth. No mention to the fact that slaves produced the sugar and tobacco in the American plantations, owned and managed by Glasgow merchants like the wealthy Glassford. There was nothing to make him think of a black man, not in the People’s Palace, where he did not expect to find the effacement of slavery to be betrayed in representation, as actual absence, the painting out of a man who had once, alongside fruit and flowers, signified wealth and status (192-193).

When wondering about slavery and its representation in European museums and having the visual representation of racial hierarchies, David points out wealth and status. What marks the difference for him is not skin colour but economic status. This quotation underscores the very basis of this thesis. While race plays a determining role in society – and particularly in South African society – wealth certainly allows the individual to rise in the social hierarchy regardless of skin colour. Fanon, for instance, also deals with the role wealth plays in South African society, examining how the white working class blames the black working class in order to resemble the elite. He asserts that the displacement of the white proletariat’s aggression on to the black proletariat is fundamentally a result of the economic structure of South Africa (1986: 64).

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<sup>42</sup> See section 6.1.

The story ends with Mandela's release, as Ouma Sarie claims "this is now Mandela's tiled floor, Mandela's bank, Mandela's toilets" (208). The story is closed in the only way possible, clarifying one more time their social outlook: "kill the Boer, kill the farmer, kill the bubbi in his pyjama. [...] She blushes for the white people's lies, Boer and English lies fed over the years and foolishly swallowed by her" (208-209).

As we are reaching the end of this chapter, one of Wicomb's most attractive techniques cannot be underestimated. It is her use of metaphors to describe coloureds comparing them, depending on the context, with something beautiful, different and unique, or with something monstrous, mixed-up and rare, as seen for instance in *Playing in the Light* with the mermaid symbology<sup>43</sup>. In Kokstad, David is given a box with "three unremarkable looking stones" which represent "beauty, durability and rarity: such are the three cardinal virtues of a perfect gemstone" (169). Considering that it is later followed by "that's where its beauty lies, inside, beyond what the eye can see" (170), this is a reference to the coloured condition, highlighting the beauty, the rarity and the socially invisible value of this ethnic group. Something similar happens in the following quotation about diamonds, which points out the importance of looking inside instead of outside, "diamonds may be forever, as the double agent Thomas Stewart says, but they represent a valuable resource stolen, in effect, from the Griqua, and in the story's contemporary account they are used to tempt David into a reactionary illegality" (Driver, *Afterword*: 226).

You see the big mistake the old guys made was with the diamonds. Now a diamond is a funny thing, you know. [...] It looks like nothing special, just a little dull grey stone, but my motto is, always look a second time; on the face of it you got something worthless, but take nothing for granted, look again, otherwise you come to grief like the old guys. Now even a rough diamond: you look again and again and 'strue's God you see like through a pinhole the light come shining through and that thing glitter man, I tell you, it just glitter, blinding you for a second or so. Then you know aha, something's up with this grey little stone. But the Griquas weren't blinded by the

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<sup>43</sup> See section 5.1 for more information about the mermaid symbology.

glitter then, David reminds him. No-o, you see it's mos always like this with our people: they're blinded by wanting to ape the white man. Say after me: this is not a diamond, and hen that's what the eyes also tell you 'cause, why, the eyes follow the heart (73-74).

Finally, for the sake of clarity I will now provide a brief summary of how Griqua identity works. Griquas were reclassified as the new racial category “coloureds” during Apartheid. This means that, Andrew and Rachael could have reasons to reject other coloured communities. However, the disdain towards coloureds by the younger couple of the story is at least intriguing because they criticize what they are. The same thing happens in *Playing in the Light*, however, it must be said that their reasons were different, they had to pretend to be whites, and that would imply rejecting non-white cultures – even if they belonged to one of those cultures<sup>44</sup>. But the fact that Sally, for example, is so proud of her colouredness yet so discriminatory towards her people is incomprehensible. In my research for the reasons for Sally's distaste of other coloureds I surprisingly realised that few critics have even mentioned Sally more than once. Apart from the articles on *David's Story* where Sally appears, at most, once or twice in the introduction, longer works on the Wicomb oeuvre do not provide much more information. In Dorothy Driver's afterword Sally is mentioned only a few times. Derek Attridge refers to Sally once, as a “sensible wife” (2005: 159) and Samuelson's critique of *David's Story* devotes only a few paragraphs to Sally (2007). The few articles where Sally is mentioned are focused on gender and her relation to the guerrilla, leaving her perspective about other coloureds aside. This is the main reason why the character of Sally has been profoundly explored in this dissertation.

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 5 for more information about the Campbells.

*David's Story* is definitely not David's story. It is a very complete historical narrative that, through David and his family tree, displays the coloured problem in South Africa as a clash between cultural trauma and ethnic pride, and exemplifies, with a wide range of characters, how these two conditions – outcomes of colonialism – can coexist in the same individual. The question is, does memory work as a counterweight to the dichotomy or as an instability? This novel proves that memory cannot always be trusted yet the past must not be forgotten, but what it implies is that it is in between cultural trauma and ethnic pride that cosmopolitanism lives:

the cosmopolitanism I want to defend is not the name for a dialogue among static closed cultures, each of which is internally homogenous and different from all others; not a celebration of the beauty of a collection of closed boxes. What I want to make plausible is, instead, a form of universalism that is sensitive to the ways in which historical context may shape the significance of a practice (Appiah, 2005: 223).

Appiah's quote on cosmopolitanism exemplifies the ethnic pride and national memory this novel is about, and at the same time it proves Andrew's – and in some way David's – separatist ideologies wrong.

#### **4.1. The female figure in *David's Story***

The female figure in Wicomb's oeuvre proves her determination to provide the reader with the female perspective of those voiceless South African women by “pointing out the difficulties suffered by coloured women” (Wicomb, interview, 2011: 142). Considering that the protagonist of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* is Frieda – probably the most autobiographical character for the writer taking into account both Frieda's and Wicomb's life progression (coloured women that moved to Scotland to develop professionally and became writers) – and Marion is the main character in *Playing in the*

*Light* (very different characters yet similar as regards the gender problems they have to face), one must suppose that *David's Story* would make no difference. Although the title suggests the opposite, the female characters in this novel play an essential role for the development of both the story and David himself; and this does not only refer to Dulcie (David's comrade) and Sally (David's wife) but to all those female relatives David asks about his past: "You have turned it into a story of women; it's full of old women, for God's sake. [...] Can't some of the oumas at least be turned into oupas<sup>45</sup>?" (119-200). Furthermore, David "chooses a woman as his narrator" (Driver, *Afterword*: 229) although it is difficult to discern the narrator's gender in the novel.

Dulcie and Sally, the antagonistic characters of this novel, represent the two kinds of women during the liberation movement. Sally would represent those women who had to leave behind the guerrilla to become a 'proper' woman, that is to say, to focus on domestic issues, reproduction and stay at home "reading novels" (119), leaving her "in some measure dissatisfied with her insertion into domestic life" (Alvarez, 2011: 129). On the other hand, we find Dulcie, whose refusal to leave the Movement automatically transforms her into "not a woman at all [...] not pretty" (80), without those feminine attributes usually attached to women:

no one has ever called her beautiful but at times like this – and there are more and more times like this – she tries to think of her body, to recall the grace of an earlier time, and feel the muscles under the loose shirt ripple into beauty. As in the days before she took up slouching and hunching her shoulders and standing with her legs apart like a man. One day, she muses, someone will take these hands washed clean under running water and kiss each fingertip, a nice man of whom no questions will be asked and who will ask no questions about her left thumb with its neat crisscross-patterned tattoo (18).

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<sup>45</sup> See Glossary.

Although she renounces her feminine features to fight for a high rank within the Movement, Dulcie seems to long for “the grace of another time” when she had not yet adopted a more masculine appearance. However, this reminds me of Fanon’s phrase from *Black Skins, White Masks* at the beginning of Wicomb’s novel: “O my body, make of me always a man who questions!” (1986: 232). In his work, Fanon argues how his body has been a reason to be rejected as well as a reason to renew himself, which I think relates to Dulcie’s passage. She may have lost some physical features she misses, but she has achieved what she has been professionally working for. To understand Dulcie’s role in the story, the reader must recall that this novel is set before and during the liberation movement that ended with the unbanning of the ANC (African National Congress). Before 1991 and

since the ANC was banned, David and Dulcie’s open political activity is conducted in the name of the United Democratic Front, a political movement launched in 1983. The UDF’s specific goal was to coordinate opposition to the National Party government’s constitutional reforms [...] whereby coloured and Indian groups were given limited parliamentary representation through the “Tricameral Parliament”, made up of three separate chambers which excluded black African voters (Driver, *Afterword*: 234).

Before focusing on the character of Dulcie, what she represents and how she is represented, I want to highlight what both Dulcie and Sally share in terms of being women of the guerrilla. Samuelson’s point on women during and after war relates to these two women’s portrayal: for her, war is “a representational mine-field in which women are cast as idealized warriors, silenced victims, and emblems of the domestic world toward which the male warrior ostensibly directs his efforts” (2007: 835). While Dulcie would represent the “idealized warrior”, Sally would be the “emblem of the domestic world”, but both fit in the role of “silenced victims”. Sally, for her part, is silenced in terms of both her involvement in the Movement and her life with David. It is true that the novel gives

special attention to Sally and her relationship with David but, by asserting that she has been silenced in her life after the guerrilla I argue that all the space given to her character is focused on her perspective of their marriage and her husband's obsession with his Griqua roots. Thus, the reader is not able to find a Sally on her own, but as a commentator of David's life. Furthermore, the fact that critics have overlooked the character of Sally makes me wonder about her actual importance in the novel. Contrarily, Dulcie has very little space in the novel, yet she is one of the most analyzed characters.

In opposition to my assertion about Sally's silence due to the domestic relegation, Rita Felski believes that

[t]he construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack) had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the site where one could freely confront the issue of humanisation, where one could resist (2000: 25).

However, I wonder about the extent to which Sally can resist at home after being "re-domesticated" (Samuelson, 2007: 851). I would not assert that Sally has resisted better than Dulcie, who for example, "longs for the quotidian" (184) but rather the opposite. Sally's insecurities about her marriage leave her in the loneliness of an empty home, wondering about her husband's affair with his comrade Dulcie. I am not trying to dismantle Felski's analysis, but it cannot be applied to the study of this novel. In fact, as it is presented in the novel: "she [Sally] knows that there are no further questions to be asked, knows that she must keep still, keep silent, that it is simply a matter of transferring the codes of the Movement to her marriage" (172). What should be extracted from this passage is that, despite her dismissal from the Movement, she must keep as silent as she was during the liberation movement. Does her gender play a role in her inability to speak? From a Spivakian point of view, her silence derives from her gender: "if, in the context

of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (1988: 83). In fact, the cultural expectations for women in politics extends through the whole African continent, stigmatizing those women who involve themselves in social activism. As the Nigerian critic Molara Ogundipe-Leslie notes:

The male-dominated society reacts in the usual fashion by denying that there is any oppression of women in Africa, glorifying an unknown pre-colonial past where our African mothers were totally happy; accusing conscious women activists of being victims of western ideas and copycats of white women; claiming that ‘the family’ is more important than the fate of the individual woman; brushing aside women’s concern with the hypocrisy that ‘national development’ is a greater priority now than women’s liberation; asserting that women anyhow do not need to be liberated because they have never been in bondage. So you have a compounding of historical and sociological falsification, all to the end of frightening women into quietude. The most vocal and courageous who continue to talk and act socially and politically are stigmatized (1993: 4).

Despite the fact that the author does not provide the reader with much information about Dulcie, there are enough hints to create a proper background for the character, who left “behind a drunken mother who would barely have noted her absence” (133) and “has never had a real doll” (81). However, from the information the unknown narrator receives from David, (s)he believes that “Dulcie is a decoy. She does not exist in the real world; David has invented her in order to cover up aspects of his own story” (124). Precisely because “Dulcie is surrounded by a mystique that [the narrator is] determined to crush with facts” (78), this unknown writer tries

to imagine a woman who takes that kind of thing seriously – protocol and hierarchy, the saluting and standing to attention, the barking of orders, the uniform. Someone who sees no contradiction between military values and the goal of political freedom. Such a woman presumably does not rifle in her handbag for a lipstick, does not pause briefly before a passing mirror to tug at her skirt or pat her hair into shape. Or perhaps she does just that, taking pleasure in her double life (79).

It is interesting how the narrator wonders about Dulcie’s double life and how s/he automatically opposes an activist and a feminine woman who stops by a mirror and wears



lipstick. In this dichotomy of double life there is Sally, who doubts: “are there women in the world who do both? She thinks not” (32). Dulcie does not dismantle this preconceived idea that makes a woman unable to be strong and feminine at the same time, but she is, at least, able to dismantle the idea that women cannot exercise their power despite the fact that “power has never held any lure for her. Or so [David] believes” (18). In fact, Samuelson suggests that “her unfeminine behaviour, her bravery and rank have challenged the gendered status quo” and this has fostered the “physical and psychological abuse” she receives (2007: 840). She thus portrays the stereotypical and sometimes-idealized character of the strong woman, who has fought against male chauvinist attitudes to achieve her current position in the movement:

They do not understand that for a woman like her – who has turned her muscles into ropes of steel, who will never be driven into subordination, who even as an eager girl in the bush wards resisted the advances of those in power, resisted her own comrades, having worked out that fucking women was a way of preventing them from rising in the Movement, who has resisted all her life, who has known since childhood that tyranny must be overthrown – for a woman like her, there is no submission. [...] what they do understand is that she has supernatural powers. It is as if the rumours about her legendary strength, her agility, her incredible marksmanship, her invincibility that have circulated for some time between friend and foe alike have taken root within her, have grown into the truth (179-180).

It must not be forgotten that this novel is precisely about truth and memory, exploring how the combination of both can result in uncertain conclusions. In Driver’s words: “memory screens truth as much as it uncovers it” (*Afterword*: 238). Furthermore, “the condition of revolution, the suspension of certain values and beliefs during the period of struggle, the topsy-turviness of that world, means that the ‘truth’ about that period is even more problematic” (Wicomb, interview, 2011: 133). This passage precisely asserts this idea by using Dulcie’s “supernatural powers” as a metaphor for the outcome of a story by word of mouth – as happens with Andrew Le Fleur and the Griqua history. In David’s notes it can be read: “TRURT... TRURT... TRURT... TRURT... the trurt (sic)

in black and white... colouring the truth to say that... which cannot be said the thing of no name” (136), suggesting that truth, sometimes, hides more than what it shows. The question Dorothy Driver leaves hanging as regards David’s notes accurately represents the uncertainty South Africans were living in: “how can we be post-apartheid [...] if truth is still “black and white?” (*Afterword*: 251). Another understanding of this quotation is made by Shane Graham, who asserts:

The novel's oblique evocation of the TRC (never mentioned by name) suggests that Wicomb's skepticism about the supposedly panacean virtues of realist representational modes extends beyond fiction and historiography to the work of the quasi-official TRC and its own narratives of past trauma (2008: 131).

The reference to colours in this passage implies that truth is usually in a middle point between one version and another; neither in the black nor in the white, truth lies in colouredness. It is interesting how David wonders about “colouring the truth” – making an obvious reference to the coloured population – considering his “avoidance of the word coloured” (200). But this novel is not only about truth but about the *absence of truth*. David’s secrecy to Sally about his affair, the hidden truths of women fighting in the liberation movement and all the abuses they have to go through, the relationship between Dulcie and David... They are all examples of how the absence of truth works and its consequences.

Returning to the gender inequity, although Dulcie “certainly would make no distinction between men and women” (78) within the Movement, she has grown up as an activist being surrounded by her comrades’ comments on how they “wondered if she were man enough to do it by herself” (82) or how “they won’t listen to a woman” (127). The physical abuse Samuelson mentions – seen earlier – is highlighted various times throughout the novel when, for example, “men in balaclavas come like privileged guests

into her bedroom, in the early hours, always entering the house by different routes, ridiculing her reinforced bolts and locks, the secret code of her Securilarm system” (81). All these examples can be used as cases in point of how “women’s bodies are still the objects of an intermingled desire and disdain” (Driver, *Afterword*: 232). Furthermore, as happens in *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb brings to light the sexual violence exercised against women:

Dulcie believes that there comes a time when physical pain presses the body into another place, where all is not forgotten, but where you imagine it relocated in an unfamiliar landscape. [...] It is just a matter of being patient. Of enduring. Until the need to relocate once more. [...] Not rape, that will teach her nothing, leave nothing; rape’s too good for her kind, waving the electrodes as another took off her nightclothes. When they speak of her, they do so as people speak of their servants, as if they are not there (178).

This is an appealing passage for this thesis as it perfectly exemplifies intersectionality at all levels, illustrating “how multiple identities such as gender, race and socioeconomic status simultaneously shape human experience at the individual level through interlocking systems of bias and inequality that exist at the macro social-structural level” (Nadan et al. 2014: 43). However, the emotional depth this passage entails should be taken into consideration because it means more than a sexual abuse. Dulcie justifies these acts because she is aware of her inferiority, as a guerrilla, as a woman, and as a coloured person. The sentence “rape is too good for her kind” (178) represents the emotional damage perpetuated in black women, and serves Wicomb to explain that above the physical damage there is the emotional one. It is sometimes difficult to find a paragraph that gathers the three main social factors: class, race and gender. This is because, despite the fact that an individual can be relegated to a lower position in society due to various social factors, they usually come one at a time, that is to say, the individual can be rejected first, in a specific event, for her/his skin colour and

then be rejected for her gender on other occasions. It is true that race and class are more intertwined and thus it is easier to find a literary passage where the character is dismissed due to both social factors. However, and I am not only referring to Wicomb's oeuvre, finding a moment when the individual is relegated because of her gender, her class status and her race all at the same time is, at least, challenging. The gender issues that sexual abuse entails are conspicuous. As previously mentioned in this thesis, the female body is often portrayed as a "virginal space to be explored and inseminated with its glory" (Lytle, 2014: 233). Then, the sentence "rape's too good for her kind" represents the racial attitudes that claim that Dulcie should be grateful for the situation and keep silent; in the words of Wicomb: "she can't be fleshed out precisely because of her shameful treatment which those committed to the Movement would rather not talk about" (Wicomb, 2002: 190-191). Finally, the class issue is brought to light with the last sentence, when the doctors "speak of her, they do so as people speak of their *servants*, as if they are not there" (178; emphasis mine). This does not only display the classist attitudes Dulcie seems to recognize but, what is more interesting for the story, the apparent absence of Dulcie, "as if [she is] not there" and has no voice. Considering this passage and the little space she is given in the novel, Dulcie can be considered "a person whose story cannot be known and therefore cannot be represented or written down (Ngwira, 2013: 44).

The characters in *David's Story* may not be the best example for classist attitudes, despite a conversation between David and the narrator, when David accuses him/her of having his/her head "filled with middle-class, liberal bullshit" (197). The reason for this absence of classism might be the Movement struggle. It is true that, within national conflicts, the class struggle is the common basis for war: "the history of all hitherto existing [societies] is the history of class struggles" (Driscoll, 2009: 21) but the Movement was, categorically, based on race struggle. The fact that this novel is

completely focused on the Movement and how the different characters react to it, the class differences are blurred. This is why individuals from very different backgrounds unite and fight for a common cause. However, here I wonder to what extent war is not based on class. Omitting the reasons for the struggle (wealth, gender or racial inequities) and omitting the fact that class differences are not present in this story, the reality of war is that, while the higher spheres start the war, the lower spheres fight in it<sup>46</sup>. I assume then that, even though social class does not stand out in *David's Story*, it is still there intermingled among the hierarchies that existed inside and outside the guerrilla.

Following the line of how socio-cultural factors affect the individual, there is an interesting moment when Dulcie recalls she does not cry because

she associates it with the dust of the playground where boys in school uniform dance mockingly around her. [...] it was then, as they rhymed her blackness with her cunt, that she bit back the tears and discovered the strength in her thin arms and legs (80-81).

This quote does not only display the gender assumptions of crying as something uniquely attached to women, but the racial condition. From her childhood Dulcie realizes the social constructions that would be detrimental to her later in her life: “her blackness” and “the strength in her thin arms and legs”. Considering the inability to change her skin colour, I assume she decided to become “the very mistress of endurance and control” (134); and thus, she learnt to speak in a “quiet, forceful manner, [a] way in which even the old people echoed her words and nodded” (128). After years dedicated to the

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<sup>46</sup> “When the rich wage war it’s the poor who die” (*The Devil and the Good God* (1951, act 1, tableau 1). This was precisely the issue in the First World War. Poets such as Owen, Sassoon or Rosenberg dealt with their experiences during the war, emphasizing the inequality that existed in terms of actively participating in the war.

Movement, fighting not only for her people's freedom but for making herself a space in a men's world, all she has left is, unsurprisingly, silence again:

The sticks won't sacrifice themselves. Yes, she's grown too big for her boots and they've had enough of her. She must give up power, hand over her uniform, make way for the big men. But that is not enough. She knows too much; knows the very fabrications, the history of every stitch against her. She must – and he stops abruptly. Why the silence, I ask, why does she not speak out? Belief. Pride. Pride in belief. The virus of secrecy (204).

The fact that the character of the fighter, the one who breaks the sociocultural barriers for a positive reason, the one who believes in “enduring [u]ntil the need to relocate once more” (178) has a similar outcome to the one who represents the opposite leaves a lot to be desired. Equally to Sally, Dulcie has her name obliterated (117) and “has done nothing less than her duty, nothing less than fighting for freedom and justice [she still] cannot speak” (179). In other words: “[Dulcie's] story suggests that women who have fought for freedom may not, themselves, experience that freedom” (Samuelson, 2007: 847). However, she might have not achieved the personal freedom she longs for, but what she has undoubtedly achieved is freedom for her people and her country by being part of the Movement and never quitting despite the constant physical and psychological abuse she receives. In this sense, we could state that she achieves one kind of freedom, something Sally is not able to do. The personal and intimate freedom she could achieve after leaving the Movement is counteracted by the jealousy emerging from David's platonic love towards Dulcie.

Now that “David's fraught relationship with Dulcie” (Alvarez, 2011: 127) has arisen it is time to deal with Dulcie's perspective on it. From what we can extract for the moment is that David's apparent protection of Dulcie – “David instructs [the narrator] to remove all references to a special relationship between him and Dulcie” (137) and “David

does not want her voice represented. That is because he wishes to protect her, he says” (199) – prevents the reader from creating an appropriate image of Dulcie and, what is more important, what he feels for her. Contrarily we have Dulcie, whose “story [is] about an obsession with our hero, who cannot, as a man of honour, submit to that which he has produced in her” (183). What is interesting about Dulcie’s perspective is how she is able to express her feelings, although she does it in her intimacy, but we have no response from David. That is to say, the woman is again presented as the fragile one in the relationship and the one brave enough to talk about her feelings, even if they are not licit, and as the only one looking for some comfort and affection:

She is enraged that after years of avoiding what is known as love, of not allowing herself to be touched, and after years of resistance, of fighting tyranny, of keeping in control and making her measured way to the top, she is left tortured with uncertainty about a phantom lover (183).

When the narrator says “Dulcie longs for the quotidian” (184) she must refer precisely to this loneliness Dulcie feels in the middle of the chaos that participating in the Movement entails. And despite the fact that “she believes that they know nothing of her secret, her friendship with David” (180) she cannot avoid becoming “an adolescent once more [...] resigned to the dilatation and contraction of her heart” (184). The inequity in this relationship is not only performed by David’s passive attitude but it is Dulcie herself who neglects her own feelings by labelling her emotions towards David as “nonsense” (198) or “kid stuff” (198) and blames herself for putting her feelings ahead of “the weighty matters of a liberation movement” (198). But the question that is left hanging is: does an actual romantic relationship exist between them? There are no specific passages that confirm this hypothesis that the reader may take for granted. In fact, “only once, did David come close enough to place his hands on her shoulders” (199). It is intriguing how the novel pays such attention to something that never happened. This is for me a symbol

of how a lie can become a truth when it is spread, which is actually, as we have seen, one of the central topics of the novel.

As previously mentioned, the steatopygia is one of the topics of *David's Story*. "I see her sturdy steatopygous form on the central patch of grass, where she has come to sunbathe in private" (212). Sally, Dulcie, Rachael and many other women have this condition. The female body is thus again used as the token for the coloured women's cultural trauma, displaying "the importance of confronting the past – the history of political subordination and accommodation, the history of women's bodies, the history of slavery" (Driver, *Afterword*: 218). As we have seen in the sexual abuse paragraph, Graham explains:

it is a project of symbolically and metonymically linking physical bodies and places with memories of the past through the medium of the landscape on which that past has been inscribed and erased. Three such mechanisms of corporal mapping feature prominently in Wicomb's novel: scars, the birth caul, and steatopygia (2008: 132).

Although Graham points out these qualities in *David's Story*, it is the only work where Wicomb actually deals with these issues, so the reader may wonder whether Wicomb actually celebrates these qualities in women, or whether she just mentions them in this novel due to the historical importance of Baartman in the story. Thus, the name of Saartjie Baartman and the "representational abuse" she entails (Poyner, 2011: 318) echoes in the novel:

Saartje's foolish vanity, the treachery of white men, the Boer mistress who would not let her go, whose prophetic words rang in her ears, the seasickness on the ship, the cage in London decked with leopard skins, and, on the catwalk of her cage, the turning of the spectacular buttocks, this way and that, so that Europeans would crack their ribs with laughter (135).



Baartman was a Khoikhoi woman who was exhibited around Europe by William Dunlop with the name ‘Hottentot Venus’. She “has been reclaimed from a colonial symbol of Otherness and shame, to a symbol of indigenous roots and a reminder of past suffering, a postcolonial inspiration for national healing” (Easton, 2002: 238–239). She was born in 1789 in the Eastern Cape and later moved to Cape Town where Dunlop convinced her to travel with him to Europe in his desire to exhibit her in his circus. Her arrival in Europe created a debate since the slave trade was abolished in 1807 but:

slavery [...] was allowed in the British Empire until 1833, so that in the 1810s abolitionists were organising, and found in Baartman's story—a woman (supposedly) taken to Europe against her will by a Dutch ‘keeper’—the perfect test suit (2013: 51-52).

It is intriguing that the slave trade had already been abolished by the time Baartman arrived in Britain but this case was allowed because slavery had not yet been abolished in the British Empire. If Dunlop brought her to a country where slavery was already forbidden, why then was this situation allowed? It was Georges Cuvier, a French scientist, who examined her body after her death in 1815 and some parts of Baartman’s body were displayed in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris until 1974<sup>47</sup>. Previously, in the course of the seventeenth century, Europeans started to focus on the scientific differences rather on the cultural differences of the ‘Other’ to legitimize the racial prejudices already existent after colonization (Young, 2011: 48). This kind of studies – like Cuvier’s – allowed Europeans to demonstrate that non-whites were biologically less evolved<sup>48</sup>.

On the contrary, in South Africa Baartman has become the token of colonial exploitation, “an icon of postcoloniality” (Wicomb, 1998: 91) and, in this novel, she represents how sexual abuse has remained in the bodies of coloured South African women

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.saartjiebaartmancentre.org.za/about-us/saartjie-baartmans-story/>

<sup>48</sup> See Nancy Stepan’s *The Idea of Race in Science* (1982)

nowadays. In David's words: "Baartman belongs to all of us" (135). With the figure of Baartman and the steatopygia, Wicomb fulfills her aim of confronting "the shameful attitudes to body shape that pervade racist South African thinking" (Driver, *Afterword*: 228). For David, there is an undeniable connection between Baartman and Dulcie:

the page at the end of the unfinished section on Baartman is a mess [...] I know that it is his attempt at writing about Dulcie, because her name is written several times and struck out. Then there are beginnings scattered all over, and at various angles that ignore the rectangularity of the paper, as if by not starting at the top or not following the shape of the page he could fool himself that it is not a beginning. Truth, I gather, is the word that cannot be written (135).

But these references by David between the two women are not usually presented to the reader by David himself but through the unknown narrator, as in the passage above or: "he chose to displace her by working on the historical figure of Saartje Baartman instead" (134). As Gillian Gane asserts, these are "layerings of displacement among which it is virtually impossible to find a 'real,' 'true' Dulcie" (2002: 106). There is also a passage, where the narrator finds David's drawings of a mutilated Dulcie that could "mirror Eduard's memories of Cuvier's laboratory and notes" (Tormena, 2013: 113):

there are the dismembered shapes of a body: an asexual torso, elbows; legs; swollen feet; hands like claws. There is a head, an upside-down smiling head, which admittedly does not resemble her, except for the outline of bushy hair. I have no doubt that it is Dulcie who lies mutilated on the page (205).

This gruesome passage can represent the inability to describe the agony of the tortured body, specifically in the context of the MK and the ANC, where the female body was exposed to torture and mutilation. For Baiada, for instance,

it hints to the fact that not only are the mysterious tormentors probably fellow ANC members, but that David may have been one of them. This suspicion is further confirmed by the fact that David commits suicide in the same exact way and place in which Dulcie was intimidated to kill herself by her torturers (2008: 37).

The similarities between Saartjie Baartman and Sally can be more evident than those of Baartman and Dulcie, although some critics have agreed with David in the similarities shared by Dulcie and Baartman: for Samuelson, Dulcie is the “avatar of Saartjie Baartman’s story” (2007: 124). However, I beg to differ with Samuelson’s comment. As presented in the following paragraph, Dulcie’s resemblance to Baartman is not that apparent since the only features they share is steatopygia, skin colour and gender, that is to say, they share physical aspects but they differ in substantial issues, such as personal and life development. Apart from the name, which can or cannot be on purpose, and their shared steatopygia, in general terms Baartman and Sally follow a similar pattern. They are both under the shadow of a man, confined and silenced by the patriarchal authority that relegates them to a position from which they can neither escape nor achieve any freedom. In fact, Gabeba Baderoon asserts:

The Baartman whom Wicomb writes into existence in *David's Story* is definitely resistant to all mythological claims, leaving readers at the end of the novel with an image of a recurring, elusive figure whose meaning cannot be defined by national or ethnic symbolism (70).

Thus, if Baartman’s symbolism in the novel was meant to match with Dulcie’s life progression, the figure of Saartjie Baartman would precisely represent this “national or ethnic symbolism” that the reader sees in the character of Dulcie. However, from the analysis done in this section, I would assert that Baartman’s elusiveness and inability to change her fate highly relates to the character of Sally; while Dulcie stands as the representational figure of the actual truth of coloured South African women, becoming a “symbol of the wounded nation that yet endures and carries within it the seeds of the future” (Gane, 2002:110).

After presenting a tentative reading of the novel and dealing with how women are presented in *David's Story* and what they represent, Sally being the re-domesticated character and Dulcie the ungovernable one, and both sharing different aspects that attach them to the historical figure of Saartjie Baartman, I argue that this novel is conducted towards the socio-cultural formations of the female body and the “seemingly immutable system of ethical imperatives that has made the coloured body and identity the site of shame” (Dass, 2009: 84). Despite the fact that Wicomb has dealt with the female body and shame in other works, what differentiates this novel from her other works is its denunciation of the sometimes-hidden reality of women in the ANC and the treatment of their gender, their bodies – which worsens if steatopygious – and their colouredness become a primordial differential issue.

[Wicomb's] concern in this novel with the abuse of women comes at a time when gender issues relating to violence against women still receive insufficient political attention. [...] Even in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, which were meant to unearth a variety of forms of violence, violence against women was rarely a topic (Driver, *Afterword*: 239).

While Dorothy Driver may refer in the passage to gender social inequalities, I think that the “violence against women” she mentions also entails the physical abuse towards women, as the physical abuse that being a woman involves is another form of social violence. Furthermore, what the author condemns is the perpetuation of these male-chauvinist attitudes towards women in modern South Africa, and how “cultural amnesia is a palpable threat as contradictory voices and stories are reconciled into a single truth” (Baiada, 2008: 45). In fact, Dorothy Driver deals with the attachment between the female body and truth in *David's Story* afterword, asserting that

For David, Dulcie's is the story that needs to be but cannot be told, just as he finds that *truth* is a word that cannot be written. She is the unrepresentable body in pain, “a disturbance at this very time of liberation” (177). Her body absorbs and gives back

the threats and promises of a violently oppressive and violently revolutionary past, a past that has not yet quite passed (218).

Transitioning to another crucial aspect of *David's Story*, and using Baiada's quotation as a link, the issue of truth plays an important role for the understanding of the representation of these women. As previously mentioned, the indetermination of truth by word of mouth usually results in misconceptions, as happens, for instance, with Dulcie's strength and her "super-natural powers" (180). In fact, "Wicomb always questions the existence of one fixed 'truth', which translates into her postmodern approach to literature, which, as previously illustrated, is admittedly "fragmented, indeterminate" (2013: 116). What *David's Story* accomplishes is a demonstration of how truth depends on the eye of the beholder, fulfilling then Wicomb's aim "to show that there is not one definite truth about that history" (Wicomb, interview, 2010: 24).

## 5. “Ask no questions and you’ll hear no lies”

Wicomb’s third book, *Playing in the Light* (2006) tells the story of Marion Campbell, a young white woman living in the Cape Town of the nineties, when the country was trying to leave Apartheid behind. Marion runs a travel agency despite her aversion to travel:

it is not exactly a phobia, that is too extreme a label, but Marion does have an aversion to travel. Why would anyone want to see the world from the discomfort of a suitcase? Let alone the dubious hygiene of hotels. [...] No, she has to confess that even travelling in this country doesn’t seem at all desirable, even in a food car with air conditioning (40).

She is presented as a successful business woman, living in a wonderful apartment with sea views and driving a Mercedes, indicating a high social position. Furthermore, she has not married, she has no children and no close friends, allowing the reader to think of Marion as a lonely woman unable to establish intimate relations. In fact, at the very beginning of the story, Marion realizes that “an intimate friend might say that such a palaver is enough to warrant therapy, or at least a dismantling, a disrobing of the bed. But she has no such friend; there are no gatherings of young women who giggle and bare their souls and call themselves girls” (3). Throughout the whole novel, Marion gives hints of this loneliness and her animosity towards close relationships, so there “is no doubt how people measure friendliness, but she cannot bring herself to do so” (68). There is certainly a reason for Marion to think of relationships as an obstacle, which is concealed to the reader for most part of the book. “No one has ever come to her flat. She doesn’t know why that should be. [...] Her parents never had friends over, and not having any family – aunts, uncles, grandparents or cousins – she cannot recall anyone ever eating at their house” (71).

Regarding the intricacies of knotty relationships there is Brenda, Marion’s first non-white employee, whose dream is to become a writer, the character in charge of

becoming Marion's counterpoint of self-confidence: "for Brenda, colouredness is neither a shame to be escaped nor a mystery to be solved but simply one aspect of a multi-faceted South African identity she is in process of constructing for herself" (Hoegberg, 2018: 2). She comes from a humble, coloured family living in the Cape Flats<sup>49</sup>: "Brenda Mackay is soft spoken, soothing even, unless that is just the musical lilt of her Cape Flats accent" (17), where she has to share a bed with her mother, which "Brenda hated: the sagging bed that, much as she tried to keep her distance, slid her to the centre, to the sponginess of the old woman's body" (65) and seems to be the first one in the family to go to university. When she is finally able to afford a "vulgar, affordable foam mattress of her very own" she dreams about "a new job or a pay rise, [so] she'll be able to move out, fix up her own place in her own taste" (66), suggesting, contrarily to Marion, a lower social position. The growth of their relationship – one of the most interesting relationships that arise in the novel – will be developed throughout this chapter.

Starting from the very beginning, Marion's first impression of Brenda was given by her mother's former advice about coloureds: "give them a pinkie and they'll grab your whole hand, her mother always said. But that was the kind of prejudiced stuff her parents were prone to" (17). So, when she is at work with Brenda and the new employee speaks on the telephone with a client, Marion thinks how "the girl's voice goes up and down, companionable and soothing, but professional. Would the client know that she is coloured? But as soon as the thought enters Marion's head, she chastises herself" (48). Marion soon realizes her own prejudices against Brenda despite her attempt not to judge her because of her skin colour.

Marion felt a twinge of guilt about Brenda. The girl has turned out to be reliable and conscientious; she's never missed a day, even coming to work when she had that dreadful cough and had to be sent home. [...] No, really, Brenda said, I'm not in need of a break. It's just that a geleentheid has arisen. Marion looked at her, puzzled.

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<sup>49</sup> A government-built township where non-whites were relegated during Apartheid.

That's what we call it in Bonteheuwel, Brenda explained, and translated: A geleentheid is an opportunity... Yes, of course, I know, Marion said impatiently. I'm Afrikaans; I know what the word means. It's so irritating that people think I'm English because of my name (18).

This passage does not only show the Campbells' prejudices against non-whites formerly mentioned but also Marion's anger because people think she is English. What is interesting about her anger is that, in fact, her family raised her with stories about their Scottish heritage and thus she grew up believing herself superior. Although the Apartheid language was Afrikaans (that is why she would relate to that language) she speaks English presumably to hide the fact that they are, in fact, coloured.

This novel also provides the socio-political context of South Africa in the nineties, this time focusing on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996) – Desmond Tutu's project to invite victims of Apartheid to tell their experiences in public as well as urging the assassins to request amnesty from victims by confessing to their crimes. "Another TRC story: that's all the newspapers have to say these days – endless stories of people's suffering in the bad old days" (49). Motivated by this commission, Marion's aversion to national politics shifts when she discovers her parents (John and Helen Campbell) passed for white during Apartheid so as to relish the socio-economic advantages of being white. Thus, on this journey Marion embarks on, she does not only find her own identity and rightful place in her country but she unravels the enigma of her family's past: "she, who has never had anything to do with politics, has been branded by this business" (75). Being set in the nineties during the "New South Africa" (a recurrent term in this novel), Wicomb proposes an ample variety of opinions that differ depending on the social background, the skin colour or the age of each character, paying special attention to the coloureds' social position. From the very beginning, it is made clear how the Campbells are not a very tolerant family regarding non-whites. When Marion is asking her father to



hire a gardener he immediately refuses because “these kaffirs<sup>50</sup> of the New South Africa kill you just like that, just for the fun of it” (13), and most of the derogatory comments towards non-whites are made by the Campbells: “bastards” (13), “disgusting native” (60), “noisy, that is what made them impossible” (146) or “vulnerable to devil’s work and dagga” (67) to provide some examples. In fact, the use of language in this context is important, as Žižek claims, violence begins with language when the fear of the Other is present in the individual (2007: 174). Helen’s rejection of non-whites is palpable in almost every conversation she has, such as when she does not allow John to drink to be “respectable, acceptable people” not “like some drunken Toiings” (52). The term “Toiings” means “rag” or “dud”, two attributes Helen would use to describe non-whites. The character of Helen represents how coloureds exert the discriminatory prejudices of whites on their own people, indirectly supporting the racist and sexist ideologies that placed them where they are. This internalized hatred and contempt for coloureds represents the attack of those play-whites in order to defend their “white” position. As Cynthia Lytle claims, Helen is not presented under a sexist ideology that relegates women but “instead, Helen is illustrated as a multifaceted character who, although she is a victim of patriarchal and racial oppression, manipulates the very system that impedes her freedom and is fully aware of the actions she takes to live the life she chooses and without moral dilemmas” (2014: 141). This idea also relates to the internalization of black inferiority Fanon argues in his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), where he exposes how the black population is encouraged to emulate whites as much as possible in terms of culture and language.

On the other hand, they usually attach a positive adjective to whites: “decent citizens” (138), “[they] were decent white people in spite of being burnt black by sun and

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<sup>50</sup> See Glossary.

wind. Who would have thought, [John] said gleefully, that there are white people living without water and electricity (23). At this point, it should be highlighted how Marion's description of a nest of rats can be ascribed to coloureds. On one of Marion's visits to her father: "she leans towards sympathy for the hazardous lives they lead, for their vulnerability, for the terrible reputation they have earned themselves amongst humans, and yet the revulsion cannot be overcome" (24). The way she presents the animal here highly relates to the position coloureds adopted in a racialized South Africa, not liked by whites nor blacks and unable to leave that place. It also relates to coloureds through the term "vulnerable", a word that is used to talk about coloureds later in the novel.

Regarding the TRC and the socio-political instability that seemed to be chasing South Africa for so long, in the first chapter we find John recalling

how hard [they] fought, took up arms for a decent life. [...] Is he losing his marbles? But Pappa, she says, you've never supported the liberation movement. [...] I'm not talking about that lot, about terrorists. [...] I was one who volunteered as a reservist to defend South Africa against the blabby Communists. [...] Look what happened: kaffirs and hotnos<sup>51</sup> too lazy to work, just greedily grabbing at things that belonged to others, to decent people (14).

He refers to the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, when the police fired on the demonstrators that peacefully protested against Apartheid. Not that he shot people but he actively participated in dissolving the demonstration when he was, in fact, coloured – information the reader does not have at this point of the story. He could even have been one of the informers the regime hired to control who protested against Apartheid. In this same line we find Marion, who "never supported apartheid. Even though she voted for the Nationalists, she knew deep down that those policies were not viable. But what could one do, short of joining the hypocritical English voters and betraying your own?" (28).

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<sup>51</sup> See Glossary.

However, being hypocritical would be voting for a party whose policies you don't support. The core of this idea is that, still in the nineties, one probably could not openly say (s)he was in favour of such an assault against human rights. It does not mean that Marion supports Apartheid, but surely she would not be against some of its policies. Furthermore, the fact that she was raised as a white person influences her vote. As, at this point of the story she does not know she is coloured, the reader cannot know whether she would have voted for the ANC if she had known the truth. In fact, there is a moment when Brenda is precisely discussing this issue with Boetie – who seems to be a white workmate:

You don't think that years of oppression and destitution and perversion of human beings, thanks to the policies that you voted in, have anything to do with you? Boetie wags his finger. Now listen here: first of all, I never voted for apartheid... No? No, of course not, Brenda interrupts. It's impossible to find a person in this country who voted for the Nationalist Party. [...] So white people didn't vote for the Nats, okay. It must have been ghosts then. [...] There is no point in talking about these things. It is not possible for people from the different worlds of this country to talk to each other (36-38).

In fact, people from these “different worlds” Brenda mentions can indeed talk to each other, and the best example of this is herself and Marion, who, despite their differences (which vanish once Marion discovers her own identity), are able to establish a friendship – that inevitably ends with Brenda's betrayal<sup>52</sup>, which I will discuss below. Bauman's opinion on sameness and the absence of the Other reminds me of Marion and Brenda's relation: “community means *sameness*, while ‘sameness’ means the absence of the Other, especially a stubbornly *different* other capable of a nasty surprise and mischief precisely by reason of their difference” (2000: 115). It is in fact a nasty surprise about Brenda what Marion finds after returning from Scotland. This relationship also entails Butler's idea of a common goal for social recognition despite the liminal place the

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<sup>52</sup> She betrays Marion by writing a book about Marion's father behind her back.

individual can be relegated to – considering that both Marion and Brenda belong to that liminal space while looking for recognition (Marion as a white person, and Brenda as a valid writer) in each other:

Each, in a different way, is compelled by the same need, the same requirement. This means that we are not separate identities in the struggle for recognition but are already involved in a reciprocal exchange, an exchange that dislocates us from our positions, our subject-positions, and allows us to see that community itself requires the recognition that we are all, in different ways, striving for recognition...To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other (2004: 43-44).

Following the line of TRC and the socio-cultural situation of South Africa in the nineties, Wicomb noticeably points out the racial issues that still prevailed in the country by showing both backgrounds and both perspectives on the other. For example, as regards the land reform that took place during Apartheid, which banned blacks from buying or occupying certain lands<sup>53</sup>. Wicomb brings this topic to discussion through a young John talking to his father who was “waiting for the papers. It will be no more than a year before the area is reclassified. [...] The law is the law. We’ll have to try for an erf<sup>54</sup> in the Bergplaas area. [...] Bergaplaas was just not a possibility, not amongst those raggedy hotnos” (113). Before Apartheid ended, as restrictions were becoming more stringent, Helen was aware of the fact that her decision to play-white was correct:

No, there is no question of letting up. Just look how the world around them is being ordered, shaped according to colour, restricted: coloureds on a new voters’ roll, job reservation, Group Areas Act – legislation upon legislation that proves how right they were (151).

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 2 for more information about the different Apartheid laws.

<sup>54</sup> See Glossary.

It is the strictness of Helen's social description of South Africa what precisely relates to Bhabha's mimicry, which supports that 'trying to play white' requires as much discipline as the regime the individual is living under. She is a "sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (1984: 318). *Playing in the Light* centers on describing the difficulties coloureds had to overcome in a country where the Apartheid regime was over, but Apartheid thinking still prevailed and sides were still radicalized, so there was no place for an in-between. Not very far from the beginning of the novel, there is a passage that summarizes and encloses this idea through the trope of mermaids as a symbol of coloureds – which I will discuss in section 5.1. John made Marion believe she was a mermaid in her childhood. Helen, on the side of protecting their new identity, eradicated any thought of mixture in Marion, asserting that "half this and half that; you have to be fully one thing or another, otherwise you're lost. [...] No one likes creatures that are so different, so mixed up" (47).

However, the perspective that prevails in this novel is Marion's, whose first unfamiliarity towards the "non-white world" noticeably changes throughout her personal journey. On one of the first occasions that Marion steps outside her comfort zone (away from home and work) the reader discovers Marion, who identifies as white, dating Geoff. They share an intimate relationship but which she describes as a friendship – listening to "coloured men in suits and bow ties bent to their instruments... or black men, she doesn't know what people call themselves these days, now it's one thing, then another" (44). There is another moment when the problematic racial nomenclature arises during a conversation between Marion and Geoff while Marion still thinks she is adopted: "illegitimacy is an old-fashioned notion, especially in this country, where everything that once was correct, ordered and legitimate turns out to have been nothing of the kind" (77).

Related to the in-between position, Marion first feels her in-betweenness during her search for the hidden family secret: “in this world of accusations and confessions, of secrets and lies, Marion is a reluctant traveller who has landed in a foreign country without so much as a phrase book” (74).

Among the efforts Helen and John had to make to play white was, for instance, breaking all their family bonds by moving to Cape Town in the late forties – to provide Marion with a better life. During the fifties, there was a racial classification in South Africa, which meant reallocating the population according to their race. Helen, who was the planner of getting white identity cards, had to visit Councillor Carter regularly for some weeks and had to bear his sexual abuses in order to get the white identity cards: “the lovely breasts throbbed against his chest, and with his right hand on her left buttock he pressed his hardness against her. Helen would not cry” (143)<sup>55</sup>. It should be highlighted then the intrinsic connection between race-making and sexual violence and how Helen considers her white identity over her female identity. Thus, Helen’s identity becomes dichotomized between the purity of whiteness and the impurity of being sexually abused (Dass, 2011: 138). In fact, she lied to Councillor Carter claiming that

they had always been white, on the right side so to speak; it was just that she could not bear the business of having to fill in forms and have humiliating interviews with low-class bureaucrats, and who knows, stand in queues with all sorts of undesirable chance-taking types. And all because Campbell had lost his birth certificate. An affidavit from Councillor Carter that the Campbells were known members of the white community (143).

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<sup>55</sup> This passage is reminiscent of Saartjie Baartman and how the doctor William Dunlop used her body as a circus attraction throughout Europe during the nineteenth century.

The Campbells were not members of the white community, John's family was coloured and he was the one who had to obligatorily leave his family behind in order to create a new white life. When they signed for their new white identity cards

the signature would be nothing, a piece of bureaucratic non-sense, just a case of signing on the dotted line that he would relinquish all contact he might have with coloureds. Of course something like that could not possibly be monitored, and besides, with a close family like theirs there was no question of being kept apart by a flimsy law. [...] And swearing before God that according to the laws of the land he no longer had brothers and sisters had been the very worst thing (158).

One of the efforts John and Helen had to make in order to preserve their new white identity was not to give Marion any siblings, due to her mother's fear they might turn out coloured: "Helen foresaw further problems: the child's hair would grow into a mass of frizzy curls; she would be slow to learn, mentally retarded, she would become a kaffirboetie<sup>56</sup>" (125). Her mother's current insecurities emerge due to Helen's awareness she would never be purely white. Although she had some advantages during Apartheid due to her fake whiteness, she lacks the privilege of living without fear. What stands out while talking about these insecurities are the curtains. "Her parents were always meticulous, neurotic really, about curtains: drawing them before switching on the lights, careful about keeping them neatly in place during the day. [...] the panic of being displayed" (10-11). Curtains in this sense work as a metaphor of protection, they are used to hide a secret hidden they avoid revealing in their neighbourhood. In fact, Marion's reaction to the discovery of her parents' past as play-whites reveals the secrecy in which she was raised: "Playing in the Light? Perhaps not, Marion thinks. More like hiding – hiding in the light" (124).

Throughout the novel, we find that Marion's mother, Helen, has died before this story starts, so there is only John, her father, who seems to have senile dementia "he

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<sup>56</sup> See Glossary.

smells strongly of pee; he has clearly not changed his trousers in all these weeks” (210). Thus, it is through the sometimes-difficult character of John that Marion discovers her authentic coloured roots. Despite her first apparent indifference towards her heritage, she has the feeling that “her father, no, both her parents, have always kept something from her; something they did not want her to know. [...] Helen is dead and there is something secret, something ugly, monstrous, at the heart of their paltry little family” (58). Marion’s hypothesis about her parents’ secrecy is that “the mystery is about her own birth. There can be no other explanation: she is an adopted child” (62). She believes so because “she does not look much like either of [her parents]” (62). Nothing could be further from the truth. After Marion’s several attempts to make John tell the truth, she finally finds “Helen’s green identity card marked WHITE” (116) so her father explains:

they were not the monsters she seems to think they were; that was just how the world was. [...] There was so very little to this business of identity cards. It was so long ago and there was nothing to it really. I’m sorry you’re so upset, but can’t you see it wouldn’t have worked, it wouldn’t have been right to tell you, to get you all worried about things. We just did what we thought best for you (117-118).

After this father-daughter conversation comes one of the most revealing moments of the story in terms of racial classification, when Marion goes to the National Library looking for information about play-whites, but “there are no entries for play-whites” (120). Marion and the librarian think that play-white “must be a condition of whiteness; but whiteness itself, according to the library’s classification system, is not a category for investigation” (120). It is not only interesting that there is no information about play-whites, not even looking through the entries on coloureds but the fact that whiteness is not considered a category that needs to be investigated. Richard Dyer’s *White* (1997) explains this idea of whiteness “as [an] ideal [that] can never be attained, not only because white skin can never be hue white, but because ideally white is absence: to be really,



absolutely white is to be nothing” (1997: 78). For Dyer, whiteness is a combination of colours and no colour at all, an absence of ethnicity, meaning that “whites are everywhere in representation... they seem not to be represented to themselves as whites” (1997: 3). However, the new bill of 1950 defined a white person as someone: “who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person” (121). Marion notices the incongruity of the definition, it “defines whiteness in terms of what it is not” (121). What this assertion suggests is that the importance is not in what to be, but in what not to be. However, “they cannot imagine circumstances under which people would freely and voluntarily admit to being coloured” (122). These definitions and ‘non-definitions’ clash with Zimitri Erasmus’ approach: “coloured identities are not simply Apartheid labels imposed by whites. They are made and re-made by coloured people themselves in their attempts to give meaning to their everyday lives” (2001: 16).

When John finally finds the strength, he explains to Marion what happened to their identities:

The Campbells didn’t have that kind of money. With coloureds being put on a separate voters’ roll, there was a helluva mix-up with identities. Many white people who didn’t even realise that they were coloured were now reclassified; some coloureds became white and some were reclassified as native. This is his explanation – it was a time of uncertainty. [...] A matter of opportunity. [...] With the affidavit proving that they were known to be white, which Helen had secured from a councillor, it was just left to John to sign a form. [...] He wanted to ask their forgiveness, Elsie’s and his brothers’, but to do so would have meant acknowledging the force of the oath. He only asked them not to tell Ma, for it would have killed her. Now he is racked with dry sobbing. Things became so complicated in the country, so political, he croaks, that they agreed to stop seeing him; he was excluded from Elsie’s dinners (157).

Before commenting on the passage, Sue Kossew is worth mentioning here as she rightly asserts that “the border between whiteness and ‘non-whiteness’ and the cultural

construction rather than the essential nature of race, is clearly illustrated by this process of reclassification” (2006: 200). Marion’s reaction towards her father’s revelation was to ignore what her father had said and the way he expressed himself, instead focusing on his coloured accent, which she had never noticed before: “Marion wonders why she has never noted what in others she calls coloured theatricality, as John warbles his voice to show the solemnity of the occasion” (157). The very first time John gathers enough courage to tell the whole truth to his daughter, she is fixated with the modulation of his voice. In fact, after John’s revelation Marion visits Elsie, John’s sister. Again, Marion’s first impression was through language: “her English is not as shaky as John’s, although guttural r’s do escape between chortles, and her syntax totters in moments of passion. She is, however, firm about not speaking Afrikaans” (166). Despite Elsie’s colouredness, she is probably determined not to speak Afrikaans because it became the language of Apartheid (in spite of the origin of Afrikaans). Elsie’s sudden appearance in the story is meant to give Marion the perspective of a coloured person in her family who is proud of being so: “Your mother was jealous, she says to Marion, because she, Elsie, for all her black husband and children, had risen in the world. They had a car and a detached house with a big garden. So what was the use of Helen and John’s whiteness after all?” (170). Elsie admits they could not trust Helen for what she did with John, but at the same time she admits that “those were bad times, my child; it may not have been fair to John, but then this was a place of black and white, not a place of fairness, no room for concessions” (172). The interesting anecdote here is how Elsie found her parents’ pictures retouched. “The practice was quite common then: a photographer would blow up the image and touch it up with a paintbrush. She’d found the portraits disturbing at the time, had not anticipated that he would touch up the pictures according to his own ideal of beauty, of whiteness” (173).

Apart from the racial issue, Wicomb's works display the different social class hierarchical perspectives that usually blended with the racial matter. In *Playing in the Light*'s the protagonist comes from an 'apparently white', middle-class family, and the prevailing perspective is that of a self-centered, unaware, apathetic individual. In fact, Marion is aware of her middle-class position, recognizing that "it is the hard-working middle class that she admires, which is to say people like herself" (25). From the very beginning Marion boasts about the "new luxury block on the beachfront at Bloubergstrand" (2) because there is "no point in having a glorious outlook on the sea, with the classic view of Table Mountain on the left and Robben Island on the right, if you are not secure. Here your property is inviolable" (2). Ludmila Ommundsen makes an interesting point about the view from Marion's flat:

The "classic view" may refer to the traditional view of Table Mountain as the starting point of white colonisation in the seventeenth century, marking the erasure of indigenous cultures, and Robben Island as the place used for isolation and imprisonment during the apartheid era. Tucked in these geographical pages of history, Marion is associated with a contemporary state of "in between-ness" (2016: 86).

Continuing with Marion's obsession for neighbourhoods, it has always been present in herself as she recalls that she "would have preferred to live above the Main Road [...] Those verandahed stoeps, edged with broekielace<sup>57</sup>, were wrapped around at least two sides of the houses, so that people could spend all day outside in the ambiguous space between private house and public street" (9). This relates to Fathi's understanding of neighbourhoods. For her "neighbourhoods are important in the formation of classed identities. They are the spaces where local, mundane and everyday descriptions of home are shaped" (Fathi, 2017: 91). Considering Marion's desire to live in a neighbourhood

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<sup>57</sup> See Glossary.

where she could enjoy the public street suggests that she conceives race as a way to achieve a safe space. Nonetheless, while Bhabha would describe Marion as “unhomely” and belonging to a liminal space due to her coloured condition, Wicomb argues that it “relies on an essentialist view which posits a ‘pure’ reality that is experienced in the space inhabited by the racially pure” (1998: 101). Bhabha uses Freud’s concept of the “uncanny” to develop his theory of the “unhomely”. For Bhabha, “unhomely” does not mean the lack of a home but rather that the thin line between the home and the outside world is dissolved. Thus, the private and the public become part of each other, creating a vision that is divided and disorienting (1992). Both Fathi’s idea of neighbourhoods and Bhabha’s concept “unhomely” resonates with the feeling of shame. Marion’s discovery about her family identity creates in her a feeling of distrust and uncertainty, that leads her to both feelings of shame and unhomely. Shame for her new identity, and unhomely for leaving her former identity.

However, Helen – the person Marion inherited her racist and classist personality from – preferred her not to be exposed to the sun so she would not be “burnt pitch black like a coloured” (9). In fact, Helen’s concern was not only about racial prejudices, she did not want her family to seem poor either: “What’s the point of working hard, of building a new life, if your husband is determined to be backward, a poor white?” (10). For example, when she visited the councillor to get the white identity cards, she does not want to “fill in forms and have humiliating interviews with low-class bureaucrats, and who knows, stand in queues with all sorts of undesirable chance-taking types” (142). Helen would represent Bhabha’s colonial mimicry, which claims that the colonized tries to resemble the colonizer as much as possible. Helen would be then a “sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (1984: 318). In this sense, Helen recalls

Mrs. Shenton, from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), who also tries to resemble the colonizer (Mr. Weedon in this case), mainly in terms of language<sup>58</sup>. Contrary to Marion and Helen there is John, whose authentic identity never entirely fades, despite his constant attempt to resemble as 'white' as possible. "You mustn't shop at Woolworths, he says, it's too expensive. [and Marion replies] It's no good trying to civilise you" (12). What John is undoubtedly guilty of is Marion's knowledge of their Scottish heritage, so she is aware that "the right corner of her mouth lifts ever so slightly like that of her father and of his father before him, and so on, generations of Campbells, she supposes, going back to the old snowbound days in the Scottish Highlands" (26). This recalls Stuart Hall's "biological referent": race "function[s] not through the truth of the 'biological referent' but as a discursive logic. That is to say, as a logic in which, of course, the biological trace still functions even when it's silent, but now, not as the truth, but as the guarantor of the truth" (1998: 290). This means that, even though their Scottish heritage is there, it is not much present in the Campbell's physical appearance, but the discourse of their historic heritage serves to preserve it.

Marion's sense of superiority is directly inherited, in different ways, from both of her parents. It is then understandable that Marion does not want to leave her Mercedes in the street where "you can't go anywhere nowadays without a flock of unsavory people crowding around you, making demands, trying to make you feel guilty for being white and hardworking" (28). Wicomb describes Marion as racist and classist meanwhile Marion seems to consider herself openminded and tolerant as she openly asserts "she'd never really supported apartheid" (28). However, her claims about not supporting Apartheid policies seem inconsistent with her company policies, when she gives the cleaning lady, Tiena "permission to stay in the yard if she wishes, there is a bench under the tree, or, if it rains,

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 3 for more information about Helen's eagerness to resemble Mr. Weedon.

to have her lunch in the kitchen with the rest of them” (34). The classist mindset revealed in this passage unveils her inherited and intrinsic animosity towards the lower classes. Another source for these kinds of prejudices is religion, which is present in Marion’s story<sup>59</sup>. When she was fifteen, she met Father Gilbert, who “spoke with passion about the parishes in the townships, the poor coloured people who were so lacking in facilities and resources that they were vulnerable to devil’s work and dagga” (67). So when she first arrives at Brenda’s house and they talk about smoking she wonders whether they are talking about dagga, but “she doesn’t know what dagga smells like” (67). Not having been in that neighbourhood before, when she meets Mrs. Mackay, she thinks her face is “kind, open and artless as only, she imagines, the faces of the poor can be” (68).

The class conflict in Marion and Brenda’s relationship is palpable. While Brenda assumes that Marion has “a holiday house in France or Italy” (83), Marion finds the supposition quite basic, since “that is what they all think of whites” (83). In an attempt to deny Brenda’s belief, Marion labels her family as “dirt poor” (84), a term Brenda finds offensive, since the construction that binds poverty to dirt is nonsensical<sup>60</sup>. At this point of the relationship, both Marion and Brenda’s generalizations about the other hinder the development of their friendship, as both classify the other in a high or low social category. Brenda refers to Marion as “people like this” (84) and the other way round: “I thought you people weren’t interested in Afrikaans” (85). They both prove the little knowledge one side had about the other. David Hoegberg precisely mentions the class differences (or *clethnicity* for this dissertation) by claiming:

Brenda is troubled not so much by their different racial upbringings as by the class difference that exists between them in the present, the difference that makes one a driver and the other a rider. Both are well-educated women, and Brenda has shown

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<sup>59</sup> Marion is one of the few Wicomb characters with whom religion arise. The fact that religion is negligible in Wicomb’s oeuvre is precisely the author’s animosity towards these beliefs. This was revealed in a private conversation with Zoë Wicomb in October 2023, in Glasgow.

<sup>60</sup> In Chapter 7 there is also a reference to this dichotomized notion of class and cleanliness.

her ability by taking over Marion's job, but the fact that Marion started in life with the economic advantages of whiteness creates a gulf between them (2018: 16).

Just as the racial prejudices seem to decrease in Marion's *bildungsroman*, the class issue seems not to be overcome yet. In fact, as Jacob asserts:

Marion's cultural repositioning of herself is an ongoing process, and one which is necessarily inconclusive. Wicomb's novel cannot, therefore, leave its protagonist with any greater certainty about herself but rather in a state of conflict about the ownership of her own personal narrative and with a dramatically heightened awareness of her identity as fissured and discontinuous (2008: 13).

One of the most important, yet passive, characters in this story is Tokkie, an old servant of the Campbell family when Marion was still a child. In the process of discovering her coloured roots, she finds Tokkie was in fact her grandmother, who was there in the role of a servant in order to preserve their white identity. It is not until the second half of the book that the reader finds Tokkie's story.

Thomasina, she had been christened, but from the very first he called her Tokkie. That was Flip Karelse, a handsome, light-skinned man with dreamy hazel eyes. [...] She told him of her own blood, her mother's sister who was white as driven snow with good red hair, but he laughed. He was no butcher; what did he know about blood and skin? (135).

Here is where both Marion's and Helen's light skin heritage comes from, from Flip Karelse. Tokkie had to hold her head high in order to fit in the Karelse family "because the Karelses thought of themselves as white, and therefore superior" (137) and, by the time they got married, "she was the envy of the village girls, who said that she, being so black, must have used witchcraft, for no husband could have been more devoted than Flip Karelse. He adored every inch of her, took delight in the mysterious darkness of her skin" (137). Despite Flip's positive representation, it should be highlighted how he found Tokkie's darkness "mysterious". This idea of colonized non-whites as desirable,

mysterious and attractive derived from the empire's desire to conquer, where the Other, the colonized non-white women were hypersexualized, and so it was the land that was seen as a "virginal space to be explored and inseminated with its glory" (Lytle, 2014: 233). This connection between colonized women and land that started with colonization is still visible in modern society, where non-white women are viewed as exotic and conquerable. I would argue here how both marriages of Tokkie and Flip and Helen and John represent the hypocritical gender differences when dealing with race. So, on the one hand, there are Tokkie and Flip, a coloured woman married to a white man – or at least apparently white. In this case, it is the woman's body that is sexualized and the woman's role remains relegated to the condition of object. On the other hand, Helen and John would represent the opposite, an apparently white woman married to a coloured man (rather metaphorical, taking into account that both were actually coloured, but Helen's attitude and efforts to resemble as white as possible marks the 'racial' difference between them). What differentiates both couples is the fact that black men could be accepted to some extent, through the white woman. However, it does not work the other way round. As Fanon notes:

Out of the blackest part of my soul, through the zone of hachures, surges up this desire to be suddenly white. I want to be recognized not as *Black*, but as *White*... who better than the white woman to bring this about? By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love...[which] opens the illustrious path that leads to total fulfillment... (1986: 45).

It is through the character of Tokkie and Marion's few memories about her that she decides to start digging into her family past. Tokkie is first mentioned during Marion's recurrent dream of her childhood when: "an old woman sitting on a low stool is illuminated" (31). The fact that Marion recurrently dreams about Tokkie already symbolizes that there is something hidden in her character. She starts then trying to dig



into Tokkie's life when she sees a picture in the newspaper and "the face makes her think of Tokkie, the old coloured servant who indulged her as a child" (56) but when she asks her father for Tokkie's name he does not remember: "she has no doubt that he is lying, pretending not to know. But why?" (56). "Marion was about five years old when Tokkie died" (32). Despite Marion's early age, she is able to remember that she was "Tokkie's sweetest heart" (32) and when the old woman died, Marion remembers her parents' argument about going to the funeral:

Pappa said in sad dominee tones that they ought to go to the funeral. He should mind his own business, Helen said, Tokkie was hers, belonged to her family. [...] It was plain folly to go to the funeral, to that little house in Kensington where her family were, subject the child to such things (32).

Helen is not presented as a very sympathetic character despite her sacrifice – having suffered sexual abuse – but this specific passage shows how little she cared about others' feelings. She asks John to mind his own business when she was the one to compel him to break ties with his own family. She does not mind missing her own mother's funeral for the sake of her new white life and, to top it all, she does not want to subject Marion to "such things" (32). "Such things" does not refer to bringing the child to a funeral but to bringing her to Kensington – which is a suburb of Johannesburg – so Marion does not have to notice she comes from a coloured family. Furthermore, Marion recalls how her mother's mood changed when Tokkie arrived "Tokkie must have been something of a family retainer, a nanny to her mother, which accounted for her devotion and for Helen's quiet humility when she was around. Marion remembered that her mother was transformed when Tokkie arrived" (69). In fact, Helen was aware that "the entire white life was shaped by her" (149). In these childhood days for Marion, she has a friend called Annie Boshoff, a white girl from her neighbourhood, who said that "that was

kaffirboetie<sup>61</sup> talk. There was no need to go to a servant's funeral, no matter how old or wonderful she was. Annie did not understand that Tokkie was much more than a servant" (33). At some point in the novel, there is a flashback of Annie's father's affair with a coloured woman, recognizing that "he was himself coloured" (194). The outcome of this affair was the Campbells' rejection, that comes full circle with Marion's dismissal and thus approving Helen's plan by throwing the scrapbook Annie gave her "into the dusting bin in the backyard. Marion was eight years old when she betrayed Annie Boshoff" (195).

During Marion's inquiry into Tokkie's past she visits Brenda's family in Clanwilliam district, where Tokkie may have come from:

Tokkie, says Mrs Mackay pulling a face, that's now an old-fashioned nickname that I for one have not come across. Coloured people are given funny names by their bosses, you know, but she would have had a decent Christian name; even country people all have decent English names. Mrs Mackay is offended. Does Marion not even know the person's surname? (70).

Again, here Marion displays her ignorance towards the racial question in her own country and shows again how she has grown up completely unaware of how offensive she could sound. A problem, in fact, created by Helen, who chose to hide their reality from her daughter in order to "protect" her. Despite the reasons to understand Helen's decisions, lying about your own heritage is not precisely a way to protect anyone, but the other way round, to expose her child to the real world without any kind of knowledge about both their own reality and the social reality of South Africa. On this journey Marion embarks on she finds Mrs. Murray who seems to have met Tokkie in the past. The woman claims that Mrs. Karelse (Tokkie's surname) "went to Cape Town to work for posh people, but not as a servant, never, rather as a house-keeper, a kind of manager. [...] She found a respectable position with English people. [...] The Karelses were decent people,

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<sup>61</sup> See Glossary.

not the sort who went into service for Boers” (95). However, Marion finds this claim “a false lead. Not their Tokkie, who Mrs. Murray would think disreputable for being a servant” (95). Even Marion blushes with her own thought, thinking Tokkie can’t be Mrs. Karelse because she was a servant for her family and thus could not come from a decent family as Mrs. Murray asserts. Nevertheless, in the same conversation, Mrs. Murray bends down to relieve Marion’s foot pain when she exclaims: “O gits, it’s like seeing a spook, because from down here with your face tilted like that you look the spitting image of Mrs. Karelse my dear! Funny that I didn’t notice before” (97). Wicomb repeatedly gives many hints about Marion’s family truth which the protagonist seems not to see, or she may not want to see. Another irrefutable piece of evidence Marion seems not to notice is “Marion’s cheeks, [which] turned a healthy brown after the weekend sun. She, Tanya, just goes bright red in the sun and peels by the next day; she supposes is the Irish blood” (48). But in fact, from the very beginning of the novel, Marion’s suspicions subtly start when she asks her father: “Why do we have an English name? Why, why, why? His father mimicked. Is that all you can say? Ask no questions and you’ll hear no lies”<sup>62</sup> (5).

The conversation with Mrs. Murray revealed what Marion resisted believing despite the numerous hints. In the following conversation with Brenda, Marion follows the five-stage process: firstly, denial and anger: “so you think I’m a play-white; that I’m a fraud, that I lied to you – to the world?” (102); then bargaining:

and so she tries to tell all: the theft of the newspaper; the ghost of Patricia Williams; her father’s lies; Tokkie’s death and the oppressive silence, weeks of silence in that house where she crept under the bed to snuggle into the old woman’s apron; the dry, white childhood; her recent belief that she was adopted; and now this terrible emptiness (102).

And depression:

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<sup>62</sup> This sentence recalls Pip’s sister in *Great Expectations*. In fact, Pip is another example of discovering his real self, in his case, the identity of his benefactor.

Marion will not say aloud: How am I to bear the fact that my Tokkie, my own grandmother, sat in the backyard drinking coffee from a servant's mug, and that my mother, her own daughter, put that mug in her hands? And she will not cry, even if these words are being swallowed like shards of glass (103).

The fifth and most difficult stage, acceptance, does not come straightaway for Marion, but she is already in the process of recognizing and accepting herself. In the meantime, Brenda tries to defuse the situation: "so what? Haven't you heard how many white people, or rather Afrikaners of the more-indigenous-than-thou brigade, are claiming mixed blood these days? It's not such a tragedy to be black, at least you're authentic" (102). Brenda here marks the difference between Helen and Marion, "she is the most grounded in her coloured identity in the "new" South Africa; she is neither attempting to escape it, like Helen, nor attempting to discover it, like Marion" (Hoegberg, 2018: 13). In a later talk with Geoff, Marion's awareness of her new identity rises: "it may be true that being white, black or coloured means nothing, but it is also true that things are no longer the same; there must be a difference between what things are and what they mean. [...] How can things be the same, and yet be different?" (106). Marion's acceptance is materialized when she says out loud: "Once I was white, now I'm coloured" (106). Marion's thinking process of crossing barriers should be mentioned here. Because her parents formerly crossed the white barrier, she is now expected to cross over the coloured one but she thinks there is "no question of returning to a place where [her] parents once were" (107). Here, Marion questions not only her new identity, but the ongoing practices of crossing boundaries that had been, and currently are, taking place in the country. As it could not be any other way, Marion's ends this conversation with the word 'shame', a word Wicomb finds essential in the construction of the coloured self<sup>63</sup>. Wicomb explains that the coloured shame started with Saartjie Baartman and her steatopygous body and

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<sup>63</sup> See Zoë Wicomb's "Shame and Identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa", 1998.

remained in the miscegenation of the coloured identity until the end of Apartheid (1998: 92).

After Marion's visit to Brenda's family in Bonteheuwel the relationship between them starts growing. Although Brenda "does not ask why Marion wishes to trace Tokkie" (79) she agrees to accompany her in her search and it is here – outside the work space – where they get to know not only each other but their backgrounds better. Thus, the reader sees how Geoff – Marion's more-than-friend – finds it hazardous to pick Brenda up for dinner: "Townships are dangerous even in the daylight, he says, although he has never been to one" (78). This fear of the unknown<sup>64</sup> is a critical aspect in postcolonial literature, entailing a combination of prejudices and a predisposition for discrimination. On the other hand, we have Brenda's first time in Camps Bay – a mainly white area in Cape Town: "Brenda is enchanted by the postcard view from the balcony. [...] Brenda says that there are so many parts of this city that she does not know at all" (78). The fear of the unknown must be highlighted here, as it is an essential issue in postcolonial theory and entails a combination of prejudices and a predisposition for discrimination. The relationship between Marion and Brenda shows the juxtaposition of the two seemingly opposing worlds that occupy South African lands since colonization. It serves at the same time to prove that these two worlds are not incompatible; instead, conviviality is needed to understand the other. This conviviality means celebrating multi-ethnic difference, while avoiding communitarian conventions (Gilroy, 2004). Besides the metaphorical meaning, this represents Marion's first friendship: "it is surprisingly pleasant to be dining with a woman, prattling about this and that. [...] Marion thinks of how well the evening went, of how she has made a friend" (79). This is in fact a turning point in Marion's personal development, when she starts widening her formerly strict social horizons. The second

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<sup>64</sup> See Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence in Colonial Discourse", 1984.

main crux comes by the end of the story when Marion overcomes her second concern, travelling.

There is an interesting passage in Marion's and Brenda's journey to Clanwilliam where they meet Outa<sup>65</sup> Blinkoog, a young man (symbolizing the stereotypical coloured country man) who gives them a lantern from all his "Beautiful Things" (88). Brenda deems his name pejorative, as it means "old black man", a title that does not correspond to his age. She comments: "No need to call yourself Outa" (87) but he has "never been a child. In those days I was Baas Pieter van Schalkwyk's shepherd, started when I was at school – I know the veld like the back of my hand – and it was Baas Pieter who called me Outa Blinkoog" (88). His language reveals a modest education, aligning with the prototype of a shepherd country man who collects "scraps of coloured cloth bunched into little mops, [...] commercial cans of all kinds, flattened out, beaten, punctured all over for texture and reshaped with settings of coloured glass" (89). Andrew Van der Vlies suggests that this picturesque character "is almost certainly not a figment of Wicomb's imagination, but rather based on Jan Schoeman, an itinerant storyteller and artist based at Prince Albert Road in the Great Karoo, who styles himself as Outa Lappies, the cloth man" (2010: 586). As he gives the girls the lantern he claims "light, he says, that is what we take too much for granted; coloured glass helps us to remember the miracle of light" (89). Wicomb's nod to the coloured community points out the importance of mixed racial heritage, specifically alluding to Marion's whiteness as a result of her coloured parents' effort. Furthermore, this lantern symbolically entails a negotiation of shared spaces, a way for Marion (representing the whites) and Brenda (representing the non-whites) to deal with conviviality. In fact, Paul Gilroy's vision of conviviality has its origins in race, which "can have no ethically defensible place" (2000: 6). The relationship between Marion and

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<sup>65</sup> See Glossary.

Brenda aligns with Gilroy's emphasis on how everyday multicultural practices rest on a radical and complex ability to be at ease in the presence of diversity but without restaging communitarian conceptions of the selfsame ethnic and racial difference (quoted in Valluvan, 2016: 205).

By the end of the story, having unraveled her authentic roots, Marion travels to Glasgow – despite her former aversion to travel – working as the last symbol of her personal development, showing how “her mind has been broadened” (187). She has sent postcards featuring iconic landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower, the Reichstag, Buckingham Palace, etc. to Brenda, although she “has been to none of these places, but then her cards make no such claims” (187). However, the crux of Marion's European journey is her feeling of displacement in England, the country she formerly thought she knew: “It is in the assumed familiarity of London that she is invaded by the virus of loneliness. It is here that Marion experiences the world in reverse, feels the topsy-turviness of being in the wrong hemisphere” (188). This same awareness is displayed by Frieda, the protagonist of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*<sup>66</sup>, which suggests that, for Wicomb, moving abroad to what they considered to be their mother country intrinsically implies a sense of dislocation for those who expected no changes from one place to another. “Believing that at some level she knows the country, or the language, she is shocked to find herself a stranger, so very different from the natives, although the motley crowds about her can hardly be all natives. [...] Perhaps it is the absence of light that makes her cry” (189). She finds herself different from the natives – from the British – but, recognizing she knows the country, how could she think she would resemble the British? Again, the fact that her family raised her amongst lies, secrets and high expectations does

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<sup>66</sup> “I'm in the wrong bloody hemisphere” (2006: 120).

not help at all Marion's awareness of the world. At some point during her stay in England, there is a revealing moment regarding Marion's whiteness:

The rectangle is a painting, or rather, is painting in action, of white light on the white wall. It is a picture of time, a projection of rain drilling into the angled glass, rolling down the pane, translating itself into a dance of light on the wall. [...] Held within the rectangle of the reflected window frame, the liquid patterns form and dissolve (192).

This composition of white on white and the dance of light symbolizes Marion's topsy-turvy journey since she discovered her family past (Jacobs, 2008: 10). It is in this space where Marion reconceptualizes her identity and her place in the world, where inside she feels the safety she cannot find outside. This is reflected in Toni Morrison's world-as-home definition:

[it is] the new space . . . formed by the inwardness of the outside, the interiority of the 'othered,' the personal that is always embedded in the public. In this new space one can imagine safety without walls, can iterate difference that is prized but unprivileged, and can conceive of a third . . . world 'already made for me, both snug and wide open, with a doorway never needing to be close.' (1998: 12)<sup>67</sup>.

There she meets Vumile Mkhize, a man she previously met in a car accident, so she travels to Glasgow, where the man is now on business. In the train to Scotland, she thinks that "in this alien world, it pleases her to think of South Africa as her country. She is a colonial at heart" (197). Notably, it is not until Marion leaves South Africa that she embraces a connection to her birth country as her home: "The premise is that one cannot speak of place without also speaking of a certain kind of dis-placement, and that one cannot conceive of home without also enacting a certain notion of being 'un-homed'" (Dass, 2011: 137). Before this journey, the reader cannot find a single time where Marion

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<sup>67</sup> Toni Morrison's idea of world-as-home is at odds with Bhabha's unhomely mentioned in the page 180. The fact that Marion feels the safety at home she cannot reach outside does not overshadow the blur Bhabha claims to exist between the outside and the inside.



boasts about being South African or about her country in general terms. However, it is only through her departure that she realizes what her place is in the world, where she feels at ease. Working as a counterpoint for Marion's new broadened perspective is Vumile, whose comments show his disregard for non-whites. "Taxis, he explains, are cheap here; they are for everyone, even the poor black take black cabs" (199). Furthermore, he adopts the "colonizer" position (despite his blackness) and romanticizes the 'Other', Marion in this case: "He is delighted by her accent" (202) but at the same time, he has a terrible perception of South Africa: "marvellous place, but he believes it's all been messed up now. Murder, rape, knifings, all kinds of atrocities, he says, rolling the r's with bloodthirsty relish" (202). He does not only complain about the South African social situation but about Scotland's: "Full of pakis with their wee curry shops. [...] It's a pity that he should use such uncivilised language. [...] Oh no, Paki, he says, it's just short for Pakistani. That, you see, is where they come from" (203). However, the outrageous fact here is that Vumile is in fact Zulu and after Apartheid, his family is now "living nice and comfy in a black neighbourhood" (206). His former racialized and classist comments and viewpoints do not correspond to his Zulu heritage. Notably, he does not conceal his heritage, yet seems not to be affected by the 'crossing'. However, if being proud of his roots, why then criticize his own people? He represents, as Helen does, the hypocritical position of coloureds 'mimicking' whites and adopting racist and classist perspectives on others.

When Marion returns to South Africa, the first thing she does is go to her father's place, where she finds Brenda has been visiting John "to see him and so enjoys talking about the olden days. A very good listener" (210). The reason for Brenda's visits is that she discovered that it was Marion's father story "that [she] wanted to write, a story that should be written" (217). Marion's anger intensifies as she thinks of Brenda taking

advantage of a “lonely, senile old man who was grateful for your visits? Sis. How dare you! Why don’t you write your own fucking story?” (217). Brenda’s response suggests that Marion does not accurately know her father’s story. “I know my father’s fucking story” (218), but the truth is she may not.

Brenda is strategically positioned in this story to give voice to all those stories Marion and her family have been trying to hide for years. As Andrew Van de Vlies suggests: “Brenda becomes the agent of such an 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” (2010: 597).

The title is clearly a nod to Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* and exposes the constructedness of racial categories, even as it explores the characteristically coloured experience of passing for white. It is an attempt to reclaim the Afrikaans language and Afrikaner ethnicity as somehow authentically mixed and authentically indigenous (Wicomb, 1998b: 365). However, the title could also relate to Hebdige’s *Hiding in the Light*, a sociologist’s work Wicomb mentions in her essay “On Shame and Coloured Identity” (1998)<sup>68</sup>. Last but not least, Wicomb provides the reader with an extensive catalogue of South African postcolonial culture such as fashion magazines, popular songs, or T. S. Eliot among others. The *Home and Garden* magazines (2) or the kitchen she created, inspired by “the recent style feature in *Cosmopolitan*” (35) are Wicomb’s tools to prove how ‘post-Apartheid play-whites’ grew up biased by the master race’s culture and the danger of social expectations that people living in a liminal place faced

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<sup>68</sup> Hebdige deals with youth cultures, arguing that teenagers were divided into two aesthetics: consumption and riots. Because of this, he creates the term “politics of pleasure”, a perspective that represents the youth cultures as a whole through photographs, objects or fashion (1998).

when they were relegated to a lower position in society, while expecting to be accepted and become a full member of the high social class, a dream that did not happen to all.

Without trying to downplay the rest of the characters in *Playing in the Light*, Marion, Helen and Brenda's roles stand out prominently among the others. Through these three coloured women with very different perspectives on what it means to be coloured, Wicomb vividly displays the difficulties of overcoming the complexities of Apartheid's racial and classist cultural barriers, particularly focused on the female perspective. Regarding their colouredness and how the three women deal with being located in a liminal space due to their skin colour, Helen would represent shame, Marion would represent denial and Brenda would represent acceptance. They symbolize the ambiguity of race and the different outcomes that social hierarchies can bring to different individuals with different backgrounds and traumas, even within members of the same community.

### **5.1. Oceanic Imaginaries in *Playing in the Light***

Wicomb's writing has been distinguished in literary criticism for its innovative ways to represent the coloured identity through intersectional and intertextual narratives. In this sense, Wicomb has asserted that the characters' setting is "the representation of physical surroundings that is crucially bound up with a culture and its dominant ideologies, providing ready-made, recognizable meanings" (2005: 146). *Playing in the Light* displays Marion's process of discovering her own past and the truth about her family, given that her parents passed for white during Apartheid. Even though this novel is not about the sea itself, it is very intriguing how in the novel Wicomb relates the sea to emotions, relationships or social constructions, while she proves the sea to be an essential element of postcolonial studies. I make no attempt to survey what has become a massive

field, but instead steer my selection of instances to where the sea plays a special role, in the direction I see Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* presents the human connections with the sea. Furthermore, only a few extracts from the novel have been chosen for this analysis, but it contains numerous subtle references to the maritime world. This section focuses on how, amidst flashbacks and flashforwards, Marion's *bildungsroman* gathers her changing perspective of the sea and mermaids, the mythological creature her father made her believe she was as a child. The use of the term *bildungsroman* is because, despite the non-chronological order, the narrative explores the development of an individual, Marion in this case. This section aims to analyze, firstly, the relation Marion has with the sea throughout the years and how her former self-conception of being a mermaid evolves into a more complex conceit. Secondly, the importance that the figure of the mermaid has in this story –how it is compared to being coloured: “half this and half that” (47) – and also how it is presented through the three family members: Marion, her father and her mother will be explored. Furthermore, the different opinions the sea generates will be considered in order to study not how the characters of *Playing in the Light* perceive the ocean, but how this perception varies depending on the diverse social backgrounds and personal experiences they have. However, irrespective of the individual's origins:

the sea has captivated human imagination and left its traces across the globe in texts, symbols and myths for millennia. Here the destructive and also life-giving nature of the sea, its capacity to evoke human longing and intercultural dynamics and its refusal to satisfy this longing by its quasi-limitless dimensions are represented over and over again in an equally unlimited series of forms and strategies (Larsen, 2012: 172).

Following the study of this novel from the perspective of the sea and whether there is a more positive or negative perspective of it, it is evident that there is a larger number of positive viewpoints. As regards the positive instances, Marion can see the ocean

“which she can see from the bed, curls in sere pink and gold across the horizon and the cool Atlantic laps at Robben Island. [...] from her bed, Marion can look out at the sea” (2-3). One thing that may call the reader’s attention is how these positive reactions towards the sea do not come only from Marion alone, but also from situations where she is exercising her different social relations: her father, her boyfriend, her friends... For example, when she is having lunch with some friends: “It is unfortunate that the argument has arisen here, at this restaurant where they look out at the palm fronds waving in the breeze and the bluest sea nibbling contentedly at the flat rocks of Camps Bay” (76). Another example of Marion’s positive reaction to the sea is with her boyfriend Geoff: “they sat with their feet on the first rung of the ladder and surveyed the world. They could see the river lined with willows trailing their fingertips in the shallow water” (112) or with her friend Brenda, who betrayed Marion by writing a book about her father, the sea appears as a way to renew themselves. The last conversation with Brenda after Marion’s return also reveals the healing condition of the sea: “as they set off, Marion has another idea: a walk by the sea, and why not just go back to Bloubergstrand?” (215). It is intriguing how Wicomb wittily places Marion in a position of safety in the sea, as it works as a counterpoint for the historical conception of the sea, traditionally seen as a place to be lost (Larsen, 2012). Resonating with Morrison’s idea of world-as-home cited in the previous section, Marion identifies the sea as the place where she is at home, not only because of her Capetonian origins, but likely due to the connection her father introduced to her through the mythical figure of the mermaid.

Despite the very few negative references this story has about the sea, it is important to mention how this perspective changes depending on the individual’s mood. In a historical context, South African literature has widely attached the sea to slavery and, thus, the sea has been rarely considered for positive purposes in the South African

imagery. Quoting Baderoon's article dealing with what the sea means in South African fiction, *Playing in the Light*

traces images of the Indian and Atlantic oceans in South African literature and art for their evocation of the country's history of slavery. I argue that turning one's gaze to the sea recovers evidence of slave lives otherwise erased from folk memory, as well as the decisively modern character of slave practices subsumed behind picturesque portrayals of the Cape (2009: 89).

Despite the positive attachment Marion has created towards the sea and the mythical imagery that surrounds it, throughout the book, there are instances where the reader finds a lonely Marion "when Marion gets home, she sits out on the balcony. [...] this must be loneliness, this vast emptiness before her. She has not felt lonely in the past, at least has not recognized the condition as such, too busy, she supposes, being her father's mermaid" (177). As an adult, Marion realizes how her father's obsession with mermaids has prevented her from feeling loneliness, from suffering. Marion's feelings towards her childhood at home convey two different perspectives. On the one hand, her feelings convey the father-daughter attachment, though the quotation does not explicitly clarify whether Marion perceives this attachment as positive or negative. On the other hand, the quotation suggests a sense of discomfort. This is in fact a recurrent topic in the work of Wicomb, as she is concerned with place and "the construction of home as a problematic space" (McCann, 2010: 55). This sense of discomfort comes from Marion's eagerness to construct her home – in the sense of discovering her family's hidden truth – truncated by the uncovering of her parents' not-so-little white lie. Now, going more specifically into what the sea means for Marion, some quotes in which the sea is related to the concept of home will be explored below. Before the analysis, Brah's conception of

home and diaspora might be relevant to understand *Playing in the Light*'s representation of home<sup>69</sup>:

Home is neither permanent nor set but a place or feeling that is variable and malleable. [Home] is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging' (1996: 192).

In *The Politics of Home*, Rosemary Marangoly George precisely argues the issue of home as a place of difference rather than as the idyllic place of the nineteenth century (1996). Already in the first chapter of the novel, where the story is based and the description of Marion's life is presented, in the first paragraph there is a description where she recognizes her environment for "the smell and roar of the sea" (1). Her neighbourhood is in the north periphery of Cape Town (Bloubergstrand) at the beachfront: "no point in having a glorious outlook on the sea [...] if you are not secure" (2). In this quote Marion distinguishes between the feeling of homeliness the sea has for her, and the insecurity of her real home (Cape Town) for a young coloured woman. Marion's dichotomy recalls some scholars' ironic idea of home as a place of displacement: "The premise is that one cannot speak of place without also speaking of a certain kind of dis-placement, and that one cannot conceive of home without also enacting a certain notion of being 'un-homed'" (Dass, 2011: 137). This differentiation must be highlighted due to the recurrent topic of the danger of living in Cape Town as a coloured woman "if it were not dangerous, Marion would walk down to the sea. What's the point, she thinks self-pitying, of living by the sea and not being able to walk down to the shore at night" (55). As regards neighbourhoods and how they work in the construction of home for the individual, Fathi considers them

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<sup>69</sup> Brah's intersectional analysis delves into the concepts of diaspora and home through the study of social categories (such as race, gender or class) along with politics, colonialism or imperialism. She notes the importance of diversity and difference in the creation of a diasporic space (1996).

spaces where class identities are formed (2017). This idea resembles Marion's desire to live in a neighbourhood where she can enjoy the public spaces. As mentioned in the previous section, Bhabha's "unhomely" resonates with Marion's experiences as a coloured woman in a place where she feels neither secure nor welcome. Finally, Marion would also represent Wicomb's critique of essentialist views of racial purity and homogeneous spaces. The three perspectives towards commonality and identity contribute to the multi-dimensional aspects of Marion's identity.

Related to the concept of home, the connection the sea has with the family for Marion is crucial. For her, the Capetonian sea is a place to come back to and take fresh air: "the wind has already risen and there is only the smell of sea air blown inland" (9). Furthermore, Marion clarifies the connection that exists for her between home and sea: "back on her balcony, they admire the classic view of Table Mountain. That is one good thing about going away, Marion says: seeing afresh how lovely the sea and mountain are" (215).

Her father, John, is the figure that represents home for Marion, the person she inherited her obsession with sea and mermaids from. Wicomb presents the sea here as an inter-generational connection. For her father, who can be considered a strong figure in Marion's life development, "the sea revived him" (23). However, in the flash-forwards we find an old father, who "would rather not go to the seaside [...] of course he must go, she argues, he loves being by the sea [...] going away even to his favourite village by the sea promises no pleasure" (176). Given that both the sea and John seem to shape the concept of home for Marion, the moment when her father rejects the sea allocates Marion in the position of dissociating the two main bases that kept her near to homeliness.

The story of Tokkie is of course revealed at the end. However, Wicomb is able to introduce Tokkie smoothly already giving some signs that there was something behind



the character of this elderly woman. When the author does so, she introduces Tokkie through the sea “she stares in horror at 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) and this resonates with the idea of untold stories that want to reach the surface. “The ocean as metaphor for suppressed histories also seeps into the spiritual meaning accorded to the ocean, given the centrality of ancestors in some Southern African cosmologies” (Byrne, 2021: 5). Moreover, seeing how Marion’s perspective towards the sea changes through time, it is worth noting Meg Samuelson’s suggestion: “Marion is transported into new (mis)recognitions: the ‘mirror smooth’ sea becomes the surface on which disavowed national and familial histories emerge” (2010: 552). Samuelson refers to Tokkie’s emergence as Marion’s grandmother, and to the national play-white system that Marion discovers in her family.

*Playing in the Light* also unveils the relation that exists between the sea and economic status by providing the reader with different approaches from individuals who come from different social classes. Byrne’s article might be worth mentioning at this point: “water holds gendered implications for human socio-economic existence and for symbolic communication. Water is associated with household and family socio-economic security” (2021: 1). Byrnes’ assertion, which argues the importance of water canalization systems, proves the attachment that has existed, and still exists in some places, between water and wealth, not only in terms of canalization but also in terms of culture, building, living standards, etc.

Social class is quite present in this novel, specifically in Marion’s parents’ generation. Her parents lived the Apartheid years being adults and, in fact, passing for white, which created in them, particularly in Helen, the mother, a feeling of non-

belonging, betrayal and dishonesty. Helen also recognizes the negative connection that can be created between social class and certain aspects of the sea:

he wanted to call the child Marina, seeing as they were in Cape Town surrounded by the sea, and seeing that he could not very well call her Mermaid. Marina, she scoffed, that's not a name. Only *hotmos*<sup>70</sup> give their children stupid names like that. Don't you know what a Marina is? It's a place where rich people keep their pleasure boats, a place that is not meant for traffic cops<sup>71</sup> (125).

Their eagerness to seem as white as possible is also present when, during one of the flashbacks, Helen and John have just moved to a modest room in a white area and “in the rented rooms – no more than refurbished servant's quarters, but in a decent white area – she hatched detailed plans for their new lives: they would buy their own house, move up the slope of the mountain where they could see the curve of the bay, and speak English” (130). This eagerness (more evident in Helen than in John) again aligns with Fanon's idea of non-whites trying to emulate whites due to their inherited inferiority complex (1986).

On the other hand, the sea can be related to poverty. When Marion rents a cottage at a fishing village (usually inhabited by blacks), an old-fashioned, poor village, the people “were decent white people in spite of being burnt black by sun and wind. Who would have thought, [John] said gracefully, that there are white people living without water and electricity” (23). It is remarkable that they cannot fathom that whites would be living in such conditions after Apartheid. It should be noted how many times the word “decent” appears in this story, always followed by the word “white”, to prove how non-whites have assumed the whites' racial superiority to the extent that it seems anything whites touch makes it “decent”.

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<sup>70</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>71</sup> John was a traffic policeman.

As regards how the sea is perceived by lower social classes, during Marion and Brenda's trip to the countryside, they meet a humble man from the countryside:

when Brenda manages to say that they arrange for people to travel overseas. "So everyone is now flying like birds across the water" [...] "he has been to the edge of the water once, to Cape Town, but then he frowns, his eyes cloud over; he can't remember anything about that time" (91).

His memories of the sea are distant compared to Marion's. He barely remembers that time, indicating he was very young, which seems to create in him a dreadful feeling by his facial expression. This character thus represents the aforementioned historical conception of the sea, as "a place to be lost, and rescue has never been assured without extraordinary efforts, close to being miraculous" (Larsen, 2012: 187).

One of the most overlooked issues by critics in *Playing in the Light* is the concept of the mermaid, which creates almost opposite reactions. John is the person from whom Marion inherited this passion for the mythological creatures: "ever since she can remember, her father has been fixated on mermaids" (46). The relation father-daughter they created when Marion was a child is highly attached to and based on these mermaids, it is what clearly connects them. Thus, there are some flashbacks when Marion remembers the moments she spent as a child with her father:

close your eyes and you'll hear the sea, the whooshing of water over the rocks. And if she concentrated hard with her eyes shut tightly, a mermaid would rise from the water. [...] thus they summoned mermaids and compared notes on the behaviour of the creatures they had conjured up – always the shy rearing of the head, the mournful expression, the opalescent sheen that intensified into a glittering tail (46).

Even when Marion is a grown-up adult about to leave Cape Town to travel overseas for six months, the first thing that comes to her mind is her father thinking of her as a mermaid across the water: "nothing will give him greater pleasure than seeing

his mermaid across the water, visiting the places where his ancestors came from, somewhere in Scotland – which, if he remembers correctly, is the northernmost tip of England” (186). Wicomb intriguingly presents Marion’s increasing aversion for mermaids and her former conception of them. However, at the same time, she offers instances where Marion connects with that part of herself that, in her adulthood, seems to be consigned to oblivion. As when she remembers herself as a child on

a summer’s evening too hot to stay indoors [...] A pale moon in the royal-blue sky lay with abandon on its back, winking at the child, so that the patch of grass where she sat clutching her ankles swelled into an ocean. Marion does not remember taking off her shorts and blouse; she was a mermaid under the moon, diving and tossing her tail through the silver waves (60).

In contrast to John there is Helen, the mother, who consistently tries to ridicule mermaids, causing in Marion a feeling of embarrassment with herself: “what kind of child was she? [...] how could she behave like a disgusting native, rolling half naked in the grass? Marion knew not to say that she was a mermaid” (60). Samuelson observes that: “the sea is, ironically, what Helen prohibits in order to maintain her fiction of pure seaborne ancestry” (2010: 554). For Helen, the identification with the figure of the mermaid resonates with the coloured identity of not being “fully one thing or another” (47), which explains her rejection towards the mythical figure. Furthermore, there is a moment when Marion precisely mentions this insecurity generated by her mother: “as the only issue of older parents, she had a peculiar childhood; that her parents loathed each other; that her mother, like all mothers, was responsible for her insecurity” (3).

However, the crucial aspect here is the way Helen connects mermaids with coloured people. They passed for white during the whole Apartheid regime and Helen refused at all costs to recognize that she was coloured, even if that meant leaving behind her life and relatives. Helen makes some comments in which she identifies both mermaids

and coloureds as “creatures that are so different, so mixed up [that] no one likes” (47) meaning that both, because of their “double” identity, remain in an in-between place that prevents them from belonging to one place or another. Helen summarizes and encapsulates this idea when she talks about mermaids: “no good being half woman half fish, half this and half that; you have to be fully one thing or another, otherwise you’re lost. Mermaids are the silly invention of men who don’t want to face up to reality, to their responsibilities” (47).

These two almost opposite visions of mermaids create a changing opinion for Marion throughout the years. As a child, she believed mermaids to be amazing creatures and even tried her best to be one of them: “Marion practiced walking like a mermaid” (47) or “Marion does not remember taking off her shorts and blouse; she was a mermaid under the moon, diving and tossing her tail through the silver waves” (60). As she grows up, Marion undergoes a transformation in her mind, seeing her former perception of mermaids as childish behaviour that made her stupid for believing in unreal creatures. In the words of Larsen: “when the experience of the sea as a cultural boundary marker no longer confirms the power of a divinity, we are left with the boundary transcending power of humans themselves” (2012: 182). The disenchantment Marion feels after the boundary with the sea is broken is, according to her, her father’s guilt: “he used to call you his little mermaid. Yes, that I am – grew up stupid as a mermaid” (171).

The times Marion sees a mermaid in the sea as an adult are expressed in a very different tone, as something from her imagination and something she will never be. Towards the end of the novel, there is a moment when she again is staring at the sea while she spots a mermaid holding a baby: “Marion would like to think that it is the sea mammal who suckles her young, the dugong, whom sailors thought to be a mermaid, but the Cape is too far south for that. Thus it is, she says loud, a figment of her imagination” (186). The

dugong, in contrast, introduces the terror that the sea can hold (the dugong is, after all, a critically endangered species). While thinking about mermaids and imagination, the first thing that may come to the reader's mind is *The Little Mermaid*<sup>72</sup>. The film establishes a dichotomy between two worlds: one on the land, the real, and the other under the sea, the imaginary. If the human world aligns with the land, the sea world would be out of the system. This is what Marion's mother tried to explain to her: you belong to the white male system or you are out of it. However, there are some instances in Marion's adulthood in which she reaches a state she had earlier achieved when living out her mermaid fantasy: Marion had lain "still as a mermaid, with her hair spread on a rock far out at sea. As the tide receded, Marion crawled and reached for her book, content to read until one of them came to unwind her bandages and turn her into a girl once more" (47).

With the gathered information, it becomes evident that, despite the sea not being the main topic of the novel, the number of references to the sea and maritime issue are remarkable, connecting the sea mainly with the different emotions the individual builds throughout the years. The character that obviously represents this emotional change is Marion, who, as the story develops, has to cope with diverse situations that make her mature and evolve: the fact that her parents passed for white during Apartheid and the isolation from their relatives that that meant; her decision to travel to Scotland despite her aversion to travel; and the discovery of the fact that their old servant, Tokkie, is actually her grandmother, who visited her house in the guise of a servant to preserve their white identity. Depending on which situation she is dealing with, her emotional state is reflected on how she perceives the sea, the sea then working as an internal mirror for herself. For Larsen:

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<sup>72</sup> *The Little Mermaid* (1989) is a film produced by Disney Pictures, based on the tale by Hans Christian Andersen.

the literary interpretation of the sea as a cultural boundary marker offers, simultaneously and inseparably, a synchronic and diachronic view on our collective efforts to define the boundaries of our cultural potentials and identities in all their paradoxical heterogeneity (2012: 175).

As regards how the perception of the sea changes depending on the person, while not many characters directly deal with the sea, Wicomb introduces through Marion's thoughts, the idea of how one's social status can be attached to the sea in some ways. For instance, Marion and her father can't believe that "decent" white people could live in a fishing village without water and electricity, perceiving these villages as meant for poor black people. Similarly, when Helen and John moved to an again "decent" white area, they could see the sea but from a cramped rented room. Another example could be the countryman who barely remember his only time by the sea. Thus, the novel suggests the nuanced social connections associated to the sea and what it means for each individual. In the first example, living by the sea is attached to something poorer, meanwhile in the second example living in Cape Town near to the sea means living in a "decent" white area. *Playing in the Light* encapsulates the sometimes-difficult human relations with the sea, the cultural boundaries that vary depending on the individual, the personal connections to the sea that can be established, or the imaginary created around the concept of the ocean:

The sea is difficult to map. Where are the stable points of orientation like hills, rivers or mountains? At sea a sense of place is almost impossible and any sense of location or direction has to be anchored, as it were, outside the sea: the solid bottom under the surface, a coastline, hills in the hinterland, stars, the sun or the moon. Navigation requires signs from elsewhere. Therefore the sea has always been a place to be lost, and rescue has never been assured without extraordinary efforts, close to being miraculous. The sea marks the limits of human powers, identity and survival and is met with attempts to find material or imaginary footholds outside the sea from where we can approach, transcend or negotiate these boundaries The sea is boundless in the sense that it forces us, possibly in the most radical way, to reflect on our own limitations (Larsen, 2012: 187).

The figure of the mermaid emerges as a central point in this analysis. The collected data has shown not only the intriguing way in which John and Helen have such different opinions of these creatures and what this created in Marion, but also how Marion's perspective evolves throughout the years. There is a shift from her father's opinion to her mother's: Marion fluctuates from imitating those fascinating marvelous creatures, to consider them something shameful for their mixed nature and to consider them a childishly stupid attitude. Consequently, the figure of the mermaid evolves into a multi-layered image that varies throughout Marion's life and has different meanings for each character. For Samuelson, the figure of the mermaid

references gender violence (in the little mermaid's sliced tail and Marion's bound legs), and the ways daughters find themselves entrapped, fixed or rendered immobile in the prophetic visions of fathers and forced to surrender their voices. It is suggestive of the negative construction of the identity from which Marion's family 'passes' away (not 'fully one thing or another'), and of the experience of 'passing' itself (2010: 554).

While the study in this section does not aim to disagree with Samuelson's idea of Marion surrendering to her father, Marion proves her ability to distance herself from him, dismantling the surrender Samuelson mentions. Moreover, the relation father-daughter that was forged between them through the figure of the mermaid is absolutely determining in Marion's adulthood, yielding both positive and negative consequences. There is a quote from Marion wondering about the effects of being raised as a mermaid that encapsulates this idea: "so what is the matter with her? Marion's reply – that she was brought up by her father as a mermaid – is inspired by several things" (76). The metaphorical upbringing as a mermaid not only influences her declining relationship with her father, but also impacts on her understanding of identity and social relations.



## 6. “Freedom is unstoppable”

Wicomb’s second short story collection, *The One that Got Away* (2008) is predominantly set at the beginning of the twenty first century, when Apartheid was officially over and “the dependencies between white and non-white South Africans could have been reduced” (Claar, 2018: 40) – even though some short stories in the collection are still set during Apartheid (for example “Another story”). However, the twenty-first century did not bring the outcome or development expected, since post-Apartheid times were marked by the social uprising derived from the political instability that remained after the regime. One of the main problems the ANC had to face was land (dis)possession, launching in 2004 a social initiative called ‘Breaking New Ground’ to “move the focus of the housing policy away from the mere delivery of vast number of houses, towards creating sustainable human settlements” (Newton, 2010: 10). As observed in previous chapters, land ownership has remained a major social issue in South Africa since colonization, with an ongoing movement of land possession and dispossession that culminated with non-whites relegated to the areas whites did not want<sup>73</sup>. Accordingly, the ongoing tension lived after Apartheid is conferred throughout the twelve short stories that make up this collection<sup>74</sup>.

Furthermore, the Scottish setting Wicomb uses in her works (usually Glasgow or Edinburgh) adds a particular dimension to her examination of issues of home and place, transnational relations and the interconnectedness between South Africa and Scotland. However, there is a noticeable increase in Wicomb’s usage of Scotland as a site for social

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<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 2 on South African social history.

<sup>74</sup> It should be borne in mind that “In the Botanic Gardens” and “Another story” were first published in 1990; and “N2” and “Nothing like the wind” in 1999 and 2004 respectively.

relations throughout her whole oeuvre, which may be influenced by her own experience living in Glasgow for decades.

However, it is *The One that Got Away* (2008), the author's second collection of short stories, which throws a light on Wicomb's complex diasporic perspective. In this work, Scotland and South Africa constitute a dual setting and the characters, many of whom recur from one story to the other, either have relationships with both places as natives/residents/exiles/travellers/visitors, or are related to them via parenthood or friendships. A network of connections more or less visible between Scotland and South Africa explored in these stories testifies to the slippery ground the notion of 'home' is supposed to derive from (Guarducci, 2015: 31).

Unlike her first short story collection *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, this collection does not carry a protagonist who links the short stories. Instead, the lives of all the diverse characters are interconnected by living, as Wicomb admittedly lived, on the Bhabbian "edge of foreign countries" (1994: 199). This collection is based on the feeling of 'unhomeliness' and the experience of displacement. In the words of McCann: "Wicomb [...] is also concerned with place and the construction of home as a problematic space" (2010: 55). Wicomb's own feeling of being an outsider in Scotland likely contribute to her writing about the liminal space the immigrant occupies:

It is a problem not to have lived in South Africa for so long and not being able to write about anything else [...]. In some ways I have acculturated in Britain – I'm middle class, educated and in a sense grew up there – but in another sense I will always be an outsider (Wicomb, interview, 1990: 87).

In addition to the aforementioned issues of unhomeliness and displacement, there is the question of cosmopolitanism and transnational relations. Set in the early 2000s, the new generations seem to be haunted by the past, which is also a recurrent topic in Wicomb's works. However, while the expectation after Apartheid was a society where "all [happens] at the same time, and that [...] is the beauty of it, the many things going on simultaneously" (46), the reality the reader finds highly differs from the

cosmopolitanism expected in a multicultural society where “there is an unconditional hospitality” (Derrida, *Preface*, 2005: 22). Thus, and despite other recurrent topics in Wicomb’s work such as gender, truth or language, classist and racist attitudes abound again in this collection.

The gender issue seems conspicuous after the analysis of previous works. In *The One That Got Away* women are the main characters in seven out of the twelve stories: “Disgrace”, “Mrs Pringle’s bed”, “There’s the bird that never flew”, “Friends and goffels”, “Nothing like the wind”, “In the Botanic Gardens” and “Another story”. The remaining stories (exempting the opening short story “Boy in a jute-sack hood”) feature married couples as protagonists. Thus, most of the gender references made in this collection are attached to marriage, the female role in the domestic space and “the angle of correctness” (53) expected in a normative woman. This differs from Wicomb’s previous works, where the gender issue is usually addressed to prove females to be independent individuals with agency (such as Frieda, Marion or Dulcie). In fact, Wicomb’s empowered female protagonists mirror those found in other African literatures. For instance, West African literature, particularly in the Portuguese colonies, is progressively incorporating educated urban women as main characters, departing from the former domestic role women used to have in literature (Bruner, 1993).

In the short story “The one that got away” Jane and Drew are in Glasgow for their honeymoon, a destination chosen by Drew in his aim to fulfill his secret mission of changing a book cover. For Jane “marriage has brought nothing but complication” (40) and she conveys that “being a wife is rubbish, precisely because you have to be careful not to behave like a wife, or rather, not to be thought to behave like a wife. Which also sounds like rubbish...” (40). It sounds paradoxical how Jane despises both the wife role and the anti-wife role. On the one hand, she does not want to follow the wife role for

being “rubbish”, but on the other hand, she does not want not to be behave like a wife either. Furthermore, Jane finds herself “ashamed of her anthropological interest in [Mrs. Buchanan’s] kitchen and hairdo” (44). Jane’s shame may derive from her aim to oppose any condition ascribed to the prototypical wife concerned about household and appearance, as happens in the aforementioned quote. However, there is no actual reason for her shame, nor for her refusal to follow the wife-figure pattern. Thus, it is probably her marriage and her relation with Drew what creates this shameful feeling. In Lytle’s words: “Wicomb shows how patriarchy not only has a direct effect but also a reverse psychological effect that can control women, who under patriarchal expectations must act carefully to please” (2014: 235).

Jane and Drew are also the protagonists of “There’s the bird that never flew”, where Jane contemplates having a baby: “she would not like to have a baby. To reproduce a fearful, tottering creature like herself, brimful with embarrassment cannot be a good thing” (75). She is not considering the issues of motherhood but rather pondering the fact that her child would inherit her own insecurities. Thus, the significance of this quote does not lie in Jane’s attitude to maternity but in Jane’s perception of herself, demonstrating then the previous statement of her insecurities derives from her relationship with Drew. A gender approach to the character of Jane is hindered by the critics’ focus on Jane only as a visitor of the Doulton Fountain – analyzed in section 6.1 – overlooking then her character as a woman and a wife. This approach does not align with the common proposal of the representation of African women in literature, where African womanhood is usually presented through three common values: marriage, motherhood and family values. As Kolawole notes:

African women’s self-definition focuses on positive collectivity as opposed to individuality. It also endorses the overt manifestation of womanhood and motherhood with no apologia. Consequently, the average African woman’s

exaltation of marriage and family values and assertion of feminine outlook are important canons of African womanhood (1997: 197).

The short story “Friends and goffels” narrates the story of Julie and Dot, two old friends who reunite after the former moved to Glasgow to marry “a pig” (101) and returns looking “exactly like Naomi Campbell” (107). For Dot, “what marriage brings [is] two people closeted together with no room for a third” (101), which could be interpreted as a feminist reference to the strictness of marriage only demanded of the female side. Later in the story, the reader finds Julie asking her European husband, Alistair Baines for permission, confirming the already mentioned strictness. Because of Julie’s toxic relationship, Dot vows that “never, never, she promises herself, will she marry” (102). However, it is not clear whether Dot complains about the institution of marriage or about the inter-racial marriage. Assuming that her concern is about Alistair’s origins, her principles resemble the Apartheid interracial marriage prohibitions where: “it was not interracial sexual contact that was seen as dangerous but its public legitimation in marriage” (Stoler, 2002: 39). This story introduces two antagonist prototypes of women, two counterpoints that ironically were best friends in school, who chose different life paths that led them to very different outcomes. Their complete relationship will be explored later in this chapter for the classist and racist connotations embedded in the narrative.

Following the female submission to men in marriage, in “Trompe l’oeil”, there are Bev – the epitome of female submission, who “sorted out the laundry into white and dark, cooked balanced meals, and settled electricity bills” (124) – and her husband Gavin. The old white South African couple finds that Roddy, a young writer they met in Italy, has written a story about them. From the very beginning Wicomb makes the male superiority clear, when Gavin asks Bev to go to Italy: “Oh, you should come, he said, it

could be something of a holiday for you – no cleaning or cooking – and besides, what on earth will you do with yourself, kicking your heels here for two months on your own? It is true that she is often lonely” (123). She is lonely, which makes a big difference from being alone and suggests that both Bev and Gavin are following the patriarchal, traditional and socially established pattern for marriage, which coheres with their generational context. For Lytle:

[Gavin] represents the old European male historian with an authoritative, absolute, Eurocentric stance on the world. His white privilege contributes to this confidence and strong self-justification, as Gavin is sheltered from the harsh realities of life that has been shaped by colonial thinking and apartheid values (2014: 248).

However, what is interesting about this couple is the truth that hides behind them. In public, people admit “how extraordinary [...] that you two should do everything together, that after all these years you still seem to like each other. A good advertisement for marriage if ever I saw one. You must know everything there is to know of each other” (128). However, Roddy unmasks their truth behind their façade after hearing them through the wall:

*There, occasionally, above the sound of rushing water he witnesses the lie that is Y's perfect marriage. He lies rigid in his bath and tries not to splash, the better to hear that voice of reason bark at Z, laugh cruelly at her quiet, timid explanations. She would be cringing at the menace that rises above the angry rush of water. X hears the wife's whimpers of fear or her clipped anger, and finds himself inventing a dialogue around which to weave a story. More than once the stifling of dry sobs like hiccups. The bathroom is also a place in which to retreat, he supposes, but then the entry of another, the unmistakable No, no, no and the slamming doors. So much for that smiling marriage (131; italics in original).*

The fact that Roddy exposes the duality of public versus private truth adds depth to the characters and to the notions of marriage. What Gavin considers a “misrepresentation” of their marriage is not only their reality, but also the fact that they epitomize the socio-cultural constructions ascribed to the historical conception of marriage where the woman

is relegated to the domestic space without agency. As Samuelson argues: “both torture and domestication enact forms of violence on women’s sense of self” (2007: 137), which is the reason for Bev’s few interventions and her inability to impose herself over her husband’s authoritative behaviour.

One of the most intriguing quotations dealing with the relation between women and the domestic space takes places in “Mrs Pringle’s bed”, where the protagonist Polly Pringle wonders about the two existent worlds for women:

there are two worlds: one she encounters in newspapers, which occupies many a waking hour as she considers the editorials, takes sides on issues of local, national or international matters; and a second domestic world, of bedclothes and whatever goes on in the rest of the house, which is rapidly shrinking (59).

The outside/inside world dichotomy is always a challenging topic, but it worsens in the South African context due to Apartheid land restrictions and the consequent sense of non-belonging. Meg Samuelson’s quotation is valid again in this context: “how does the metaphor of the national home resonate for those who lived within corrugated iron, between cardboard, or huddled under bridges or on doorsteps?” (2008: 130). This concept of home directly connects to the gendered idea of the *domestic(ation)* of women, not only because they were relegated to the household but also because the home space was – and still is – usually the space for gender violence. The first world Polly mentions does not only refer to the one seen in magazines but to the common outside world many women did not have access to. The second is the inside – or domestic – world, the space historically assigned to women, a place that, for Polly, constantly “shrinks” (59), symbolizing the overwhelming feeling of being trapped in the same claustrophobic place.

As regards truth – which, as seen in previous chapters, is a motif Wicomb employs in her writing – this collection does not pay equal attention to truth than other works like

*David's Story*, but it provides some subtle hints about truth, lies, secrecy, distrust and “little white lie[s]” (177). In the opening short story “Boy in a jute-sack hood” the protagonist Grant Fotheringay is asked by George, his gardener, whether his son, Samuel, could stay at Grant’s home.

Couldn’t be left at home, George mumbled, although Grant seemed to remember that there were a number of children. But it would not do to ask. Better to just say yes rather than unleash a long, convoluted story that would not add up, that would have to be taken with a pinch of salt (17).

Thus, aware of his gardener’s lie, he opts not to ask and accepts his gardener’s truth. In fact, Baiada precisely comments on the riskiness of how “contradictory voices and stories are reconciled into a single truth” (Baiada, 2008: 45). However, could it be that his disinterest for secrets has something to do with the fact that he is a grown man? This question arises because the next short story “Disgrace” precisely starts with Grace and Fiona’s conversation about secrets: “I don’t have secrets any more; I leave that kind of thing for the young people” (23). Despite the number of grown-up characters in Wicomb’s oeuvre that have kept their secrets, it is true that younger characters seem to be more interested in the search for the truth. In fact, the last short story “Another story” has the same scenario where Sarah, the young character is asking Deborah, her great aunt, for “all these things from the past, the bad old days that Sarah wanted to talk about” (183).

In “The one that got away” Drew remembers himself at school where “Wilton was reading aloud in a dominee’s voice the sentences that had to be memorized for the examination, and that the class had to underline in their Fowler and Smit, now reduced to roughly half the history” (38). In the literal sense, this would mean that the books are probably reused and in bad conditions after the years. However, it seems to function as a metaphor of colonial history. Fowler and Smit wrote history textbooks during Apartheid,



which were biased in favour of the Apartheid regime (Da Cruz, 2005). In a symbolic sense, it could relate to the superior white authority speaking on behalf of their inferiors. The populist speeches that framed Apartheid were based precisely on rejecting other views or mindset, where they could build and tell their own history without considering the other side's opinion. Or, in other words, where they could tell "roughly half the history" (38). This can refer, for example, to the idea of museums as colonial institutions, where governments displayed what they wanted their populations to know. They exhibited the native flora, fauna or pictures where visitors could see their colonialists happily interacting with the indigenous people<sup>75</sup>. However, as happened with school books too, the negative aspects of colonialism were never told to the European populations: massacres, rapes, crimes against humanity, violation of human rights, and an endless list of cruelty against the colonized.

Finally, in the last short story "Another story" Sarah and Deborah engage in a conversation about their family past (the former found the latter through the family tree and asks Deborah, who lives in Scotland, to visit her, her great-niece, in Cape Town). Sarah seems very interested in knowing more about her ancestors while Deborah does not share Sarah's enthusiasm: "No point in brooding over things that happened a long time ago. [...] My advice, child, is to stick to your business and forget about stories of old times" (186). This reflects the same attitude that Grant and Grace showed about their disinterest in secrets.

Do you know if someone has written the story of our family, from the beginning, right from the missionary from Europe? Do you know a woman, a white woman, speaking to your mother or brothers about those old days? A woman who then wrote a book about them? Have you heard of such a book? (187).

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<sup>75</sup> See section 6.1 for more information about museums as colonial institutions.

This passage further underscores the colonial voice mentioned above with Fowler and Smit. For Spivak, the usual practice of whites talking about non-whites and how they cope with cultural clashes is not objective enough and distorts the real situation of the subaltern figure (1988). Therefore, this excerpt along with the previous examples, reinforce the Spivakian idea of white individuals writing the story of the colonized.

As regards colonization, I will present excerpts where not only colonization and colonial references stand out but also the following relationship between Scotland and South Africa throughout the years until the present time. When exploring the stories in a chronological order instead of the order they appear in the collection, the first reference we find in *The One That Got Away* dates back to colonial times, with Grant Fotheringay's – the protagonist of "Boy in a jute-sack hood" – meeting with Fiona – one of the main characters of "Disgrace". The party with academics Grant arranged "reminded [Fiona] of nothing less than the clipped white world of middle England. It would seem, she said, that the Scots necessarily lose their way in the old colonies" (31). In this conversation where Fiona evidently feels out of place, "Grant told her about Pringle<sup>76</sup>, the father of South African poetry, a Scot she had never heard of" (31). The fact that Fiona does not know Thomas Pringle may seem somehow strange given that both are Scottish. Notably, neither of them identifies as a writer. At some point in "Boy in a jute-sack hood" Grant reveals he is a researcher and a teacher, and Fiona seems interested in poetry but at no point in the story is she mentioned as a writer. While Griem suggests that "in 'Disgrace' two Scottish writers are further estranged by a conversation about the poems of Thomas Pringle" (2014: 404). I contend that their occupation is a misconception since Fiona's occupation remains untold.

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<sup>76</sup> Scottish poet of the eighteenth/nineteenth century who moved to South Africa in 1820 and became famous for his abolitionist texts and his writings about the natives' living conditions (Calder, 1982). In fact, Pringle is a character in Zoë Wicomb's latest novel, *Still Life* (2020).

One of the main connections that remained after colonization and Apartheid is undoubtedly miscegenation, mixed physical appearance and roots.

Throughout the Cape definite strata in [the coloured people's] make-up is evident. Differences which exist in physical characteristics are determined by: (a) Primary Miscegenation: the crossing of pure stocks. (b) Secondary Miscegenation: the crossing of the pure with the mixed stocks. (c) Tertiary Miscegenation: the union of different admixtures of mixed stocks (Stuhardt et al. 1940: 209-210).

There are a couple of examples where the results of miscegenation emerge: in “Trompe l’oeil” the old, white, South African couple, Gavin and Bev are talking about Roddy’s parents: “you are a colonial at heart, Gavin teased Bev. He could not quite bring himself to say so, but her interest was surely in the young man’s parentage – a Scot with a South African mother – as if they did not have enough of all that tiresome stuff at home” (119). The “tiresome stuff at home” Gavin mentions proves the “narrow cultural horizons between people of different cultures” (McCann, 2010: 59) but at the same time it alludes to the current situation of the country since, despite their whiteness and the small percentage of whites in South Africa, South African society was based on miscegenation. The same colonial miscegenation takes place in “Another story”, where Deborah and Sarah realize

In [...] the green-flecked hazel eyes derived from the same sockets of a long-dead European missionary, there was nothing to report. The improbable eyes, set generations ago into brown faces, betrayed nothing, as eyes rarely do, but both claimed to read in the other signs and traces (181).

While colonization might not always actively appear in Wicomb’s literature, she introduces hints of how colonization has affected society at all levels. For instance, in “Friends and goffels”, Dot and Alistair are having a conversation about *Lost in Translation* (2003), a film about a film star that starts a relationship with a twentysomething girl due to their shared feeling of loneliness in Tokyo:

Well, how you Europeans like to be bothered in this way? How would you like to have your difference from other people made fun of? At the crudest level, take size – do you think the filmmakers weren't banking on the uproarious laughter when whatshisname towers over the little Japanese in the lift? What's the point of Europeans being hyper-civilised when civility can stretch to those who are different? No thought there that the little Japanese might find such height grotesque, hey?

Oh lighten up, Alistair said. The trouble with you people is that you're hypersensitive, terrified of being slighted. This society is well on its way to becoming more confident, and then you'll take a more liberal, more urbane view. Relax, one doesn't have to keep an eye on political correctness all the time. Why not talk about the aesthetic qualities, the cinematography, the brilliant ending... (112).

The apparent focus on the film in this conversation is in fact a simple justification to talk about colonization in an indirect way. Wicomb's usage of opposite perspectives serves to demonstrate not only the inaccuracy of biased opinions but also the whites' incapacity to empathise with the 'Other', using Alistair as the token for Eurocentrism. In "Trompe l'oeil" Gavin precisely proves both the British inability to empathise and the inability to leave the past behind:

Gavin was irritated. Why behave as if South Africa had not lost its pariah status? He said out loud, Why not take your cue from Mandela? Heard of ubuntu<sup>77</sup>? Gavin had just that day read in *The Times* an English political commentator ridiculing the word, citing its transliteration as so much meaninglessness (119).

This quotation demonstrates that, despite the aforementioned visible development in the country, the reality is precisely that people have not fully overcome the negative consequences of colonialism. Gavin is irritated due to the use of the word 'ubuntu' by an English commentator. Wicomb's witty decision to use precisely a word that means 'humanity' is meant to display firstly, British non-decreasing condescendence towards the colonies and, secondly, non-white skepticism of cosmopolitanism or a shared humanity. In fact, what this quote illustrates is what Balibar calls "current racism":

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<sup>77</sup> See Glossary.

the new racism is a racism of the era of 'decolonization', of the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises, and the division of humanity within a single political space. Ideologically, current racism [...] fits into a framework of 'racism without races' which is already widely developed in other countries, particularly the Anglo-Saxon ones. It is a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences (Balibar, 1991: 21).

Furthermore, the passage from “The one that got away”, where Drew, in his aim to change the cover of the book *The One That Got Away* by Helen McCloy, reads from the library’s lending sheet: “a book must be returned to the library from which it was borrowed” (45) and later fulfills his aim: “the book has been returned to the library from which it was borrowed” (49) may mean a reference to colonial times. Given Wicomb’s former ingenious metaphors, this could be a reference to the historical pattern of colonialism, where colonizers expropriated, took advantage of all the goods and displayed them in their museums<sup>78</sup>.

Despite the different characters’ reactions towards colonization, Apartheid or miscegenation, what they all seem to agree with is the country’s change over the years. For Grace from “Disgrace”, “South Africa is mos now a free country” (23) and Fiona wonders: “perhaps now under a new dispensation, South Africa was the place to be” (29). “To Mrs Pringle’s reformed, New South African ears” (56) in “Mrs Pringle’s bed”: “South Africa had changed over the years” (56). It seems paradoxical how Wicomb presents, at the same time, the increasing concern for the past already mentioned, and the general agreement on South Africa’s development. Although these two concepts are not inherently incompatible, it is difficult to think of social development if that society is anchored in the past.

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<sup>78</sup> See section 6.1 for more information about museums as colonial institutions.

I would like to conclude this section on the references to colonization by providing an excerpt from “N2” where the couple Mary and Harold are having a conversation about the current South African situation:

There are now all kinds of freedoms. Just think, that a man who had sat in prison for decades, no champagne, no sex, was the one to push the country into the twentieth century, into the civilised world; she had been to Amsterdam where they made no bones about these things. Now everyone here at home could talk about it, see it on television, read about it in magazines, even in poems. No need any longer for men to make sinful trips to the Wild Coast of Sun City, it was all there to be had at home. And what’s more, for women as well. Sex between all kinds, although she would have drawn the line there, perhaps taken one step at a time, no good in being too advanced, even stepping ahead of England, but that’s freedom for you, just as De Klerk said, freedom is unstoppable (149).

Given the number of examples of the still-prevailing coloniality provided in this chapter I argue: is freedom really unstoppable? Neither the South African nor the British characters in Wicomb’s *The One That Got Away* seem to be ready for cosmopolitanism. In fact, as previously mentioned, I defend the idea of the younger generations to be more attached to the past than ever, while the older generations’ incapacity to forget what they have lived cannot be omitted. My answer to the question is that freedom is as unstoppable as the individual allows, that is to say, individuals are the only ones able to stop – or allow – freedom. However, combining both lines of the country’s development and its relation to freedom, postcolonial theory suggests that the history of colonial freedom is a history of denial. As Bhabha claims: “colonial fantasy is the continual dramatisation of emergence – of difference, freedom – as the beginning of a history which is repetitively denied” (1997: 52).

The language question appears in almost every chapter of the collection and, as seen in other sections of this thesis, it concerns all ranges of characters, from blacks to whites and from poor to rich individuals. In the first short story “Boy in a Jute-sack Hood”, the white protagonist, Grant Fotheringay notices the gardener’s son’s “strong

Cape Flat accent” (18), which would not be considered a diminishing view if it were not for his friend’s reaction. His friend Jenny considers Grant’s interracial relationship with the boy, Samuel, as “inappropriate” (19), revealing thus either a racist or a classist attitude, or a combination of both. Here Grant Fotheringay – a male Scottish feminist who moved to Cape Town in 1984 (when university riots were taking place (13))<sup>79</sup> and became an anti-Apartheid activist – represents the acceptance of not only transnational and interracial relations but intergenerational relationships which, as formerly mentioned in other sections, may be considered one of the main socio-cultural gaps within communities. On the other hand, Jenny works as the counterpoint for Grant, representing the empire perspective of racial – and due to the boy’s economic background, probably classist– social segregation.

However, language disparity is not only attached to race but can also emerge from intra-racial variations in the use of language. In “Mrs Pringle’s bed”, for example, Polly Pringle criticizes her cousin Trudie for her “vulgar language” (54), a word that can be applicable to classist mindsets. Cousin Trudie’s excuse for her language is “the idea of character: people are either characters or *gevrek*<sup>80</sup>, by which Mrs. Pringle understands herself to be without character. She will not use the other word” (55). It is intriguing not just that Polly does not want to use her cousin’s vulgar words but the word itself. “*Gevrek*” can mean “died” or “slow” but it also refers to a Turkish circular bread with seeds. The meaning both Trudie and Polly give to the word remains undiscovered but given that Polly does not want to pronounce it out loud I would lean towards the first meaning rather than towards Turkish bread.

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<sup>79</sup> The 1980s were marked by students, women, and community protests, and in 1983 the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed to help anti-Apartheid groups. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/people-armed-1984-1990>

<sup>80</sup> See Glossary.

Dealing with the word ‘vulgar’ and the classist meaning it has attached, there is an intriguing passage in “There’s the bird that never flew” where Herbert Ellis Kelvey, the architect of the Doulton Fountain is talking about Andrew Geddes Bain, the creator of the character of ‘Kaatje Kekkelbek’, a racialized Hottentot girl who ridicules missionaries and changes from Hottentot-Afrikaans to speak in Afrikaans-English to sing. Furthermore, this character represented the prejudicial stereotypes of steatopygia, illiteracy and laziness (Shaw, 2009).

My name is Kaatje Kekkelbek,  
I come from Kat Rivier,  
Daar’s van water geen gebrek,  
But scarce of wine and beer.  
Myn A B C at Philip's school  
I learnt a kleine beetje,  
But left it just as great a fool  
As gekke Tante Meitje<sup>81</sup>.

Ellis “can’t or perhaps won’t read his ‘Kaatke Kekkelbek’, written as it is in the vulgar dialect of the girl herself, and in any case he believes the poem also to be an insult to England” (73). The vulgar dialect he mentions refers to the Hottentot-Afrikaans language Geddes Bain used for his female character. As in the first short story, we find two white, high-class characters with almost opposite opinions on non-European languages. While Geddes Bain seems to celebrate non-English languages, Ellis rejects Bain’s work for being written in Hottentot-Afrikaans and thus, for being “an insult to England” (73). Moreover, in the story “Neighbours” Marie, the white protagonist, is concerned about their new neighbour, Ben, a South African woman recently moved to

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<sup>81</sup> Full text in <https://mansellupham.wordpress.com/2020/09/19/kaatje-kekkelbek-or-life-among-the-hottentots-by-andrew-geddes-bain-1797-1864-featuring-verbatim-the-original-text-plus-expanded-english-text-with-explanatory-notes-by-mansell-upham/>



their respectable neighbourhood (74). She imagines Ben “practising her swearwords [which she finds] not good at all. The problem with bad language is that bad deeds are sure to follow” (88). Marie accurately represents the prejudices and hypocrisy inherited from the empire since, before even meeting her new neighbour, she already condemns her for a language she has not heard yet, only because of Ben’s skin colour. Besides, it also displays classism, for neighbourhoods “are important in the formation of classed identities. They are the spaces where local, mundane and everyday descriptions of home are shaped” (Fathi, 2017: 91) and Ben’s apparent social position does seem to fit in the neighbourhood for Marie.

There are various examples of language correlation between British and South African languages that must be taken into consideration. Later in “There’s the bird that never flew” we find Jane, the female protagonist, noticing Margaret’s Scottish pronunciation: “best place from which to keep an eye on the world. The woman pronounces the word like a Xhosa-speaker, inserting another vowel so that it sounds almost like the Afrikaans ‘wêreld<sup>82</sup>’” (74). Thus, here the linguistic gap decreases to the extent that they would understand each other in different languages. As regards language pronunciation it might be appropriate to briefly mention the linguistic hierarchy that was established in Britain. Precisely dealing with Scotland, the Scottish dialect was considered inferior than RP English, as it was, in some way, the English from the colonies. In the same chapter we find the phrase “all finished and klaar” (67), which is a phrase used in South African slang that means ‘really finished’. However, ‘klaar’ is literally translated as somewhat redundant “all finished and finished”. In the last part of the story, Jane and Drew – the protagonist couple – are talking about a song Jane has discovered during their honeymoon in Glasgow. Again, the correlation between cultures emerges

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<sup>82</sup> See Glossary.

with Drew's grandmother's song in Afrikaans, having approximately the same meaning. The relevance of this quote lies in the similarity of these songs, proving the sometimes-invisible cultural knot that exists between cultures and thus dismantling the racist attitudes that focus on the differences rather than on the similarities shared by different societies.

There's the tree that never grew	Daar's 'n hoender wat 'n eier nie kan lê nie
There's the bird that never flew	Daar's 'n hoender wat 'n eier nie kan lê nie
There's the fish that never swam	Daar's 'n hoender wat 'n eier nie kan lê nie
There's the bell that never rang	En dis die haan wat op die kerk se toring staan
	Daar's 'n perd wat hmm hmm nie kan hmm nie
	En dis die perd wat op die whisky-bottle staan

(79)

Furthermore, in the short story "Nothing like the wind", the main character Elsie, a South African teenager living now in Glasgow, reminds herself "to say traffic lights" instead of "robots" (137). Concluding the discussion on the linguistic interaction between English and African languages there is the last short story "Another story" where Deborah and Sarah "had slipped into comfortable Afrikaans, a relief to Deborah whose English pinched like the Lycra step-in [...] why on earth should the girl have switched again [...] for the two languages flew at each other to make wild words" (184). The symbolism of intertwining both languages could signify a healthy relationship between both cultures, using language as a way to connect both. However, the recipient, Deborah in this particular case, does not only consider the mixture wrong but that the outcome of mixing languages is "wild". Moreover, Sarah's wait for Deborah at the airport should be taken into consideration for the generational use of language:

[Deborah], incidentally, was the only elderly coloured woman on the flight. Sarah corrected herself: so-called coloured, for she did not think that the qualifier should be reserved for speech. [...] Lexical vigilance was a matter of mental hygiene, a regular rethinking of words in common use, like cleaning out rotten food from the back of a refrigerator where no one expects food to rot and poison the rest (180).

What interests me about this passage is the generational change, which is used by Wicomb to “accentuate the complexity of communication” (McCann, 2010: 56). We have formerly dealt with this issue in this thesis as one of the main socio-cultural gaps within a society. In this paragraph we see a young girl aware of her use of language, trying to adapt to modern times and to be inclusive in her speech, what highly differs from previous generations where language remained one of the main factors for social exclusion. In fact, as seen in this Wicomb collection, the older the character is, the less politically correct his/her language is towards other races or social classes. Apart from the evident worldly social development in the twenty-first century, I argue that one of the main reasons for this change in the use of language is education. For Jacob Dlamini, education was a synonym of freedom (2009: 92) and he explains the previous generations’ anxiety to provide their children with a proper education to be respectable. In fact, in the short story “There’s the bird that never flew” Jane’s father “may not have known much English but she remembers his use of the word ‘uncultured’. [...] For him, that was what placed people beyond the pale. [...] Even if he understood cultured simply to mean respectable” (67). Thus, and as I have been asserting throughout this thesis, education is highly attached to social class, despite the fact that the idea of respectability meant upgrading class-wise for the lower classes. The middle and upper classes were not captivated by this concept, they were already ‘respectable’.

As seen in other chapters, classist attitudes are performed by all ranges of characters and not necessarily performed by the normative, white, high-class, male character. In “Disgrace”, for instance, Grace – a coloured woman from Manenberg<sup>83</sup> cleaning for the white Shirley Haskins – and Fiona McAllister, Shirley’s visitor from Scotland, each give their opinion about the other. On the one hand, Fiona leaves “without

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<sup>83</sup> Coloured township in Cape Town.

as much as a tip for Grace, when the blinking English pound is worth so many rands. It's of course not the money, it's the thought that counts" (28) – although at the end of the short story the reader sees the generous tip she leaves. On the other hand, Grace “knows exactly what that's all about. Meanness – the woman doesn't want Grace to do the ironing so she needn't leave a tip. And with all those rich English pounds too, it's unbelievable, no wonder she calls herself Scottish” (34). But this is not her only reaction towards Fiona, whose apparent kindness represents the Spivakian theory on Westerners considering themselves kind and generous towards non-whites (1988), as happens, for example, with Mr. Weedon in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*<sup>84</sup>. Grace, on her part, firstly shows the prejudices of Scottish people as mean and miserly, and secondly, she displays the widespread idea of rich people from abroad being easily deceived:

Grace cannot believe how easily these people from overseas are taken in. [The wood carvings and the artefacts made of telephone wire are] just a load of old rubbish made by the layabouts and dagga-rockers, she says helpfully; they're nothing but skelms setting out to rob innocent people, especially the ones from overseas who've got now a lo-ot of money (28).

Furthermore, social upgrading implies the social and familial relationships an individual both inherits and/or establishes: where to live, who to marry... Wicomb provides the reader with various instances where the characters convey their interest in those relationships. Polly Pringle, coming from a “respectable family” (55), from “Mrs Pringle's bed”, “chose Polly Pringle over Polly Kleintjies. Kleintjies sounded too much like the nickname of a farm labourer” (55). Grace – who indirectly appears in “There's the bird that never flew” through her daughter Jane – criticizes her daughter for marrying an artist: “are you mad, after all I've spent on your education? How could you sink so low? Even overseas – I've seen on the TV – they sit on the pavements or in city squares

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<sup>84</sup> See section 3.1.

making pictures, and then people throw money at them” (65). Then there is Mary from “Neighbours”, who is frustrated for not living in a “posh postal address” (81), although they live in a neighbourhood that “may have been a run-down area once, but it’s been respectable for a while now” (84). Her husband, Jeff, interrupts their new coloured neighbour’s party for using a “private, exclusive garden [that] has to be kept neat” (93) or otherwise “every layabout and drug addict will be sprawling on this grass, littering the place” (93). Jeff’s reaction can relate to “the high amount of antisocial and criminal activity, especially violent crime, in South Africa [that] has a profound effect on the use of public space” (Penfold, 2012: 999). However, the couple’s classist attitudes towards Ben, their new coloured neighbour, do not finish there. Even when Jeff suffers a heart attack and Ben offers to go with Mary to the hospital by bus, Mary hesitates because she “finds public transport difficult. On a route like that you can just about be sure that some drunk or unwashed person will sit next to you” (96). And finally, there is Deborah from “Another story”, who receives a letter from a niece “who was educated and rich” (175) asking Deborah to visit her in Cape Town. However, when they meet, Deborah finds the girl “rather disappointing, untidily dressed in denim without as much as a dash of lipstick. [...] Also, her car was not at all what Deborah expected. [...] The house that they pulled up at was very nice, but modest, she thought, for a learned person” (182). All the aforementioned examples prove how individuals, despite their social background, try rather to establish or maintain those relationships that benefit their position in the social hierarchy. This unceasing competition against oneself to achieve the highest social rank reflects Marx’s assumption that competition is a necessity of capitalist social relations (*Capital*, 1887). Although his approach relates to workers’ competition, the idea of social relations as essential factors for capitalism reinforces the previous idea.

As seen in this section, classist attitudes are not always performed by characters belonging to the highest class. Yet, some of the classist attitudes Wicomb displays in this collection are attached to slavery and colonization, instead implying superiority or sympathy towards the 'Other'. In fact, these examples of 'colonial classism' prove the interconnectedness between race and class in the South African context, and the difficulty that entails studying them as separate categories, an idea that has been mentioned throughout this thesis. On the one hand there are characters that perform openness such as Grant Fotheringay, protagonist of "Boy in a jute-sack hood", who "voted for the first time, along with the oppressed people of South Africa" (30). In "Trompe l'oeil" Gavin admits that:

they have never had servants, and after the children left, they dismissed the char who came once a week for three hours. They would not be typical South Africans, Gavin said, though Bev worried about the hungry women who knocked on her door for bread, and who offered, in exchange, to wash the windows she had just buffed into gleaming mirrors. She could not say with pride, I've cleaned them myself; instead, she said that she already had a cleaner (124).

Despite the apparent difference between Gavin's and Bev's opinion of servants (Gavin seems to boast about the fact that they never had servants and Bev seems to be ashamed of the fact that they never had any), Gavin's classist attitude follows his critique on "typical South Africans" conveying the country's general classism, which is inseparably intertwined with racism. On the other hand, there is Elsie's father from "Nothing like the wind" who thinks that "servants could not be trusted, not any more; they would shut them alright but carelessly" (143). However, it turned out "that they couldn't afford even such a person" (138). This short story is precisely enlightening because "social class [takes] on a whole new dimension" (McCann, 2010: 58). It tells the story of Elsie, a thirteen-year-old girl who has moved from Cape Town to Glasgow with her family.

In a couple of years she'll go to Glasgow Uni like the others and no doubt some of them, or perhaps just a nice quite girl like herself, her father says, will become a friend. But first there is surely the problem of class. Her father says nonsense, our family's always been a good class of people, of Scottish blood, but he knows nothing about the topography of class, the complexities of double-barrelled terms: lower-, middle-, or upper-middle class, and then the possibility of upper or lower- working class. He does not know that it is different over here, that differences, no longer simply identified by surface, the colour of skin or texture of hair, is hidden. Elsie suspects that they are either upper-working class or lower-middle class, but the difference between the two, in spite of all her sociology, would seem to be discernable to natives alone who talk about these things in code. Anyway, whatever it is, she would by dint of Uni be propelled into middle-middle. Which she understands to be a solid, comfortable place from which you can't escape (136-137).

This compelling passage not only shows Elsie's awareness of social hierarchies (unusual for her age), but also underlines an essential point for this thesis. While South Africa has been, and continues to be, deeply submerged in racism, in Scotland – working as a reference for mainly white societies – the line for exclusion is not drawn over skin colour but over wealth and income. In fact, Pitcher explains how the British state has reinvented their inclusion/exclusion policies in *The Politics of Multiculturalism*: “the British state's turn to community under New Labour can thus be seen as incorporating existing racialized minorities *and* poor whites into a single multicultural policy framework” (Pitcher, 2009: 108). This suggests that, after diaspora, the racial line for exclusion was drawn at the same level than the pre-existing classist segregation. However, South African racialization prevents class attitudes to stand out in both inter-cultural and intra-cultural relations, a difference that a teenager is able to perceive but her father is not.

Finally, the most interesting relationship in terms of classist and racist attitudes is displayed in “Friends and goffels” by Dot and Julie, two old friends who meet again after Julie's return from Britain with her new husband Alistair Baines. During their childhood “in the class of posh coloureds” (103), Dot and Julie

were the only ones who were very dark, had short frizzy hair and flat noses with prominent cheekbones. Everyone knew the indexes of worth amongst coloureds,

knew the acceptable combinations of facial features, and that good hair would always override the other disabilities. Dot and Julie did not qualify (103).

Before delving into the racial issue presented in this quotation, the change from the racist attitudes they received during their childhood to the classist prejudice Dot conveys after their reunion should be highlighted:

Julie was no goffel<sup>85</sup>; Julie looked exactly like Naomi Campbell with long, sleek hair that bounced like a horse's tail, and a complexion that glowed deep honey. [...] Julie seemed laminated with an overall glossy poly-something substance. Now don't you judge a book by its cover, Julie laughed. [...] The point surely of a cover is to give you an indication of what the book is about or what you would like potential readers to think the book is about. Thus one should always judge a book by its cover (107).

The book cover metaphor demonstrates the 'hypocrisy of acceptance', meaning that the individual asks for an acceptance – Dot, in this particular case, does not reciprocate. It is also revealing how, Dot being diminished by her racialized physical features, later adopts the same speech of exclusion towards her friend. Based on the information given in the short story, Dot did not understand her classmates' hateful remarks about their skin and hair, two physical features that can be considered a kind of 'book cover'. However, as the situation shifts, she becomes the one who judges her friend by her new physical features forgetting the former psychological abuse they had both received in school. The prejudicial relationship between Dot and Jane's European husband, Alistair, intensifies by the end of the story after various run-ins, such as the conversation they have about her neighbourhood where "a goffel opened the door in the middle-class neighbourhood, and the blond dame didn't ask whether the goffel was the owner of the house, she just assumed that I wasn't" (114-115). Julie's attempt to bring both closer by asking them to "try to be more tolerant" (116) illustrates the aforementioned hypothesis of Dot's hypocrisy:

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<sup>85</sup> See Glossary.



“tolerance – and she beats her fist on the table – she’ll have no truck with wishy-wishy tolerance” (116). Balibar precisely deals with the troubles of displacement and race relations within society “*which naturalizes not racial belonging but racist conduct*” (1991: 22; his emphasis). In his study, he asserts that “to avoid racism [...] you have to respect the ‘tolerance thresholds’, maintain ‘cultural distances’” (1991: 23). However, the cultural distance Dot establishes between herself and Alistair seems to differ from Balibar’s proposal. Dot’s cultural distance is bound to prompt bigotry while Balibar’s is intrinsically attached to acceptance.

Returning to the racialized attitudes displayed in this short story, and specifically returning to Dot’s and Julie’s former physical appearance, the quotation previously mentioned proves the importance of hair for social upgrading. Hair has been already discussed throughout this thesis, but *The One That Got Away* provides the reader with the definitive evidence. I want to focus particularly on the sentence: “good hair would always override the other disabilities” (103). Wicomb’s use of the word “disabilities” seems to mock the white perspective on non-whites as biologically inferior<sup>86</sup>) proving once more how non-normative phenotypes could automatically fix the individual’s social position. Cynthia Lytle argues this issue asserting that: “the possibility of upward social mobility led to some even changing their identity” (2014: 53). The identity change she refers to implies both a physical (such as straightened hair) and psychological (leaving family relations behind) change.

However, Wicomb’s recurrent narrative of double-sided racial prejudices is especially clear in *The One That Got Away*, probably due to the fact that the collection format allows a wider range of characters. Thus, instances where racialized attitudes arise

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<sup>86</sup> See Nancy Stepan’s *The Idea of Race in Science* (1982).

towards whites can be found throughout the twelve short stories. One of the best examples for this double-sided racism can be found in “Friends and goffels”, depicting the unceasing fight between Dot and Alistair. From the very beginning Dot makes it clear that “Julie is married to a pig” (101) and despite the fact that being Scottish “does not, of course, make him a pig, [...] he is a pig all the same” (101). Since their childhood, their identities have been marked by their “short frizzy hair and flat noses” (103), which induced posh coloured classmates to label them *goffels*: “some wondered if the pair having seated themselves one behind the other had not provoked the goffel attack. That, so often, is what these unfortunate ones do: they ask for it” (104). What intrigues me about this quotation is the attribution of responsibility to Dot and Julie for their physical features, as if they deserve the bullying they receive. This passage is complemented by Alistair later commenting on being late: “perhaps that’s what’s wrong with you Africa, Alistair snorted. Things might just work out better for you oppressed if they paid attention to time” (111). This again suggests that the racial problem in South Africa stems from the coloureds’ inability to avoid it due to their lack of agency and reliability. However, it is precisely due to this lack of agency that the subaltern figure is inherently unable to leave subalternity, in other words: “the recognition of agency [...] always already moves us away from subalternity” (Bracke on Spivak, 2016: 9).

In “Disgrace”, the coloured protagonist, Grace, mocks Fiona – Shirley’s visitor – for “the white woman’s idea of being friendly” (24) and the “expensive potions, their toorgoed<sup>87</sup>, which like any toorgoed must be paid for, and still it doesn’t work” (25). In return, Fiona wonders about the long way Grace must go for water: “Oh no, we do have taps in Manenberg. What does the woman take her for? I’d like to visit a township” (26). Fiona’s stereotypical comments towards Grace allows the latter to harbor the same

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<sup>87</sup> See Glossary.

stereotypical prejudices about Fiona, thinking of her “as *that* woman” (26) who comes from overseas, wants to be called by her first name, and engages in that “puff-puff kind of kissing that the white people do” (26). The white characters in “Mrs Pringle’s bed” display racial intolerance towards Annie, the coloured cleaner, who is fired for her good relationship with Mrs. Pringle. Apartheid regime policies are glimpsed here with the family’s attempt to impede this inter-racial relation: “she should get her fat Hotnot arse back to Bonteheuwel” (63) and they doubt whether she could “start all over again with new people, white people to boot” (61). In the short story “Trompe l’oeil”, Gavin labels Roddy’s story about them as “an act of positive discrimination” (132) since the only feasible reason for Roddy’s hate can be nothing but prejudice. Finally, Sarah’s assumptions about the people in the family farm in “Another story” as “degenerate brown people” (184) displays once again the white woman’s ignorance about the former colony.

The characters in “Neighbours”, the white couple Jeff and Marie, reveal their racist attitudes through the issue of land (dis)possession. When their new neighbour Ben, a coloured single mother – who worked for the ANC as Dulcie and Sally from *David’s Story* did – moves in next to their house, their only concern is about the untidiness of her back garden. Ben’s witty response about how wonderful the dandelion looks symbolizes the coloured issue and why “one can’t imagine how they came to be classified as weeds” (83). After Ben’s family visit and the classist attitudes displayed by the white couple, the short story concludes with an assertive “they are not her sort of people; they’re only neighbours” (99). Tom Penfold wonders: “how has post-apartheid South Africa adapted to sharing space?” (2012: 993). This short story would confirm that a respectful, multicultural society is impracticable since old hierarchies and segregation remain in place (2012: 994).

Despite the post-Apartheid setting of most of this collection, Wicomb recurrently makes reference to the fact of being non-white during Apartheid. In “Disgrace”, for instance, Grace recalls when “Ed was still alive” (31) before his murder for being on a beach that “in the meantime [had] been declared white” (31). In “The one that got away”, Mrs. Buchanan, the white woman Jane meets during her honeymoon in Glasgow, asks Jane “what people eat in South Africa” (46) in order to try new dishes now “curry [is] the favourite British dish” (47). Mrs. Buchanan’s comments represent not only the whites’ lack of awareness about other cultures but the continuous references to colonialism – considering that the British brought curry from India and it became popular in Britain for the Indian restaurants that were staffed by people from the subcontinent. Wicomb’s continuous references to the past may aim to prove the importance of social history for the construction of identity. In other words: “identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity’s earlier life” (Alexander, 2004: 22). That is to say, despite the importance of present acts to secure a bright social future, the relevance past has in the construction of society is undeniable, as it shapes not only the population individually and communally but it also has a huge impact on present actions. Furthermore, the past also serves as a mirror of what should be done or not: those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it<sup>88</sup>.

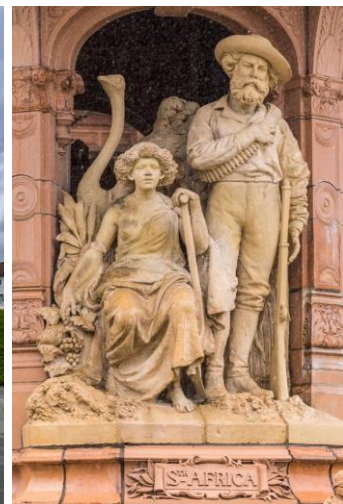
To conclude with the racial issue in *The One That Got Away*, I will now delve into Jane’s analysis of the Doulton Fountain in “There’s the bird that never flew”, an excerpt that has been exhaustively analyzed by critics such as Ritcher, Griem or Lytle. In fact, as

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<sup>88</sup> This famous saying seems to come from the writings of the twentieth-century philosopher Jorge Santayana.

previously mentioned, critics have overanalyzed this passage overshadowing Jane's character itself.

The Doulton Fountain [is there] to celebrate imperial achievement, the information leaflet says. [...] The fountain is circular; it accommodates arched niches for each of the colonies, and these house representative figures in terracotta, surrounded by typical flora and fauna. [...] The niches are much the same, and without the scrolls with the names of the colonies, they are indistinguishable. [...] And then on the east side, reaching *S<sup>th</sup> Africa*, she stops. [...] [Jane] has missed the girl in all that elaborate Victorian detail and modelled in the same white stone as all the other figures. South Africa, then, comes to offer a different kind of knowledge. [The coloured girl she calls Kaatje Kekkelbek<sup>89</sup>] is conspicuously native. Not only are her facial features – cheekbones, nose, full lips – distinctly Khoi, but the fullness of hair framing her face speaks unashamedly of miscegenation. [...] Unlike the man, the seated Kaatje is unshod. [...] They are unmistakably a couple. Kaatje's posture and facial expression tell that she is not a servant; she occupies her space with ease. [...] Kaatje has been sitting here bathed in grace for more than a century, unembarrassed (71-77).



\*Doulton Fountain, Glasgow<sup>90</sup>.

The main topic that arises in this excerpt is colonial representation. For Spivak, one of the main dilemmas of colonization is the representation of developing countries from a universal point of view based on the white perspective (1988). The Doulton Fountain shows how colonial institutions misrepresent foreign cultures, rendering the different

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<sup>89</sup> Fictional character created by Andrew Geddes Bain.

<sup>90</sup> Pictures taken during my visit to Glasgow, 2023.

human figures indistinguishable if it was not for the cultural accessories they may wear, all carved in the same *white* stone. This symmetry is meant for two purposes according to Griem: “the indistinguishability of the colonized peoples turns them into manageable objects [and] the dominating mimetic norm of a western standard provides the sculpted monument of imperial power with a structure establishing a clear hierarchy between center and periphery” (2011: 396). Furthermore, the abbreviation of South Africa to *5<sup>th</sup> Africa* supports the same idea than the previously mentioned colonial symmetry in terms of reducing the national identity to a single, unitary entity. In Žižek’s words: “There is something violent in the very symbolization of a thing, which equals its mortification. [...] Language simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to a single feature. It dismembers the thing, destroying its organic unity” (2009: 52). Finally, Jane’s analysis of the girl must be highlighted. After naming her, having studied her physical features and posture and determined a social position for the girl, Jane’s surprise derives from the girl’s ease despite her colouredness, contradicting then Wicomb’s or Adhikari’s theories on coloured shame (1998 and 2013 respectively). In fact, Jane realizes the girl has Khoi features and still she refers to the girl as coloured. Even today Khoi people are still legally classified as coloureds instead of being given the indigenous status they are supposed to have.

However, Wicomb also provides the reader with instances where racist and classist attitudes are blurred. As pointed out earlier, the opening short story “Boy in a jute-sack hood” presents Grant’s relationship with his non-white gardener’s child, which his friend Jenny considers “inappropriate” (19). While this would apparently derive from her racism, it is not clear whether her rejection comes from the boy’s skin colour, from his low social position, or from a combination of both. Grant, working as a counterpoint for Jenny “wincing at the word ‘black’: was it okay to call people like that?” (14), proving his

efforts to dismantle the dominant white, wealthy, male mindset. And, in “There’s the bird that never flew” Aunt Trudie reminds Jane “that not one in her family cleaned for white people” (69). While this quotation apparently makes reference to racial markers, the fact that Trudie does not want her family members to clean for whites reveals a classist attitude more than a racist one.

After the analysis of Wicomb’s second collection I would like to draw some conclusions. First of all, and as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the collection format allows the writer not only to provide the reader with a wider number of characters, backgrounds and settings, but “also relies on changing characters constantly on the move; and the main pattern providing consistency in a scenario dominated by mobility and travelling seems to be the bipolar organization of a diegetic space oscillating between South Africa and Glasgow” (Griem, 2011: 394). Secondly, and given Wicomb’s other works, classist and racist attitudes not only dominate the narrative, but these prejudicial attitudes combine both classism and racism to the extent that they hinder the analysis of racism and classism as separate categories. Thirdly, the fact that the more time passes (in both the stories and real life), the more colonial references seem to appear in Wicomb’s books. This occurs probably because “South Africa’s eutopian new order has not become an accomplished reality but rather a dystopian struggle where the past has remained very much present and many new social problems have arisen” (Penfold, 1994). Connected to this is another idea that has arisen in this chapter: the younger the characters are, the more obsessed they seem with the past and truth. Which, in some way, seems licit for their eagerness to know better what happened to their family during those agitated years. However, I wonder whether this fixation with past events relates to forgiveness or blame, that is to say, whether knowledge is used to overcome the traumatic past or to justify their anger towards Apartheid. In this sense, I would like to finish with a quote from Derrida’s

*On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2005) in the preface written by Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney:

Derrida identifies a certain globalisation of the concept of forgiveness in contexts that call for forms of ‘national reconciliation’, as [...] when, in South Africa, white oppressors asked forgiveness of their black victims. What is interesting here is the way in which the Abrahamic moral tradition, in which forgiveness is a central concept and which is at the basis of the three great monotheisms, has globalised itself in a more or less secular form. Increasingly, we live in a world where forgiveness is demanded, granted, or withheld (*Preface*, 2005).

From the analysis carried out in this chapter, the forgiveness Derrida explores is usually withheld, but rarely demanded or granted, which, I argue, relates to the question of freedom’s unstoppability. The apparent inability to forgive displayed in *The One That Got Away* is what precisely prevents characters from achieving the freedom they all seem to expect, yet no one is willing to fight for.

### **6.1. The Authority of the Observer in the short story “In the Botanic Gardens”**

Theories on how the Western perspective has shaped a distorted view of non-white communities have been exhaustively analyzed in recent years. In his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) Edward Said claims that colonial discourse has relegated non-whites to an inferior hierarchical position, failing to acknowledge that Western dominance is entirely dependent on those cultures. Considering that without that part of the world population their authority would decrease, the Western outlook continues to preserve that widespread idea of non-whites being inherently inferior and subordinate to the “colonial voice”. As Said asserts “my subject [is] how culture participates in imperialism yet is somehow excused for its role” (1994: 22). He introduces the concept of hybridity and comments that although the human urge to dominate may be universal, people have



become more conscious than ever before of borrowings, connections, and interdependence. In his discussion of the themes of resistance culture, Said argues persuasively that the history of all cultures is a history of borrowings. For instance, Western science borrowed from the Arabs, who, in turn borrowed from Greece and India. No one in this globalized world, which is rife with movements and migrations, is purely one thing.

One common way to perpetuate the national discourse of Europeans *helping* the “inferior” community was, among others, through museums used as colonial institutions, where they could exhibit all the conquerors’ achievements. Museology studies the role museums have in society, encompassing their history and their preservation techniques; a field which could be considered intrinsically connected to the theories on Western views of developing countries. The idea of museums as institutional tools was first articulated for the public in the organization of colonial exhibitions. Visitors could marvel in front of the displays that highlighted the power of their nation overseas and absorb the national discourse according to which “inferior” peoples would “progress” accordingly through the gift of Western modernity. The reality is that those “displays perpetuated stereotypes and created prejudices that would be used for centuries to dehumanize and control colonized peoples” (Baber, 1996: 171). However, in the study of museums it is crucial to note that the Second World War had a deep impact on how the West defines itself, how successful Western nations adapted to this societal change, and how museums found a new social purpose outside the colonial frame. “Only when we consider colonialism as a full system in which modern, national identities and values were forged are we able to understand that the “acceleration” and the “democratization” of history both emerged from the same event, that is, the end of the national, colonial order as the dominant cultural model” (Sauvage, 2010: 100).

In Wicomb's short story collection *The One That Got Away* (2008) there are five different stories in which she deals with Scottish-South African relations through non-white characters moving to or visiting Scotland. In the short story "In the Botanic Gardens" Dorothy Brink flies from South Africa to Glasgow to find her missing son, Arthur. Once in Scotland, she discovers by herself not only how South Africa is depicted in museums but also how Scottish people treat non-whites with contempt and derision. Therefore, this section seeks to examine class and race – or *clethnicity* – more deeply in Wicomb's short story "In the Botanic Gardens" through the Saidian idea of the Western attempt to maintain a racial and hierarchical society based on the colonizer-colonized relation (1993). Concurrently, it will scrutinize the representation of developing countries in museums.

What can be extracted from this short story is that Dorothy Brink is a South African woman, presumably non-white, and the owner of a store in South Africa, which settles her in a good position in society. However, her arrival in Glasgow marks the differences between her and the Scottish people she finds in her way. While she does not interact with many people, it is essential to note that those people are "superior" in terms of race or class. For instance, in the opening of the story when she remembers her conversation with Mr. MacPherson, the British Council man<sup>91</sup>. On this very first page where Dorothy feels more and more inferior to MacPherson, who could be considered the representation of Englishness, the national costume and the perfect English pronunciation are some of the cultural facts Dorothy points out:

She did not quite catch his name but decided that Sir would be an appropriate form of address. The man was in national dress; he wore a green tartan kilt, a short tweed jacket and tassels on his socks. He spoke very fast, so it was difficult to follow him, but perhaps she would not have understood anyway. His English was very smart, she supposed, quite different even from the English of the SABC newsreader; he might

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<sup>91</sup> *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* also has this dichotomized relation between two similar characters, Mrs. Shenton and Mr. Weedon. See Chapter 3 and section 3.1. for more information.

as well have been speaking a special language understood only by those in national costume (159).

Then, from the very beginning it is made clear who is in a dominant position. Mr. MacPherson's way of speaking to Dorothy, his manners and his attire allows him to have the controlling voice. As Edward Said explains: "in modern times, however, thinking about cultural exchange involves thinking about domination and forcible appropriation: someone loses, someone gains" (1994: 195). This domination is forged by Mr. MacPherson through his physical appearance to firmly establish his position in Said's dichotomy.

In his attempt to be "kind" to Dorothy (Spivak dealt with this idea of Westerners presenting themselves as kind and generous (1988)), Mr. MacPherson suggests Dorothy should visit both Kibble Palace and the People's Palace. The former "it's unbearably hot, of course. Tropical conditions, you understand, for these marvelous plants from all over the world: Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, India and, of course, America. Absolutely marvelous, like traveling..." (161). The latter is "another glass structure, smaller, but devilishly hot too [...] lovely tropical things. The rest of the building is a museum – the history of the working people of Glasgow. You'll find that interesting, coming from South Africa" (162). Firstly, it is important to note how authorities used museums for their own culture advertising. European colonialism was not only about economic profits; their discourse also forged European identity and culture as "The modern West" (Hall, 1997 & 2000) and the use of the museum was a social tool to promote such cultural identity and values. For Lytle, "it is a space based on fictitious narratives created through imperial curiosities; its plants have been collected to build a representation that fits the Eurocentric expectations and exoticizations in an unnatural, hothouse display (Lytle, 2014: 226). It sounds ironic how Mr. MacPherson encourages

Dorothy to learn Scottish history when he seems to know very little about non-white cultures he calls “lovely tropical things”. It is also important to highlight both adverbs he uses when referring to the temperature: *unbearably* and *devilishly* hot. To Edward Said, imperialism always impacts culture and it can even ruin culture. In this specific passage, consciously or unconsciously, the adverbs Mr. MacPherson uses to describe the heat are pejorative, compared to *devil*. It is also intriguing how a Scottish man describes the tropical weather to a South African woman. Far from challenging Mr. MacPherson’s perspective, Dorothy seems to internalize and assume his attitude.

During this conversation in which Mr. MacPherson insists Dorothy should keep calm and be prepared for anything relating to her son, he recalls “he had seen television images of South Africans at gatherings, black women ululating and stamping their feet and really he would not know what to do about such behaviour in the office; he would steady her with practical advice” (163). First of all, it is crucial to remark the perspective MacPherson has, shaped by what he sees on television and how the empire will always keep that idea of non-whites being barbaric. The last sentence, when MacPherson thinks about imposing his power over Dorothy, aligns with Said’s words about Europeans benefiting from non-whites: “the European authorial subjects [...] hold on to an overseas territory, derive benefits from it, depend on it, but ultimately refuse it autonomy or independence” (1993: 193). Dorothy’s autonomy or independence here is completely limited by the representation of the empire, MacPherson<sup>92</sup>.

However, her thoughts about losing control were “as if she would lose control here amongst strange white people” (163). But at the same time, she’s confused about the conversation which should be about her son and thinking “she, a woman without learning

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<sup>92</sup> This situation resonates with Helen’s in *Playing in the Light*, when she meets Councillor Carter to obtain the white cards, see Chapter 5.

[...] could only sit quietly and obey” (163). This last part of the sentence encapsulates the imperial ideology that has made inferiors believe, that they could not have their own voice and must accept their superiors’ decisions. As Said notes:

The authority of the observer, and of European geographical centrality, is buttressed by a colonial discourse relegating and confining the non-European to a secondary racial, cultural, ontological status. Yet this secondariness is, paradoxically, essential to the primariness of the European (1994: 59).

After the confusing and with-no-results conversation, a taxi drives her “to a comfortable, if old-fashioned, hotel” (164) where a woman, the night before, kept on explaining to her how to switch on and off lights. Dorothy finds it ridiculous and does not understand why this woman said the same thing all over again. It is here again exemplified to what extent the European population has been taught to perceive non-white cultures as undeveloped. Saul Dubow considers that this perspective has been perpetuated through centuries by geneticists that asserted that the racial mixtures proved to be mentally, physically, and morally inferior (1992: 227-228). Gender discrimination also appears in this story when MacPherson refuses to allow Dorothy to talk with another South African student about Arthur’s disappearance. “Young people, and especially the young women, are so vulnerable, so easily upset” (164). In the hotel room, as she gets dressed the next morning, Dorothy thinks again about Arthur and, specifically, why nobody seems to pay attention to her missing son:

How could they tell her that there was no trace of him, that he had just disappeared? Just a name? A missing person? An absence? A nothing? [...] She would not cry here in this barbarous place where no one cared to find his body. [...] That was what the girl, Tsiki, had said. That they had done nothing (166).

This environment accentuates how officials silence Dorothy by ignoring her emotions and are rather uninterested in finding her son. This does not only show how Europeans consider non-whites secondary citizens with less priority than whites, but also how they erase, in a way, their personalities. Said argues this notion by asserting:

Eurocentrism. These accumulated experiences, territories, peoples, histories, it studied them, it classified them, it verified them, and as Calder says, it allowed “European men of business” the power “to scheme grandly”; but above all, it subordinated them by banishing their identities (1994: 222).

When she goes out to take a taxi that drives her to the Botanic Gardens, she meets a taxi driver who “did not say Ma’am; he asked for money and shrugged and shook his head. [...] He joked about her twenty-pound note – Lots of money eh – and gave her as change a ten-pound note with a picture of what seemed to be smiling Africans” (166). Again, she finds someone who diminishes her just because of her colour, joking about how much money that should be for a woman of her status. Dorothy, in fact, thinks that it’s a false note (but it was not), so she tells the taxi driver she had been running her own village shop successfully; “a business woman was not to be fooled in this way” (167). “Just you fuck off, Missus, Bank of England! Where do you think you are? This isn’t fucking England [...] but surely Scotland was part of England” (167). Before delving into the note itself, it’s worth mentioning the taxi driver’s manners and his excessive reaction. The only reason for this rejection is Dorothy’s colour and the idea of non-whites as ignorant or uneducated.

The picture on the note depicted

a man called David Livingstone [...] trapped amongst palm leaves [...] on the back – and she flushed with shame – a naked woman was flanked on either side by naked men, captives or slaves, squatting serenely in their leg-irons under palm trees. An overdressed Arab on a camel occupied the middle-ground. [...] Across the plain white strip at the edge marked simply with the £10 figure, someone, the taxi-man perhaps, had written in blue pen: if dat bastard Geldof don’t git ‘ere soon I goes eat dat camel (168).

This passage recalls Mary Louise Pratt’s interpretation of how explorers’ missions were depicted for the population, as great historical landmarks with the maximum number of references to those places they conquered:

[they] identified three conventional means which create qualitative and quantitative value for the explorer's achievement. [...] First, and most obvious, the landscape is *aestheticized*. The sight is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background, foreground, [...] and so forth. [...] Second, *density of meaning* in the passage is sought. The landscape is represented as extremely rich in material and semantic substance. [...] The third strategy at work here has been discussed off and on throughout this book: the relation of *mastery* predicated between the seer and the seen (204).

The picture on the banknote presents a superior explorer in the middle of the jungle, in this case David Livingstone, known for his anti-slavery crusade in Africa, and symbolises such benevolence, surrounded by naked natives (as savages) and an exaggeration of the Arab costume. Despite this cramped portrayal, the written sentence is also emphasized. The name Geldof seems to reference the musician Bob Geldof, who became famous for his charities. Written in Jamaican Patois, this message appears to be full of anger and disdain towards non-whites and has no respect for other cultures. Unaware of Bob Geldof's charities, when Dorothy reads the name "Geldof" she associates it with "geld" (which means money in Afrikaans), which makes her wonder whether her son's disappearance had financial implications. Dorothy does not know "what was she to make of this message?" (168) and she does not understand the dialect, so it leaves her again in that state of confusion she has lived in since her arrival in Scotland. As Richter notes: "In the Botanic Gardens" the experience of utter alienation in a strange city is pushed to the limits" (2011: 386). The picture of Livingstone, the name Geldof and the note represent the perpetuation of power dynamics and stereotypes, contributing to the hierarchy between colonizer and colonized.

When she finally arrives at Kibble Palace "a discreet notice announced that this was South Africa. Not that she recognized many of the plants. A raggedy tree [...] sprinkled with icing-sugar, she had certainly never seen before" (169). It's interesting how a South African native cannot recognize any plants that are supposed to be from her country. This exhibition demonstrates how little Europeans know about other cultures or what

Europeans want to show to their population. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, colonial expansion brought new disciplines such as archeology, natural history, anthropology... and “this increasing scientific organization of world knowledge came to progressively give priority to objects that were representative (i.e. common), rather than to objects that would be selected for their rarity” (Sauvage, 2010: 106). Instead, this exhibition prioritizes “rare plants” rather than representative objects from South Africa. The whole display of plants, as presented by Dorothy, evokes that aesthetic density of the landscape mentioned before, with the “palm trees squashed together in the inner circle [...] the lilies, nerine, strelitzia, agapanthus...” (169). A magnificent, even overwhelming perspective to “weave an intricate web of concealed, dimly registered and ever proliferating relations that ultimately grants life its thickness, its texture” (Villiers, 2008). However, this portrayal contributes again to the misrepresentation of colonized countries in order to align with the European expectations, as well as reinforcing the exotic stereotypes of South Africa.

Entering in the Papua New Guinea exhibition, she finds an explanatory board saying “to seek out orchids, begonias and ferns for display at the Glasgow Garden Festival and thereafter, to become part of the permanent collection maintained at the Glasgow Botanic Gardens, part of the cultural heritage of the City” (170). In the last part of the sentence, they assume non-white cultures are part of the European cultural heritage; however, in day-to-day life Europeans do not allow non-whites to belong to their same status (as seen with Arthur, who no one cares about or with Dorothy with the taxi driver). Said thought the whole Africanist discourse of Europeans was a “systematic language for dealing with and studying Africa *for* the West” (1994). To finish her visit to the Palace, “a young child came upon her and [...] shouted, Mu-um, look a Papoo person. But his mother whispered, Shush, and dragged him away” (170). The mother’s response is more



relevant than the child's reaction. While the fact that a Scottish child is not used to seeing non-whites could be a kind of justification, the fact that the mother remains silent and leaves, helps to reevaluate the perspective whites have towards non-whites. Both the exhibition and the mother and son reactions align with Said's theory of a systematic language used to dealing with non-European countries. Contrarily, months later, Dorothy remembers the museum guard saying to her: "alles sal regkom, Mevrouw" (171), meaning "everything will be fine, ma'am". However, whether the guard actually said that remains unknown, and it could be Dorothy's invention.

This short story certainly illustrates the Western perspective towards non-whites, how the empire has created a distorted image of non-Europeans to keep that superiority over the rest of the cultures and how the European population has internalized this image. All ranges of Scottish people Dorothy encounters, from MacPherson and his perfect English to the "lights on and off lady" or the taxi driver speaking with a strong Scottish accent, have an implicit racism embedded as they have similar reactions to the South African woman: a primitive woman without learning and easy to manipulate. Said mentions Fanon in his work while dealing with this image Westerns have created and displayed to the white population which sums up this idea:

Fanon goes still further when he reverses the hitherto accepted paradigm by which Europe gave the colonies their modernity and argues instead that not only were "the well-being and the progress of Europe..." built up with the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians, and the yellow races" but "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World" (1994: 197).

While much has been done as regards Westerners' mindset, there is still much work to do not only in society but in how institutions deal with cosmopolitanism at all levels, including the representation of non-white cultures, since "the concept of the Other is not just symbolized through racial markers. Through the story "In the Botanic Gardens", Wicomb shows how flora and fauna can represent an entire nation regardless of whether

or not they are native to that nation” (Lytle, 2014: 164). This institutional misrepresentation was followed by social exclusion that led to segregation and ethnonationalisms. In the words of Fanon, there must be “a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness” (1986: 230). Wicomb displays numerous distorted images of non-whites’ representation to both challenge and portray the perpetuation of colonial perspectives and systemic social issues.

## 7. “The idea of home is overvalued”

Zoë Wicomb’s penultimate novel *October* (2014) will be the last work analyzed in this thesis given that her latest novel *Still Life* (2020) is set in pre-Apartheid South Africa and it is a departure from the issues she deals with in her previous works. *October* tells the story of fifty-two-year-old Mercia Murray, a woman who has lived in Scotland for twenty-five years “who has been left” (1) by Craig, her Scottish partner. Following her separation from Craig, Mercia receives a letter from her brother Jake, writing from Kliprand, South Africa, asking her to go back home (13-14), which is, in fact, the trigger of the whole story. Furthermore, making reference to previous sections, Glasgow has been gradually introduced in Wicomb’s work, making the African-Scottish dichotomy complete in this novel. In fact, Dorothy Driver considers Wicomb “a cosmopolitan writer, not so much because she is an African living in Europe and travelling a lot, but because her fiction builds a cobweb of intertextualities connecting faraway places in unpredictable ways as if to show that we all live in heterogeneous conditions” (Driver 2010: 529). Thus, *October* mainly evolves around the concepts of homemaking, exile and return and (non)belonging despite other subtle topics that shape the whole oeuvre of Wicomb such as secrecy and social (de)constructions. However, what differentiates this work from previous ones is the number of classist allusions that invade the whole novel. Although the reasons for this shift will be analyzed throughout this chapter, the rationale behind this seems to be the relation between characters. While in other Wicomb works the characters come from different families, places or backgrounds – which allow racist attitudes to be glimpsed – most of *October*’s relationships are intra-familial and thus, it is class inequality what marks the difference among characters.

This novel is dedicated to the most recent years in South Africa, when there was an evident socio-political development but also when the aftermath of Apartheid was still

affecting the population. In this sense, Wicomb proves in *October* how the opportunities the characters are given throughout their lives can shape almost opposite outcomes, even if they come from the same, or a very similar, background. The siblings Mercia and Jake accurately represent this class inequality derived from their eagerness to embrace social upgrading, Mercia being the representation of the strong character who leaves her family behind for a brighter future, and Jake being the portrayal of the negative consequences of Apartheid: alcoholism, poverty and slackness. As Mercia notices:

Strangely familiar, this story of siblings, brother and sister, that turns out also to be one of father and son. But theirs – Mercia and Jake’s story – is from a different continent, a different hemisphere, a different kind of people, a kind so lacking in what is known as western gentility. Theirs is a harsh land that makes its own demands on civility (12).

Building upon the analysis of class dynamics within the Murrays, a different outlook arises with the other main character, Sylvie Willemse – Jake’s wife. The Murray and the Willemse families were neighbours in the past but, despite sharing space, the Murrays were considered to be better educated, to have better hair and better blood (92). Thus, the classist attitudes seen within the Murray family members can also be found outside the familial space. Because of this, class inequality will be exhaustively analyzed in this section.

In a very inventive way, Wicomb uses *October* to raise immigrants’ concerns of home and displacing, and “conveys the unhomeliness of home and simultaneously dethrones the privileged perspective assigned to the exile” (Samuelson, 2017: 1). These being recurrent topics in postcolonial theory, critics such as Brah, Hall or Gilroy have dealt with the issues of home, diaspora and belonging, along with the complex relation between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, a dichotomy very present in Mercia’s story. On the same page the reader finds Mercia wondering about “the small town in Klein

Namaqualand, Kliprand. Hardly more than a village. *How could anyone want to live there?* (14; her emphasis); and, while thinking about Glasgow, Mercia “insists on the distinction between living and staying; she is only there temporarily; it cannot be her home” (14). As regards home and exile, there is Edward Said’s *Reflections on Exile* (2000) where he notes that “the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever” (173). However, Wicomb’s *October* revisits this interpretation through the character of Mercia. The novel does so by, firstly, relocating Mercia in her homeplace, surmounting then the permanent loss Said describes (1994). Secondly, the novel declines Said’s suggestion of achievements being undermined by the loss of home through Mercia’s belittling perspective of Kliprand, as, for her, staying there “would allow the soul to die rather than to live” (15).

Delving into the story itself, Mercia Murray comes from a respectable coloured family in Kliprand thanks to her father, Nicholas Theophilus Murray, a “decent coloured man [...] of civilized Scottish stock” (9) who arrived in Kliprand to become the Meester – an Afrikaans term used to name the schoolteacher and, in historical contexts, a resident tutor hired by rural families; an itinerant schoolmaster<sup>93</sup>. Her mother, Antoinette Murray was “raised in the respectable mission station of Elim” (136). For her husband Nicholas, she “was of good stock” (138). In fact, it is Nicholas himself who validates what already seems to be a classist character by describing his family background:

The Murrays were of old Scottish stock, people who had settled before the Europeans were corrupted by Africa. A good old colored family, evenly mixed, who having attained genetic stability could rely on good hair and healthy dark skin, not pitch-black like Africans, and certainly nothing like sly Slamse<sup>94</sup> from the east, who were not to be trusted. The Murrays had no further use for European blood, no need for more mixing; they were proud colored people who kept their distance from others. [...] The important thing was that that father was visibly of European stock (138-139).

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<sup>93</sup> <https://dsae.co.za/entry/meester/e04675>

<sup>94</sup> See Glossary.

In this quotation where hair again stands out as an important factor for “genetic stability”, Nicholas’ disregard for other coloureds (as happened, for instance, with Andrew Le Fleur in *David’s Story*) seems conspicuous. This recurrent prototypical character is again used by Wicomb to prove that, even after Apartheid, the complexity of the coloured issue is still latent within the population. Nicholas, despite sharing skin colour with almost nine percent of the South African population (Seekings, 2005: 53), considers himself and his family not only superior to other coloureds but even to Europeans “corrupted by Africa” (138). Does Nicholas then suggest that, the older the family tree is, the better your heritage is? Having grown up with Nicholas, Mercia has thus acknowledged and internalized the social superiority her father has taught her. This inherited attitude challenges Wicomb’s theory on coloured shame (1998) and confirms Bhabha’s mimicry by proving that such structures of power exist (1984). Usually, both theories can be combined for the relation they have for unpacking coloured identity. Coloureds have been constantly diminished for not belonging to the main racial categories, developing a weak sense of identity that has been following them for decades (1984). Because of this, middle-class coloureds tried to resemble as much as possible the white – and socially superior – part of the population, to achieve the identity stability they have been awaiting (1984). However, the sense of superiority the Murrays display makes me wonder about the extent to which Mercia and Nicholas try to imitate whites. In other Wicomb works there are characters that perfectly fit in this mimicry, such as Frieda’s mother in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, or Helen in *Playing in the Light*, both aware of their colouredness but still trying to ‘play white’. Notwithstanding these characters’ mimicry, this novel presents a different attitude towards colouredness, an approach not necessarily related to social progress.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and related to the aforementioned identity construction, there are the issues of home and belonging, presented through the diasporic character of Mercia. From the very beginning, Wicomb explores the diasporic mind to show the social misconception that usually exists between diaspora and cosmopolitanism:

How far you have travelled. You should write your story. Mercia has met this with embarrassed silence. They are mistaken, also about the source of her embarrassment. Yes, she has come a long way geographically, crossing a continent, but what people really are alluding to is what they believe to be a cultural gap, a self-improvement implied in the distance between then and now, the here of Europe seen as destination. In that sense, Mercia is not conscious of having traveled any great distance. As she once deigned to explain to Craig, her humble origins left little improvement (9).

By referring to Mercia's own opinion on self-experience, the reader discovers that migration does not entail the cultural adaptation of immigrants that is somehow demanded. It shows how they manage to adjust to different conditions, even if the individual retains his/her higher social status upon arrival. In Guarducci's words: "Mercia Murray's diasporic standpoint makes way for a series of sharp comments on exile, belonging and affiliation that once again stress the uneasiness of the relationship between the individual and her space" (2015: 30). In fact, Mercia refers to this uneasiness throughout the whole novel, displaying a sense of discomfort while thinking about home:

How effortlessly the word comes: home, the place she has not lived in for more than twenty-six years. Hot, oppressive, and heavy with the memories of growing up under the eagle eye of the old man, Our Father. [...] Home, no more than a word, its meaning hollowed out by the termites of time, a shell carrying only a dull ache for the substance of the past (18).

Mercia's unfavorable perspective of home derives from Nicholas who, despite seeing no distinction between living and staying (15), he did see it between living and belonging, and accordingly instilled that idea in his children:

The people around them were not their kind, and thus Nicholas taught his children to speak English. Which meant that they were not to play with others who spoke Afrikaans. [...] It was, according to their father, important to remember that they did not belong there.

Then where did they belong? they wanted to know.

[...] Why belong to any place or any people in particular? They simply belonged, a word that need not be followed by where or to. [...] Yes, their home was there, but the Murrays couldn't possibly think of belonging there. As long as they could fit in anywhere with decent people, also city people, that was the important thing, that was where they would be at home. By which, of course, he meant English-speaking coloreds with straight hair, skin color being less important than hair, the crucial marker of blackness. [...] Thus, the notion of home was revised (81).

At this point Wicomb has made clear the importance hair has for coloureds, with examples such as Frieda in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Helen in *Playing in the Light*, or Julie from 'Friends and Goffels' in *The One That Got Away*. The fact that hair was "the crucial marker of blackness" (81) created within coloureds "a fixation based on racial aesthetics as to remain a part of the "higher" echelon of the coloured community" (Lytle, 2014: 200). Due to the classism displayed in this quotation, the classist traits displayed in this passage will be explored below. However, the interest of the passage here lies in Nicholas' perception of home. For him, Kliprand was "his place of domicile, but saw no need to abandon his position as an outsider, [a place where] he could not very well belong" (137). While his perspective can be considered understandable and licit, the reasons he conveys to argue his not-entire feeling of belonging spoil his opinion. His view, which I cannot completely agree with precisely for the classist attitudes attached to the concept of home, actually relates to Brah's question of home, which differentiates between feeling at home and calling a place home (1996: 197):

Home is neither permanent nor set but a place or feeling that is variable and malleable. [Home] is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging' (1996: 192).



Building on the influence Nicholas had on Mercia's and Jake's perception of home and belonging, he also makes reference to the connection that exists between coloureds and belonging. For instance, when Nicholas explains to his children that, because of their colouredness, and since they do not belong to South Africa because it belongs to white people (145), they "are free, above geography. [They] are free to belong anywhere. The children snort at his distorted idea of freedom" (145). Nicholas' statement about colouredness and belonging agrees with Wicomb's idea of racialized contemporary South Africa: "the New South Africa is too much like the old and is therefore necessarily a racial affair. [...] Moreover, we have all become rather perversely attached to apartheid" (1993: 28). In his *Native Nostalgia*, Dlamini argues that black South Africans could also live contented lives under Apartheid, due to their sense of community bond that bounded them together. For those people were not directly involved in the struggle, the racial affair was not that hateful. Thus, it is probably this continuous racialization of colouredness what generates Nicholas' refusal of belonging, instilled in his children's minds:

If Kliprand is not home to Nicholas, it cannot be home to his children. They were born there, raised in Namaqualand, but no, they should not think of it as home. Physical geography is not everything; it is important, in the interest of self-improvement, to dispense with the notion of home. It is after all an excessive sense of belonging that leaves the people of Kliprand tied to the place. [...] Thus his children should not think of this place of their birth, burdened as it is with the arcane complexities of belonging, as their home (144).

Despite Nicholas' confusing message about home, and Mercia's recurrent rejection of Kliprand as home, her perspective of home fluctuates throughout the story. Once she arrives in Cape Town, she "knows that this is home. There is a part of her, perhaps no more than insensate buttocks, that sink into the comfortable familiarity of an old sofa" (127). The reason for this might be because Mercia's rejection towards South Africa does not only derive from Apartheid but from the loss of her mother: "The twelve-year-old

child felt the thrall of placelessness. Ghostly and vague as it was, it whispered the promise of escape from the dreariness of Kliprand and the vulgarity of Apartheid” (162). This sentence demonstrates that Mercia’s decision to move was primarily triggered by her mother’s death, rather than by Apartheid. However, the reader will never know what would have happened if Mercia’s mother had not died. In fact, during her visit to Kliprand she recurrently recognizes South Africa as home although “everything is topsy-turvy” (168), and despite the cultural gap that has been growing since her departure: “what is happening to Mercia, the carnivore, here in Kliprand? Is this the measure of her distance from the place, from her home, her people?” (168). Within Mercia’s fluctuant opinion on the concept of home, she resists admitting that Kliprand is her actual home: “how else is she to get through the days in this place called home? [...] This home where Jake snores and Sylvie squeals is not a place to yearn for a dubious past” (171-172). Despite all the instances where Mercia finds herself thinking about Kliprand as home, by the time of her return, she is aware of the fact that “she has to keep moving, get away from this place called home. [...] And she, Mercia, must live, will live, as long as she can get away. Out of Kliprand. Out of the country” (198). While this might literally refer to moving away from a country devastated by the Apartheid regime, it also refers to escaping from problems. Familiar problems such as Jake’s alcoholism or her role in Nicky’s (Jake and Sylvie’s son) development, as well as the social problems her country was living even after Apartheid. This assumption comes after her return to Scotland, where she wonders: “is this where she lives? Is this her home? [...] If this home away from Kliprand and her family feels strange, it is only a question of time, a matter of half an hour at most, for the emptiness to be filled with what soon will be familiar routines” (222-223). But Mercia gives no chance to these routines in “a place that no longer carries meaning for her” (228) and finally decides that “when [she] put[s] the flat on the market, it will no longer be [her]

home” (228). After her return, both Mercia and the reader realize that there is no place where she feels the homeliness she has been searching for throughout the whole story. She has not been attached to a place or to people in either country, demonstrating the diasporic dilemma of belonging. Dealing with diaspora, Cohen states that “a diaspora meant “dispersion” and if people were dispersed, some point of origin – more concretely a homeland – was necessarily implied” (2007: 2). However, Mercia does not seem to follow the diasporic pattern Cohen conveys, but that of Stock, who asserts that home is a compelling notion for those who live in the diaspora (2010: 25). Safran’s theory on diaspora also relates to Mercia’s attitude:

Some diasporas persist – and their members do not go “home” – because there is no homeland to which to return; because, although a homeland may exist, it is not a welcoming place with which they can identify politically, ideologically or socially; or because it would be too inconvenient and disruptive, if not traumatic, to leave the diaspora. In the meantime, the myth of return serves to solidify ethnic consciousness and solidarity . . . when the family is threatened with disintegration (1991: 91).

This accurately indicates what happens to Mercia Murray. Despite her former apparent eagerness to come back home after Apartheid, the socio-political context of the time prevents Mercia from perceiving South Africa as the place she imagined the country would be after the regime. On the other hand, and despite the years Mercia has lived in Scotland, Glasgow has not become her home either. Through her flat in Scotland, which she decides to sell, the notion of home as a safe space is discussed: “but a flat, says Smithy, is not the same as a city, or a country” (231). Here, Mercia’s Scottish friend, Smithy, conveys the different levels of home the individual can create. Did the flat contribute to Mercia feeling out of place and is that the reason why she is selling it? Smithy’s reflection proves the importance of recognizing the safe space, which is not measured according to size but according to familiarity and comfortability. All these examples develop her concern for the “unreliable status of origins and originals” (Coetzee

2010: 559) and the difficulty of untangling the question of home and belonging from a theoretical point of view (Guarducci, 2015: 28). However, by the end of the novel the reader is not provided with Mercia's final decision, whether she stays in Scotland or in South Africa. Interestingly, when Mercia goes back to Kliprand to bury Jake and considers taking Nicky with her, Sylvie explains to the child "that one day he will visit Auntie Mercy in England" (239). Does this mean Mercia is moving to England or does it show Sylvie's unawareness of British geography? Thus, in terms of home, Wicomb's introduction of England at the very end adds ambiguity and confusion to Mercia's untold decision.

An intriguing moment in Mercia's perception of home comes with the language issue and, specifically, with the speaking agency, something striking considering the little space coloureds had to speak for themselves in South Africa: "this place, home, is a place for doing and thinking at an angle, a place where speech, triumphantly over genteel silence, has many different functions" (39). While speech actually has different functions is undoubtedly true, I wonder here about the specific functions Mercia refers to – self-expression, negotiation, etc. Despite this initial statement at the beginning of the novel, the story later reveals that Mercia does not take advantage of these multiple speech functions. In fact, Desiree Lewis considers "interruptive languages" as part of the diasporic identity formation (2001: 155); an idea that supports Mercia's inability to benefit from these functions. As will be seen later, she does not say anything to Sylvie, her sister-in-law who Mercia cannot really stand, neither does she talk about the rape episode between her father and Sylvie. Moreover, she does not tell Jake all her thoughts about him and the family he has created. So, I wonder to what extent Mercia uses this agency she claims to have in South Africa. To exemplify this idea, when Mercia receives Jake's letter, she wonders about the child, Nicky, who she barely knows but she thinks

that “it was so much easier not to ask questions” (14)<sup>95</sup>. Furthermore, Mercia, who does not understand Jake’s letter, admits that “people seldom say what they mean” (14). Later in the story Mercia accepts that “she would like to take [Sylvie] firmly by the shoulders and say loud and clear: it’s over; save yourself, go away and leave him to his drink” (51). But Mercia never tells Sylvie her opinion on the latter’s family situation; and this reluctance to speak ratifies the complexities of Marion’s relationships. These examples prove that, even with the agency required, she prefers not to use it, dismantling then her former assertion of South Africa as a place where speech triumphs over silence. Besides, Mercia’s silence contradicts her position as university lecturer, which should allow her to embrace that agency so desired by the subaltern individuals (Spivak, 1988). On the one hand, Mercia would actually fit in the subaltern figure for her colouredness and gender, two social factors that usually relegate the individual to a subordinate position, unless they belong to a high class. But on the other hand, Mercia is precisely the representation of determination and willpower, having moved abroad at a young age and making her own decisions without a superior voice talking on her behalf. Thus, Mercia remains in an in-between position in which she genuinely has agency but chooses not to use it.

Still in the same line that connects home and language, this sense of belonging Mercia seems to be looking for is glimpsed in Scotland, where “Mercia loved being called pal. [...] There you are, pal, or, Got the time, pal? she was named, felt the warmth of an embrace, a welcome that came close to a sense of belonging” (67). Here, speech does actually have a function, that of being in the already mentioned safe space. However, and despite the apparent connectedness between Mercia and her new ‘home’, this is one of the few instances where Mercia actually feels at home in Glasgow, what leads to the

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<sup>95</sup> As happens with Grant Fotheringay in *The One That Got Away*, who preferred not to ask questions. See Chapter 6.

conclusion that, despite these kinds of moments, Mercia did not find Glasgow her home. On the other hand, the language gap seems more evident in South Africa, where Mercia admits that her “Afrikaans is rusty; her ability to make small talk rudimentary [...] It is of course not only a matter of language. Everything in her dealings with Sylvie is uncomfortable, creaking with embarrassment” (51). This does not only dismantle again Mercia’s aforementioned assertion on speaking agency – as she is not able to properly communicate with non-English speakers – but also proves again the superiority Mercia exerts over Sylvie. This is shown by the discomfort Mercia feels when dealing with Sylvie when, in this particular case at least, the understanding is impossible due to Mercia’s weakened ability to speak Afrikaans.

The fact that Mercia feels uncomfortable with Afrikaans does not solely derive from being taught to speak in English, but also, once again, from her father’s animosity towards Afrikaans: “we may not have in English different verbs for animals’ eating and drinking, it is too civilized a language” (140-141). Mercia’s opinion is remarkable as, unlike other attitudes she inherited, she manages to adapt to modern times when explaining to Nicky the benefit of learning various languages. Thus, in this sense, she breaks with her father’s hostility: “Mercia explains that it is simply good to know more than one language, that it allows you to talk to different kinds of people, and living as he does in South Africa, he should also learn Xhosa. [...] But Nicky says he hopes not” (152). While Mercia demonstrates a shift in attitude, Nicky seems to have inherited Nicholas’ animosity towards various languages. The interest of this lies in the fact that a child could not possibly build a fair opinion on linguistic issues, so it uncovers Sylvie and Jake’s belittlement of languages spoken by blacks. Thus, it is through the character of Mercia that Nicky learns that “it is so much better to speak more than one language”

(155). Wicomb actually dealt with this issue in her essay “Culture Beyond Color?”

(1993):

In our situation, where apartheid conditions have militated against the linguistic development of black people, both in the imposition of European languages and the neglect of education, the function of the literary prize becomes obvious. Not only is it inappropriate or inadequate as a means of encouraging writing, but it actively perpetuates inequity by rewarding those who have been privileged (Wicomb, 1993: 28).

However, and despite the importance of education in the quotation above, language – and specifically lesser taught languages – is directly attached to other social factors such as race and class, race being one of the main reasons for the linguistic gap that exists in South Africa even before colonization. Notwithstanding this, racism does not prevail in *October*, as mentioned before, due to the fact that the novel is based on family relations and thus, it is challenging to find racist attitudes amongst family members. The very first reference to this racism comes when Wicomb describes Jake through the prototypical racist description of non-whites: “he is a drunk, and wears his drunkenness on his sleeve, which is to say that there are bags under his eyes, that his face is a flushed mass of veins barely concealed by his dark brown coloring” (3). While this is an accurate representation of Jake, what he represents is precisely the sometimes-mistaken quintessential prejudices against non-whites in South Africa. Furthermore, dealing with racial stereotypes it is Nicholas – the figure from whom both Mercia and Jake inherited their condescending nature – who, despite his colouredness, still wonders about Craig (Mercia’s ex-partner) and whether there were “any problems with this man. [...] Why has Craig not managed to get a woman of his own kind? What was wrong with him?” (19). Not only does Nicholas distrust Craig for choosing a coloured woman but he also congratulates Mercia for choosing

a man from Europe, but he hoped that she would be careful, vigilant against anything shameful.

What on earth did he mean?

We-ell, he said, people say that European men, at least here in South Africa, are disrespectful, that they hate themselves for going with nonwhite women (20).

The issues of home, language and race – the three topics that have already arisen in this chapter – are wittily combined in Mercia’s thoughts about living and staying in both Kliprand and Glasgow:

South Africans, having inherited the language from the Scots, speak of staying in a place when they mean living there. Which is to say that natives are not expected to move away from what is called home. Except, of course, in the case of the old apartheid policy for Africans, the natives who were given citizenship of new Homelands where they were to live. But they were required after all to work and therefore to stay in the white cities from which they had been ejected. *Come stay with me and be my slave...* (14).

This intriguing passage summarizes South African history of colonization and Apartheid at the same time that it explains the current situation of the country derived precisely from the unfair requirements to fit in the national archetype. Butler & Spivak summarize this idea of qualifying for national belonging:

The nation-state assumes that the nation expresses a certain national identity, is founded through the concerted consensus of a nation, and that a certain correspondence exists between the state and the nation. The nation, in this view, is singular and homogeneous, or, at least, it becomes so in order to comply with the requirements of the state. The state derives its legitimacy from the nation, which means that those national minorities who do not qualify for “national belonging” are regarded as “illegitimate” inhabitants (2007: 30-31).

In fact, symbolically, Mercia discovers that her name, despite the Christian meaning of ‘mercy’ her parents gave to the name, “was a place, an English region, the name for border people, which she supposes has its own resonance for certain South Africans like them, or for that matter her own liminal self” (27). Her name represents her diasporic identity,



at the same time that her diasporic identity represents the coloureds' dilemma both abroad and within the national structure for belonging neither to whites nor to blacks. As regards names there is Antoinette, Mercia's mother, who was named with "a grand English name [to] cancel out the Afrikaans surname with its reference to madness<sup>96</sup>" (114). Being, in the words of Butler & Spivak, "illegitimate inhabitants" in South Africa was directly attached to townships. To some extent, this can relate to the issue of home I have been dealing with above. When Sylvie announces that they are moving to one of the government's RDP<sup>97</sup> houses, Mercia's first concern is what people will think about her family:

How strange that the architects of these townships, living as they no doubt do in comfortable houses lost in large gardens, and well out of sight of their neighbors, should imagine that the poor want to huddle together in cramped conditions. [...] The state of the country, with nothing working! The blacks now wanting to kill all the coloureds, even swarming into Kliprand, into the RDP houses. Who know what will happen to them in such a place?

Precisely, Mercia retorts, if you don't know what will happen there, there's no basis for racist assumptions. And people can't swarm into their own country; they belong here. Namaqualand can also be their home; she hears herself saying.

The girl laughs mockingly. Ooh, you Murrays have such bakgat<sup>98</sup> ideas. Jake also says she should stop talking like a white person (44).

Aside from the classism displayed in this quotation according to the RDP architects, Sylvie's racism against blacks is dismantled by Mercia's resulting answer. Mercia's denial of Sylvie's anti-blackness raises several questions. Considering the classism Mercia displays throughout the novel, it seems hypocritical to judge Sylvie for her racist comment against blacks living in Kliprand when Mercia judges Sylvie, Jake and other

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<sup>96</sup> Antoinette's maiden surname is Malherbe.

<sup>97</sup> Reconstruction and Development Programme. South African socio-economic policy for housing after Apartheid.

<sup>98</sup> See Glossary.

characters for their economic status. However, due to the number of classist references in *October*, section 7.1 will be devoted to this issue.

Once again, hair always has space in the Wicomb oeuvre. This time, through the character of Mercia, who regrets referring to a white woman's hair:

she was blond or blond-streaked like the majority of women in Glasgow nowadays were. Oh, it made Mercia sick, her own delicate tiptoeing around markers of race, required to prevent others from thinking her sensitive about color. She had no such difficulty, thought that if there were a problem, it belonged to her beholder. No doubt a matter of multiple mirrors. Craig would have been the one person to know that she was comfortable in her skin (49).

Is Mercia “sensitive” or “comfortable” about her colouredness? Given the few references she makes about her skin colour, the reader would have asserted that Mercia is comfortable in both her skin and her social position. However, this quotation seems to prove the opposite. Her commentary on the white woman's hair and the nervousness she displays thinking about what others would think about her comment, suggests that she is probably not that comfortable being coloured, at least, in Glasgow. The role hair plays in South African social hierarchies has been exhaustively analyzed throughout this thesis, showing its importance for Wicomb's characters<sup>99</sup>. It is true that this novel does not provide the readers with many references to this, probably, due to the fact that *October's* focus seems to be on class and not that much on race.

Another recurrent resource in Wicomb's novels is the use of metaphors through fauna and flora (mermaids in *Playing in the Light* or the display of plants in *The One That Got Away*<sup>100</sup>). In *October*, Wicomb uses eggs to prove “how different types have different

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<sup>99</sup> Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 contain references to hair.

<sup>100</sup> See Chapters 5 and 6 for a deep analysis on mermaids and plants.

characteristics, different natures. Foolish to think that everyone is the same, or equal”

(84). Furthermore, the salmon are used to explain

not only the biological imperative to reproduce, but the need to return to origins, to the very same stream, to make their babies back home. [...] Call it a tourist attraction! It was indecent [...] the gravel redds murky with spawn and the self-satisfied rumbling parents, turned into shallow graves where, exhausted by the business of reproduction, the salmon must lie down and die (124-125).

The conversation about salmon starts before this quotation, when Craig offers to take Mercia to see whether the salmon are already back from the Atlantic trip (120). Thus, this quotation does not only refer to reproduction – which may refer to Mercia’s rejection of pregnancy – but to the diasporic identity. In this sense, that Mercia fits in the metaphor of traveling overseas, but always returning home. Furthermore, Samuelson agrees with the fact that Mercia “has the additional phobia of becoming a mother” (2017: 5). Could this derive from her homelessness? Because the mother, historically seen as the original home, precisely represents the feeling of homeliness Mercia seems to despise. Freud formulates this idea of the mother as “the place where everyone once lived” (1999: 151) and, despite the male approach Freud gives to his theory on the uncanny, it accurately depicts Mercia’s feeling of unhomely where “the uncanny is what was once familiar. The negative prefix *un-* is the indicator of repression” (1999: 151; his emphasis). Mercia’s constraint at home can then relate to Freud’s contradictory belief of the uncanny as familiar, positioning her in an in-between position between feeling unhomely (due to the loss of her mother) and feeling at home (Kliprand being her original home) at the same time.

When dealing with race, it is essential to take into account colonization. In previous chapters, I have explored the impact colonization had on South Africa, specifically the impact it has on recent generations, an interest that seems to increase in

young people. Younger characters in Wicomb's work are the more seemingly concerned with colonization. In *October*, the references to colonization Wicomb uses serve to prove this. For instance, when Sylvie talks about their sheep, the colonial symbology stands out: "once upon a time, she says, they would have been wild, doing their own sheep thing, and then people came along to domesticate them. Seduced them with ready-made food in winter, and that was the end of them. Fed and fattened so that they have lambs, and then the slaughter" (59). In this same line of colonizers arriving at the Cape the reader finds Mercia explaining to Nicky how the

Dutch sailors who, on their way to procuring Eastern spices, stopped at the Cape to cure their scurvy with sorrel. [...] She explains that scurvy led the Dutch to gardening and refreshing themselves at the Cape, that it could be seen as the root of all the country's troubles. Nicky the parrot repeats after her: the root of all our country's troubles (153).

Similar to the instances with Jane and the Doulton Fountain or Dorothy and the Botanic Gardens in *The One That Got Away*, Mercia also finds herself analyzing a colonial monument. "She came across a monument celebrating the emancipation of slaves. She had not known of any such monument, of any acknowledgment of slavery in colored communities, and the inscription of 1938, some century after the actual emancipation, was puzzling" (147). What differentiates this example from the aforementioned ones is the inaccuracy of time. Usually, the references Wicomb makes to monuments represent the distorted image Europeans had or wanted to give to the public. Yet, this example has the irrefutable stamp of ignorance. While the colonial misrepresentation would be on purpose, I wonder whether they could confuse the emancipation date. What I suggest, then, is that I find it difficult to believe they did it on purpose, which suggests that the person who wrote that date did not even know the correct date.

Furthermore, similar to *The One That Got Away* with the curry<sup>101</sup>, Wicomb uses food to depict colonial relation. In this sense, Mercia admits having learnt to cook her Cape dishes from an English chef, “gloriously freed by the fact that there is no oppressive tradition of fine British cuisine which demands slavish adherence” (171). It seems intriguing how Mercia, having lived half of her life in South Africa, has to learn the traditional cuisine from an English person. However, the importance food has in the Wicomb oeuvre lies in the fact that “culture in her work is a place where people struggle to make sense of life, through food, through memory [...] and history is the stuff that people pull on to make sense of things.” (Scully, 2011: 306-307).

After considering the main topics in this novel, where the concept of home resonates throughout the whole writing, I wonder about Mercia’s perspective. For Singh:

Most of [Wicomb’s] characters are incessantly in search of a stable home; they fluctuate between the different locations, seminally the “original” home and the “diasporic” home; though finally they find their “desired” or pertinent location of home, whether it is their native place or it is the place of settlement (Singh, 2018: 382).

However, Wicomb navigates Mercia’s continuous uncertainty about her home place to the extent that, even at the end of the novel, the reader is not provided with a definitive answer. While this leaves the question of belonging open, Wicomb makes clear how descendants of diasporic migrants react differently to the concepts of “home” and “belonging”. It is more complex for them to singularly identify themselves with any home (Stock, 2010: 26-27). Stock’s theory on second and third-generation migrants does indeed

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<sup>101</sup> In “The one that got away”, Mrs. Buchanan asks Jane about South African food and curry. Mrs. Buchanan’s comments represent the whites’ lack of awareness about other cultures – considering that the British brought curry from India and it became popular in Britain for the Indian restaurants that were staffed by people from the subcontinent. However, the history of the South Asian diaspora in the Eastern region since 1860 may place curry as a South African cultural dish such as, for instance, the “Bunny Chow”, a bread filled with curry.

relate to the character of Mercia, who finds it challenging to settle in a place where she never feels completely comfortable.

Both Mercia's uncertainty and her open ending are reflected in Pamela Scully's vision on Wicomb's characters:

I argue that Wicomb's work rejects the notion of a cosmopolitanism of urban spaces, of negotiation; in fact, rejects the dominant notions of cosmopolitanism altogether. Wicomb rejects the injunctions of our era to affirm the possibilities of tidy tolerance and reconciliation, instead writing in the spaces of ongoing uncertainty, brutalities large and small, and refuses us easy closure (2011: 300).

Although I agree with Scully in the sense that Wicomb does not portray through her characters a utopian cosmopolitanism, I argue that the main characters (the ones supposed to convey the main topics) are not the ones who display this cosmopolitanism Scully misses, but instead the secondary characters that assist the protagonists in their *bildungsroman* do so. However, it is interesting how, Mercia Murray being a character that could be considered cosmopolitan in the literal sense of the word, actually does not fit in the idealized cosmopolitanism that "underestimates the inherent tensions that pertain in the creation of any solidified "we" that gets to speak for a point of view [and that] underestimates the structural inequalities that prevent individuals and groups from even participating in a conversation" (Scully, 2011: 302). Contrarily, she would fit in what Attridge calls "idioculture", which signals the "continual evolution of a person's unique (indeed singular) cluster of attributes, preferences, habits, and knowledges, not all in harmony with one another" (Attridge, 2015: 61). Attridge's "idioculture" idea relates to the concept of *bildungsroman* in the sense of constant evolution, but it considers the external and sometimes colliding factors that shape the individual. Thus, Mercia Murray, the character who could have represented a transnational social development, eventually become another failure for cosmopolitanism.

## 7.1. The Haves and Have-nots in the Family: A Case Study of the Murrays

Social class has been the main issue of this dissertation, not considered as the only – and isolated – topic but, as intersectionality argues, entwined with other social factors that shape society. However, the racial issue has been demonstrated to be the essential point of conflict for the South African population. Thus, the whole of Wicomb’s work displays what has been the major issue for the country in recent history. Nevertheless, *October* plays an important role for this thesis for the classist attitudes within the Murray family. This novel allows Wicomb to show the role class plays in South African society, only sometimes blurred by the racial issue due to the fact that most of its characters come either from the same family or similar backgrounds. Thus, in terms of class, *October* provides the reader with the maximum number of references in comparison to other works. This analysis of *October* resonates with Wright’s term “mediated class locations”, which implies a class analysis within the same family (1997: 27). However, this approach has been challenged by other critics who have considered the dominant family member’s class position to be the same for the whole household (Runciman, 1990: 382), which, at least in this particular case, would not account for the difference between the characters’ classes in *October*. Other critics such as Goldthorpe have attached this dominant individual to the male figure which, again, would not work for this analysis as it is Mercia who has the dominant income. Yet, despite the individuals’ wealth, other factors such as conduct, relations or education that also shape the class categories (Bourdieu, 1979) will be considered to explore the classist attitudes of Mercia Murray.

Although Mercia Murray – who considers herself to be in a “privileged position” (27) is by far the most classist character in the novel, other characters such as Nicholas (Mercia’s father) or Sylvie (Jake’s wife) also display their classism throughout the whole novel. From the very beginning Sylvie boasts about being raised under “a good zinc roof

[in] Kiewiet Street” (6), in Roodepoort, a posh city near Johannesburg, known for its prime location and quality schools and medical facilities. In fact, Sylvie, who married Jake for the good social position of the Murrays, does not see the point of “being married to a Murray who has sunk lower than the lowest farm laborer” (23). Furthermore, she justifies beating her child Nicky by ascribing it to the impoverished situation of the country; blaming the socio-economic scene instead of her educational abilities: “there overseas where people still are decent, children may know how to behave [...] but here, in this godforsaken place, nothing other than a smack will keep a child on the straight and narrow” (30). To have a better understanding of the Willemse family Wicomb provides the reader with a short description of Sylvie’s family and their classist airs:

The Willemse sisters were respectable, and not bad looking either, but too full of themselves, people said, almost as snooty as the Murrays, whose house had a verandah and glazed windows. Which the light-skinned Willemses did not have, and neither did they have such good hair, such good blood, so why they gave themselves airs and graces, no one knew (92).

As happened with Mercia and Jake’s inheritance of Nicholas’ prejudices and sense of superiority, Sylvie’s family also displayed their classism towards other family members with a lower social position – because classism is not only displayed by the rich, but by anyone who has someone economically below them. This reflects Bhabha’s theory on mimicry, where he argues that “mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (1984: 280). In other words, the denial of the self allows the individual to condemn others for what they have in common (colouredness, social position...), thus proving their social superiority. When talking about Ousie, who worked in Cape Town, “they boasted about her neat check uniform and the white cap that was nothing like a servant’s. They said that Ousie was *trying*” (90; Wicomb’s emphasis).



On a previous visit, when Mercia arrives in Kliprand, Jake not only boasts about his new social position but also, aware of his sister's social position, seems surprised by Mercia's clothes:

So here I am, Mr. Bigshit, I mean Mr. Bigshot, driving a Chevy in my suit and tie. I'm in the liquor business, the only secure business in South Africa, one that will never go under. [...] Then he looked her up and down, puzzled by her plain skirt and T-shirt, the scuffed flat shoes. Aren't you supposed to be some grand professor or something? So what's it with the clothes? Do you think you have to dress down for us? Are we not good enough for you? For a proper hairdo and makeup? We're not plaasjapies<sup>102</sup> anymore. I'm a city playboy, don't you know (21).

What Jake proves here is that, even with an apparent disinterest in class position, every individual aims to rise in the social hierarchy and aspires to respectability. As mentioned earlier, Mercia and Jake represent how each individual takes advantage of opportunities. Considering that they come from the same socio-economic background, one may wonder about the reasons that led Jake not to take advantage of his family position when, in the words of Driscoll, "all the evidence suggests that class remains the single most powerful determinant of life chances" (Driscoll, 2009: 2). In fact, one of Wicomb's flashbacks shows the moment when Jake abandons his idea of social upgrading:

university loans are only for those who become teachers. Can't face that, so I'm off. [...] All those pathetic tales of a snot-nosed barefoot child with no schooling, pulling himself up by his own bootstraps, dragging himself through night school, the scrimping and scraping by and going without in order to fulfill his promise to Mummy that we'll go to university – I've had enough of that (79).

Another important aspect considering Jake's lack of concern for social class, is that he expects the classist individual (Mercia in this particular case) to behave and pretend to be socially superior. Jake's prejudice against his sister recalls Seekings'

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<sup>102</sup> See Glossary.

analysis about how cohabitation affects the behaviour of dependent members. He considers it probably best “not to assume that adult men are always the dominant individual in the household, determining households’ class position” (2003: 15). However, the study on dependent members seems to be limited, since “there appears to be no data on attitudes and behaviour *within* families or households in South Africa” (2003: 15). Of course, his empirical study cannot be compared with a work of fiction but, even considering the fictional foundation this dissertation is based on, *October* provides an actual example of how income inequity affects familial relations.

Nicholas (who, after moving to Kliprand became “a first-class kind of man” (135)) gained that position due to his strangeness, “for strangers must be honored. He was an outsider and so necessarily better” (136). Here, being an outsider automatically positions an individual in a higher social position, whereas nowadays, migrants from other parts of Africa trying to find work in South Africa, or migrants trying to reach Europe are often positioned in a lower social category. In a colonial context, Aijaz Ahmad claims that “the outsider [is] seen as bearer of that Enlightenment rationality” (1996: 289). This may explain Nicholas’s archaic perspective, but it does not align with the time this novel is set, as Ahmad’s quotation refers to white outsiders during colonization. His disregard for Kliprand – which was analyzed in depth in the previous section – is continuously glimpsed through his classism:

those people don’t wash their hands; one can’t risk eating their food. Here, Elim certainly had its share of poor people, but they at least were clean.

Mercia laughed at the poor-but-clean usage. [...] How shocked she was visiting fellow students’ flats in Europe, and then their family homes, where she found it hard to drink coffee from stained cups hastily rinsed under a tap. Cleanliness seemed inversely proportionate to privilege, as if people no longer able to pay others to look after them had failed to learn to clean themselves (148).

It is compelling how Mercia queries her father's criticism on the incongruous relation between poverty and cleanliness, but right after she recalls her surprise about the rich not being clean. Thus, for Mercia, there is no connection between poverty and cleanliness, instead, there is actually an inverse connection between wealth and cleanliness. This global dichotomy has been addressed by writers and scholars. George Orwell, for instance, deals with this issue in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)<sup>103</sup>, asserting that "the essential thing is that middle-class people believe that the working class are dirty... and, what is worse, that they are somehow inherently dirty" (130). Orwell's work aligns with Mercia's classist prejudices that dichotomize rich/poor and clean/dirty.

However, Mercia encapsulates most of the classist references in *October*. She lives in a "grand nineteenth-century Glasgow apartment, built by sugar and tobacco lords from the spoils of slavery [...] with the marble fireplace and mantelpiece at the far end" (222-223). When she arrives in Kliprand, she wonders about Jake's decision to stay there: "It puzzles her, Jake's retreat to Kliprand. They have always talked about it as a place to leave behind, so why has he stayed and taken this Kliprand girl as wife? Mercia corrects herself; she must not be unkind or snobbish" (29). There are two remarkable facts about Mercia's attitude: first of all, her awareness about her own classism and, secondly, how little she cares about being like that; or otherwise she would not have conveyed so many classist comments. Thus, Mercia fits in what Wright calls "class *consciousness*: The subjective awareness people have of their class interests and the conditions for advancing them" (2005: 21; his emphasis) and imposes her interests above others. Mercia's attitude would also relate to the BEE and how the black high spheres enjoyed a good position in

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<sup>103</sup> Orwell's work is divided into two sections: the first one contains his sociological research on the working class in the north of England before World War II, while the second part narrates Orwell's working-class background and his political moral sense (Pettican, 2022). Furthermore, in Chapter 5 there is also a reference about this dichotomized notion of class and cleanliness.

society which remained out of reach of the rest of the black population. In fact, there is another moment with Sylvie when Mercia “is embarrassed, critical of her own snobbery” (32) but then she wonders: “what on earth is Mercia to make of these people who belong to her” (32). “These people” refers to Jake, Sylvie and Nicky, but the fact that she uses the verb “belong” is nothing but striking, and symbolizes the class attitude that allows the individual to think of people as their belongings. She considers herself responsible for them for having money. In this same instance, Mercia realizes that Nicky’s clothes are from Mr. Price (32), a low-cost shop, which entails that her comment comes from her classist view against buying cheap clothes. But this is not the only instance where clothes stand out as a sign of income. When Nicky tears his trousers, Mercia and Sylvie discuss the possible solution and Sylvie explains to Mercia how she learnt to sew fashionable clothes because her family had no money, so “she doesn’t buy that stuff about being poor” (130). For her part, Mercia

says that if there’s an old pair that he’s outgrown, she could use the material to patch this one. She understands Sylvie’s frown. Faux-poor is the prerogative of the wealthy [...] so Mercia explains that patches these days are okay, ripped trousers twice as cool and not at all a sign of poverty. [...] It will have to be your fancy patches then, even if it makes no sense that people should want to pretend to be poor (131).

Even in the more subtle conversations, such as those about traditional food between Mercia and Sylvie, Mercia is incapable of hiding her animosity towards her poor sister-in-law. Mercia repeatedly refers to Sylvie as ignorant for being from the countryside, which is again another hint of her classism. In the analysis of class, Weininger studies Bourdieu’s class foundations in which both food (in the following quotation) and clothes (in the aforementioned quotation) are considered part of the “data on consumption practices and preferences, including those having to do with “canonized”

forms of culture [...] and those that belong to culture in the wider, anthropological sense of the term (food, sports, newspapers, clothing, interior decor, etc.) (2005: 93).

[Sylvie] if you could take back some of my culture in a Tupperware [...] her voice gathers volume as the empathic Namaqua speech takes courage from her sister-in-law's ignorance. [...] [Mercia] I've no idea how to make it, but you could buy a sourdough loaf, expensive it is too, at my local organic bakery in Scotland. [...] This is her territory, and she delights in the fancy woman's ignorance (55-57).

Public transport is also a topic in the class issue. In *Capitalism's Crises: Class Struggles in South Africa and the World* Alfredo Saad-Filho criticizes the "explosion in automobile sales [and the] woefully insufficient investment in infrastructure and in public transport" (2015: 183). The fact that governments do not publicise and invest in public transport while they allow the car market to rise uncontrollably only sharpens the socio-economic gap. Because of this, Wicomb places Mercia in a bus, making the protagonist wonder: "why was Mercia on a bus rather than on the train to Edinburgh? [...] So why not the bus, why not see for herself why people of her kind preferred the train?" (106). Mercia is already aware that the suitable transport for her position is the train. During the trip, she hears a child chattering and how "the young mother interjected with a soothing voice, reassuring him about the animals awaiting them in the zoo, the growling wra-wra of the lion; the hiss-ss of snakes. Christ, that was why people preferred the train" (108). What makes this excerpt classist is not only Mercia's differentiation between the train and the bus – the bus being the public transport for the poor – but also the fact that people talk and children travel in trains as well. Does she suggest that there are no children in trains? This suggests that what bothers Mercia is the lower position of both the passengers and the bus, and not the child himself.

Despite Mercia's awareness of her own classism, she does not seem to avoid it at any time, so she continues displaying her classism towards her sister-in-law. When she

discovered that Jake had married Sylvie, her only response was: “what on earth, Jaques, are you doing with one of those people?” (86), suggesting that Sylvie, and subsequently her family, was not enough for a Murray for their social position. As Jake conveys later in the novel:

The truth, dear sissie, Jake cackled, is that you disapprove. You’re no different from the old man. You don’t even know Sylvie, but you do know that she’s not your kind, not good enough for your brother. You’ve become European, too grand for us; you don’t belong here anymore. How bourgeois you’ve become, Mercy, a fine liberal you are.

Mercia stared at him, tongue-tied. Once upon a time she used to think of bourgeois as a dirty word. But the truth was that over the years the label of bourgeois like a garishly colored garment had faded into something less offensive, something perfectly wearable. Acceptable, because she was wearing it. [...] Certain aspects of the bourgeois I won’t deny, she admitted. Social and economic security is after all of value because it brings tolerance of the other, which can only be a good thing.

But which, Jake said triumphantly, you have just shown to not be the case. You are your father’s child, and Sylvie belongs to those other people who can’t be tolerated (159).

Despite the classism shown in this passage, the focus should be on the last part, where Mercia thinks that social and economic security is a synonym of tolerance. There are two ways to understand this assertion. On the one hand, Mercia would agree with Todorov’s belief:

This extraordinary success [that the colonized peoples have adopted our customs and have put on clothes] is chiefly due to one specific feature of Western civilization which for a long time was regarded as a feature of man himself, its development and prosperity among Europeans thereby becoming proof of their superiority: it is, paradoxically, Europeans’ capacity to understand the other (quoted in Spivak, 1996: 218).

On the other hand, Mercia would relate to Spivak’s idea of Westerners considering themselves as generous and kind towards the other (1988). While Todorov’s is an archaic understanding on how inter-cultural relations work, the second understanding may effectively explain the condescendence and disdain Mercia demonstrates towards Sylvie

and Jake. There are a couple of instances when Mercia thinks of Jake's decision of leaving the child, and she wonders about Sylvie's opinion:

the poor have always had to gird their loins and harden their hearts, packing off their children to be raised by grandparents. [...] the barbaric Homelands policy for those less privileged than coloreds was justified by the belief that black people do not care for their children in the usual ways. Just look at how they pass them round! Wages from the cities easily compensate for leaving behind children in the desolate Bantustans! Distancing herself from the cant, Mercia still cannot help thinking that Sylvie ought not to part from her child (41).

This quotation resonates with the widespread belief among the bourgeois who think that the poor do not love their children as they do. In fact, Mercia, who conveys this idea in the aforementioned passage, "distances herself" from the lower-class Sylvie belongs in order to maintain the social gap. Later she wonders again: "What, Mercia wonders, will happen to Sylvie? When all is done and dusted will Sylvie go quietly, launch herself into a new condition of single motherhood and ugly poverty?" (128). In the same line of Mercia thinking of Sylvie as poor, there is another instance where Mercia thinks about publishing a book and the following invitation that would bring, she wonders:

how do the poor manage? Must Sylvie put up forever with the attentions of a husband who seems to not like her anymore. [...] Where do people like Sylvie go? [...] Everything in her dealings with Sylvie is uncomfortable, creaking with embarrassment. A problem of class, Craig has proffered after her last visit, without the benefit of having met the woman, but what did he, a Brit, who had visited the country only once, know about the complexities of rural colored life? (50-51).

The intriguing issue here is how Mercia seems to think that she understands class better than Craig does – a questionable belief. Being herself from a coloured rural background directly allows Mercia to think of herself as more sympathetic with the lower classes. The relation between class and education in former years has been already studied throughout this thesis, education being an important factor for social upgrading. In fact,

Mercia conveys how “she would support the child financially, put him through school and university” (42). For example, in a conversation between siblings, Mercia criticizes Jake for not empathizing with their father: “you refuse to understand the pressures under which that generation was raised. [...] The large families, the poverty, and lack of education” (84). It is interesting how “poverty” and “lack of education” are intertwined to prove the attachment these two concepts had in previous generations, and how this connection is still ingrained in younger generations. Jacob Dlamini argues that, for former generations, education was synonym of freedom and that compelled them to provide their children with the highest education as possible (2009: 92). Besides, there are not only references to education itself, but how to educate. While Nicholas used a whip to educate Jake, and Sylvie uses a belt to educate Nicky, Mercia brings a different approach to education, one of providing the child with different options so he can decide which one would be better. Wicomb cleverly provides the reader with different instances where one can see the almost opposite ways of educating Nicky by Sylvie and Mercia. When Mercia takes Nicky for a walk, she tells him that he will “see that things [he does not] know can be looked up in a book” (38) and gives him options for taking flowers:

on the one hand: how beautiful these white flowers would look at home in a vase, how your mamma would love such a present; on the other hand, they’ll die so much sooner before they were meant to and, besides, any other children who come to explore here won’t be able to see them (38).

The child finally decides to take one to show his mother but, when they arrive home Sylvie answers: “why didn’t you pick some for Mamma? They last very, very long in water” (40). This exemplifies the difference between imposing a decision and allowing the child to choose between the options available. But, on the other hand, for Jake’s family, Mercia, “for all her supposed cleverness knows nothing of either children or sheep” (62). The two very different ways of educating a child can actually derive from



the contrasting class positions between Mercia and Jake/Sylvie, along with the life opportunities mentioned earlier. Richard Breen's analysis accurately represents how Mercia and Jake's opposite decisions have not only shaped their own lives but how they educate children:

if life chances determine the conditions under which certain types of action are undertaken – including the interests that people have (and which they may express in, say, voting) and the resources they can bring to bear (and which may be important in, say, shaping their children's educational attainment) – then variations in these actions will be structured according to class position (Breen, 2005: 49).

When dealing with education, Nicholas (Mercia and Jake's father) must be taken into consideration for all the biased thoughts he taught his children – something already mentioned in the previous section. For example, he was disappointed by Mercia's PhD in literature for her not being a real doctor, when, genuinely, the education jobs were “previously monopolised by white people (Seekings, 2003: 10). Thus, given the importance Nicholas gives to social hierarchy, he should have appreciated his daughter's position:

When Mercia gained her doctorate her father shook his head: a doctor of literature who could not even cure a headache? He hoped she would not go about calling herself doctor, making a fool of herself. Doctoring books, he said wistfully, well, what good could that do? He supposed if one day it brought a steady, well-paid job... (26).

This passage resonates with Dlamini's belief of former generations' fixation with higher education (2009). Nicholas, who belong to those former years when the access to university was restricted to the higher classes, conveys the classism attached not only to education but also to different degrees. The fact that Nicholas sees a PhD – despite being a high degree – as something useless is due to the fact that it is about literature. Those more 'vocational' disciplines were – and still are – seen not as posh or productive as other

disciplines, such as medicine, for instance. Mercia, on the other hand, representing new generations, understands the importance of achieving a PhD, regardless of the subject. In terms of going to university there is Fanus, an old friend of Mercia, who “would not be going to university [because] the Lategans were poor, the father a farm laborer who would not manage to pay for higher education” (181), showing the other side of South African society. In the following excerpt, education, age and *clethnicity* are entwined to exemplify the difficultness of conviviality between races and ages. However, the final outcome of this conversation between Mercia and Jake about their father is social class:

the price for this grand education is eternal obedience. [...] Look where obedience has got him. A bloody apartheid collaborator. I’m surprised he’s not stood for the tricameral colored parliament. [...] And what about Africans? Did he teach us to respect the people of this country? Or the people of Kliprand? What does he mean when he says they’re not our kind of people?

Then Mercia refused to argue with him. Jake was intolerant, did not appreciate the difficulties of a previous generation who barely managed to raise their heads above water. You don’t understand how difficult is to think outside of the dominant ideology, she sighed.

Ideology! [...] The people around them were not their kind, and thus Nicholas taught his children to speak English. Which meant that they were not to play with others who spoke Afrikaans. [...] It was, according to their father, important to remember that they did not belong there. [...] He explained that Kliprand was inhabited by uncouth, uneducated people. Yes, their home was there, but the Murrays couldn’t possibly think of belonging there (80-81).

The Tricameral Parliament Jake mentions refers to the Apartheid court that was established between 1984 and 1994 where restrictive policies for the coloured and Indian populations were installed, limiting their political voice in the country’s legislations<sup>104</sup>. Furthermore, from 1969 to 1980, a Coloured Persons Representative Council in South Africa was meant to represent coloured South Africans in the Tricameral Parliament. The fact that Jake thinks of Nicholas as a Tricameral Parliament supporter explains how Nicholas’ racist and classist – as well as incoherent – mind would have agreed with

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<sup>104</sup> See Chapter 2 for more information about the Tricameral Party.

restrictive policies for coloureds, being himself coloured, although he does not consider himself of the same social status than other coloureds (coloureds from Kliprand, for instance). However, the intransigence Jake condemns in his father resonates with his own stubbornness towards Nicholas, as Jake is incapable of understanding his father's reasons to behave the way he did. While this excerpt can be related to the racial issue, I argue that the reason for Nicholas' eagerness to stand out among others is not only about skin colour but about social class. That is why, despite being coloured, he taught his children to speak English – a determining factor for social position<sup>105</sup>. He instilled in their minds their unbelonging to the place – because Nicholas felt hierarchically superior in many aspects, not only in terms of race.

The social upgrade Sylvie could have achieved was truncated by Nicholas' rape, although this comes to the reader in the second half of the novel.

He told her to unbutton her shirt and free her new breasts, small as green apples. [...] Meester said that God had made Eve to be adored and looked at by Adam in all her naked beauty, that there was nothing for Sylvie to fear. [...] I have come in sin. I must ask for forgiveness, but you are so beautiful, so very beautiful, and his voice, his body, trembled with appreciation for her (190-192).

Previously, her family was “planning for Sylvie to train as a teacher” (65). However, “after school, after all the things that happened, that filled their heads and leaked silent poison into the house, there was little else. [...] Sylvie was very, very lucky, they said, and her face fell. Oom<sup>106</sup> Lodewyk would take her on in his butchery” (99). Sylvie's eagerness to rise up the social ladder is accentuated in the butchery, where she created a whole character “like the film star on TV, the one in *Egoli*” (102), by covering her naked body with a sausage “like a rick silk scarf” (102). This intimate moment confirms the

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<sup>105</sup> In *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Frieda's father, Mr. Shenton, also encouraged his daughter to acquire a high level of English, among other things, to achieve a better social position.

<sup>106</sup> See Glossary.

inferiority complex she drags throughout her whole life; a complex that can also be attached to the character of Jake. Wright, despite his focus not being specifically South African, mentions Charlesworth and Bourdieu in his analysis on how the youngest generations of the working class have fallen into scarcity and shortfall. The following passage aligns with Jake's reduced existence that represents a percentage of the younger generation:

the younger members of the working class – despite sharing similar life conditions and a similar lifestyle – exhibit a collective identity that has slipped altogether below the threshold of discursive articulation. Under these conditions, their symbolic existence is reduced to what Bourdieu (1984: 178) calls a “lifestyle ‘in-itself’” – that is, its characteristic practices and objects function primarily as signs of deprivation, and thus, as stigmata (Charlesworth, 2000: 150–202) (2005: 117).

Finally, an intriguing moment comes with the idealization versus the reality of countryside life, both perspectives paradoxically stated by Mercia. On the one hand she realizes “the apparent lack of new spring growth, the lambs are gamboling in that desolate veld” (57). On the other hand, she thinks of “the clichés of the countryside sprang to life, with lambs gamboling on brand-new legs, yes, actually leaping joyfully in the reluctant sunlight” (69). What is then what denotes the difference for Mercia? The first instance happens during her stay in Kliprand while the second one takes place near Glasgow. It is revealing how, depending on the place, Mercia finds the countryside a desirable place or somewhere to escape from. Usually, the countryside is seen by classist people as less developed areas where families with a lower income live. When comparing two countrysides, one from a first world country, and the other one from a developing country, the former is perceived as bucolic and idyllic and the latter is attached to underdevelopment and impoverishment. However, Mercia seems to give little importance to travelling and what this has brought her. In the previous section it was seen how she considers her journey unproductive but, she considers that, despite the fact that “travelling

had brought her very little [it has brought her] the civility achieved through money” (128). I fail to see the relation between the civility achieved through money and travelling. Does not money bring civility without travelling? Does she refer to the fact that she made money in Glasgow? And last but not least, why does money bring civility? Can’t someone be civilized and poor at the same time? All these incongruities derive from Mercia’s incessant classism that distances her from separating money and social position from every aspect of her life. The whole novel presents an incoherent protagonist, who, despite her education and her awareness of the world, refuses to sympathize with those who differ from her. This disregard for her own people resonates again with the black high spheres in the BEE, whose power and economic profit was not distributed to the general black population. However, it remains unknown whether Wicomb meant Mercia to be this irrational in order to illustrate the incomprehensibility of the higher classes.

For a better understanding of Mercia’s classism, one must take into account the way in which this classism emerges and develops. Seekings establishes two ways for class mobility: “intra-generational mobility” which means that the improvement happens throughout the course of the individual’s life, and the second is “inter-generational mobility” which means that the improvement occurs between generations (2003: 43). From what we can extract from the novel, Mercia would fit in both mobilities. Having access to university and her following move to Glasgow allowed her to ascend to a higher social position. However, she also fits in the inter-generational mobility due to the socio-economic improvement from her parents to her. Despite Nicholas’ accommodated social position in Kliprand, Mercia recalls her youth living in an “old house built of clay bricks baked in the sun” (71), which allows the reader to think of the Murrays as a formerly lower-income family.

Throughout her whole oeuvre, Wicomb has displayed the main difficulties coloureds – from very diverse backgrounds – have to cope with in Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa. Her work, along with most of both literary and scientific studies, has its focus on the issue of race, which “serves to obscure even the *possibility* of collecting data on other criteria, such as class” (Seekings, 2003: 2; his emphasis). However, this emphasis on race was blurred “under apartheid, [when] the basis of disadvantage shifted from race to class (Seekings, 2005: 4). Whether this is true or not for critics, Wicomb’s chronological work proves that class has been a factor in the increase for upward mobility, and her most accurate example is Mercia Murray. “Class position is a determinant of the individual’s conditions of action” (Weber, 1922: 929) and *October* proves so with Mercia and Nicholas encapsulating all the attitudes, mindset and chauvinism expected in a classist individual. Concurrently, Sylvie and Jake embody the inferiority complex and mimicry attitudes attached to less socio-economically developed individuals. The range of characters Wicomb presents in this novel serves as a small sample of South African society and underscores the sometimes-forgotten importance class has for its individuals’ upward mobility.

## 8. “Faux-poor is the prerogative of the wealthy”<sup>107</sup>

The analysis carried out of the exploration of how Zoë Wicomb’s fiction portrays the fragmented realities of Apartheid and the post-Apartheid years was not meant to prove class to be more significant than race. Instead, the aim was to explore the extent to which social class has been beneficial or unfavorable for each character. However, as discussed throughout this thesis, the racial issue in South Africa has been exhaustively analyzed, both sociologically and literarily speaking. Nevertheless, this dissertation is based on the idea that the class issue seems to be blurred by “the understandable national obsession with race” (Seekings, 2003: 55) and that this has created a research gap in postcolonial studies and South African literary studies. Thus, I have made no attempt to survey what has become a massive field, but instead steer my selection of these issues and debates in the direction I see Wicomb’s fiction taking.

Class has been seen to play a determinant role for society even when the racial issue muddies other social factors. Frieda Shenton, David Dirkse (along with Sally and Dulcie), Marion Campbell, the characters in *The One That Got Away*, and Mercia Murray prove, firstly that “an interracial culture is a long way off” (Wicomb, 1993: 28) due to the fact that “shame is still inscribed in the tragic mode routinely used to represent coloureds where assumed cultural loss is elevated to the realms of ontology” (Wicomb, 1998: 100). Secondly, most of these characters prove how class remains the most powerful determinant of life chances (Driscoll, 2009: 2). Wicomb provides a wide number of characters, predominantly coloured, whose different social positions determine their lifestyles. This thus lowers the importance the racial category has held for South African society and argues that race is not that relevant when the individual occupies a higher

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<sup>107</sup> Quote from *October* (2014: 131).

social position. Seekings' analysis reveals how social stratification shifted from race to class during Apartheid: the South African population started to be divided by class positions and less by racial issues. Consequently, some black South Africans could benefit from the privileges of upward mobility:

Now, in the 'new' South Africa, class inequalities are highly visible all around us. The growth of the black elite and 'middle class' is evident in advertising as in real life. At the same time, huge numbers of black people are confined to an 'underclass' of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Most white people have retained the advantages conferred by their class position at the end of apartheid. But, at the same time, a small number of white people are downwardly mobile. The use of aggregate data for racial 'groups' or data on the average for racial 'groups' both obscures the social stratification within racial 'groups' and the extent to which race has ceased to be the key cause of inequality. Indeed, it might be that the emphasis on race, especially in official statistics, serves to obscure even the *possibility* of collecting data on other criteria, such as class (Seekings: 2003: 2; his emphasis).

Undoubtedly, the racial issue remains a latent problem in South Africa, considering the white-black racism in the country that started in the seventeenth century with the Dutch colonization. Only twenty-nine years after the 1994 first democratic elections, the legacy of racism persists. Zoë Wicomb accurately illustrates, through these five books, how the discrimination and violence displayed in Apartheid that derived from colonialism have profoundly affected the South African population for generations: "colonialism is a context that produces violence; apartheid, from which white people benefited – and with their investable cultural and economic capital continue to benefit – produced violence" (Wicomb, 2004: 136). Despite Wicomb's focus being on Apartheid and the post-Apartheid era, references to colonialism serve to prove the trace it has left in South Africa, which is the main way in which Wicomb addresses this issue. *David's Story* extends its gaze to colonial times through the Griqua community's history<sup>108</sup>. Furthermore, Wicomb displays the imprint colonialism has left through multiple

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<sup>108</sup> See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of this novel.



instances where colonial references are perceived: Jane's perspective of the Doulton Fountain in "There's the bird that never flew", Dorothy in "The Botanic Gardens" or Mercia Murray in *October*. The three women deal with the representation of non-whites that colonization has created. Throughout this dissertation, less evident instances, where the vestiges of colonialism still stand out are observed to abound in Wicomb's work. These are wittily positioned there by Wicomb to prove that democracy can only emerge after "the end of the national, colonial order as the dominant cultural model" (Sauvage, 2010: 100). Instances of these subtle references include the ten-pound note Dorothy receives from the taxi-driver in "The Botanic Gardens", or the Fowler and Smit school books and the library poster in "The one that got away", the latter urging people to return the book from where it was borrowed. They all serve as examples of colonial references. Furthermore, Mr. Weedon from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Councillor Carter (Helen's rapist) from *Playing in the Light* or Gavin from "Friends and goffels", all of them being white, also convey the colonial attitude inherited by the white population.

Apartheid is presented as a consequence of colonialism, and its laws "emerged over the course of four decades in response to the increasing contradictions inherent in the system and the intensification of opposition from Africans, Coloureds and Indians" (Clark et al. 2004: 49). However, the fact that the basis of social stratification changed from race to class during those years (Seekings, 2005: 2), advocates an increase in privileges for the white population that come from their class status and not from their race. Furthermore, when dealing with *clethnicity*, the different social classes within a specific racial community must be taken into consideration, since class differences existed even within the black population (Dlamini, 2009: 92). My argument is – as Wicomb's oeuvre demonstrates – while race is marked by class (class differences exist within racialised communities), class does not necessarily seem to be that marked by race.

The intra-communal social classes and the shift from race to class as the main social marker during Apartheid not only demonstrate the relevance class has in the social structure, but also the insufficient research done in terms of class in the South African sociological field. This inadequacy has been acknowledged by some sociological researchers such as Seekings. Concurrently, other critics have seen the exclusivity or singularity of South African social classification as an advantage to study “the large area of overlap between “race” and “class” in South Africa” (Alexander, 2007: 102). However, in other societies class also been concealed by other social categories such as gender or ethnicity. “In the frequently incanted quartet of race, class, gender and sexual orientation, there is no doubt that class has been the least fashionable...despite the fact that all the evidence suggests that class remains the single most powerful determinant of life chances” (Driscoll, 2009: 2). In England, for instance, gender and race have, according to Westergaard, “replaced the lines of class inequality” (1995: 12), thereby positioning class again as the principal social factor that governs people’s identities.

In many ways, the intricacies involved in the construction of the coloured category were based on racial ideologies engendered through religious beliefs and historic and scientific “truths” created with a white supremacist mindset. In the discussion of the complexity of creating a fixed meaning of the term “coloured,” Wicomb explains that it “exemplifies postmodernity in its shifting allegiances, its duplicitous play between the written capitalization and speech that denies or at least does not reveal the act of renaming—once again the silent inscription of shame” (Wicomb in Attridge et al. 1998: 93-94). Throughout the five books analyzed in this dissertation, Wicomb exemplifies the complexities of being coloured in a racialized country by setting her characters in different socio-cultural instances where their colouredness can play against them. Besides, the different protagonists react differently towards their colouredness or their

social position, thus Wicomb's method shows how colouredness can evoke both shame or pride. For instance, Dulcie, from *David's Story*, accurately represents this pride. However, inquiring deeper into her characters, the myriad different class positions one can find throughout her works can be observed to uphold wealth as a determining factor for both opportunities and exclusion. Addressing the question of dominance between class and race, I argue that Wicomb's characters show how race directly relegates the individual to an inferior position, while wealth allows people to rise – or not – to a higher status. Her characters also display how wealth provides a better education, which actively assists an individual to achieve a higher position (Dlamini, 2009). In fact, Wicomb provides the reader with a meaningful number of teachers (school teachers in rural areas, university teachers...) which seems to be a recurrent affair in South African literature, considering the number of references to this occupation in works by South African writers. Some examples could be Athol Fugard's play *My Children! My Africa!*<sup>109</sup> (1989), Beryl Gilroy's novel *Black Teacher*<sup>110</sup> (1976) or J. M. Coetzee (*Disgrace*<sup>111</sup>, 1999). This idea of education as a launch pad to a social upgrade is then disclosed by the writers' incorporation of these kinds of characters.

Moreover, when analyzing the references to classist and racist attitudes in Wicomb's oeuvre, we find that not only are both quite equivalent in number but, given the relevance race has in South Africa, classist references are more subtle, internalized, less visible and less evident than the racist attitudes. In general terms, Wicomb's protagonists Marion Campell and Mercia Murray can be considered the most classist characters of Wicomb's oeuvre. Driven by different reasons, they both convey those

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<sup>109</sup> *My Children! My Africa!* features a black schoolmaster, Anela Myalatya.

<sup>110</sup> The author of this memoir is Paul Gilroy's mother, and the novel tells her experience as one of the first Afro-Caribbean headteachers in Britain.

<sup>111</sup> *Disgrace*'s protagonist, David Lurie, is a university professor.

subtle classist references that advocate class over race. Marion believes herself white until she discovers her family truth. Mercia, aware of her colouredness, believes herself better than other coloureds because her father instilled in her the classism she displays. Despite both being coloured, they show how class can be the definite social factor. They both enjoy a good social position despite their colouredness, and it is their upward mobility what allows them to criticize aspects such as low-cost shops, rural way of living, language, and all the diverse factors that shape the individual.

Nevertheless, the role intersectionality plays in the study of multicultural societies has been acknowledged for the significance it has in postcolonial studies. While intersectionality theory does not highlight any factor as more relevant than others, it agrees with the main basis of this thesis: the negative consequences stemming from social hierarchy. As intersectionality theory argues:

identity categories are re-defined and are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division . . . but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality, as an analytic tool, gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves (Hill et al. 2020:193).

Wicomb's characters, and specifically her protagonists, represent the main principles of intersectionality theory, as they are seldomly "shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways" (Hill et al. 2020: 2). Most of them are coloured women, representing the two social markers, race and gender, from which the idea of intersectionality derives. Intersectionality was firstly created for the interaction between gender and race with other identity categories (Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, researchers have been specially focused on the binarism race-gender "as a means to describe and explain how institutional and social policies, practices and ideologies work to produce and compound inequitable arrangements experienced by

members of such groups” (Nichols et al. 2019: 9-10). Yet, following this established scheme, and as happens with the racial issue in South Africa, class seems to be consigned to oblivion, which is precisely one of the central concerns in this dissertation. As a result, Wicomb’s characters have been analyzed in this dissertation considering all the social factors that could play against them, paying special attention to their class position, their social background, their social surroundings and their upward mobility. It has been seen that, although the racial issue is central to her oeuvre, class issues are constantly present throughout the whole work, and may be overlooked by some critics. The characters’ identities have been shaped by their experiences and decisions, and thus, these identities have fluctuated throughout their lives depending on the context they were living in. Marjo Buitelaar would conclude that “identity is the temporary outcome of responses to the various ways in which we are addressed” (in Phoenix and Pattynama “Intersectionality”, 2006: 191). The best example Wicomb provides for this fluctuating identity is Marion Campbell, the protagonist of *Playing in the Light*, who believes herself to be white until she discovers her family’s authentic coloured roots.

Furthermore, after a deep analysis of Wicomb’s oeuvre, I find her short story writing is more successful than her novels in merging all the socio-cultural aspects, intercommunal and intracommunal relationships that occurred during Apartheid, before and after, and in displaying how these relations have shaped the country until today. Julia Griem discusses the novel and the short story asserting that “as in Dorothy Driver’s essay, the novel is associated with the homogenizing processes of nation-building, whereas the short story is credited with offering a form to express and intervene more directly in the fractured realities of postcolonial situations (Griem, 2011: 393). It is probably the proximity Griem and Driver argue what allows Wicomb’s short story collections to encompass the maximum number of realities and their resulting outcomes.

Wicomb's books are more or less written in chronological order, so the reader would expect a development in her characters from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* to *October*. However, despite the evident change and development in the country after the Apartheid regime, it seems that the longer time passes, the more concerned South African characters are with the past, specifically with colonialism. This begs the question as to what extent new generations are ready for the change. Scully has argued Wicomb's technique of pulling her:

characters back into discussions about their pasts. History itself also moves like a target, a fact or truth, morphing under closer scrutiny into something that looks more like a claim, or something even less substantial. [...] culture in her work is a place where people struggle to make sense of life, through food, through memory, through attention to that which is spoken and that which is not: a process of self-fashioning that is never neat, nor easy, nor self-evident. And history is the stuff that people pull on to make sense of things (Scully, 2011: 306-307).

Throughout this thesis, I initially asserted that younger people perceive this world as a more cosmopolitan place, where transnational relations are commonplace and less embittered by the atrocities of Apartheid. However, as the study progressed, I realized the assertion was not entirely accurate. There is an evident – and necessary – transformation in the new generations, but it may not be the one the reader expects. In fact, Driver argues that Wicomb's oeuvre does not provide any conclusion or finding for the coloured issue, asserting that her fiction “offers no resolution, but it does offer some relief, and [...] steers the problematic in interesting directions” (Driver, 2011: 94). While fiction is obviously not meant to provide a solution for social problems, optimistic readers may expect a better, albeit fictional, outcome for the characters that embody a current social problem. However, Wicomb's fiction paradoxically reflects the truth: the realization that there is no solution. Yet, even if her narrative does not provide an answer, it does offer some light at the end of the tunnel, provided by not-always protagonist characters that subtly convey

the basic notions of cosmopolitanism. Minor relationships that may go unnoticed such as Grant Fotheringay and Samuel, or Mrs. Pringle and Annie in *The One That Got Away* represent this expected multicultural acceptance. Wicomb's approach then concurs with Clingman's vision of literature: "literature – in its mysteries, in its indirections – can be a guide, can provide counsel for a story that is still in the process of unfolding" (2009: 247). In the discussion of the role of the reader, the author's use of free indirect discourse stands out in her writing, for it allows her to implicate the reader in different perspectives. Wicomb's oeuvre does not grant a solution, but it presents the tools and the central principles from which to start the social reformation, by providing characters who feel comfortable in their skins, such as Dulcie from *David's Story* or Mercia from *October*. Samuelson points out Wicomb's usage of this technique and the effect it has on the reader:

The effect on [Wicomb's] free indirect discourse is not simply to trouble the notion of a transcendent truth in the interests of producing a suspicious reader; on the contrary, by drawing the reader into a particular point of view and then nudging her into another or holding her briefly in the conjunctive space between, it teaches us about how networks work and how we work through networks – about assembling meaning through participation and implication rather than from a position of aloofness. Wicomb has often said that she finds free indirect discourse the most democratic way of writing in that it disseminates authority (Samuelson, 2016: 136).

Wicomb's writing then releases the obscure segments of the racialized identity while it calls on the readers' capacity for empathy by settling them in uncomfortable, sometimes contradictory situations. Her oeuvre encapsulates the basic principles of postcolonial theories through characters who seek to imitate whites (Bhabha's theory on mimicry, 1984). Furthermore, Wicomb explores the permitted agency for individuals subordinated due to social standards (Spivak's theory on the subaltern figure, 1988), the futility of utopian cosmopolitanism (Appiah and Derrida's theories on cosmopolitanism, 2006 and 2005 respectively), the shame of colouredness (Adhikari, 2013), and the importance of education for upward mobility for previous generations (Dlamini, 2009).

Literary scholars such as Samuelson, Driver, Ritcher, Gurnah, Baiada or Van der Vlies have agreed on Wicomb's triumph in portraying a social reality by benefiting from, although not using, truth itself. Driver summarizes Wicomb's work in the South African literary field by pointing out some of the aspects mentioned throughout this dissertation:

Wicomb's writing allows us to re-imagine the nation as open and fluid, receptive to change and exchange even in the matter of racial identity, and then also as existing prior to the invention of race and ethnicity. *David's Story* presents a Griqua history that speaks of the vernacular and the cosmopolitan combined, before the separation into an opposition between nationalisms and the relegation of the idea of the cosmopolitan to the European outside Africa (2011: 104).

However, Driver's idea of the former open and fluid society neglects the class hierarchies that indeed existed in pre-colonial South Africa. This oversight is, in fact, one of the basic foundations of this dissertation, the fact that class has been, historically speaking, a ubiquitous feature – as well as one of the most powerful forms – of social stratification (Grusky et al. 2014: 4) and has resulted in bigotry for those who do not fit in the socio-cultural standards.

One of Wicomb's most recurrent methods to allow the readers access to the aforementioned obscure segments of racialized identity is settling them in a diasporic space. In this space, the expected cosmopolitanism is glimpsed by some critics who think of Wicomb's diasporic space as “the enriching experience of travel which might be taken as a kind of cosmopolitanism” (Gurnah, 2011: 264). However, I consider the diasporic characters of Wicomb still far from finding cosmopolitanism (for instance, Frieda Shenton from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Marion Campbell from *Playing in the Light* or Mercia Murray from *October*). Instead, they usually collapse in the turmoil of a standardized, strict society structured by “the division of society into classes of the modern type” (Ahmad, 1996: 279). Notwithstanding this, Wicomb's depiction of a grim



reality enhances the multiplicity of voices, prioritising those that have been historically silenced to contradict the oppressiveness of a discriminatory government. What Wicomb longs for is:

a culture where participation in a number of coloured micro-communities whose interest conflict and overlap could become a rehearsal of cultural life in the larger South African community where we learn to perform the same kind of negotiations in terms of identity within a lived culture characterized by difference (Wicomb, 1998: 105).

This study aimed to prove the importance of income and the opportunities provided by social position that individuals can take advantage of, without overlooking the other social factors – especially race – that social discrimination embodies. All the ranges of characters found in Wicomb’s oeuvre actively depict how the different social constructions relegate individuals to diverse hierarchical positions depending on their race, class, gender or age. Most of Wicomb’s main characters are coloured women. However, her female characters differ in terms of age and class, and it is in those differences where the reader can observe the importance of each social factor. For example, Dorothy from “In the Botanic Gardens”, being an elderly, coloured woman in Scotland, has to cope more often with her coloured identity than with her age<sup>112</sup>. Sally from *David’s Story*, who belongs to the coloured working class, pays special attention to physical features when her insecurities derive more from her income than from her colouredness. Mercia Murray, on the other hand, belongs to a social class that allows her to “forget” about other social markers that could have played against her; as is the case with Marion Campbell, who thought of herself and her family as accommodated whites. As all of them are coloured women, one might assume them to be consigned to lower social positions. Nevertheless, Wicomb’s protagonists prove that each social marker

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<sup>112</sup> See 6.1 for a more detailed analysis of Dorothy from “In the Botanic Gardens”.

shapes the individual in some way, but, as mentioned earlier, social class relations throughout their lives are what grant them upward mobility. This implies that a character does not need to have been born in the same social stratum as s/he enjoys during adulthood. Wicomb's characters fluctuate among different social classes depending on the context of a specific moment of their lives. This phenomenon is called "relational class" by Wright, who considers the different class determinants such as location, genetics, or discrimination to play an important role in the explanation of how various people are positioned in different social classes:

When class is used to explain inequality, typically the concept is not defined primarily by subjectively salient attributes of a social location but rather by *the relationship of people to income-generating resources* or assets of various sorts. Class thus becomes a *relational*, rather than simply *gradational* concept. Class, in this usage, is contrasted to the many other determinants of a person's life chances – for example, geographical location, forms of discrimination anchored in ascriptive characteristics, or genetic endowments (Wright, 2005: 185-186; his emphasis).

Through theories on social class, both sociological and literary – such as Wright, Seidman, Runciman or Bourdieu's class analyses, as well as Seekings' social analysis – this dissertation has conducted an examination of how issues such as "household income, living conditions, health and the inter-generational reproduction of inequality through the education of children" (Seekings, 2003: 4) are strongly correlated to class in Wicomb's work. Furthermore, it has been argued how these correlations existed within specific communities (coloured women, for instance) to present an alternative view of class, and how social class has been underanalyzed in South African postcolonial studies. However, despite this analysis of fictional characters, South African sociology argues the impossibility of establishing a feasible pattern to demonstrate class as the most important factor for South African social stratification: "the paucity of data linking class to behavioural or attitudinal variables makes it impossible to demonstrate conclusively that any one approach to class is better than others, or indeed that class is more important than

other factors (such as race or income)” (Seekings, 2003: 41). Furthermore, Wright’s theories on intergenerational mobility and equality of life chances have also been taken into consideration to analyze how characters from the same – or similar – backgrounds react and engage with those opportunities (2005: 186). Mercia and Jake in *October*, for instance, represent this equality of life chances by taking (Mercia) and rejecting (Jake) those intergenerational opportunities which have led them to almost opposite outcomes, proving education as a determinant of life prospects (Dlamini, 2009).

Considering the limited data in terms of class analysis in South African literature, future research should consider the potential effects of social class more carefully, taking into account all the implications social position entails for the characters, and how upward mobility can fluctuate within the same individual depending on his/her vital context. The fact that South African literary studies have focused on the racial issue overshadows the significance of class. Both sociological scholars such as David Attwell, Christopher Culpin, Jacob Dlamini or Zimitri Erasmus; and literary critics such as Derek Attridge, Gabeba Baderoon, Njabulo Ndebele or Elleke Boehmer, have primarily focused their studies on the racial issue. The same has happened in the Western literary field, where intellectuals such as Kwame Appiah, Frantz Fanon or Zygmunt Bauman – all of them useful for this dissertation – have directed their postcolonial studies towards racial concerns.

Characters such as Frieda, Marion or Mercia prove that, despite being coloured women, they have achieved a high social position due to two different factors: either due to their family’s former position, or their ability to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. Thus, in future work, investigating social stratification might prove important for the understanding of South African society if further studies undertake research into more realistic settings, for example, to analyze the association that exists

between social class and living standards without establishing the focal point in race. Accordingly, after the analysis of Wicomb's characters, further investigations are necessary to validate the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from this study, especially regarding sociological aspects.

The current research has aimed to identify the relation between race and class in Wicomb's oeuvre by analyzing her characters' backgrounds, opportunities and social positions, exploring whether those social positions have fluctuated. However, Wicomb's writing entails a greater number of factors that shape the individual. Because of that, other issues have been taken into consideration for the investigation. Issues such as the conflict between cosmopolitanism and diaspora, the relation that the character establishes between home and belonging, familiar truths and lies, language as a social marker or the relationships between certain characters are just some of the main concerns considered in the study of Wicomb's characters. Nevertheless, this dissertation has given special attention to the impact of both colonization and Apartheid on the different generations provided by the writer. All this allows us to understand the complications of analyzing class in South Africa, and the limitations of class analysis in both the literary and the sociological field in terms of upward mobility. Thus, it becomes challenging to arrive at any conclusions with regard to the influence race and class have on each other, but it might be considered a promising aspect for future investigation. However, a definitive assertion that this thesis has proven is the intrinsic interconnection between race and class (or *clethnicity*) in certain societies. Furthermore, it has brought valuable conclusions about the lack of class research, particularly, in the oeuvre of Zoë Wicomb and, generally, in the South African literary context.

In essence, Wicomb's writing skills show her capacity to recreate, in the form of fiction, an accurate yet complex representation of South African society, allowing the

reader to enter in the sometimes-unknown world of colouredness. Wicomb unveils a world that has remained unknown by history and by those who write it, but that has been opened up by literature. In the words of Winterson: “works of art do not reproduce themselves, they re-create themselves and have at the same time sufficient permanent power to create rooms for us, the dispossessed” (Winterson, 1995: 114). Furthermore, her display of multiple perceptions accentuates the veracity of her texts and facilitates a sociological analysis of her characters. One of the most intriguing aspects of Wicomb’s treatment of class – and that has been determinant for this dissertation – is upward mobility and its connection to life chances. Despite her focus on racial issues, I find Wicomb’s works increasingly aware of class position and the relevance it holds as a social marker, with *October* being one of the works with more references to class issues. I would like to finish with a reference precisely from *October*, where Mercia wonders: “born to be, rather than choose to be?” (*October*, 227). Wicomb displays how the eagerness to seize opportunities can shape very different outcomes, even for individuals who belong to the same community or social category. Thus, her characters exemplify the very basis of this thesis: that class has a greater impact on upward mobility than a great deal of postcolonial criticism acknowledges.

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## GLOSSARY

**Ant; Anties.** Aunt. Also used as an honorific, not necessarily indicating a blood relationship.

**B.A.** Bachelor of Arts.

**Baas.** Honorific for white man, used primarily in rural areas.

**Bakgat.** Good, excellent, fine.

**B.O.** Body odour.

**Bubbi.** Muslim shopkeeper.

**Brakvlei.** Brackish marsh.

**Brakwater.** Brackish water.

**Broekielace.** Panty lace.

**Dagga.** Marijuana.

**Dominee.** Minister of religion.

**Eejit.** Geet.

**Erf.** Inheritance.

**Geitjie.** Grecko.

**Gevrek.** Died.

**Goffel.** A derogatory term to refer to a working-class woman. Also “prostitute”.

**Goose; Goosie.** Mildly derogatory term for a woman.

**Hotnos.** Shortened version of Hottentots. Derogatory term used by many whites for the Khoikhoi people.

**Kaatje Kekkelbek.** Little cackling mouth.

**Kaffir.** Derogatory term for a black person.

**Kaffirboetie.** Derogatory, offensive. An abusive form of reference or address to a white person who is perceived to be friendly with black people or working for their welfare.

**Karoo.** Semidesert terrain.

**Kêrels.** Boyfriends.

**Khanoum/Khanum.** A woman or certain position, especially in Iran and Turkey. Also madam, lady.

**Khoikhoi.** Collective name for a major group of indigenous peoples of the Cape of Good Hope.

**Klaar.** Finished.

**Larnie.** Posh, classy, dressed up.

**Lekker.** Nice. Common modifier.

**Lekker werk, kêrels.** “Nice job, guys”.

**Maar.** But.

**Meester.** Afrikaans term used to name the schoolteacher and, in historical contexts, a resident tutor hired by rural families; an itinerant schoolmaster.

**Min draad.** Little Wire.

**Moffie.** Derogatory term for an effeminate homosexual man.

**Mos.** Indeed; at least. Used as an intensifier.

**Nkosi kakhulu.** Nguni term equivalent to *thank you*.

**Oom.** Uncle. Also used as an honorific, not necessarily indicating a blood relationship, especially in rural communities.

**Ou.** Often used to indicate familiarity of affection rather than age. Also used as noun, the equivalent of *guy*.

**Ouma.** Grandmother. Also used as an honorific for any elderly woman.

**Oupa.** Grandfather. Also used as an honorific for any elderly man.

**Pap.** Porridge made of mealie-meal, similar to polenta.

**Plaasjapies.** Farm boy.

**Robot.** Traffic light.



**Skollie.** Hooligan.

**Slamse.** Pertaining to the Cape Muslim people.

**Toorgoed.** Magic stuff.

**Ubuntu.** Nguni Bantu term for “humanity”.

**Volk.** The people; the nation.

**Wêreld.** World.

**Werk.** Work.