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„Postcolonial Departures: Narrative Transformations in
Australian and South African Fictions“

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative reading of selected contemporary fictions from Australia and South Africa. By drawing on postcolonial theory and trauma theory, this thesis argues that specific genres are transformed in distinctive ways in these two settler literatures to address the continuing presence of the colonial past. It focuses in particular on three genres: the *Bildungsroman*, the historical novel, and the pastoral to consider how these have been reproduced, adapted and transformed in these literatures in the recent past.

This thesis argues that these transformations testify to the ways that recent Australian and South African literary imaginaries respond to the legacies of traumatic histories of colonization and dispossession. In both Australia and South Africa processes of reconciliation and social justice in recent decades have produced intense debates about history, fiction and the ways these disciplines can generate new ways of understanding the traumatic legacies of settler colonialism. By focusing on a selection of close and comparative readings, this thesis identifies a series of common tropes, techniques and preoccupations that draw together these two literatures which are so often read apart in terms of distinctive national histories.

The first chapter, “Representation of Trauma in Two Selected *Bildungsromane*”, investigates how the genre of the *Bildungsroman* is rehabilitated and how its traditional boundaries are transgressed to explore the psychic landscapes of childhood trauma. Gail Jones’ *Sorry* (2008) and Rachel Zadok’s *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005) are examined as case studies to suggest their departures from European traditions to include the legacies of colonisation. These challenge the traditional passage from adolescence to maturity in the *Bildungsroman*, resulting in narratives where this journey remains incomplete.

In the second chapter of the thesis, “Postcolonial Pastoral”, an analysis of how the pastoral engages in distinctively postcolonial forms suggests the flexibility and mutability of generic themes, such as landscape, borders, and memory, and reveals points of contact within the frame of trauma theory. The chapter focuses on David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and Lisa Fugard’s *Skinner’s Drift* (2005). Both postcolonial novels attack the traditional tropes of nostalgic myths and belonging to expose the settlers’ feelings of

unsettledness in anti-pastoral scenes marked by traumatic memories and Indigenous dispossession.

Recent contemporary Australian and South African historical novels challenge officially sanctioned national histories by engaging with the legacies of the colonial past. The third chapter, “Making Use of History”, focuses on alternative imaginings of histories of settlement in Australia and South Africa that center on the trauma of the past. In this final chapter, Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* (2005) and Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* (2001) are examined to investigate how they engage in revising their nations’ histories to recuperate a violent and silenced past. Both writers inscribe a traumatic memory within their historical texts to seek justice for a dispossessed people.

This thesis argues that these fictions contribute to debates about colonialism, trauma and social justice, and that together they make a distinctive intervention into ways of thinking about contemporary postcolonial fiction.

Dedication

To Maribeth Mobley for igniting the spark

To Amy Farrior for never giving up on me

To my father Nedim for coming back home

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations used in Thesis	i
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Nation and Narration	2
Postcolonial Departures from Traditions of Genre	13
CHAPTER I: REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA IN TWO SELECTED BILDUNGSROMANE: GAIL JONES' <i>SORRY</i> (2008) AND RACHEL ZADOK'S <i>GEM SQUASH TOKOLOSHE</i> (2005)	18
The Traditions of the <i>Bildungsroman</i>	18
Postcolonial <i>Bildungsroman</i>	23
A Reading of <i>Sorry</i>	31
A Reading of <i>Gem Squash Tokoloshe</i>	42
Rape in <i>Sorry</i> and <i>Gem Squash Tokoloshe</i>	57
Conclusion	64
CHAPTER II: POSTCOLONIAL PASTORAL: DAVID MALOUF'S <i>REMEMBERING BABYLON</i> (1993) AND LISA FUGARD'S <i>SKINNER'S DRIFT</i> (2005).....	66
Pastoral Traditions	66
Postcolonial Pastoral.....	71
A Reading of <i>Remembering Babylon</i>	85
A Reading of <i>Skinner's Drift</i>	107
Conclusion	128
CHAPTER III: MAKING USE OF HISTORY IN KATE GRENVILLE'S <i>THE SECRET RIVER</i> (2005) AND ZOË WICOMB'S <i>DAVID'S STORY</i> (2001)	130
The Historical Novel – Possibilities and Dynamics.....	130
Histories Within Postcolonial Fiction.....	132
A Reading of <i>The Secret River</i>	147

A Reading of <i>David's Story</i>.....	175
Conclusion	203
CONCLUSION	205
BIBLIOGRAPHY	211
APPENDIX.....	257
Deutsche Zusammenfassung	257
Curriculum Vitae	259

List of Abbreviations used in Thesis

DS.....*David's Story* (2001)

Gem Squash.....*Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005)

RB.....*Remembering Babylon* (1993)

SD.....*Skinner's Drift* (2005)

Introduction

Contemporary novels in Australia and South Africa continue to engage with the legacies of invader-settler colonialism¹ – literatures that are drawn into the ongoing legacies of dispossession and its terrors. Sue Kossew argues for strong connections between these two ‘postcolonizing’ states,² suggesting that “both these national narratives [speak] of past suffering [...] [and] attempt to heal past wounds by recounting the violence and personal loss that had been unheard or actively buried and hidden” (*Writing Woman* 11-12). As Kossew suggests, working through historical losses under these conditions involves an engagement with postcolonial trauma: violence, dispossession, and recent responses to these in terms of reconciliation. New comparative readings of contemporary fictions across these two ‘southern spaces’ indicate that literature continues to play an important role in reformulating nation and narration in ways that are open to new possibilities and opportunities for apology and redress. As the concept of ‘postcolonialism’ suggests, the legacies of imperial conquest remain as a continuing presence (Moreton-Robinson “Home” 30).

The readings in this thesis are organized in terms of three selected generic types that shape fictional responses to colonialism, trauma, and reconciliation: *Bildungsroman*, pastoral, and historical fiction. These genres are transformed to address the continuing presence of the colonial past. In the first chapter a comparative reading of Gail Jones’ *Sorry* (2007) and Rachel Zadok’s *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005) investigates how traditional boundaries of the *Bildungsroman* are redefined to explore the psychic

¹ Although the term ‘settler’, according to Sarah Nuttall, “carries with it in its originary sense a master-slave dialectic based on land: a relationship based on conquest and ownership on the one hand and on dispossession and subjugation on the other, in which one party acts and the other is acted upon” (245) the term ‘invader-settler’, more fittingly, perhaps, suggests an acknowledgment of the colonising act. Alan Lawson argues that using the sole term “settler” allows a “strategic disavowal of the colonising act” (31) transforming “invaders” into “peaceful settlers” (31). Thus, to avoid the term settler, which in some commentaries on the Australian context is used as a euphemism, ‘invader-settler’ is viewed as more appropriate for the denotation of the colonizers. In this sense, Annie E. Coombes suggests that “[t]he term ‘settler’ has about it a deceptively benign and domesticated ring which masks the violence of colonial encounters that produced and perpetrated consistently discriminatory and genocidal regimes against the indigenous peoples of these regions” (2). See Alan Lawson’s “Postcolonial Theory and the ‘Settler’ Subject” (1995); Lorenzo Veracini’s *Settler Colonialism* (2010); and “Telling the End of the Settler Colonial Story” (2011).

² Aileen Moreton-Robinson introduces the term “postcolonizing” to denote the “ongoing process” (“Home” 30) of the postcolonial, to thereby underscore the continuing presence of the colonial past, and its continuing impact upon any reconciliatory processes. See Robinson’s “I Still Call Australia Home” (2003), and “Writing off Treaties: White Possession” (2008).

landscapes of childhood trauma. In the second chapter, David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and Lisa Fugard's *Skinner's Drift* (2005) are read as transformations of the pastoral mode to suggest the flexibility and mutability of generic themes, such as landscape, borders, and memory. The final chapter that reads Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2001) as contemporary postcolonial historical novels focuses on the historical novel to consider alternative imaginings of histories of settlement in Australia and South Africa that deal with the trauma of the past.

Through the case studies this thesis will adopt a comparative approach to Australian and South African contemporary fictions that employs key concepts of postcolonial and trauma theory. In both countries there have been processes of reconciliation and social justice in recent decades that have produced intense debates about history, fiction and the ways these disciplines can produce new ways of understanding the traumatic legacies of settler colonialism. By focusing on a selection of close and comparative readings of recent fictions, this thesis identifies a series of common tropes, techniques and preoccupations that draw together these two literatures which are so often read apart, in terms of distinctive national histories.

Nation and Narration

This study moves “beyond the boundaries of the nation” (Whitlock “Departure” 157) in search of transnational ties and interrelationships between postcolonial narratives prevalent in the contemporary literary landscape of Australia and South Africa.³ Chaganti Vijayasree argues that in narrating the nation postcolonial writers “stress the need for making the contours of nation and nationalism elastic, porous and resilient so that all historical and contemporary cultural formations [...] are accounted for and accommodated” (xvi). This study of selected Australian and South African contemporary novels transcends readings that focus on nation and narration by exploring readings that look for connections and intersections across the south.

³ Postcolonial narratives are understood as literary texts that have “emerge[d] from a context of political upheaval” (Hiddleston 1). They address the colonial period and its historical and cultural consequences of dispossession and domination that remain active and prominent in the postcolonial present.

Several Australian scholars (Carter 1999; Whitlock 1999; Kossew 2004; Huggan 2007) call for readings of Australian literature that move beyond the national frame (Whitlock “Departure” 153). Postcolonial approaches have been part of this turn in criticism, representing a valuable tool “to understanding Australian literature, which has emerged into something transnational and transdisciplinary” (Carter “Post-Colonialism” 114) by generating new narrative forms and thus calling “for literary and historical revisionism” (Huggan *Transnationalism* 33).⁴ Graham Huggan’s recent study of Australian literature is an extended argument in favour of a new transnational approach.⁵ Attention to cultural connections and transnational forces triggers a rethinking of the nation, questioning “the process of imagining the nation as purely the product of internal factors [...] [W]e should not consider [national] cultures in isolation, but endeavour to locate them in the relational matrix of their significant others” (M. Featherstone 57). In this respect, the opening of new perspectives for understanding the connections between – in this case – Australia and South Africa can prove to be useful.

In recognizing South Africa as one of Australia’s “significant others”, David Carter calls for a re-examination of Australia’s continued conservative stance towards the neighbouring continent as more and more parallels between the two countries’ histories cannot be overlooked: “We still tend to think of South Africa as belonging to another time and place altogether, another moral universe and historical trajectory. This is not a mistake that colonial Australians made. The parallels will become less and less resistible” (“Readers” 131). A comparison of Australian and South African contemporary fictions points to the multiple pasts of these nations, decentring a single and progressive historical analysis. They generate “counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase

⁴Due to the fact that the term postcolonialism cannot be defined by any “single approach, nor any uniformly binding methodology” (Huggan *Transnationalism* 34), it will be used in its widest sense, namely to suggest the political and cultural experiences of societies that were former European colonies. I will apply this term in my thesis to relate to experiences of cultural exclusion and view postcolonial theory as a “valuable vehicle for literary and historical revisionism” (33). Postcolonialism is not limited to a specific historical moment, and in my thesis I will point out how it relies on multiple, marginal, ambiguous, and fragmentary narratives that destabilize and comment on the “fragility of ‘grand narratives’” (Boehmer *Literature* 237). When analysing Australian and South African literature in my thesis, I will use postcolonial theory as it offers an array of significant debates on relevant issues for my project, such as violence, rewriting, and memory.

⁵Transnationalism will be used in my thesis to refer to cross-cultural themes in South African and Australian narratives. Especially in relation to issues such as oppression, dispossession, and violence transnationalism will serve to give an account of the increasing fluidity of Australian and South African colonial legacies.

its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (Bhabha “DissemiNation” 300).

This reading is based on the comparative analysis of postcolonial Australian and South African texts which destabilise the parameters of the nation in literary analysis and move across and beyond them. The treatment of African and Australian Indigenous communities is particularly relevant in this thesis. When referring to a trend in a recent study of Indians and Inuit in Canada, A.G. Hopkins argues that “the best of recent studies deal with [indigenous histories, claims, and wrongs] entirely within a national framework, thereby conveying the impression that they are unique” (217). Yet in resisting the exclusivity of nation, he goes on to suggest that one can “open new possibilities for comparative studies of both settler communities and indigenous peoples, and underline the widespread growing significance of non-national affiliations in a world divided formally into nation-states” (217). Similarly, Annie E. Coombes argues that the

colonisers’ dealings with indigenous peoples – through resistance, containment, appropriation, assimilation, miscegenation or attempted destruction – is the historical factor which has ultimately shaped the cultural and political character of the new nations, mediating in highly significant ways their shared colonial roots/routes. (2)

Whilst Indigenous literature is not a focus of the thesis, the representation of Indigenous peoples is a shared concern across these settler literatures.

Inspired by a rich body of comparative work that explores the connections between settler colonies as southern spaces, my thesis aims to investigate the dialogical relations between selected Australian and South African contemporary fictions in regard to their commensurate thematic concerns. Overlapping themes recur across these literatures. These focus on, for example, history and memory, the settler/Indigenous relationships to land, place, and space, and the frameworks of reconciliation, and they provide new insights into a comparative relationship between South African and Australian

literatures.⁶ Moreover, both postcolonial literatures, when placed in “wider *imperial* contexts” (Huggan *Transnationalism* 34), take up similar themes, such as the quest for individual growth and development towards reconciliation, the search for belonging and a stabilized identity, and the ongoing attempt to claim and come to terms with a violent and complex past. These similarities highlight the resemblances between Australian and South African narratives, placing them within a discourse of transnational relations rather than national distinctiveness. As Kossew argues, “the links between land, gender, identity, and indigeneity are of increasing significance in settler cultures, particularly in contemporary Australia and in post-apartheid South Africa, as the processes of reconciliation become increasingly urgent” (*Writing Woman* 10).⁷

My thesis aims to provide explicit references to landscapes and territories as ‘battlegrounds’. Settlers are not only determined to prevent the Indigenous peoples from breaching their physical borders, but they are also caught by an anxiety of belonging that is characteristic of the unease and unsettledness in Australia’s and South Africa’s colonial settler nations. Settlers inscribe their histories and identities upon previously occupied lands; in view of this, borders, boundaries, and frontiers become essential concerns in the formation of settler subjectivities and the exclusion of the colonized. To shape my readings of the selected postcolonial narratives in this thesis territory and landscape are viewed as, on the one hand, determinants in the formation of white settler identities, and on the other, contested spaces in regard to settler/Indigenous belonging. Marked by the phenomenon of colonization, both postcolonial literatures share affinities in relation to tropes such as land claims, dispossession, belonging and alienation. In their postcolonial study *Text, Theory, Space* (1996) Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner, and Sarah Nuttall open up new directions for defining transnational links between the two settler nations. Possession and dispossession are prevalent themes that shape their collection of essays to

⁶ Traumatic events rely on representations of memory. The trope of the complex and difficult acts of remembering is embedded in my selection of the postcolonial literary narratives. Representations of traumatic memory partly organize these narratives and attest to the difficulties of recovering the uncertainties of a troubling past. Protagonists struggle to understand the past and draw attention to difficult and fragmented memories that speak of a traumatic experience. My reading aims to elucidate how the conceptual tools of postcolonial and trauma studies can present traumatic memory “as it is constituted across cultural, bodily, linguistic, geographic, and temporal boundaries” (Bennett and Kennedy 7).

⁷ Leela Gandhi argues that postcolonial theory is an important tool in dealing with reconciliation discourses: “the colonial aftermath calls for an ameliorative and therapeutic theory which is responsive to the task of remembering and recalling the past” (8). In my study of Australian and South African contemporary fictions discourses of reconciliation underscore the importance of the postcolonial literary project to deal with the difficult and complicated “memory of the history of race and racism” (Bhabha *Location* 63). The selected literary texts reflect upon the limits and problematics involved in national reconciliation processes.

provide and “highlight the multiple and complex meanings attached to both land and place in South African and Australian colonial and post-colonial societies” (Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall 3). In Fugard’s *Skinner’s Drift* (2005), Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* (2005) these similarities between these southern spaces become very clear.

David Trigger’s and Gareth Griffith’s collection of essays *Disputed Territories: Land Culture and Identity in Settler Societies* (2003) also identifies issues of land contestation as a shared legacy in settler nations. This lays the groundwork for my thesis in its comparative attention to overlapping colonial histories and the specific nature of settlers’ contested identities on conflicted lands. In this essay collection Gareth Griffiths argues that conflicts over land belonging are thematic concerns across settler nations, whereby “land [...] becomes the subject of speculative and competitive politics involving such culturally determined practices as naming, selecting of environmental features as foci of meaning, and intellectual ordering of natural phenomena” (305). Both Australian and South African settlers are involved in ‘taming’ unforgiving landscapes that share “similar latitudes, their arid, fragile interiors” (Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall 1). This not only involves the working of the land through agriculture and industry, but also the systematic acts of place-naming that erase Indigenous prior occupation and map out settler colonial space.⁸

A thematic concern with the nations’ problematic and violent past in both literatures is one of the transnational issues in this thesis. The history of white settlement in Australia and South Africa is marked by ongoing Indigenous dispossession. In *Writing Woman, Writing Place* (2004), Sue Kossew argues that:

One of the striking issues of comparison between the new South Africa and Australia at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first is the renewed sense in each nation of coming to terms with the past. The more obvious need to effect a transition from apartheid to post-apartheid state by means of the healing process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was echoed in Australia’s long-overdue release of voices and breaking of silence in the stories of

⁸ In *Text, Theory, Space* (1996) see Liz Gunner’s “Names and the Land: Poetry of Belonging” and Tony Birch’s ““A Land so Inviting and Still Without Inhabitants””.

the Stolen Generations published as the *Bringing them Home* report, as well as the 1992 Native Title Act that finally refuted the concept of terra nullius. What both these narratives of past suffering performed was an attempt to heal past wounds by recounting the violence and personal loss that had been unheard or actively buried and hidden. Both have had profound effects on their societies – hopefully, leading to an awareness of reconciliation and redress of past and present injustices – but also on literary production which has had, too, to come to terms.⁹ (11-12)

In her study, Kossew suggests that this trend has gained purchase in the literary narratives concerned with urgent revisionings of history. Bain Attwood adds that “[d]uring the last three or four decades, settler societies have been forced to confront the nature of their colonial histories, as new political movements and new histories have provoked controversy over injustices committed in the past” (“Unsettling” 243). Contemporary Australian and South African writers reimagine historical experiences to foreground the deeply problematic relations of settler and Indigenous people. Kossew’s close literary analysis “across the[se] settler literatures [...] makes connections between the historical representations” (*Writing Woman* 9) and reveals transnational parallels as both postcolonial literatures deal with a “suppressed and silenced history of violence between indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants” (56). Inspired by Kossew’s study, my analysis deals with literary responses to these troubled postcolonial histories. In this respect, “a shared history of indigenous dispossession and violent repression [...] links the two settler societies” (Kossew *Writing Woman* 13). For example, Gail Jones’ and Rachel Zadok’s novels of development, *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* are driven by the desire to investigate colonial crimes in order to come to terms with the past and encourage personal and national reconciliation. In these fictions the unravelling of the past involves discourses of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the suppressed stories of the Stolen Generations in Australia. The unreconciled deaths of Indigenous characters in both these novels, Mary and Nomsa, represent the problematic legacies of colonialism in both personal and national narration and are commensurate with Kossew’s findings that “the politics of reconciliation [...] in contemporary settler-

⁹ In *Writing Woman, Writing Place* (2004) Kossew traces themes of self, identity and place in women’s fiction concentrating – among other subject matters – on violence as represented in literatures across contemporary South African and Australian contemporary fictions.

invader colonies, such as Australia [and] South Africa [...] are fraught with complexities” (*Writing Woman* 76).

The thesis will consider how these selected narratives engage both in recognition of violence and processes of reconciliation in the recent past. A plurality of opposing memories and histories emerge through recent discourses of reconciliation in nation and narration. Fictions bring to light the contradictions of reconciliation discourses, particularly in the South African context. In the case of Australia, Ghassan Hage questions the nation’s progress toward reconciliation and dismisses the idea of Australia as a postcolonial nation.¹⁰

For a long time to come, Australia is destined to become an unfinished Western colonial project as well as a land in a permanent state of decolonisation. A nation inhabited by both the will of the coloniser and the will of the colonised, each with their identity based on their specific understanding, and memory, of the colonial encounter: what was before it and what was after it. Any national project of reconciliation that fails fully to accept the existence of a distinct Indigenous will [...] is destined to be a momentary cover-up of the reality of the forces that made Australia what it is. (94)

Others agree that Australia is unable to express a “mature national identity” (Birch 185) due to its failure to face and come to terms with the past and “accept histories that relinquish [its] amnesia” (185). In contrast to Hage’s view of Australia as an “unfinished colonial project” (94), I suggest that Australia is uneasily situated in an ongoing process of postcoloniality – still caught between the violent legacy of colonisation and the gradual movement towards a postcolonial state. It is neither positioned beyond the opening of “a new horizon nor a leaving behind of the past” (Bhabha *Location* 1). My thesis indicates that the similarities between the selected narratives do not distinguish Australia as a failed postcolonial nation; rather, they suggest similarities to South Africa’s troubled route towards reconciliation and the unfinished business of settler colonialism. Contemporary fictions address these difficulties – for example, both *Sorry* (2008) and *Gem Squash*

¹⁰ Curthoys argues that reconciliation in Australia is not the common goal of the nation as it is “desperately seeking to hold onto foundational myths and sentiment which find little support elsewhere” (“Mythologies” 37).

Tokoloshe (2005) appropriate the *Bildungsroman* to demonstrate the unreconciled legacies of colonialism in both personal and national narration.

Literary approaches to these colonial pasts are drawn to representations of colonisation in terms of traumatic experience. Paul Newman argues that “each country’s version of reconciliation has also become deeply concerned with concepts of trauma, and the memory and testimony required to overcome or express that trauma” (20).¹¹ Trauma theory highlights transnational links between Australian and South African postcolonial works of fiction. It identifies common grounds in the divided legacies of traumatic histories, memories, and silences embedded in the selected narrative texts. Due to the fact that “little has been done to think through the more contemporary and differently situated effects of trauma that have evolved through the legacies of colonialism” (Burrows 162) my project partly focuses on the presence of trauma within Australian and South African narratives that arises from the continuing legacies of colonization.

Trauma emerges out of the shared Australian and South African violent pasts which have been shaped by invasion, colonization, dispossession, and exploitation. In this sense, discourses of trauma travel and draw on similarities in the investigation of colonial histories. This comparative reading will highlight the effects of trauma that focuses on both individual and collective forms of traumatic suffering in Australian and South African fictions. Caruth argues that “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s trauma” (*Unclaimed* 24). She further suggests that “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures

¹¹ The impact of individual trauma is understood as the result of an overpowering event that is unacceptable to the consciousness, yet may return and haunt the victim in the guise of somatic symptoms and repetitive behaviours. The traumatic event can be viewed as a sudden blow to the victim’s psyche, an event “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth *Unclaimed* 3-4). Caruth suggests further that an overly traumatic and painful event is repressed and kept hidden in the unconscious. However, the repressed memory of the event still continues to exist in the unconscious, haunting and gradually taking possession of the victim’s mind. These repressed memories surface into consciousness as belated and unexpected flashbacks and nightmares (Caruth *Unclaimed* 4). An important Freudian concept when dealing with trauma is the concept of ‘latency’; Freud coined the German term “*Nachträglichkeit*” which means latency or belatedness. It refers to the fact that the memory of a traumatic event can be repressed over time but resurfaces in a postponed, deferred manner. These reemerging events can return through visual, olfactory, or auditory triggers exposing the festering wounds which have not been assimilated into our language or understanding of reality. In this sense, Caruth writes of trauma as referring to “a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth [...] cannot be linked to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language” (Caruth *Unclaimed* 4). The truth of the traumatic event is not recognised by the mind and hence never fully translated into language. It is nevertheless felt and expressed through unexpected reenactments.

(Caruth “Transactions” 11) as it forms a “bridge between disparate historical experiences [...] contribut[ing] to cross-cultural solidarity” (Craps and Buelens 2).

Recent research published on homologies and isomorphisms between contemporary Australian and South African literatures suggests the need to identify colonial and postcolonial connections in matters of identity, ethnicity, race and gender.¹² Yet, the ways that trauma narrative shapes accounts of ethnicity, race, and gender in these two literatures has received insufficient critical attention. In a recent issue of *Studies in the Novel* critics “set out to examine whether and how trauma studies can break with Eurocentrism through the analysis of novels that bear witness to the suffering engendered by colonial oppression” (Craps and Buelens 2).¹³ Both Ana Miller and Michael Rothberg suggest that trauma theory, with its Western individual psychoanalytic approaches, remains rather stuck within Euro-American events and experiences and thereby unable to relate to the particular manifestations of colonial violence. This causes tensions between postcolonial narratives and Western psychoanalytic approaches such as trauma theory. Hussein Bulhan argues that “[t]he discipline of psychology did not of course emerge in a social vacuum unrelated to Europe’s history of conquest and violence. From its beginning to the present, the discipline has been enmeshed in that history of conquest and violence” (37).

Are traumatic experiences within Europe commensurate with traumas across the colonial and postcolonial space? Critics suggest that theories based on trauma produced by the Holocaust transfer to interpretations of traumatic experiences such as slavery and genocide in postcolonial histories. Dominick LaCapra argues that comparisons can be made, suggesting that “[s]lavery, like the Holocaust, nonetheless presents, for a people, problems of traumatising, severe oppression, a divided heritage, the question of a founding trauma, the forging of identities in the present and so forth” (*Writing History* 174). Others specifically argue for the relevance of trauma theory to understanding postcolonial cultures. For example Abigail Ward suggests that “psychology cannot be simply dismissed because of its complicity in colonialism, or its status as a ‘Western’

¹² See *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia* (1996), edited by Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall.

¹³ The Volume 4, 2008 issue of the *Studies in the Novel* journal addresses postcolonial trauma novels and invites numerous critics, such as Victoria Burrows, Rosanne Kennedy, Ana Miller, Maria Emma Neeves, Michael Rothberg, Shane Graham, Petar Ramadanovic, etc. – to name but a few – to analyse in their respective projects the usefulness of trauma theory in regards to its examination of postcolonial narratives.

discourse. [...] It is necessary to contend with psychology in order to discover new modes of postcolonial thought” (191). Postcolonial theory and trauma studies both engage in a recuperative process to gain an understanding of the past in order to comprehend the complexities of the historical condition of colonialism. The lexicon of trauma studies makes a distinctive contribution to understanding such concepts as history, temporality and suffering within the postcolonial context. It will become clear that in the constant re-enactment and revisioning of the past, trauma fiction “overlaps with postcolonial fiction” (Whitehead *Trauma Fiction* 82) and becomes useful in dealing with postcolonial concepts such as dispossession, racism, and genocide.¹⁴ These connections between trauma theory and literary criticism become evident in postcolonial narratives, which attempt to uncover suppressed personal and collective histories, rescuing “shattered remnants of the past [...] and redeeming the stories of the conquered and the dispossessed” (Whitehead 10). Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy suggest that “[p]ostcolonial critics have begun to re-read the literature of colonialism in light of trauma theory, thereby reinterpreting histories and practices of colonialism under the sign of trauma” (9). Literature can represent the unrepresentability of trauma by suggesting what is inaccessible, incomprehensible and what remains indescribable regarding traumatic experience:

Trauma narratives go beyond presenting trauma as subject matter or character study. They internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience with their underlying sensibilities and structures. They reveal many obstacles to communicating such experience: silence, simultaneous knowledge and denial, dissociation, resistance, and repression, among others. (Vickroy 3)

Postcolonial critics argue that trauma theory needs to globalize itself and adapt to different, less individualized, and more collective forms of “colonial-induced traumas” (Craps and Buelens 6). The thesis will suggest that colonial violence does not explicitly suggest a singular event that is specific to an individual’s experience of trauma. Within colonial/postcolonial contexts it need not always refer to the Caruthian definition of trauma as a singular or central event that deeply disturbs the individual who is subjected to it. Due to colonial induced power structures trauma is viewed as a systematic and ongoing paradigm that affects individuals/groups of Indigenous peoples continuously

¹⁴ Here I will distinguish between the traumas experienced by Indigenous people through, for example dispossession, and the “traumatic” white guilt that emerges in white literary retellings of colonial history.

over periods of time. In particular, trauma theory in the postcolonial context addresses the systematic abuse in the form of racial violence in the colonies. Frantz Fanon argues that the ongoing traumatisations of the colonized arise out of “the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment” (*Black Skin* 30).¹⁵ These are continuing traumatic conditions producing constant anxieties that are not fixed upon a “singular location in time and space” (Van Styvendale 215).

By contextualizing trauma in colonial/postcolonial environments the “impact of severe, multiple, repeated, and cumulative aspects of trauma common to many communities” (Robin, Chester, and Goldman 246) comes to the foreground. These can be everyday forms of racism which evolve from ongoing degradation.¹⁶ Michela Borzaga suggests that “[w]hat is needed [in postcolonial contexts] is an approach to trauma that takes into account both the historical and cultural syncretisms as well as the everydayness of people’s lives and their unique textures” (75). My thesis takes up one of these approaches: Laura Brown’s usage of the term “insidious trauma”. This is not understood as a singular event; it relates to ongoing and structural abuses that are invisible on the surface, yet damage the individual’s/groups’ sense of existence.¹⁷ Kai Erikson’s concept of collective trauma, which is not defined as a sudden, but an ongoing experience, relates to “insidious trauma”:

By collective trauma [...] I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even *insidiously*

¹⁵ Rosanne Kennedy argues that the concept of trauma is transformed by the uniqueness of the colonial environment: “the traumas of a racist environment – which contributes to the attrition of material, social, and psychological conditions – are compounded by genocides and civil war in post/colonial contexts” (“Mortgaged Futures” 90).

¹⁶ The terms ‘race’ and ‘racism’ are relevant in my study of postcolonial literary texts as I touch upon race relations and the effects of racism in Australia’s and South Africa’s imperial colonies. Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths argue that

[a]lthough race is not specifically an invention of imperialism, it quickly became one of imperialism’s most supportive ideas, because the idea of superiority that generated the emergence of race as concept adapted easily to both impulses of the imperial mission: dominance and enlightenment. [...] Racism can be defined as: a way of thinking that considers a group’s unchangeable physical characteristics, and which on this basis distinguishes between “superior” and “inferior” racial groups. (*Key Concepts* 198-99)

¹⁷ The term “insidious trauma” has first been coined by Brown’s feminist therapist colleague Maria P.P. Root. See Root’s “Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality” (1992).

[italics mine] into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma.” But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. (153)

My study points to some of the effects that are part of the unconscious systematic abuses of racism and colonialism. Insidious trauma is brought about by the colonial enterprise and described as an ongoing symptom of systematic subjugation and discrimination.¹⁸ This term will be taken into account in my thesis when discussing the enduring spiritual torment of an Indigenous people due to their forced institutionalization and dispossession described in, for example, Lisa Fugard’s *Skinner’s Drift* (2006).¹⁹ Here the African family, ‘employed’ as farm hands, share a prolonged sense of social suffering due to pervasive and everyday practices adopted by the white tyrannical farm owner, who threatens to annihilate their sense of community. In this case, I will suggest that notions of insidious and collective trauma entail cross-generational effects that have a traumatizing impact upon the collective dynamics of a people.

Postcolonial Departures from Traditions of Genre

The study compares nationally diverse postcolonial texts with a particular interest in the parallels in their deliberate breaks with generic patterns and structures. Departures from the traditions of generic narratives enable innovation in postcolonial literatures. The adaptation and appropriation of traditional genres is a tactic which indicates that genre is a dynamic construct. Heta Pyrhönen argues that

genre continually remakes and reworks its norms, thus extending them. As a dynamic process it is dominated by repetition, but also fundamentally marked by difference and change. Each new instance constitutes an addition to existing corpus and entails a selection from the repertoire of generic elements available at any one time. New novels aim to extend or to modify the repertoire, either by adding a new

¹⁸ Frantz Fanon’s discussion of racism as a traumatic experience is relevant here; see Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

¹⁹ This novel will be examined as written in the pastoral mode. Some examples will argue that the image of the African farm and its representation of white supremacy, ownership, and entitlement suggest how white mythologies of land ownership are employed in order to assert power over the colonized.

element or by transgressing one of the old ones. One might thus characterize genre as a plethora of innovations within certain limits. (118-19)

My use of genres here takes up John Frow's recent work on the remapping of genre.²⁰ Particularly useful for this thesis is Frow's concept of "generic fix". For Frow this suggests how genres shape a view of the world as they shift and travel, "creat[ing] effects of reality and truth that are central to the ways the world is understood" (1632). Genres, then, are not static; rather they adapt in response to the constitutive characteristics of social and historical contexts. In this sense, genres can be viewed as mobile, constantly transforming to "describe a generic reality and participate in constructing it" (Pyrhönen 114). Their continual transformations are shaped by the changes in society.

In 'new' literatures in English, genres map points of tradition and innovation, continuity and change. My study reads postcolonial narratives which take up traditional genres and "reinvent [...] generic conventions in order to represent postcolonial experiences" (Hiddleston 2). When genres are immersed within socio-historical postcolonial contexts they are portrayed as expanding upon and departing from traditional generic forms. Heta Pyrhönen suggests that this "dynamic process [...] is dominated by repetition, but also fundamentally marked by difference and change" (118). For postcolonial criticism the notion of generic "fixes" opens up ways of thinking about how traditional generic forms take on new formulations in narratives that address the unsettled historical conditions of colonisation. The conventions of genre shift and expand in postcolonial narratives as "postcolonial writers have manipulated and reshaped these forms" (Hiddleston 8). When "drawing on and upsetting [genre] conventions" (6) particular generic changes occur within postcolonial literatures to suggest the transforming conceptions within postcolonial society and culture.

The thesis traces genre formations that help to elucidate fictional responses to colonialism, trauma, and reconciliation in Australian and South African contemporary novels. Transformations of genre travel across these two southern spaces and draw on transnational connections as they respond "to the historical anxiety and trauma enforced

²⁰ Genres are understood as evolving forms, "structures of information" (Frow 1631) that respond to and give shape to social and historical contexts. See John Frow's "'Reproducibles, Rubrics, and Everything you Need': Genre Theory Today" (2007).

by colonialism and its legacies” (Moore-Gilbert 91). Postcolonial formations of genre react to the socio-cultural and socio-historical encounters between settler invader populations and Indigenous peoples in Australia and South Africa. The selected categories of genre, which originate in Western generic structures, embrace these challenges as they incorporate the contested histories of nation and narration. By addressing discourses of national reparation and reconciliation postcolonial transformations of the *Bildungsroman*, the pastoral, and historical novel expose the troubling pasts and the contradictions of settler existence on contested grounds.

Each chapter of this thesis addresses the ways that a traditional literary genre is reformulated and renewed. The first, “Representation of Trauma in Two Selected *Bildungsromane*,” investigates how the genre of the *Bildungsroman* is rehabilitated and how its traditional boundaries are transgressed to explore the psychic landscapes of childhood trauma. Julie Mullaney argues that this particular “genre attracts writers keen to explore the trajectory of (national) self-formation in postcolonial locations” (32). Their focus is on the developmental progress of the protagonist when “chart[ing] the initiation of the child or young adult into society and the challenges this process generates” (Mullaney 30) in the postcolonial context. Both Gail Jones and Rachel Zadok adapt the traditions of the *Bildungsroman* in *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* to portray their protagonists’ struggles in their journeys of self-formation. These appropriations of the traditional *Bildungsroman* suggest flexibility as *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* depart from European traditions to include the legacies of colonisation. Instead of accomplishing the passage from adolescence to maturity, which is characteristic of protagonists in traditional *Bildungsromane*, Perdita and Faith fail to enter adulthood successfully. The exposure to trauma stalls their childhood developments. These traumatic experiences stem from the violence and racial injustice that continues and remains unreconciled in postcolonial states. These protagonists’ failures to reconcile with the past and their repression of traumatic memories speak of the buried and silenced national stories of Indigenous/African women in settler colonies, which remain unspeakable in conventional examples of the genre.

The second chapter of the thesis, “Postcolonial Pastoral” explores the departures from the pastoral in Australian and South African postcolonial narratives of settlement. Traditional pastoral forms were associated with a sense of nationalism which strengthened notions of

mythical homelands understood in terms of fixity of place and security of belonging. Utopian idylls conveyed an intimate environmental interrelatedness between the individual and the land. My study of how the pastoral engages in distinctively postcolonial forms suggests the mutability of generic themes, such as landscape, borders, and memory, and reveals points of contact within the frame of trauma theory. Postcolonial writers attack the traditional literary tropes of nostalgic myths of belonging and entitlement. Postcolonial landscapes “are the site[s] of deep contestation and challenge” (Mullaney 24) where the trope of finding serenity in nature is set against the violent settler/Indigenous conflicts over land. David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* and Lisa Fugard’s *Skinner’s Drift* negate the settlers’ land priorities in anti-pastoral scenes to expose their feelings of unsettledness. Moreover, traumatic memories of death and Indigenous dispossession haunt the landscapes of these depictions of the postcolonial pastoral.

The final chapter, “Making Use of History”, focuses on alternative imaginings of histories of settlement in Australia and South Africa. The historical novel genre has the capacity to question received histories and disrupt singular and authoritative accounts that have been privileged in historical records. My study of postcolonial historical novels explores narratives that take the form of historical revisionism in order to recuperate a violent and silenced past that challenges dominant ideology. Both novels establish “fiction as an alternative site for the re/construction of histories” (Mullaney 39). Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* and Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* are very different historical novels in terms of their narratives, yet both revision their nations’ histories on behalf of a variety of untold stories of injustice and violence. In a realist linear narrative, *The Secret River* investigates the failures of Australia’s colonial historiography to incorporate the traumatic history of past settler/Indigenous encounters in nineteenth century scenes of frontier violence. The novel seeks justice for a dispossessed people by inscribing a traumatic and unsettling memory within the realist historical novel. The ensuing trauma of the massacre of the Darug people remains unfinished business beyond the telling of story. Grenville’s postcolonial historical novel suggests that the traumatic legacy of Indigenous suffering remains unresolved in contemporary Australian society. *David’s Story* is a postmodern narrative that is shaped around apartheid’s blind spots as it incorporates the “provisionality of truth” (Driver Afterword 219) to shed new light on South Africa’s apartheid and post-apartheid historical records. By exposing the incompleteness and

selectiveness of the histories that circulate in the new South Africa, the novel ultimately challenges the discourses of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Its fragmented and anti-linear narrative establishes divergent temporalities to comment on the failure of national and political discourses to acknowledge the traumatic absences of marginalized women across South Africa's violent history.

Chapter I: Representation of Trauma in Two Selected *Bildungsromane*: Gail Jones' *Sorry* (2008) and Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005)

The Australian writer Gail Jones and the South African writer Rachel Zadok transform the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* as a form/sub-genre of the novel. By engaging with questions of female development, processes of becoming, and reconciliation with the past both writers adapt the *Bildungsroman* to address settler-colonial legacies of racial and ethical injustice. In her novel *Sorry* (2008) Jones adopts the perspective of a non-Indigenous female child named Perdita to recognise the grief of Australia's Stolen Generation, the thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly taken from their families in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005), Zadok portrays the development into adulthood of a white girl, Faith, who witnesses the harrowing experiences of black South Africans both during the apartheid period and in the post-apartheid regime. These appropriations of the traditional *Bildungsroman* point to the genre's flexibility, and suggest it can contribute to the deliberate reworking of European inheritance in postcolonial fiction. Both postcolonial *Bildungsromane* appropriate and disrupt the traditional generic framework.

The Traditions of the *Bildungsroman*

The traditional *Bildungsroman* has been conceived (stereotypically perhaps) as a "European genre defined primarily by male theorists, in terms of works by and about men" (Lima, "Caribbean Women Writers" 2). From Wilhelm Goethe's prototypical *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795),²¹ via Charles Dickens's self-cultivating *David Copperfield* (1850), to James Joyce's protagonist in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

²¹ Randolph P. Shaffner points out that the concept has been coined by the German literary theorist and author Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg in his *Versuch über den Roman (Essay on the Novel)* in 1774 (according to Wilhelm Dilthey, a German historian and philosopher, the designation of the term can be contributed to the German philologist Johann Simon Karl Morgenstern). Also of importance is the fact that the somewhat less known German writer Christoph Martin Wieland with his novel *Agathon* in 1766-67 (*Geschichten des Agathon*) might have published the first form of the *Bildungsroman*. Although Goethe did not invent the form of the apprenticeship novel he "did definitely shape the form" (Kornbluth 128) and contributed to its propagation. Furthermore, Wilhelm Dilthey's 1870s usage of the genre's defining term led to its broadcast in the English-speaking world (Cha 7).

Man (1916), the celebration of the bourgeois white male protagonist has been a prominent feature of the genre. These *Bildungsromane* adhere to a conventional storyline, tracing “the spiritual and psychological formation and development of a young man who eventually comes to compromise the rebellious self with the social order and its values by passing from innocence and ignorance to a certain stage of maturity and knowledge” (Cha 7). This incorporates the protagonist into a process of social inclusion and communal accommodation:

The genre embodies the Goethean model of organic growth: cumulative, gradual, total. Originating in the Idealist tradition of the Enlightenment, with its belief in human perfectibility and historical progress, this understanding of human growth assumes the possibility of individual achievement and social integration.

(Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 5)

The protagonist’s inclusion as a subject in a social network is essential as it coincides with his personal formation, the process of *Bildung*. The concept is a term identified within the conventional *Bildungsroman* and serves as a “structuring principle in the narratives of development” (Bell 46).²² Franco Moretti argues that “a *Bildung* is truly such only if, at a certain point, it can be seen as concluded: only if youth passes into maturity, and comes to stop there. And with it time stops – narrative time at least” (26). It further emphasizes the development of characters from early adolescence to maturity, in terms of a journey from fragmentation to personal wholeness. The *Bildungsroman* might be viewed as the genre that “stands out as one of the most prominent attempts to diagnose the intricate dynamics of [...] self-formation” (Buma 1). Moreover, *Bildung* refers to the private formation of the individual, the “harmonious cultivation of the whole personality” (Tennyson 142). The term is founded on the deep-rooted “humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity” (Sammons 41), “reestablishing the myth of the evolution of a coherent self, giving mankind precisely the illusion of a distinct, self-

²² Françoise Jost in “La Tradition du *Bildungsroman*” writes of the etymological origin of *Bildung* as “a synonym, up to the eighteenth century, of *Bild*, or imago or portrait. *Bildung* (education, formation), in the pedagogical sense of the word, is the process by which a human being becomes a replica of his mentor, and is identified with him as the exemplary model” (98-99).

The character’s process of *werden* or ‘becoming’ coincides with the reader’s moral and educational development as well as the nation’s path toward progress and maturity (Esty 413-14).

present subjectivity” (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 43). Many of these characteristics will trouble postcolonial writers and critics.

The traditional *Bildungsroman* assumed an educative function, and a contractual obligation to promote the *Bildung* of its readers. Most importantly, it was associated with the notion of nation-building. For example, literature – especially the *Bildungsroman* genre – in Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries enjoyed superior status as the promoter of the nation’s progress and evolution. Hence, German humanist scholars attempted “to develop a national culture that would equal and in certain ways surpass other cultures, East and West” (Buma 2). The philologist Karl Morgenstern, who had defined the term *Bildungsroman*, was convinced of the genre’s potential in the nation-building process:

It will justly bear the name *Bildungsroman* firstly and primarily on account of its thematic material, because it portrays the *bildung* of a hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain state of completeness and secondly because it is by virtue of this portrayal that it furthers the reader’s *bildung* to a much greater extent than any other kind of novel. (qtd. in Swales 12)

James Hardin suggests that the term *Bildung* might be viewed as a “collective name for the cultural and spiritual values of a specific people or social stratum in a given historical epoch, and by extension the achievement of learning about the same body of knowledge and acceptance of the value system it implies” (xi). Similarly, Marc Redfield explains that for the protagonist and, ultimately, for the readers “to undergo *Bildung* is to identify with humanity: a humanity that is itself an ongoing process of self-realization or becoming” (191). The *Bildungsroman* acted as an institutional forum perpetuating humanist ideologies and ethical guidelines for good citizenship. Jed Esty speaks of the “double notion of becoming: aesthetic education of the bourgeois subject [...] and the development of the people into the historically meaningful form of the nation” (413). Thus, the literate citizens were involved in a nation building practice, as they were – in a didactic manner – encouraged to follow the novels’ ideologies and guidelines to evaluate their moral and rational observations. The traditional *Bildungsroman* is viewed by Esty as “a symbolic device that binds subject to nation in a shared trajectory of progress and development”

(421). This process, in turn, “inspire[d] the middle class to a life of public service, with obvious benefits to the state” (Kushigian 16).

Childhood in the Traditional Bildungsroman

The hero’s childhood, his trials and tribulations of becoming and attaining integration into society’s higher echelons, is a main constituent of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Katherine Bell describes the middle of the nineteenth century as “the height of the bildungsroman’s success” (47), when it contributed to conceptions of childhood, providing its readers “with the most persuasive and poignant ethical and moral cues on what it means to be a child, to grow up and to reach adulthood” (2). She argues that the popularization of childhood drew upon John Locke’s concept of *tabula rasa* that had been gaining in popularity and palatability among a wide audience in the nineteenth century (Bell 47). Novelists portrayed their child characters as unwritten pages: innocent and unknowing. Conventionally, from their birth onwards, child heroes in traditional *Bildungsromane* were made to be blind to the evil intricacies of society. The inexperienced and susceptible characters, such as Dickens’s Pip and Hardy’s Jude, have contributed to the popularization of “literary representations of innocent, vulnerable children [that] abound in educational texts and tracts of the period and extol the importance of preserving and sequestering childhood through extended education” (51). The growth process of the child is portrayed in his or her search for experience that is largely based on social relations and which forms a “direct line from error to truth, from confusion to clarity, from uncertainty to certainty” (Tennyson 137). In Victorian *Bildungsromane* the child hero is expected to learn and mature as his environment, which is predominantly patriarchal and essentially linked to his father, compels him to endure hardships (Buckley 16). Jerome Buckley summarizes the classic male-centered *Bildungsroman* plot as follows:

A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy. [...] He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence), to make his way

independently in the city. [...] There his real “education” begins, not only his preparation for a career but also—and often more importantly—his direct experiences of urban life. [...] By the time he has decided [...] the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. (17-18)

In this prototype the child hero’s search for a vocation and hence a secure place in the social order facilitates “the development of the individual [and] repeats the evolution of a nation” (Bell 14). The process of becoming does not only apply to the child, but also to the nation. As the child character might be viewed as an unknowing blank page of society, an unconscious imitator of its nation, it also becomes the nation’s mirror image, its close link (21). Thus, two main processes are linked in the conventional *Bildungsroman*, “the processes of personal and national ‘becoming’” (13).

The German interpretation of the *Bildungsroman* genre has been regarded by scholars including Todd Kontje, Martin Wieland, and Pensena Pascal Buma as unyielding. Buma adds that it is “limited in its applicability by the constraints of nationalistic ideology, its bourgeois bias, its concern for the strength of the masculine character, and its historicity” (4). As other national literatures took up the genre, its conceptions were subject to adaptation, opening up new possibilities for transformation. For example, Buma argues that during its inception in England, the genre began to distinguish itself from the German prototype:

In England the *Bildungsroman* quickly became an even less defined genre, expanding to embrace the problems of development of the individual generally and portraying the conflict of the protagonist with the world at large. Thus the term has come to be used loosely to include novels of education, adolescence, apprenticeship, initiation and simply life stories. (2)

Ideological and historical agencies “allowed for a multiplicity of contending views about the very nature, form, and function of the *Bildungsroman*” (Buma 2). Martin Swales in *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* points out that “as long as the model of the genre is imitated as a sustained and sustaining presence in the work in question, then the genre retains its validity as a structuring principle within the palpable stuff of an individual literary creation” (12). Adaptations of the *Bildungsroman* genre keep it alive

and suggest its ability to compromise and evolve. Tzvetan Todorov in *Genres in Discourse* further argues that “the fact that a work ‘disobeys’ its genre does not mean that the genre does not exist [yet] the transgression requires a law – precisely the one to be violated. We might go even further and observe that the norm becomes visible – comes into existence – owing only to its transgressions” (14). By incorporating and even transcending “the narrow confines of nation, race, religion, and culture” (Buma 9), these transgressions of the genre open it to other, more global contexts. Moreover, they revitalize the genre as they expand the set boundaries of the traditional *Bildungsroman* and open up a place for new discourses, such as postcolonialism and feminism that challenge many of its founding precepts.

Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*

Despite its origins in a national tradition, the historical record of the *Bildungsroman* suggests openness to gendered and global issues and points to the fact that it is flexible enough to incorporate cultural and global specificities.²³ For example, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland observe that

[i]t has been a tradition among critics of the *Bildungsroman* to expand the concept of the genre, first beyond the German prototypes, then beyond historical

²³ Sandra Frieden adds that the dynamic character of the traditional *Bildungsroman* has the ability to adapt; the gendered *Bildungsroman* became “a changed function for a genre which was historically adapted to other needs” (316). Hence, after its encounter with emerging female heroines at the centre of *Bildungsroman* narratives in the nineteenth century, it became clear that the established conservative groundwork was subject to reinvention, being more open and flexible towards other kinds of narratives. The revisions of the genre suited the female authors’ intentions when narrating the social growth of a struggling female’s identity. Bonnie Hoover Braendlin argues that

[t]he emphasis of a *Bildungsroman* on repressive environmental factors, on the process of disillusionment necessary for personality change and maturity, and on the possibilities for transformation offered by individual choices makes it an attractive genre to modern women intent on expressing female awakening and consciousness-raising and on proclaiming new, self-defined identities. (77)

It became one of “the most salient genre[s] for the literature of social outsiders, primarily women or minority groups” (Hirsch “Formation” 300). The paradigms of the traditional *Bildungsroman* seem more supple and related “borrow[ing] from that tradition while at the same time reconfigur[ing] it” (Hoagland 5). These transmutations of the *Bildungsroman* point to the fact that, as a genre, it was able to emancipate itself from ideological conventions of nation and narration and adjust as a continually changing dynamic entity subject to historical transformation. In the twentieth century the face of the traditional *Bildungsroman* began to change more significantly introducing stories of formation not only from Europe and America, but also from Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

circumscription, now beyond the notion of *Bildung* as male and beyond the form of the developmental plot as linear, foregrounded narrative structure. (13-14)

Moreover, Moretti argues that the *Bildungsroman* has been able to include and accept ideological clashes in specific historical moments, thereby proving “capable of responding most adequately to these new demands on social life” (10). New postcolonial forms of the genre indicate this flexibility and capacity to interrogate familiar western genres and incorporate “counter discourse[s]” (Erwin 91). So, for example, the revisiting and rewriting of the traditional *Bildungsroman* offers evidence on “how ‘the Empire writes back to the Centre,’ since different cultures, at different times, (re)produce literary genres to serve culture-specific purposes” (Lima “Decolonizing Genre” 432). Jose Santiago Vazquez points to examples where the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* integrates “western formal and generic structures into the narrative” (30), and where prototypical elements borrowed from the traditional *Bildungsroman* prevail,²⁴ namely experiences of “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal of love, the search for a vocation and working philosophy” (Buckley 18). As Helena Maria Lima comments on the relationship between the traditional *Bildungsroman* and the thriving evolution of its postcolonial reconfiguration, she suggests that “postcolonial novels of formation continue to ask the genre’s traditional questions about the relationship between experience, subjectivity and social structures[;] they explore all its possibilities, thereby expanding its genre” (“Decolonizing Genre” 434) by infusing it with greater social and historical intricacy. In this way, the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* opens up new spaces for culturally intricate and specific worldviews to be incorporated into a more flexible and dynamic genre.

The continual adaptability of the traditional *Bildungsroman* not only highlights its flexibility, but also suggests that the postcolonial version of the genre can flourish in African, Australian and Caribbean literatures.²⁵ Thus, Tobias Boes, who has noticed a

²⁴ Jose Santiago Fernandez Vazquez offers *Bildungsroman* examples in postcolonial literature, which incorporate generic devices from the conventional *Bildungsroman* genre: Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981); Nuruddin Farah’s *Maps* (1986); and Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991).

²⁵ A very partial list of postcolonial *Bildungsromane* from Africa in contemporary literature includes: Euphrase Kezilahabi’s *Rosa Mistika* (1971); Nafissatou Diallo’s *A Dakar Childhood* (1975); Mohamed Sueliman Mohamed’s *Nyota ya Rehema* (1976); Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* (1976) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979); Mongo Beti’s *Mission to Kala* (1964); J.M. Coetzee’s *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983); Said Ahmed Mohamed’s *Utengano* (1980); André Brink’s *The Wall of the Plague* (1984); Zoë Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987); Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous Conditions* (1989);

growing trend concerning the traditional *Bildungsroman* as one of the most salient genres for postcolonial fiction, argues that

[d]uring the past few years, attention within twentieth-century *Bildungsroman* studies has increasingly shifted towards post-colonial and minority writing. As a result, it has become obvious that the critical commonplace of a decline of the genre during the modernist period is a myopic illusion. In reality, the novel of formation continues to thrive in post-colonial, minority, multi-cultural, and immigrant literatures worldwide. (“Apprenticeship” 239)

Postcolonial writers participate in the continuing innovation by redrawing the boundaries of the conventional *Bildungsroman*. In this way the revitalized form of the *Bildungsroman* and its appropriation by postcolonial writers “has furthermore imbued the genre with greater complexity” (Hoagland 17). These fictions speak of present racial inequalities and “explore the psychic landscapes of a lost past [...] and of repressed childhood trauma, abuse, and patriarchal oppression” (Smith and Watson 128). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that there are instances of

[c]ontemporary postcolonial writers employing the form [to] typically reshape the story of education as one of becoming alienated subjects of double legacies in ways that interrogate the form’s ideology of development, self-determination, and incorporation of citizens into the new nation. (129)

Thus, the characteristics of the traditional *Bildungsroman* are adapted to postcolonial histories. Fredric Jameson argues that in these “national allegories [...] stor[ies] of the private individual destiny [are] always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (“Third-World Literature” 69). Given this, in postcolonial *Bildungsromane*, narratives of family life and the protagonist’s troubled development become implicated in the traumatic histories of a troubled nation.

Pamela Jooste’s *Like Water in Wild Places* (2000); Clara Momanyi’s *Tumaini* (2006); Caribbean postcolonial novels of development include: George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953); Geoffrey Drayton’s *Christopher* (1959); V.S. Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* (1959); Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970); Zee Edgell’s *Beka Lamb* (1982); Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990). Australian postcolonial *Bildungsromane* include: Kim Scott’s *Benang* (1999); Gail Jones’ *Sixty Lights* (2004); and Andrew McGahan’s *White Earth* (2005).

In postcolonial *Bildungsromane* the process of *Bildung*, the protagonist's decisive passage towards self-formation, self-assimilation, and integration into society, is troubled since the supposed journey of growth and self-discovery must engage with experiences of alienation and loss. Bonnie Hoover Braendlin argues that as the traditional *Bildungsroman* is cast by postcolonial writers into a postcolonial discourse, its identity changes: "This new *Bildungsroman* asserts an identity defined by the outsiders themselves or by their own cultures [and] evinces a revaluation, a transvaluation, of traditional *Bildung* by new standards and perspectives" (75). Joseph R. Slaughter suggests that "in many postcolonial *Bildungsromane* the genre's traditional conclusive event of social, civil, and self-integration is perpetually postponed, so that the sovereign undivided human personality remains a vanishing plot beyond the frame of the text" (215).²⁶ The development towards growth, which involves the character's movement towards wholeness, is thwarted, forcing the youthful protagonist to distance herself from society, not being able to realize her aspirations. Slaughter views first-person postcolonial *Bildungsromane* as "novels of disillusionment in which the promises of developmentalism and self-determination are revealed to be empty" (215). In contrast to the traditional *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist becomes "the builder of a world that seeks its meaning in the future rather than in the past" (Lima "Decolonizing Genre" 437) the postcolonial protagonist remains stuck in the past, unable to escape. Also, there is no "homeland" (Moretti 26), no wholeness of community, no place of safety that the hero may claim in order to settle down and thereby conclude his psychological journey towards self-formation and resolution.

Under these conditions, the shared trajectory of the protagonists' and readers' *Bildung*, that traditionally binds reader to nation towards progress and development does not produce a flourishing and stable national imaginary. Lima has noticed that "it is significant that many of the post-colonial novels that chart this process of *Bildung* for the individual self and the nation (both standing at the threshold of development) begin with a death rather than with the more conventional birth" ("Decolonizing Genre" 441). Violent

²⁶ In *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form and International Law* (2007) Joseph R. Slaughter examines the comparability of law and literature, exposing conspicuous relations between the novel and discourses of human rights, especially between the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman* and the culture of human rights.

death sets the tone and becomes the structural framing for many postcolonial *Bildungsromane*. Because authors hesitate to propose individual or national maturation and unification, characters, who are either primary victims or secondary victims of bereavement, are denied development towards wholeness, and inclusion in a stable homeland. Death makes the characters' personal development troubled, and it denies participation in the organic development of a postcolonial nation. Shaul Bassi suggests that the representation of death in some postcolonial *Bildungsromane* refers to "the state of impoverishment and devastation in which the 'triumph' of the West has left the colonies"; the character as well as the nation are left fragmented in "dire social and political conditions" (109).

When addressing postcolonial *Bildungsromane* one tends to speak less of the nation's future and more of the difficult task of remembering the past. The histories of these nations, more often than not, point to histories of violence. Violations of communities and ongoing dispossessions, disintegrations and deprivations remain unreconciled in personal or collective histories. Postcolonial nations have been formed on fragile and insecure grounds, and the past is a troubled country. Quite often memory involves a rekindling of disturbing and traumatic memories that entail painful recognition and witnessing before reconciliation can occur. These processes suture both individual and national histories in ways that both draw upon and adapt features of the classic *Bildungsroman*.

In Australia and South Africa, the *Bildungsroman* has been adapted to contribute to processes of reconciliation. When referring to postcolonial narratives, especially the post-apartheid literary project, Ingrid de Kok suggests how the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* might serve to unlock and uncover private histories:

Its charge is private, not public. Its bid is to unwrite, retell, and reorganize the nature of the record, investigating the relationships between stories and history, staging the drama of individual and collective experiences and perspectives, examining discontinuities and lacunae. (5)

Jones' and Zadok's postcolonial *Bildungsromane* revisit the specific histories of their countries and re-open the archives of a "history of white privilege" (Kossew *Writing*

Woman 3), thereby textualizing the deep-seated and still embattled national politics of race and reconciliation.

Characters in postcolonial *Bildungsromane* risk capture in a separated nation that remains divided by race, still maintaining its “exclusionary myth of national unity” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin *Key Concepts* 139). The nation is not founded upon national and cultural oneness (Boehmer *Literature* 182-83), and mythologies of unity are exposed and called into question. By engaging in the difficult work of imagining a nation whose consciousness and sense of solidarity has been ravaged by loss and dispossession, internal differences, especially between diverse races and ethnicities, remain intractable. Reconciliation and equality are both necessary but difficult issues for the nation-building process. Do these postcolonial *Bildungsromane* “reopen the old wounds, so they can heal” (Butler 25) and so foreshadow a brighter future for the nation than they themselves are able to suggest?

The protagonist’s return to a traumatic past troubles histories of the nation. The unsettled journeys of the characters, who are called upon to remember distressing and often violent pasts, point to “the tension[s] between memory and amnesia” (Attwell and Harlow 3) at the fringes of colonial rule, and the beginnings of reconciliation. Novels of formation seek to “undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization – the myths of power, the race classifications, the imagery of subordination” (Boehmer *Literature* 4) to reveal the injustices of the colonial state. These revelations can bring a sense of justice to the disparities of a traumatic past, addressing difficult truths about trauma and the witnessing of violence that remain unspoken. Gabriele Schwab suggests that a “politics of redress, reparation, and reconciliation means, then, acknowledging and integrating the unforgivable in order to repair what is possible at the present time” (105). But what if the unforgivable cannot be integrated and forgiven and if the language of healing and regeneration is absent? Possibly, national discourses of reconciliation will fail. Moreover, in some postcolonial *Bildungsromane*, especially in the ones I will analyze here, readers face complex and unexpected narratives that trouble reconciliation and the nation-building process. Postcolonial *Bildungsromane* dealing with trauma and loss are inclined to be fragmented and incoherent, highlighting the unspeakability and perplexity arising out of traumatic events. An inability to reconstruct the past and fully acknowledge the protagonists’ complicity and the reverberations of an unclaimed

experience suggest failure to transcend the past and participate in what has come to be termed ‘national reconciliation’. In this event, protagonists become prisoners of a past they cannot control. However, remembering a violent and often traumatic past that involves catastrophic tragedies of victims of colonialism can be a formative experience in the passage to reconciliation. Julie McGonegal argues that “[r]emembrance may not lead to the telos of reconciliation. And yet, the impossible task of remembering is a very preliminary step in a reconciliation process that must be conceived as an open-ended, perpetually ongoing and always unfinished conversation” (“Canadian” 78).

Do these postcolonial *Bildungsromane*, which are driven by “the competing demands of reconciliation and remembrance” (Parry 88) as they attempt to reconcile the “bad histories’ of their nations’ past, encourage the hopelessness and fragmentation of their characters in order to suggest the difficulty of the truth and healing process? What are the consequences of failed *Bildung*, where the developmental progress is forever postponed? These and other aspects of the postcolonial *Bildungsromane* are questions that shape the close reading of Gail Jones’ *Sorry* and Rachel Zadok’s *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* that follows. These are case studies of the adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* in the contemporary literatures of settler colonies, where the legacies of colonization trouble reconciliation and national renewal.

Both these novels portray the developmental processes of their protagonists toward psychological wholeness, although whether they reach closure is open to question. These postcolonial *Bildungsromane* introduce characters in troubled narratives plagued by crises. Their female protagonists not only bear witness, but are also directly affected by colonial injustices and – as they mature – are forced to reveal and acknowledge their complicity in an oppressive history.

Most postcolonial *Bildungsromane* feature Indigenous or subaltern subjects as their protagonists, but *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* evolve around two non-Indigenous characters that recount the dissonances and conflicts of their lives as subjects in societies characterized by ongoing racial inequality. These first-person perspectives attempt “to speak [of] the unspeakable” (Leys 109) and thereby recover the traumatic events of the past in order to pay homage to the silenced primary victims of trauma. As child witnesses, and consequently (secondary) victims of a central traumatic event, both Perdita and Faith

struggle to comprehend the nature of the world, as psychological maturation is thwarted and parental relationships, especially the mother/daughter bond, is troubled. Also, in each of these fictions the traumatic experience of rape plays a critical role in the narrative and will be looked at closely here.

In Australian and South African postcolonial contexts, quests for knowledge raise questions about the processes of personal and national reconciliation. In these fictions the protagonists fail to speak of and take responsibility for the traumatic truth; in *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, “[c]ertain violent histories, individual or collective, will forever remain beyond reparation and unforgivable” (Schwab 105). In turn, the protagonists’ evasive actions indicate the difficulties of reconciling with the violent past.

Jed Esty suggests subject and nation share an idealist trajectory of growth, advancement, and development in the conventional *Bildungsroman* (421). But as I have begun to show, both Jones and Zadok question and depart from the humanist ideal of the traditional genre, as both nation and subject face troubling and violent histories and remain “unreconciled to the past and discontented with the present” (Parry 95). The authors return to a national and personal history plagued by traumatic experiences, including forced separation, rape and murder. In both *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* the particular traumas of gendered and racial violence deal with enduring personal and collective suffering.

Trauma troubles the conventions of the quest narrative. I will argue that Perdita and Faith are devastated by experiences that shatter the innocence of their childhoods and force them to revisit and relive their personal and complex histories in order to be able to reconcile with the past. Ericka Hoagland argues that “the presence of trauma [...] serves as a sharp demarcation between the *Bildungsroman* and the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*” (47). Both Jones and Zadok place their female protagonists on troubled paths where Perdita and Faith must endure psychological childhood trauma that disturbs their formation into adulthood. The following readings of Jones’ *Sorry* and Zadok’s *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* focus on how the concept of trauma exerts a profound impact on these postcolonial *Bildungsromane* whereby development into maturity is cut short by acute crises and results in the protagonists’ unfinished maturation. Their search for knowledge and the pursuit of a coherent identity are blocked and perpetually postponed as “time

seems strangely stagnant, bereft of its traditionally progressive dynamic” (Barnard “Tsotsis” 551). Here, the traditional passage “from error to truth” and “from confusion to clarity” (Tennyson 137) cannot be attained. Perdita and Faith face a traumatic truth that is not ameliorative and liberating, but “an event outside the range of human experience” (L. Brown 100). In each narrative a painful truth, a trauma of death and rape, remains buried in amnesia. Readers do not encounter the protagonist’s quest towards a precise, harmonious, and confident maturity in society, but bear witness to the protagonist’s stasis, trapped in unclaimed experience. In these ways, two novels from very different contexts display shared and troubling similarities in the development of the contemporary postcolonial *Bildungsroman*. Both Perdita and Faith fail to atone for their actions and expose the truth concerning the perpetrators’ crimes, indicating the difficulties in speaking about victims, perpetrators and complicity in these contemporary postcolonial societies.

A Reading of *Sorry*

In her depiction of Perdita Keene, Gail Jones transforms the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* to trace the childhood journey of a girl born and raised on a remote station in Western Australia during the 1930s and 1940s. Named by her Shakespeare-crazed mother after the missing daughter of *The Winter’s Tale*, Perdita – Latin for ‘lost one’ – narrates and explores her puzzling and fragmented story of development that “can only be told in a whisper” (*Sorry* 3).²⁷ Perdita’s story is one that is beset by haunting traumatic memories and the consequent speechlessness that accounts for her posttraumatic stress. After stabbing and killing her father, Nicholas, who has forced himself upon Mary, the family’s Aboriginal maid and Perdita’s most cherished friend, the 10-year-old protagonist develops a severe psychogenic stutter, the result of emotional and traumatic shock.²⁸ In turn, she cannot communicate the meaning of the traumatic event.

²⁷ Rosanne Kennedy argues that voicing the story of rape and murder troubles the gendered and racialized rules and values of white Australian society: “Perdita’s story can only be told in a whisper because it is incomprehensible within normative ideologies of race and gender, which dictate that white men do not rape black girls and that white daughters do not kill their fathers” (“Trials” 349).

²⁸ Perdita refers at length to her rare condition:

A History of Loss

From the onset of the novel, Perdita characterizes herself as an unwanted child, a mishap in the loveless marriage between her mother, Stella, and her father, Nicholas: “I was a mistake, a slightly embarrassing intervention, and knew this melancholy status from earliest childhood” (*Sorry* 4). Her upbringing is characterized by isolation and solitude, as she grows up in a small shack in the desolate wilderness with two adults who do not show any interest in affection for each other or their child: “They didn’t count to each other, my parents. And they barely counted me. I was a foreign coin they possessed, a worthless shape” (27).

In this way it is not only a single horrific event, but the unfolding of traumatic events involving her parents, which lays the ground for her speechlessness and social maladaptation. She is “stuck in the wrong bloody place with the wrong bloody parents” (68). Her upbringing is fraught with grave emotional disorders emanating from dysfunctional parenting and an exposure to traumatic events. This is not unusual, and Denise Lacher, Joanne May and Todd Nichols suggest that

[t]rauma exposure often occurs within the home and involves caregivers who are supposed to be the source of safety and stability. It may include various types of maltreatment – emotional abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and witnessing domestic violence. The traumas are chronic and begin early in childhood. Moreover, the initial exposure puts the child at risk for subsequent exposure. (24)

Although Nicholas does not exert a great influence upon his daughter, I want to argue that his enduring fascination with the First World War and its images of horror have contributed to Perdita’s troubled upbringing. Wounded physically and psychologically during the First World War by shrapnel that had been lodged deep in his back, Nicholas is plagued by recurring nightmares of “bodies blown to kingdom come” (*Sorry* 5). To

Of all the anguishing forms of stutter that torment children (mostly males, as it happens, statistically, at least), mine was one of the rarer. Called psychogenic, it is the consequence of shock, or upset or circumstantial disaster. It is infrequent in its appearance and enigmatic in its cure. Most stuttering is developmental, and fades over time; the eruption of stuttering, as it were, is a stranger thing. (*Sorry* 151)

overcome and forget his traumatic past he dreams of becoming a famous anthropologist, studying most particularly the Australian Aboriginals. Destroyed by his own exaggerated grandeur Nicholas becomes an irritable recluse. He turns to his anthropological studies to distance himself from his wife and daughter. Moreover, his war experiences lead Nicholas to construct a wall of silence which makes it impossible for him to resolve the war's traumatic affects which force him to act viciously as a husband and father. The shameful sense of his physical incapacity that prevents him joining his comrades in fighting "the great cause," propels him to drift further into delusion.

The beginnings of the Second World War ignite Nicholas's infatuation with the calamities of warfare and he becomes "unconscionably, disastrously lost" (*Sorry* 40), a mere shadow in the household. Through countless newspaper clippings of the horrors of the war Nicholas reiterates and relives the memories of grand-scale warfare. The trauma of his past is thereby continually remembered and revived in the visual representations of the Second World War, until it becomes psychic reality. Perdita recognises that her father had the "war inside him [...]. [C]alamity was glorious, tragedy was seductive" (62). She becomes directly exposed to Nicholas' war craze as she gives in to childish games in the "mean little shack with its mad decorations" (67). It is in this so-called "zone of the *abnormal*" (68), a place filled with images of death, that Perdita grows up; these images force her imagination to give in to the horrors of the war:

The image was by then already a little tattered – it had been on the wall for two weeks at least – but it suddenly seemed to address her. This was a man whose job it was to kill, and somewhere, behind the image, were the corpses he had made, post-mortally transforming to grotesque blue jellies, and those too, perhaps, of some of his comrades, indistinctive in the banal democracy of death. (82-83)

Apart from Perdita's relationship to Nicholas, Jones places greater emphasis on the mother/daughter relationship in *Sorry*. The mother, herself a victim of traumatic loss, exercises a disruptive influence over her daughter. Stella, apparently lost with a newborn child in an environment that in no way resembles her home country, fails to cope with what she perceives as the debilitating isolation and vacancy of the Australian landscape. The remoteness and dehumanization of Australia's outback leave her emotionally stranded; "she learned, most of all, to seal herself in, to find what solace might lie in self-

erasure” (18). Early on in the novel, she realizes that “her life, just begun, had already ended” (15). Stella gives in to “post-natal depression” (25) and thus describes her life as “futureless and sad” (5); she has become an empty vessel as “birthing had scooped her out” (25). She succumbs to feelings of unworthiness and solitude, ignoring her responsibilities as wife and mother. In an examination of mother/daughter relationships in contemporary novels of development, Melanie L. Walters argues that in many of these fictions “mother and daughter lack a strong connection because the mother resents her roles as wife and mother and has succumbed to negative conceptions of dependency, domesticity and lack of freedom” (10). It is Stella’s own feelings of unworthiness and resentment that manifest themselves in anger and coldness toward Perdita. Stella’s indifference and lack of feeling become evident when Perdita considers the relationship with her mother: “Stella was incurious about me” (*Sorry* 75). Perdita watches as her mother slowly slips away from reality; “[s]he lost sight of her own life as a separate thing [and] felt diminished” (8-9).

In her desolation, Stella turns to the lives of Shakespearean characters, finding solace in their tragedy, thereby further distancing herself from Perdita. The mother/daughter bond is portrayed as a problematic one due to the fact that Perdita is physically drawn to her mother, yet is forced to distance herself as Stella cannot function as mother or wife, and gradually disappears in Shakespearean grandeur, “becoming enshrouded by a 400 year old eloquence” (15).

Stella’s absence in her role as mother harms and obstructs Perdita’s growth process. Thus, Jones places great importance on the dysfunctional relationship between Stella and Perdita, and this emphasis is characteristic of contemporary examples of the genre:

In many contemporary *Bildungsromane* the mother is portrayed as the most significant influence on the adolescent female’s identity, and in many cases the mother is represented as a hindrance which stalls the daughter’s individuation and successful entrance into adulthood. (Walters 2)

Perdita is influenced by her mother’s crazed obsession with Shakespeare with its deranged and isolated concept of the world. Stella’s escape from her Australian prison, “a place of utter barbarity” (*Sorry* 16), is the fixation with the sophisticated world of

Shakespeare as “in Shakespearean language she found a betokening glory, that was lacking in her own much-too-common life” (7-8).²⁹ Moreover, intertextuality is an effective tool in Jones’ postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, suggesting the repetition of “actions of a previously encountered story, that the reader knows in advance the end which is to come, and that the decisions and fate of the character are predestined from the outset” (Whitehead *Trauma Fiction* 89). For example, many quotations taken from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* foreshadow the bleak outcome of Perdita’s encounter with the traumatic secret that has beset her life: “Foul whisperings are abroad. Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds to their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets” (v.i).³⁰

Stella reads and memorizes Shakespeare to shape her language ethics; this ultimately clouds her mental capacities and forces her to “a life immobile and tyrannically fixed” (*Sorry* 28). Influenced and confounded by Stella’s misappropriations of Shakespearean fragments, Perdita “inherited an addled vision of the world; so much was unremembered or misinterpreted” (35). When commenting on female childhood relationships in postcolonial *Bildungsromane* Rose Sau Lugano argues that “protagonists are either built or destroyed, weakened, or empowered by the interpersonal relationships with the ‘significant others’ in their lives” (15). Thus, Perdita is not necessarily destroyed by her mother, who is, in psychological terms, the ‘significant other’ in her life. Yet she is certainly psychologically damaged and it is, I argue, precisely the inheritance of her mother’s infatuation with Shakespeare that contributes to Perdita’s forgetfulness and misinterpretation of the past and hinders her knowledge of the significant traumatic event. The inability to understand and interpret the past stalls her individuation and successful entrance into adulthood.

All of this is a pre-history to the traumatic event that is both tragic and embedded in histories of suffering that predate the family’s immigration. Both Nicholas and Stella carry with them a troubled history characterized by “indefinable loss” (*Sorry* 20) and despair brought about by the effects of the First World War. They have found each other

²⁹ Sustained intertextual references concerning Shakespeare’s plays recur and the significance of their emotional paroxysms stands in for Stella’s own emotional outbursts.

³⁰ Jones also uses other intertextual references, namely to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (1849). Henry Lawson’s “Drover’s Wife” (1892) and Barbara Baynton’s “Squeaker’s Mate” (1902) evoke gothic scenes of Australian isolation and horror to contribute to and articulate the characters’ — especially Stella’s — fears of misery of the colonial condition.

in their questioning misery, yet have never been able to connect, “they never quite met, that is to say, as lovers do, with intermingling and exchange, and with lips corresponding” (21). While their personal stories are not specific to Australian or postcolonial history, they bring their burdens along with them. It is in Australia, situated in the remote frontier country, that Nicholas’s and Stella’s separate experiences of isolation and melancholy are exacerbated. The terrible isolation and the danger of the remoteness of the Australian landscape drive them to catastrophe and their story of emigration becomes part of the collective suffering and loss that is endemic to settler colonial history. All this is a precursor to the rape and murder in which Perdita becomes a participant. She bears the gravity of human tragedy in this menacing environment and is forever affected by its outcome.

Failed Bildung

The murder has a radical psychological effect on Perdita’s further development and her process of becoming. As I have pointed out, the traditional concept of *Bildung* has been defined as the protagonist’s journey from fragmentation to wholeness, but the murder dramatically stalls Perdita’s development toward wholeness and maturity. The trauma of witnessing Mary’s violent rape, and her consequent patricide, renders her silent. The protagonist is helpless, a victim of her own “dissolving memory [...] [when] approach[ing] its substance; there was a gap and shapelessness to her own lost history” (*Sorry* 166). Her memories of the event are characterized by what Cathy Caruth refers to as “the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience” (“Explorations” 200). Her inability to grasp the full magnitude and the meaning of the event turns her into a prisoner of the past; she describes herself as being trapped and fundamentally dislocated from the present due to the

implicating dragnet of the past, the accumulated experiences to which I was somehow compelled to return, the *again* and *again*, of moments drastically mistaken. [...] [T]hese summonings were a form of backwards learning. I recognised – with a gloomy apprehension – that although my body had moved, parts of my mind were lodged still in an altogether elsewhere, lagging behind, fraught and ill-fitted. (*Sorry* 182-83)

This expression of ‘backwards learning’ disrupts and reveals the illusion inherent in the traditional concept of *Bildung*, which is a linear movement towards clarity and certainty, a development and process toward coherence. Yet, due to trauma, Perdita’s only way to move forwards in the present is to clarify the uncertainties and fragments of the past and until then “she had no sense of future time” (188).

Traumatic memory distorts Perdita’s childhood thereafter. She is forced to turn inward to remember the forgotten event and hence find answers for a mental blankness buried deep inside her. Her life, thus, becomes “this dreadful containment” (136) as she experiences the dilemma of the trauma as a compulsive act of remembering and trying to forget. Moreover, Perdita’s mind is filled with abstracted images that compel her to relive death-like experiences: “when she lay she felt a compression of time and space and the crowding in of images she had been trying to suppress. [...] It was a half-way death” (136). Not only does the linearity of time lose its logic for Perdita, but time seems eradicated and “cannot heal the victim’s suffering in the same way time heals other wounds” (Schwab 3). Perdita becomes a victim of her own past: “victims fall into a melancholia that embraces death-in-life. [...] [O]ne remains forever tied to a loss that never becomes real” (Schwab 3). Moreover, this unrecognizable loss has forever etched itself onto her mind: “[i]n the deepest folds of memory, the heaviest sediments, paradoxically, are those produced by loss” (*Sorry* 117). When referring to a definition of the traumatic event Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue that

trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. (69)

Perdita is continually haunted as “the scene returns and returns, unsettled, mutable, fraught with the abstraction of trauma and the shattering of time” (*Sorry* 124). This violent past continues to haunt her in the present and causes her to relive the inaccuracies, the “submerged and inexpressible” (117) memories of the horrible event. Nicholas’s terrible ghost figure haunts her from the start:

For the first time Perdita thought about the existence of ghosts and became afraid. He might be there now, distending into phantasmic, airy shapes, long-fingered, eyeless, yawning and strange, his back and neck gaping open where the knife had been. He might be floating between the book-stacks, wreathing around her bed, passing restlessly in and out of the room where last night he was alive and sleeping. (94)

This is the haunting of “unthought knowledge”, which is theorised by Christopher Bollas in *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. Unthought knowledge, Bollas suggests, is knowledge that has been perceived, yet has not been fully known or has not been relived. In Perdita’s case, it is her knowledge of the traumatic event of her father’s murder that has been experienced, but cannot be fully known in the present. Consequently, she is caught “between knowing and not knowing about trauma, between the compulsion to complete the process of knowing and the inability or fear of doing so” (Auerhahn and Laub “Knowing” 288). The heroine comprehends the fact that she may never be able to leave behind these violent memories as their impact has been so riveting and deep-seated that memories have turned into “compulsive reminiscences” (*Sorry* 117). Haunting memories of rape and murder that took place in the shack cannot be forgotten as “something of the past always remains if only as a haunting presence or revenant” (LaCapra “Loss” 700). The forceful revisiting of the painful memory is essential if Perdita is to come to terms with the past and lay the dead to rest.³¹ “I wanted a last glimpse of memory so that I could seal the shack, and the death, and my life with Mary, into an immured and sequestered past. To guard against what? To guard against haunting” (*Sorry* 117).

According to Caruth’s concept of unclaimed experience, one possible way for Perdita to reconcile with the past and attempt to live with the scars of memory is to speak of the trauma and to translate the knowing into telling. However, Perdita is rendered speechless. She is incapable of what, the historian Hayden White proposes in terms of the role of narrative, “fashioning [her] human experience into a form assimilable to structures of

³¹ Gail Jones in “*Sorry-in-the-Sky*: Empathetic Unsettlement, Mourning, and the Stolen Generations” (2004) uses Derrida’s concepts of the *revenant*, a returned ghost, and *arrivant*, one coming, to argue that a revisiting of violent memories becomes essential as it may ultimately lay the ghosts of the past to rest: “Derrida argues that revenants must become arrivants, that a laying to rest or a burial is a naturalization, and that we must be revisited, as it were, by represented claims” (Jones 166).

meaning” (“Narrativity” 5) and comprehensible to others. The traumatic event constrains her and she reverts to a pre-linguistic state. Outside language, she is forced to resist communicating her repressed knowledge as the “traumatic experience overwhelms the individual and resists language” (Whitehead *Trauma Fiction* 3). Her stutter characterizes the elusiveness and fragmentation of speaking about her trauma:

My throat is misshapen with all it now carries. [...] [T]ime has made thus, deformed my mouth, my voice, my wanting to say. [...] In my mouth syllables cracked open and shattered, my tongue became a heavy, resistant thing, words disassociated, halted and stuck. (*Sorry* 3-10)

Trauma has violently taken Perdita’s speech: “She found herself stuttering. Something fretful and uncommon pestered her tongue, some mischief was there, some remnant of the day” (94), namely a “newly warped voice, this juddery, hunchbacked, troublesome voice” (97). Her difficulty in verbalizing the traumatic history of the event is defined as a “speechless terror” (Van der Kolk 193)³² that encompasses the victim of a violent trauma and robs her of the ability to recount the events she has suffered and witnessed. This “unsayable secret” (McGonegal “Canadian” 71) has mangled Perdita’s speech and is characterized by the female protagonist as a “violence [that] remained like congestion in her mouth” (*Sorry* 96); “something that made her words seize and stick” (103).

It is also her stutter that causes her to further turn inward and become more reclusive. Consequently, she becomes isolated from her social environment and is “filled with wild loneliness” (102): “the quieter I became, the more others ignored me, the more I disappeared” (151) and the “isolation of her destroyed speech made Perdita aware of the larger isolation in her life” (108). Billy, her friend and neighbor, distances himself from her; his mother, who has considered adopting Perdita in order to save her from her incompetent parents, loses interest in her. Her own mother is rankled by her daughter’s inability to speak (101). The loss of speech turns her into a social misfit and she loses the affection of others, who she believes “considered her an idiot” and a “half-witted child” (108, 171).

³² In a compilation entitled *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (1996) Bessel Van der Kolk and other researchers, clinicians, and teachers in the area of posttraumatic stress and other related phenomena concentrate on how trauma affects an individual’s conceptions of the world, psychological functioning, and psychosomatic functions.

Speechlessness

Deeply embedded in this *Bildungsroman* is the primary trauma: the rape of the Indigenous girl, Mary, by the protagonist's father. When the relationship between mother and daughter breaks down irretrievably and Stella is taken to a lunatic asylum, Mary, a teenage Aboriginal housekeeper, is brought from a convent to the Keene household in order to take care of Perdita. Mary, who has been born "half-caste" and thus has been forcibly taken from her mother, is a child of the Stolen Generation and carries with her a traumatic history of her people that is gradually revealed. Mary's narrative explicitly introduces the violent history of settler invasion and Aboriginal dispossession. It is Mary's story of maternal loss, submission to Christianity, and her experience of rape that speaks about and embodies the collective suffering of a people, and her troubled life can be argued to "serve as a synecdoche for a collective historical experience" (Boes "Apprenticeship" 277) of Aboriginals.³³ It is ultimately Mary's unjust imprisonment for the murder of Nicholas that makes her the martyr of colonial violence. How this narrative represents its only Indigenous character raises some troubling issues: Mary might be characterized as the archetypal Aboriginal sacrifice burdened by dispossession, displacement, and isolation, carrying the whole violent freight of the Stolen Generation on her shoulders. She voluntarily suffers in order to save her white "sister", Perdita, from going to jail and her sacrifice remains unacknowledged.

Here the protagonist's speechlessness connects to the witnessing of Indigenous dispossession. Perdita is unable to show gratitude for her friend's sacrifice and utter the simple word 'sorry', which raises questions concerning the 'Sorry Day' initiative and the national reconciliation movement in Australia. It may remind readers of the unsatisfactory apology given to Australia's Indigenous community in the opening speech by Prime Minister John Howard during the first official Convention on Reconciliation in 1997.³⁴

³³ Rosanne Kennedy suggests that "[t]he figure of the Aboriginal girl or young woman raped by a white man is a recurrent symbol for the violence and hypocrisy of settler colonialism in postcolonial Australian fiction" ("Trials" 350-51).

³⁴ During his speech the Prime Minister acknowledged Australia's era of colonization as "the most blemished chapter in our history"; however, he went on to argue that "Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control" ("The Reconciliation Convention" Channel 9 News), which, in turn, was met with jeers from the audience.

Gooder and Jacobs speak of the ‘postcolonial apology’ which, parallel to acts of reconciliation, “turns to the past in order to imagine a new future, [and] requires the offender to ‘recall’ and [be] ‘mindful’ of the past so that he or she might move on to a restored state of being” (237).³⁵ Australia is a country immured in the “historical refusal to mourn” (Santner 144), when it comes to evading responsibility to recall the colonial dispossession of Aboriginals. In a theoretic response to the belated acts of mourning and testimony in regards to the Stolen Generations, Jones argues that “certainly both the historiographical record and our civic discourse evidence delay and incompleteness in recognizing historical violence: the nation is out of sync, time is out of joint – riven by competing anteriorities, if you will” (“Sky” 165).

Mary’s untimely death towards the end of the novel and Perdita’s failure to apologize for the injustice her friend had to endure overshadows the national narrative of reconciliation and reparation and delays indefinitely the recognition of historical violence. In his analysis of *Sorry*, Christopher Eagle suggests that “Perdita finds herself trapped in yet another kind of speechlessness when she visits Mary and feels the impossibility of any kind of reparation for Mary’s act of self-sacrifice. [...] Perdita’s lingering silence before Mary suffers from a tragic belatedness” (27). No admission of guilt or gesture of reconciliation emerges from Perdita’s witnessing of an Indigenous trauma. Perdita is conscious of her “distinctive forgetting” (*Sorry* 213) as she claims that certain “compartments of memory I had begun to seal; and although I did not will it, I was already selecting what to forget” (213). When commenting on Perdita’s willful forgetting and her belated utterances that shape and shadow her narrative, McGonegal argues that Perdita can be viewed as an allegorical figure for Australia’s settler community and its tendency to repress particular historical knowledge in order to save itself from guilt (“Canadian” 77-78). Similarly, Rosanne Kennedy suggests that

[t]he novel may be read as an allegory of the inability of white Australians, and of their institutions, to witness their own complicity in acts of violence against Indigenous people. Perdita benefits from Mary’s sacrifice, but she also inherits –

³⁵ Gooder and Jacobs make references to Nicholas Tavuchis’ sociological work *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (1991) who draws upon the dynamics of interpersonal and collective apologetic discourse as means of resolving conflicts.

like Australians today – the responsibility of atoning for her father’s crime, and her own unwitting crime against Mary. (“Trials” 346)

Within the context of national reconciliation, that connects with Kennedy’s statement here, McGonegal notes that the “knowledge of settler responsibility for colonial genocide is devastating and will surely unsettle the psychological as well as collective boundaries that delimit the non-Indigenous subject, and yet this knowledge must be un-forgotten if reconciliation is to stand a chance” (“Canadian” 78). Perdita does not partake in the restoration of the past; she refuses to reveal the secret for which Mary’s unjust fate has been sealed “in the forgetfulness of someone else’s crime” (*Sorry* 204). The protagonist’s decision not to act and speak out calls into question the logic of reconciliation and reparation. Perdita comprehends that she “should have been otherwise. She should have said ‘sorry’” (204), yet she refuses. One may argue that Perdita’s process of *Bildung* has not contributed to her personal wholeness. She has not arrived at a point of maturity as towards the end of the novel “there was no atonement. There was no reparation” (213) for her wrongdoings. Her story ends with an “inertia of denial and repression” (213), which in turn inhibits her journey towards wholeness. As the wrongs of her past cannot be healed, Perdita understands in her last words that she will forever be “afraid of slumberry agitation, or ghostly visits” (214). It is Mary’s haunting ghost that will enduringly remain and remind her of her failure to reconcile the burdens of the traumatic narratives that emerge in the novel. Consequently, Mary’s cruel fate and Perdita’s silence reflect the covert affairs of a violent colonial history and “the ghost of that unarticulated apology operates across the continent to the present day” (Adil 1). Christopher Eagle fittingly suggests that “Perdita’s persistent silence before Mary represents another generation’s failure to speak up on behalf of the Aborigines, public testimony thought to suffer inevitably from the same belatedness” (28).

A Reading of *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*

Rachel Zadok creates a powerful evocation of a coming of age narrative that is divided into two parts: the first set in 1985 in a rural area of South Africa, and the second tracking

the protagonist's harrowing life as a young woman in post-apartheid Johannesburg in 1999. Growing up with her parents during the last decade of apartheid on a remote farm in Northern Transvaal, the protagonist bears witness to the unjust practices of apartheid and its fostering of racial injustice and inequality. At a young age she notices the treatment of blacks and understands that there must be something inherently wrong with the world of which she is part:

I felt as though the world was somehow different, like I had been exposed to something that made no sense, that had no reason to be the way it was. It was an unfathomable thing made up of tenuous strands that had to fit together, if only I knew how to place them. Yet, even as I grappled with the threads of it, trying to weave them together into a solid idea, I knew that what I would find when I finally managed was something rotten.³⁶ (*Gem Squash* 95)

Faith, like Perdita in *Sorry*, is traumatized when she witnesses the rape of the black maid, whom she also considers to be her friend. As in *Sorry*, the protagonist's childhood development is also troubled by more than just a single traumatic event. Furthermore, her development towards maturity is obstructed by her parents, whose relationship is coming to an end.³⁷ Both Marius's and Bella's pasts become disruptive forces driving them to separation and seclusion, and contribute to Faith's uneasy childhood.

Generational Trauma

In Zadok's novel, as in *Sorry*, the family is the victim of the posttraumatic effects of war. Faith's father, Marius Albert Steenkamp, once a soldier in the Angolan war, and now a traveling salesman, contributes to both the family's downfall and his wife's collapse into

³⁶ Miki Flockemann argues that this also "establishes the link between historical affliction, the pollution associated with apartheid and its legacy that is woven into the fabric of her lived social reality" (12). On the farm Faith is directly positioned within the uneven race relations of apartheid.

³⁷ In "Out of the Mouths – Voices of Children in Contemporary South African Literature" (2012) Susan Mann suggests that the "list of South African fiction in which narrative is woven either through or around a child protagonist is extensive" (335). She gives the following examples: Ben Okri's *Songs of Enchantment* (1993); Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1995); J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1997); Carolyn Slaughter's *Before the Knife* (2002); Mary Watson's, *Moss* (2004); Troy Blacklaws' *Karoo Boy* (2005); Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005) and her own novel *One Tongue Singing* (2005). Mann views child narratives as drawing readers into immersive juxtapositions of an innocent child view and the violence and corruption of the nation. She argues that, due to a child's bearing witness of violence, rape, and death, "the child narrator appears to have lost his or her innocence, mirroring the lost innocence of the nation" ("Mouths" 343).

lunacy. Marius's traumatic war experiences are unconsciously transmitted to his wife Isabel (referred to as Bella throughout the novel) and then to his daughter. The traumatic memories of his combat in Angola are never revealed in Zadok's narrative – Marius remains, like other traumatized war victims “encapsulate[d] [by] the unbearable affects generated by a catastrophic event in a space that will remain sealed off from the everyday and, in most cases, from the free flow of memory” (Schwab 113).

Marius has never reconciled with his past, relaying his suffering to Bella. Mia, an old friend of Faith's parents, tells Faith of Marius's grotesqueness: “He was quite strange. There was an odd look in his eyes, obsessive. Lots of men had that look, the ones who'd been to the border. He looked at Bella with these eyes, and it freaked her out” (*Gem Squash* 233). When thinking of her father's eyes, Faith is told by Mia that “[a]fter they married, it was like they swapped eyes. Like all the demons he'd brought back with him from Angola attached themselves to her. Started whispering. I didn't see it then, her going funny. Maybe I didn't want to see” (233). Miki Flockemann notes that “Faith's mother appears to ‘take on’ her husband's unspoken memories of the atrocities committed during the Angolan war” (9). Bella becomes a victim of her husband's past and the demons of Marius's past come to haunt his wife, who in turn begins to gradually dissociate herself from Marius and Faith.

Bella is described as an eccentric woman who gives in to strange moods and inconsiderate behaviour, especially towards her daughter. As an ardent admirer of the fairy world, Bella finds comfort in painting various forms of fairies, repeatedly descending into a fantastic world, losing her grip on reality, and evading her responsibilities as a mother. At a young age, Faith begins to notice her mother's reclusive and odd behavior: “Some days a strangeness would take hold of her, and she would disappear into the orchard for hours, leaving me alone on the farm” (*Gem Squash* 8). On other occasions Faith recognises that “she didn't seem to notice I was there” (9). As Bella is described as “the only one who ever saw the fairies” (10-11) and the one who befriended them, she also becomes responsible for impregnating her daughter's thoughts with frightening and upsetting stories about fairies who stole bodies and others who would be seeking out children to conceal them. Consequently, Faith experiences bouts of anxiety throughout her childhood, and begins to express a growing fear in her mother's increasingly menacing presence:

She looked back at me, narrowing her blue eyes. Her focus bored into me, unblinking, drilling through my skin into my gut until my stomach twisted into a knot. I looked away, trying to break her stare, but she didn't move and I was forced to look back up at her. I felt a twinge of fear as I watched her, tall and sturdy, her hair white snakes uncoiling over her shoulders. I couldn't take my eyes off her, fearing that if I did she would turn into something bad, something that was not my mother. (15)

In *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* the relationship between mother and daughter is defined by fear, not love. The encounter with her mother in this particular situation not only moves Faith to “a hot prickle of tears”, but she quickly realizes that her mother has distanced herself and “had seemed so strange [...] so far away” (16).

When Marius leaves the family, Bella's disruptive influence and her strange behaviour continue to define her daughter's feelings of alienation and fear. After a fierce quarrel with Marius, ending in his definitive departure, Bella further descends into the darkness of the fairy world, and thus strips herself of all responsibility, giving up her role as mother.³⁸ She even abandons Faith on their trip to town:

Mother had gone to the toilet, and I waited impatiently for her to come back. She had been gone a while, it seemed like hours, and I was beginning to worry that she might be feeling ill. [...] Mother's van wasn't there. [...] I'd been abandoned. (38-39)

Faith observes her mother after the violent argument with Marius and with hindsight comprehends that “it was like mother had gone to bed that night after Papa left and never properly woken up” (61). Bella turns inward and succumbs to a melancholic state of self-deprivation and isolation. Her physical and mental absence is felt strongly by Faith, who remembers that she “could never stem the flow of tears that made [her] feel like [she] was, at those times, not her daughter” (88).

³⁸ The quarrel will be looked at more closely when dealing with Faith's experience of the event and her consequent dissociation from it.

Zadok, like Jones in *Sorry*, shifts the emphasis towards the mother-daughter relationship in order to describe how Stella influences Faith and how her daughter struggles with their emotional bond. She hopes her mother will regain her old self and recuperate from her sickness: “I looked towards mother’s window, hoping to catch a glimpse of her through the drawn curtains. [...] [M]aybe she would be mother again” (82). Faith is naturally drawn to her mother, but begins to realize that the sickness has encompassed and changed Bella, turning her into a stranger: “I got scared that this was mother’s sickness, because my real mother didn’t cry, the mother that was sick cried, the fairy-sick mother cried, but not my mother [...] I felt wary of this mother-person and I didn’t want her to touch me” (127). As Bella continues to slip further into a state of oblivion, Faith finally comprehends that she has not only lost her mother, but, now, has to live together with a stranger that used to be her mother:

I stared at her, taking in her sallow skin, her limp ropy hair, the stick-like arms that protruded from her filthy nightgown. [...] The way she walked, the strange shuffle like she never lifted her feet suddenly erupting into what seemed like flight hardly touching the floor. Mother was becoming one of them, crossing over into the realm of fairies. [...] [N]ow, looking at this person in front of me, this person who was supposed to be my mother but didn’t feel like her, I was gripped with deep penetrating fear, the same fear I felt when looking into a dark cupboard at night. (98-100)

In her daughter’s eyes Bella turns into an alien figure that has lost all of her endearing features. Her drastic change causes Faith to think that the dark fairies have taken possession of her. She feels insecure and associates her mother’s appearance and behavior with horrors that lurk in dark corners and sinister spaces.

Failed Bildung

It is Bella’s considerable influence that threatens Faith’s maternal attachment and contributes to a negative process of her *Bildung*. Like Perdita, Faith’s development towards wholeness is stalled and disrupted. Walters argues that “[r]egardless of the

particular nuances of the mother-daughter relationship, the mother's influence and perception of her daughter is one of the most profound forces that shape the adolescent daughter's emerging identity" (10-11). Bella's own troubling immersion into a fantasy world has a grave impact on Faith's childhood as she recalls that "as long as I could remember I'd been surrounded by fairies. They lived on the peripheries of my vision, well hidden from my curious eyes, but I knew they were there" (*Gem Squash* 7). Stories of evil fairies have distorted Faith's understanding of reality and have filled her upbringing with fears and horrors, causing her to believe that her mother has been snatched by fairies that will eventually come for her as well.

Also, the violent argument between her parents affects Faith's maturation and causes her to deny several disturbing instances of reality. When Marius and Bella have an argument over his affair with another woman, the dog Boesman is 'accidentally' shot; Marius and Bella exchange blows and he leaves the farm for good.³⁹ As Faith witnesses this domestic violence she turns inward, and falls unconscious to dissociate herself from the psychic pain of the event:

They screamed at each other, yelling at the same time. I clamped my hands over my ears, trying to block out the din until suddenly, it stopped. The quiet echoed, making me feel hollow and cold inside. [...] [I]t seemed a black hole would swallow me. (49)

The scene is traumatic for her and she cannot process its meaning. This childhood trauma marks her first dissociation from reality. Vickie Abel argues that "if a child was exposed to inconsistent care giving coupled with emotional and physical neglect, that child would be forced to rely on primitive and inadequate skills: aggression, dissociation, and avoidance" (19-20). Dissociation becomes Faith's way of dealing with the outcome of her parents' fierce clash. It is a defense reaction to dissociate and detach herself from reality and hence, later on in the scene, from witnessing her mother's prostrate figure and the tear-and blood-smeared face:

Mother lay, propped up against the black wall, her body twisted away from me. Her chest heaved, sending little shudders through her. Mother was crying. I had never

³⁹ Flockemann suggests that Bella purposefully "shoots the family dog, suspected of having rabies" (11).

seen her cry before. [...] Mother turned and looked up at me through puffy eyes. Her face looked soft and slack. One side of her face was swollen, and blood mixed with snot on her upper lip. I felt sick. Black dots swam in from the edges of my vision, landing on my face with prickly legs, then went up my nostrils and filled my mouth. Mother's broken face bobbed between the dots and I slid downwards. Everything went black. I struggled to breathe; it felt like there was a heavy weight on my chest. (*Gem Squash* 53)

When commenting on children's coping mechanisms which are triggered by traumatic experiences, Danielle Malluche identifies dissociation

as one of many defenses an individual uses under stressful life events. The tendency to use disassociation is highest during childhood. Children may be more prone to use dissociation as a defense mechanism because of their underdeveloped defensive strategies. (4)

To evade the disturbing images of her mother and to escape from what she views but cannot comprehend, Faith turns inward and feels sick to her stomach. Furthermore, she detaches herself from reality and faints in order to avoid the painful exposure of seeing her mother crying and broken on the floor.

Other repetitive stressors of troubling experiences throughout Faith's childhood contribute to a repeated employment of dissociation: when staying with her suffering and troubled mother, Faith's coping mechanisms continue to be tested. As Bella, unable to cope with her husband's leaving, breaks down, Faith shares the emanating pain from her mother's psychic wound. Once again, to avoid and protect herself from the sheer enormity and immediacy of her mother's pain, she dissociates and detaches herself from the painful event:

The sound of mother's wailing went on and on. At first I stared, unable to understand what was happening, but her crying burrowed into my head and traveled through my body until it seemed that it would split me open. I couldn't sit and listen to it, so I stood on shaky legs and began to walk away. The sound followed me around the side of the house, allowing me seconds of respite where it seemed less

penetrating, but soon it became the only sound I could hear. I walked until I began to crack open, the keening scissoring through me trying to find a way out. It pushed between my hips, into my gut, boiling upwards until it reached my throat. I couldn't breathe. My legs gave up their march. I crumpled to the ground... (*Gem Squash* 109)

Consequently, whenever Faith is faced with a traumatic experience, she is able to suppress it, sealing it away from her consciousness. Malluche further argues that “the occurrence of traumatic experience during childhood, when the use of dissociation is high, may lead to the chronic use of dissociation to cope with aversive symptoms following a subsequent traumatic event” (4). In this respect, Faith becomes prone to sealing herself off from violent realities which she carries on subconsciously into the present. These intrusive past memories return to haunt her in her adult life, furthering her process of dissociation, yet stalling her personal development. Children who have been exposed to traumatic experiences are more likely to make use of dissociation later on in their adult lives in response to stressful events (Lipschitz, et al. 263-64). Dissociation develops into an involuntary, yet persistent response for Faith. This will later on become evident in the adult Faith's dealings with the past and her coping with the main traumatic event.

Another crucial moment in Faith's childhood occurs before the traumatic rape scene and its elusiveness and mystery haunt this coming of age narrative. Faith is present during her parents' argument, yet she cannot overhear what secret Marius whispers into her mother's ear before finally hitting her in the face. At this point the reader can only presume that Marius might have given her a justifiable reason for his infidelity. He may have reminded Bella of her own unfaithfulness that led to the illegitimate birth of Faith.⁴⁰ Faith, at the

⁴⁰ There are a quite a few references in the novel that point to the fact that Bella might have had an affair. When describing Faith's looks, she is depicted as not having much in common with her father Marius. Looking at her daughter, Bella admits the following: “‘You have such soft hair. [...] [S]ometimes I wonder where it came from. Your father—’ she faltered, and swallowed. ‘He’s got such coarse hair. [...] [Y]ours [is] so delicate, fine, like silk threads’” (*Gem Squash* 128). Also, when Faith observes herself in a reflection she considers how little the colour of her eyes resembled those of her parents: “Blue eyes stared intently back out at me. Where did they come from? I wondered. Mother’s eyes were a deeper blue, more intense. Nothing like the pale eyes that looked out at me. And Papa’s? Papa had brown eyes” (132). As to who could have fathered Bella, one may suggest that Oom Piet, described as the biggest flirt in town and the only other man in Bella's secluded life, might have had an affair with her. When in his presence Bella acts nervously and perplexed: “Mother stared at him and said nothing. [...] He was not her favorite person, that much I knew, but the look on her face was not the usual disdain she displayed whenever she saw him, [...] [it is] the confusion she seemed to have” (*Gem Squash* 144). Consequently, in her paintings Bella portrays

young age of seven, might have sensed something, yet did not have the capacity to comprehend the gravity of the circumstances. As a result, she harbours this uncanny memory, a remembrance that carries no meaning during its inception, until it haunts her later on. The unrevealed secret becomes “a foreign body lodged within the subject” (Abraham 174) that speaks of “the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (171). Along these lines Gabriele Schwab argues that

[c]hildren have a way of knowing. Children have a way of listening to the unspoken. Children also have a way of incorporating their parents’ unresolved conflicts, contradictions, and shameful secrets. This is why children may fall from the edge of a violent world into a no-man’s land of inner uprootedness that leaves them with a feeling they never belong. (100)

The shameful secret that leads to Faith’s uprootedness is to some extent revealed to her when she looks at her mother’s paintings of Dead Rex, described as one of the most evil fairies. She recognises her own striking physical resemblance to the depiction of Dead Rex and consequently considers that she cannot be Marius’s daughter:

There, in the painting, were the same long fingers, the same knuckles, the same knobbly wristbone. Even the tiny freckle between the knuckle of my little finger and my ring finger was mimicked on his hand, on the hand of the most terrible fairy. [...] My whole life was a lie. I wasn’t even a person like other people were. I was something else, a halfling, a changeling. [...] That was probably why Papa had left, because he knew and he hated me. [...] They all knew. [...] I felt dizzy, sick. [...] I closed my eyes, feeling a stifling flush of heat rush up my neck into my head. I opened my eyes but the room was gone, replaced by billions of tiny points of light. (*Gem Squash* 133-34)

The painting evokes great distress in Faith, as she experiences feelings of exclusion and abandonment. She realizes that there is some family secret that is not hers to know. Annette Kuhn argues that “sometimes family secrets are so deeply buried that they elude the conscious awareness even of those most closely involved” (230). To protect herself from the possible psychic pain of revelation, Faith’s unconscious employs the defensive

him as one of the most evil fairies, namely as Dead Rex. That is why Faith finds that the portrait of Dead Rex bears a great resemblance to her.

strategy of dissociation to once again block out a stressful moment in her childhood life: “Characters and happenings that do not slot neatly into the flow of the family narrative are ruthlessly edited out” (Kuhn 231). Faith’s bouts of dissociation have become automated responses to traumatic experiences. In her failure to comprehend the significance of the secret her development is arrested and she regresses further in her *Bildung*’s process and reverts to a rudimentary practice most commonly found in children who have experienced some trauma in their childhood: “I had wet myself, like a baby” (*Gem Squash* 136).

As in *Sorry*, the relationship between mother and daughter breaks down, as an Indigenous/subaltern character enters the narrative as a loving presence. Nomsa is introduced as Bella falls into seclusion and absolves herself from any parental responsibility. Consequently, Nomsa is hired by Tannie Hattie to work as the housemaid and caretaker of the household. She gains Faith’s trust and they establish an intimate relationship. As caretaker Nomsa takes up Bella’s role as mother until Bella recuperates her strength and feels ready to become part of public life again. Thus, she begins to date Oom Piet in order to make an attempt to recover from her own social seclusion.

Faith remembers the evening when her mother is getting dressed for a night out with Oom Piet: “Mother was made-up and dressed, and all that was left was shoes and stockings. [...] She looked at herself in the mirror and adjusted the belt on the dress” (165). These are the last events known to the reader from Faith’s perspective that night. It becomes obvious that something must have gone terribly wrong during that evening as Faith wakes up in her own bile with an aching shoulder. She, then, has to witness how her mother is taken away by the police and Nomsa is nowhere to be found.⁴¹ Faith has no recollection of how she got into bed or what occurred the previous night. Only later on, in the second part of the novel, when Faith grows older, do we comprehend the gravity of Faith’s

⁴¹ After gathering all the pieces from Faith’s puzzling flashbacks one finds out that Faith, after hearing distressing sounds described by Faith as “fear-screams” (*Gem Squash* 306) coming from outside the house, recognises that it is Nomsa’s pleading. Hence, she takes up her father’s rifle and decides to shoot at the perpetrator, who, as she later discovers, is Oom Piet. The reader realizes that Faith, trying to shoot Oom Piet, accidentally kills Nomsa who has been raped by Oom Piet. Due to the dissociation mechanism that is triggered to defend her from the devastating event she does not remember anything about the incident, but notices the next morning that her shoulder is hurt and bruised. One may deduce that her shoulder has been hit by the sudden rifle recoil after she had pulled the trigger. After the accident, Faith, clearly dumbfounded, observes the police carry away a corpse, her father’s rifle, and as Bella takes the blame for the murder in order to protect Faith, she is taken to a mental asylum.

dissociative process. Dissociative symptoms aggravated by traumatic experiences that children generally suffer from include a “subjective sense of numbing, detachment, or absence of emotional responsiveness; a reduction in the awareness of surroundings; derealization, depersonalization, and dissociative amnesia (i.e., inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma)” (First and Tasman 368). These are all barriers that Faith unconsciously erects to guard against her full knowing of the traumatic event. Hence, her defence process, triggered under stressful situations, protects her during childhood. However, most of the tragic events of the past come to haunt her in her adult life.

Like Jones, Zadok represents the rape of an Indigenous/African woman obliquely, focusing on the traumatic effects on the protagonist. Neither of the authors engages directly with the victims’ perspectives in the first person. The pain and suffering of Mary and Nomsa remain between the lines, unspoken and unspeakable. Like Perdita’s journey, Faith’s process of becoming and her quest towards future aspirations is greatly troubled and affected by her inability to overcome the traumas of her past, especially the witnessing of Nomsa’s rape. After moving to Johannesburg to live with her mother’s childhood friend Mia, Faith realizes years later that she will not be able to escape her past and that her fate seems to have been sealed: “Since the day I stepped on the train bound for Johannesburg, I have done nothing to alter the course of my fate” (*Gem Squash* 242). In several instances in her adult life she describes herself as lost, insignificant, and aimless: “I looked away and up at the sky. I felt myself lifting into it. Like a lost helium balloon, going up and up until I was nothing more than a tiny speck, irretrievable and far away” (146). In another example, she feels that she is going under, due to the weight of her unbearable past: “Like an abandoned paper boat set sail on a lake. I have drifted out of reach, sodden and heavy with water, soon my own weight will drag me under” (242). The experience of trauma has burdened her with a great defeating weight of which she cannot let go. In terms of her *Bildung*’s process, her movement towards the future is greatly obstructed by an unspeakable and burdening weight, as she comes to believe that “there is no point to [her] life, it lacks meaning, direction” (242).

The memory of her experience sets her apart from the present, and disorients her. The inability to access the unsettling and painful memory of Nomsa’s rape causes her to feel displaced. She believes that losing the memory of Nomsa will forever set her apart. Even

fourteen years after the incident, Faith has not progressed in her development nor has she been able to master her past:

Memory is fickle and fades fast, soon she was just a faceless name, attached to a set of stories I told myself, alone in the bathroom. The loss of her memory made me feel small and insignificant and homeless, like I belonged nowhere. Now, years later, the sudden power of the returning memory makes me feel the same way. Fifteen years on I'm still displaced, unsettled, homeless. (203)

Faith's development is thwarted; she cannot reconstruct a semblance of continuity in her present life, because the devastating and incomprehensible events of her past still haunt and hinder her from moving forward. Laura Brown argues that "[t]o the trauma sufferer, the future looks like the past. There is no revelation from which to develop or grow forward" (165). The haunting of trauma and its habitual return through nightmarish visions of the past make it difficult for Faith to grasp hold of the past, as this inability further plunges her into incomprehension and alienation. She is "plagued by violent nightmares, nightmares that left [her] feeling terrified yet unable to remember anything about them. [...] [E]very night [she] would wake up screaming and thrashing about" (*Gem Squash* 181). Faith, as other patients suffering from trauma, is repeatedly brought back into the situation of the devastating event, yet she has no control over the literal return of the event. Caruth argues that the "painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way" (*Unclaimed* 59). Faith is powerless to take control of the past, whenever she wakes up from another unspeakable nightmare: "I can feel it when I wake up, that sense of futility, that there is nothing to live for, that everything is lost" (*Gem Squash* 187). As in Jones' novel, a haunting occurs and Faith begins to understand that the ghosts in her nightmares, namely her mother and especially Nomsa, are calling upon her to re-remember them and make sense of their involvement in her tragic past. Judith Herman argues that most trauma patients are plagued by feelings of intense fear, hopelessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation (33). In the same sense Faith describes the imminent threat of her psychic trauma, which, if left unattended to, could ultimately destroy her:

I can't remember when I gave up hoping, when I buried myself so deep that I ceased to be. There is something inside that is beating to get out, some violence that is buried, an anger that, if I remain here and ignore it, will end up harming more than Bratcat. There is something inside of me and it's out of control. A thing that has been suffocated for too long and now claws its way up, gasping for air. It's the voice that whispers spite in my dreams, a darkness that attached itself to me long ago, before I was aware of dark things that grasp. [...] If I don't do something soon, it will be all of me [...] a nothing locked inside my body, waiting for death. (*Gem Squash* 243)

To avoid the threat of annihilation, Faith decides to return to the farm and face the ghosts of her past and the collective history of post-apartheid South Africa; for Faith's personal and individualized trauma is connected to South Africa's larger social and historical events. Her urge to return to the farm speaks of white national guilt and the collective impulse to query the nation's past. Faith may well be viewed as a symbolic figure of the nation's compulsion towards the past to excavate its horrors and redress its wounds.

After her mother's death Faith inherits all the farm assets and goes back to claim what has been left behind. When meeting with Petrus, the new caretaker of the farm,⁴² Faith's memories begin to intrude upon her with every step she takes inside her childhood home. She realizes that "it's one of those things that you forget about completely until something stirs it up in your memory and suddenly its absence seems inexplicable and a minor tragedy" (263). Caruth refers to trauma patients who force themselves to "returning to the site of catastrophe – which is also the site of unconsciousness" (*Unclaimed* 55) in order to excavate the hidden memories that have been associated with a specific location. At the farm and particularly inside the house Faith is transported back into the past through several triggers. The particular smell of the house, the creaking sounds carried by the wooden floorboards, the cold feel of the dark walls, and the familiar sights of the interior house, all set off Faith's memory tape and hence bring her back to the past. She suddenly feels "like a child" with a "toddler[']s voice": "I felt six again, lying awake,

⁴² When Faith meets Petrus on her farm in the post-apartheid period, Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) emerges as an intertext. Petrus claims his share of the farm and Lucy, the rape victim, decides to be married to Petrus in order to be able to save her house and raise her child in it. In *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, Faith becomes quite conscious of Petrus' claim to his native land and in one scene plays with the thought of upsetting an Afrikaner shopkeeper by implying that she is married to Petrus.

afraid of the things I might see in the dark” (*Gem Squash* 255, 260, 270). Her telling and vivid nightmares when sleeping in the house transfer her to the main traumatic event, when she is woken to Nomsa’s desperate cries:

I am walking down the passage, following a voice that cries for help. The voice seems to be all around me. [...] I look down and discover that my feet are not my own, they are small and bare, their skin plump and smooth like a child’s. [...] Someone’s crying. Someone’s moaning. (290)

After a series of dreams and flashbacks and intrusive memories Faith comes closer to the difficult and disturbing truth of the past. She begins to remember and comprehends that it was Oom Piet who raped Nomsa that night. After accusing Oom Piet of raping and killing Nomsa, Faith finds out that she was responsible for the killing; by trying to kill the perpetrator, she accidentally shot her beloved friend.

Ultimately an Indigenous witch doctor contributes to Faith’s healing process. In a spiritual ceremony he chants for three nights and three days in order to save Faith from what he calls “a thing inside her. A thing that has been there for many years, maybe since she was a small girl. It grows. [...] [I]t will destroy her. [...] If we are to help her, we need to get it out” (321-22). After the procedure Faith accepts her grief and mourns for all she has lost, so far, in her life. In her last lines she wishes to start afresh and hence calls up the people she lived with in Johannesburg whom she refers to as “my family”. In terms of the protagonist’s *Bildung*’s process, her journey from fragmentation to personal wholeness, one might argue that Faith has recovered and is experiencing posttraumatic growth.⁴³ In this respect, Annette Mahoney, Elizabeth Krumrei and Kenneth Pargament argue that “[a]n enduring wonder of human nature is that many people respond to traumatic events by experiencing posttraumatic growth. They often become stronger personally and deepen their connections to other people as well as their faith in life” (105).

Furthermore, as her symbolic name suggests, Faith does not lose her belief and conviction in life, but decides to have faith in new venues and perspectives that include her

⁴³ The term “posttraumatic growth” was first coined by Tedeschi and Calhoun in 1996. When dealing with posttraumatic stress they argue that “[p]eople exposed to even the most traumatic event may perceive at least some good emerging from their struggle” (Tedeschi and Calhoun 455).

willingness to trust her friends. Her decision to embrace and be part of a newly found family in Johannesburg and the willingness to be more open to relationships can be viewed as a change in perspective. Faith feels renewed and high in spirits, “feel[ing] good to be alive”. She goes on to add: “I am whole and healed and more than I have ever been” (*Gem Squash* 325). Faith’s joyful exclamations point to the drastic positive changes in her philosophy on life. Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, who theorise the phenomenon of posttraumatic growth development, have pointed out five domains in which a patient who has suffered from traumatic experience, might excel when recovering from trauma: “appreciation of life, relating to others, personal strength, new possibilities, and spiritual change” (qtd. in McKee 16). All of these can be said to apply to Faith, who has – to some extent – decided to leave the past behind and look positively towards the future.

In this respect, it must also be added that Faith’s healing process might not have been fully completed. She has resolved the puzzling fragmentations of her past, has reconciled with her killing of Nomsa and has also accepted the fact that her mother has goodheartedly protected her, but can she return to normality and accept all disastrous intricacies of the past? For example, she has failed to acknowledge that Nomsa’s rapist Oom Piet has not been punished for his horrific crime and is still on the loose. Although she understands as a young girl that there must be something inherently wrong, “something rotten” (*Gem Squash* 95) at the core of white South African society and their dealings with blacks, she does not, in her adult life, notice that she owes a debt to Nomsa. Hence, Faith’s failure to claim responsibility for Nomsa’s death and thereby exact retribution for Oom Piet’s rape of her dear childhood friend sheds a negative light on her personal development toward wholeness. Faith, like Perdita, might never be able to absolve herself from this guilt. Both protagonists have decided that in saving themselves they might move on and leave their pasts behind. In Faith’s case, she cannot be fully healed as she can never speak of Nomsa’s story, which would in turn prove her guilt for having committed a murder. Hence, Nomsa’s narrative and her devastating cause of death remain an untold tale beyond the novel’s main storyline.

Rape in *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*

In Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* Nomsa is portrayed as the primary victim of trauma, the one whose trauma has been so devastating that it has claimed her life. She is silenced, a victim who relies on the benevolence of others, mainly Faith, to speak of her story and bring justice upon the guilty. Nomsa's story is one that bears some similarity to the tale told by Tasso in the romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*.⁴⁴ Nomsa's death becomes Faith's crying wound: the wound inflicted upon her mind that cries out to her, and repeats itself as an "unwitting reenactment" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 2) in her terrible nightmares "that can be re-traumatizing and even life threatening" (Hesford 204). In this context, Caruth argues that

it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (*Unclaimed* 4)

Faith is haunted by Nomsa's death, and by the belated nightmares that plague her all throughout her adult life, yet she cannot find words to make sense of the events. The nightmares exceed the limits of Faith's capacity to narrate, and she cannot find a language to decode and consequently work out the meaning of her unsayable pain. Faith's trauma, as Caruth might argue, "is tied up with the trauma of another" (*Unclaimed* 8), namely with Nomsa's. It is in this sense that Nomsa haunts Faith's memory: to remind her of Oom Piet's horrific act and her death.

Yet, as Faith is responsible for Nomsa's death she cannot speak of Oom Piet's rape; consequently, Nomsa's story can never be told and, thus, reconciliation with the past cannot occur. In this respect, *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* and especially Nomsa's untold story engage in debates concerning the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,

⁴⁴ In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud summarizes Tasso's epic tale:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusader's army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (16)

which attempted to excavate the many unspeakable truths of the past in order to bring justice to those who should have been held accountable for their crimes to pave the way for national healing. This exercise in accountability allowed some truths to be spoken. Others, however, remained veiled and allowed perpetrators to evade responsibility. Faith has evaded her responsibility of being held accountable, burying Nomsa's tragic tale forever in the past. Similar to Perdita's decision not to reveal herself as the killer of her father Nicholas, letting Mary take the blame, Faith, too, cannot publicly reveal the whole truth of her past actions for fear of being held accountable. When speaking of belief and truth-telling in regard to the aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Denise Ackermann argues that "truth and reconciliation can only truly take place when we have the courage and insight to face *all* manifestations of lack of accountability" (50). Faith is left with the crippling burden of having to transform "the act of bearing witness into the possibility of engaging with ritual processes of healing, truth, and reconciliation and thus (re)producing a social narrative that explores the past in order to facilitate transition" (Gunne 168). She, however, lacks the courage to confront the past to face her own accountability concerning Nomsa's untold tale and thereby fails to reveal the injustices of the apartheid past and partake in the healing of a ravaged nation and the construction of a new and recovered South Africa. When referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Dirkie Smit argues that without an "acknowledgement or confession there can be no freedom and no reconciliation. No freedom is possible from the past or for the future" (97).⁴⁵ Faith is haunted by her inactions that might obstruct her path to freedom and in turn, obstruct her posttraumatic growth.

The issue of rape connects these novels in their responses to historical trauma. Both writers concern themselves with the representation of rape as being a quintessential act of violence and part of the settler/colonial/masculine project of mastering and subjugating the black female body that bears the brunt of physical trauma. In *Against Our Will* Susan

⁴⁵ Fiona Ross argues that especially women's stories in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission concerning rape and sexual abuse have been shrouded by a veil of silence: "Researchers attributed women's 'silence' about sexual violation to a 'general stigma' that attaches to women in a society that regards rape as private" (23). At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Women's Hearing on Human Rights Violations in July 1997, Meintjies (part of the Commission's Board and involved in women's experiences) argues that

we know that very few women have, in fact, come forward to recount their experience of sexual abuse in the context of political violence. Of nearly 9000 cases of violations only about nine have claimed they have been raped. Yet, in our research we came across many cases of violations [that] could be described as rape or where women knew of others who had been raped. (1)

Brownmiller argues that “rape is the act of the conqueror” (35) and Australia’s and South Africa’s colonial suppression of its Indigenous population perpetuated acts of violence such as rape in order to gain and maintain power.⁴⁶ Imperial ideology “hinges on the concept that those that are considered to be inferior need to be ruled” (Gunne and Thompson 6) and thus rape occurs as a manifestation of colonial rule (Julien 161). It becomes “power taken to its logical end [...] and asserts itself simultaneously in the political military arena” (Julien 161) thriving at the margins, namely the frontiers, and in colonies. Both *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* focus on white on black rape, and the ways the occlusion and censorship of women’s voices enable colonial patriarchies to subjugate black women sexually and systematically rob them of their agency.⁴⁷

The representation of rape in both novels indicates that men, in this case, white settlers, literally force their authority upon black women by dominating them through systematic rape warfare. Rape serves to epitomize “the dynamic of dominance and submission, voice and silence, agent and object” (Julien 165). It is the white man’s “attempt to strip a sexually and racially differentiated woman of her agency and reinscribe her as an inferior and impotent being” (Noon 12). As victims of rape, Mary and Nomsa have been humiliated and oppressed when their perpetrators forced them to submit to their sexual will. Brownmiller views rape as “not a crime of irrational, impulsive uncontrollable lust, but as a deliberate hostile violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear” (391).⁴⁸ Nicholas in *Sorry*

⁴⁶ Written to give an account of the history of rape and shed a light on the tensions of men and women, *Against our Will* examines man’s dark and primal desire to rape:

Man’s discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe. From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear. (Brownmiller 15)

Susan Brownmiller defines rape as “a sexual invasion of the body by force, an incursion into the private personal inner space without consent – in short, an internal assault from one of several avenues and by one of several methods” (376).

⁴⁷ There are many forms of rape representation in Australian and South African literature, such as black on black, white on black, black on black, white on white, male on female, male on male, adult on child, female on male. In South African literature, for example in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999), Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* (2001), Ken Barris’s *What Kind of Child* (2006), and Elbie Lötter’s *It’s Me, Anna* (2005), different forms of rape narratives are developed to interrogate the consequences of this violent act and the psychological burden it imposes on its victims. Also in Australian literature rape takes many forms: e.g. In Murray Bail’s *Eucalyptus* (1998); Kim Scott’s *Benang* (1999); and in Mark Svendsen’s *Poison Under Their Lips* (2000).

⁴⁸ In Joanna Bourke’s *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present*, the author gives a comprehensive account of the complexities of sexual violence.

and Oom Piet in *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* are the would-be conquerors of colonized women whose passivity and silence they depend on, as these aspects promote the processes of colonial subject formation. The powerlessness of both women is exploited within a world constructed to keep their silence in the margins by colluding on forced terms with the perpetrators. Herein, silence becomes “a language like any other. [...] [S]ilence is a particularly relevant topic to rape narratives” (Gunne and Thompson 14).

In *Sorry*, Nicholas forces himself not only upon Mary, but also on the Trevors’ fifteen year old housemaid Martha. The following rape scene is particularly telling, as it describes the silence of perpetrator and victim, maintains the validity of masculinity of white men and undermines the agency of black women:

At the Trevors’ Nicholas discovered that he could force the cook, Martha, and that she would not tell. All the white men did it; he felt manly and justified. At first he put his hand over her mouth, and watched her dark terrified eyes as he pushed hard into her. He made threats to kill her if she ever told; she believed his murderous threats and was sure to remain silent. (*Sorry* 28)

Nicholas asserts his authority as the powerful white man whose violent actions are justified as they have established themselves to be fixed norms among the male settler community. His primary motivation for rape is to exert his power over the young and frightened Indigenous maid.⁴⁹ By subjugating and raping Martha, by preventing her from speaking, and by monitoring the panic in her eyes, Nicholas may feed his issues of mastery, control, and strength.⁵⁰ Also, in threatening to kill her, if she speaks of the act, Nicholas affirms complete authority over the telling of the rape.⁵¹ His deliberate control

⁴⁹ Rosanne Kennedy suggests that the “figure of the Aboriginal girl or young woman raped by a white man is a recurrent symbol for the violence and hypocrisy of settler colonialism in postcolonial Australian fiction” (“Trials” 351).

⁵⁰ In the *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, Bruce A. Arrigo and Angela Pardue identify three different types of rapists (according to Groth and Birnbaum’s study in 1979), the power, anger, and sadistic rapists. Nicholas and, for that matter, Oom Piet would fall into the category of the power rapist, as both of them exercise their strength and control over their victims in order to assert their masculinity.

⁵¹ Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver argue that “who gets to tell the story and whose story counts as truth determine the definition of what rape is” (1). Hence, Nicholas becomes the owner of the rape narrative and ultimately the owner of its truth. His omission of the narrative may stand for the perpetuation of the systematic demoralization of black women’s agency during colonization.

and erasure of the rape narrative “bears the marks of a patriarchal discourse of honor and chastity” (Roynon 39) and concretizes Nicholas’ supremacy over black women.⁵²

Mary is raped several times by Nicholas, yet his violent actions remain one of the hidden sides to Mary’s story of suffering. When Perdita is woken one night to “the sound of Mary softly weeping” and her father’s “grunting and pounding”, she retreats back into her bedroom knowing that “Nicholas was hurting Mary” (*Sorry* 60). However, she decides that “[s]he did not want to know” (61).⁵³ Perdita’s reluctance to bear witness to Mary’s rape and her subsequent retreat into silence which conceals her father’s violent actions connect to the ensuing traumatic event of her involvement in her father’s murder. Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver argue that rape narratives must be voiced and properly contained due to the fact that “a failed attempt at repression [...] ensures the violence will return” (5). It was Perdita’s sole responsibility to speak with Mary about the rape and play a part in assisting the victim to give a voice to her suffering. This, in turn, could have prevented further rape crimes against her friend, who relied on Perdita’s help: “No one w[ould] believe the word of a bush blackfella. Unless, she added, ‘they’re confessing a crime’” (*Sorry* 203). Yet, Perdita never breaks the silence surrounding Mary’s rape and thereby her silence becomes a poisonous knowledge that will ultimately threaten to destroy Perdita and perpetuate the history making process of forgotten and violated black bodies.

In Zadok’s *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* the witnessing and silencing of rape plays a significant role in the portrayal of the general censorship of the black woman’s voice during apartheid. Since “South African literary criticism has tended to steer away from analyzing rape portrayal [...] [as] the topic is under-represented in recent critical anthologies” (V. Graham 9), the representation of rape novels such as *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* needs to be looked at more closely.⁵⁴ Zadok describes Oom Piet’s rape of

⁵² Mae Gwendolyn Henderson comments on the dangers involved in black women’s voicelessness: “The absence of black female voices has allowed others to inscribe, or write, and ascribe to, or read them” (24).

⁵³ This scene can also be viewed, as Rosanne Kennedy suggests, “[a]s national allegory[;] the novel engages readers in reflecting on how beneficiaries of settler colonialism fail to witness the violence and injustice inflicted on Indigenous people” (“Trials” 348).

⁵⁴ Graham Lucy Valerie argues that although representations of rape have been quite common in post-apartheid literature, the topic itself seems to have gone unnoticed in the recent essays and anthologies on the portrayal of violence. She points out that publications, such as Rosemary Jolly’s and Derek Attridge’s co-edition of *Writing South Africa* and *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee include “nothing on the subject” (V. Graham 9).

Nomsa by using two different points of view, namely Dead Rex's fragmented omniscient perspective – written “in the style of a darkly gothic tale [...], rendered in a dialect-inflected English” (Flockemann 12) in the prologue and Faith's limited first-person point of view that is based on the narrative of her belated remembrance of the traumatic event triggered by a nightmare.

Dead Rex's perspective portrays the rape in a very direct, brutal and graphic way. Oom Piet, the perpetrator, is described as the “fat fingered butcher” with his “fat pig-bristle buttocks, hard pumping, the trouser shackle round his ankles. The dark juice stain on his legs as he mash into woman. [...] He groan-grunts, pig-beast, hard-boiled-egg eyes bulging” (*Gem Squash* 3).⁵⁵ The common colonial binary of the human/bestial has been reversed in Dead Rex's perspective: Oom Piet becomes a dehumanized and almost surrealistic beast-like figure crushing his victim, dominating Nomsa and reducing her female body to an inferior status, yet, which nonetheless remains human. His primitive, bestial mentality is further demonstrated, as the reader moves on to the portrayal of the silenced victim. Nomsa is depicted in a submissive way as the “[w]oman bent over bed, [...] fat-fingered butcher hand push down her head [...] [and] squeeze her delicate woman wrists, bend her arms back behind her, like broken sticks they look” (3). There is a great amount of force used to gain victim compliance. Oom Piet carries out his assault not only to sexually violate Nomsa, but to physically control and humiliate her. She has no opportunity to resist, as she is bent over with her hands held behind her back.

His actions serve as a basis to assert his masculinity and his power over a black woman. Oom Piet's urge to dominate Nomsa may as well contribute to Brownmiller's earlier comment that “rape is an act of the conqueror” (35). Similar to Nicholas in *Sorry*, Oom Piet can be described as exerting his “given right” to rape a black woman as, from his perspective, she can be perceived as part of a conquered people. Both men, in this case, use physical brutality to gain control over the colonized victims and involve them in coercive methods whereby men's genitalia are used as a weapon (Brownmiller 14-15).

From Faith's child perspective the reader bears witness to the portrayal of a helpless and motionless Nomsa after having been raped. Faith finds her in the shed at the back of the

⁵⁵ The “dark juice stain” (*Gem Squash* 3) on Oom Piet's leg suggests that Nomsa had been a virgin before the rape.

farm: Nomsa appears almost lifeless, as she has been fatally wounded by Faith, who has accidentally shot Nomsa, yet Faith does not remember this crucial detail during her dream. Faith describes her friend as “body-broken, bent forward over the bed [,] [...] schoolgirl innocent. [...] Her pushed up skirt sits bunched around her waist like a tyre” (*Gem Squash* 307).⁵⁶ In this scene, Nomsa is portrayed as an innocent, powerless, and overwhelmed victim left to die by her rapist. During Nomsa’s last moments Faith recalls the following: “Her eyelids close and open, slow and sedated, and then fear-wide they’re alive and bright with terror and her mouth twitches opens screams. ‘No, baas, no.’” (307).⁵⁷ The final, desperate plea, bearing the marks of the master/slave dialectic, cannot reach its addressee, since Oom Piet has fled the scene. Hence, the plea reverberates through the interior of the shack and falls silent. As Nomsa dies and her plea is ignored, she cannot speak of her rape. It is thus Faith’s duty to remember and exact retribution by giving voice to her friend and thereby punish Oom Piet for his terrible crime. As Faith decides to break the silence surrounding Nomsa’s rape by confronting Oom Piet, she falters during their argument; charging him with rape would mean that she would have to admit to killing Nomsa. Saving herself means Oom Piet will never suffer for his crimes. Ultimately, he walks out on Nomsa with a “victorious sneer” (317). It becomes clear that Nomsa’s story will never be told, continuing the silencing of women’s stories of struggle and suffering during apartheid. Their unchallenged and uncorrected tales gave the perpetrators the opportunity to “remain unreconstructed, perhaps ‘living to fight another day’” (Dowdall 32). At the end of the novel it is Faith’s passivity and lack of agency that perpetuate black women’s subjugation and misrepresentation. Nomsa’s story is set out to represent one of the many rape narratives that has been silenced and is bound to stay hidden as long as the white oppressor, in this case Oom Piet, holds the power over the narrative: “Let me tell you something, girly, there’s no evidence any more. What evidence there was against me is long buried” (*Gem Squash* 316).

⁵⁶ What is interesting about Faith’s description of the skirt around Nomsa’s waist is that with the flickering candle light in the background she compares it to a tyre. This immediately brings about the image of necklacing that was used as a form of black on black violence to punish political traitors during apartheid. Victims were burned to death, as inflamed petroleum filled tires enveloped their bodies. As the older Faith remembers the rape, she must have picked up the image of necklacing in her youth seeing it on television. One may argue that this could be Faith’s flawed connection, as Nomsa was not a traitor.

⁵⁷ The term ‘baas’ is Afrikaans and stands for: master, boss, leader, chief.

Conclusion

The *Bildungsroman* is subject to adaptation and transformation in postcolonial contexts. For postcolonial writers, the revisions and reinventions of the *Bildungsroman* genre raise difficult issues about nation and narration. In this context, the integration of the traditional *Bildungsroman*'s generic structures, including the concern with the youthful character's *Bildung*'s process, the passage from innocence and ignorance to maturity and knowledge, and the character's reciprocal relationship with the nation, are subject to change in societies that have been burdened by colonial oppression. Lynn Michelle Brown makes the valid argument that the reconfiguration of the *Bildungsroman* form "is less an attempt at conformity than it is a continual and multi-pronged rupturing of the form's traditional boundaries" (*Screams* 124). Through continual transgressions of the traditional form, postcolonial writers may reshape their characters' narratives of development to explore their "psychic landscapes of a lost past of repressed childhood trauma" (Smith and Watson 128). If we bear in mind that "the presence of trauma [...] serves as demarcation between the *Bildungsroman* and the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*" (Hoagland 47), it follows that the protagonists' struggle in their passages towards self-formation, their integration and self-assimilation into society is troubled. Instead of reaching a fixed, harmonious and confident maturity, protagonists might have to engage with experiences of alienation and loss. The consequence of their failed *Bildung* prevents them from moving towards a promising future, as some are portrayed to be burdened by the difficult and strenuous task of remembering and working through a traumatic past. The traditional linear progression of the protagonist turns stagnant, as the development into maturity is cut short by trauma.

These two novels suggest that the legacies of settler colonialism remain alive and unreconciled in personal and national histories. Protagonists and the nation fail to reconcile with the past. In both novels "the child is a significant vehicle for conveying the ways in which traumatic violence ruptures both the innocence of childhood and cognitive frames of understanding" (Kennedy "Trials" 336). The lost innocence of the child echoes that of the nation (Mann "Mouths" 343); *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* lay bare the corruption of the nation. These postcolonial *Bildungsromane* raise questions about reconciliation and the national regeneration. They suggest that violent national histories, individual and collective, remain a haunting presence. *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*

enter the discourse of personal and national reconciliation; their female protagonists struggle to exorcise the uncertainties and fragments of their traumatic pasts. As children, Perdita and Faith witness the cruelty and inhumanity that befalls the Indigenous community during colonial oppression. The exposure to trauma arrests their childhood developments and stalls their individuation and successful entrance into adulthood, as both fail to atone for their evasive actions in exposing the truth concerning the perpetrators' crimes. Personal reconciliation with the past fails to occur; rather, what remains is their complicity in an oppressive colonial history. In this sense, the inability to confess and take responsibility limits individual freedom, and thwarts national reconciliation. The protagonists' lack of accountability and repression of traumatic memories reflect the failure to account for many of the buried and silenced stories of Indigenous/African women in settler colonies.

In both novels the Indigenous women Mary and Nomsa are victims of rape. Yet, as the focus remains on the journey and development of the white protagonists, the violence inflicted on Indigenous/African women is not only unspoken, but also unspeakable in these examples of the genre. Their historical and individual trauma remains ignored as their stories do not enter national discourses. Perpetrators escape proper justice and white women remain burdened by their complicity and failure to disclose rape narratives. Ultimately, Perdita and Faith remain trapped in the contradictions of reconciliation discourses as they emerged in Australia and South Africa in the late last century, and their evasion of responsibility hinders the pursuit of justice and fails to secure reparation and punishment. In the case of Australia and South Africa, the "trauma of rape takes on a communal proportion that becomes the [unhealed] traumatic history of a formerly colonized people" (M. Brown *Screams* 225). The violated and uncontested bodies of the Indigenous characters evoke the image of a silenced and broken community that has been rendered speechless by those who hold the power over the narratives of injustice. Both *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* reflect on the limitations of reconciliation discourses in contemporary Australia and South Africa, appropriating the *Bildungsroman* to suggest the complex entanglements of victim and perpetrator and the unreconciled legacies of colonialism in both personal and national narration.

Chapter II: Postcolonial Pastoral: David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and Lisa Fugard's *Skinner's Drift* (2005)

Contemporary fictions by the Australian writer David Malouf and the South African writer Lisa Fugard adapt the pastoral mode to produce distinctively postcolonial forms of the genre. In *Remembering Babylon* and *Skinner's Drift* the grounding of the pastoral in traditional ideas of human rootedness, belonging, and entitlement is challenged to address the legacies of the violent past in these settler literatures. Both postcolonial pastoral novels contest the harmonious idylls of the genre as it is traditionally conceived to represent characters haunted by the spectres of Indigenous dispossession and loss. In these fictions the pastoral is turned into a powerful critique of the settlers' selective memory.

In what follows an overview of the pastoral will indicate a number of defining features. Recently postcolonial approaches to the pastoral explore the flexibility and mutability of the genre to suggest how it can introduce innovative forms in contemporary fiction. This comparative reading will examine how *Remembering Babylon* and *Skinner's Drift* can be read as examples of the postcolonial pastoral, where traditional features of the genre are adapted to represent the distinctive landscapes, spaces, temporalities, and collective memories of the settler literatures.

Pastoral Traditions

Traditionally two canonical texts, Theocritus's *Idylls* and Vergil's *Eclogues*, anchor the pastoral as a classic historical genre.⁵⁸ As a form of poetry, the pastoral mode is associated with the opposition of what are seen to be two mutually exclusive spaces: country and city. Peter Marinelli argues that the "contrast between town and country is therefore essential to the rise of a distinctively pastoral art" (12). As this distinction is played out in classical Greek and Roman pastoral poems, the lives of shepherds, who are

⁵⁸ Though there are discrepancies in regards to the precise years of literary distribution, it is widely accepted that the *Idylls*, composed by the Greek poet Theocritus (viewed as inventor of the pastoral), were written "under the patronage of Ptolemy II in Alexandria, in the middle decades of the third century" (Alpers *Singer* 2). The *Eclogues*, by the Roman poet Virgil were written between 42 and 38 B.C. They were based "and in some cases closely modeled on [...] the pastoral poems" (Alpers *Singer* 2) of his Greek predecessor.

conventionally gendered male, are celebrated while the poems comment upon an implicit and explicit distinction between the country and the city. Moreover, “nature and idyllic landscape figure prominently in most scholarly and critical accounts of pastoral” (Alpers *What* 28) where the shepherd’s realm is conceived to be an imaginary place set in the Golden Age, a defining feature of the pastoral:

In the Golden Age, human life is conceived in terms of the contemplative and the recreative rather than in the active; it is devoted to pleasure and virtuous idleness rather than motivated by ambition. In a word, life in the Golden Age is pastoral. (Marinelli 17)

The pastoral expresses a craving for “simple innocence and carefree spontaneity that [man] has lost” (Coleman 1) to the sophistications of urban society. This idea of a state of harmony and peace within the self looked to an idealized topos, which is associated with an idyllic state of simple innocence. The late eighteenth century German poet, philosopher, and historian Friedrich Schiller argues that “all peoples who possess a history have a paradise, a state of innocence, a golden age; indeed every man has his paradise, his golden age, which he recalls” (211).⁵⁹

The pastoral mode serves to identify and criticize the tensions between the hardships of city life and the simplicity of the country. Helen Cooper suggests that “it is the attempt of the court or city to find an image of life outside itself and the simple life of the pastoral world is the opposite of the society that creates it” (2). The idealized and imaginary space of the pastoral is captured in nature and its idyllic landscapes, a “golden country of the imagination called Arcadia, and their time is that timeless time of the mind in regression from reality” (Marinelli 4). The idea of Arcadia as established in the *Eclogues*⁶⁰ has become the common name for the setting of serene pastoral retreats. Inside the imaginary realm, man can remove himself from society and its distractions. The pastoral retreat is distinctive in space and time: a spiritual and mythical landscape that is a setting for

⁵⁹ In “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” (1795), Friedrich Schiller gives an insight into ways of thinking about the pastoral and how its poetry may contribute to a better understanding of man’s/the poet’s relationship to nature and his representations and perceptions of an ideal and the harmonious existence within this realm.

⁶⁰ In *Eclogues* (See Ecl. 7.4) Virgil is the first to use the term Arcadia as an idealized setting of the pastoral myth. It should also be noted that Virgil’s Arcadia was based on an authentic geographical location part of the Peloponnese peninsula. It was a rustic, secluded area occupied by herdsmen leading simple lives.

creativity in an environment characterized by solemn leisure. In this utopian world the shepherd leads a peaceful and simple existence, which is idealized and sought after. An “intimate environmental interrelatedness” (Gifford 18) between shepherd and landscape is a constant characteristic of the pastoral. The shepherd “remains first and foremost an emblem of humanity, a general rather than a specific type, and his afflictions and joys are universal” (Marinelli 6).⁶¹ Moreover, shepherds represent men to suggest man’s disappointment with the degeneracy of city and court life and his wish for a harmonious existence within the environment.⁶²

The withdrawal from the city in search of a spiritual rediscovery and the fulfillment of eternal bliss remains one of the prevalent themes of the traditional pastoral. Renato Poggioli argues that the

psychological root of the pastoral is a double longing after innocence and happiness, to be recovered not through conversion or regeneration but merely through a retreat. [...] The pastoral longing is but the wishful dream of a happiness to be gained without effort, of an erotic bliss made absolute by its own irresponsibility. (qtd. in Alpers *What* 34)

The pastoral setting suggests an idealized past in idyllic landscapes which are generically utopian. Moreover, Terry Gifford suggests that the pastoral as a literary device “involve[s] some form of retreat and return, the fundamental pastoral movement, either

⁶¹ At this point it must be noted that discussions of the classic pastoral characteristically use a discourse that is gendered, racialized, and class specific. Marinelli’s reference to universality and humanity suggest the gendered assumptions of the pastoral tradition. This is why the postcolonial pastoral is such an interesting critique.

⁶² Michael Squires argues the following when commenting on the genre of the pastoral novel:

The pastoral novel [...] [is] the subgenre of the novel, developing out of the pastoral tradition, which idealizes country life by using many of the elements and techniques of traditional pastoral—principally, the contrast between city and country; the recreation of rural life from both urban and rural viewpoints; the implied withdrawal from complexity to simplicity; the nostalgia for a golden-age past of peace and satisfaction; the implied criticism of modern life; and the creation of a circumscribed and remote pastoral world. This remote pastoral world features harmony between man and nature, idyllic contentment, and a sympathetic realism which combines elements of idealization and realism and by means of which country life, stripped of its coarsest features is made palatable to urban society. (18)

The traditional pastoral has lost its vitality in the eighteenth century, yet the emergence of the pastoral novel is one form of its survival (Squires 3-4).

within the text, or in the sense that the pastoral retreat ‘returned’ some insights relevant to the urban audience” (1).

The idealized pastoral landscape – meant to represent simple and innocent life – is also associated with suffering and loss to which the shepherd is subjected. Seeing the shepherd as a representative of archetypal man, Alpers, Barfield, and Cooper take this argument further and suggest that the shepherd, too, becomes a figure of suffering and loss when Arcadia turns into a place of dispossession. The shepherd, “socially humble, innocent, his life determined by loss and reduced to a simple round of activity, he is nevertheless made to seem representative in his suffering and his needs” (Alpers *What* 383). Arcadia becomes a place where the shepherd attempts to overcome a sense of loss, possibly caused by dispossession or exile. The simple world of Arcadia, which could be troubled by war and social upheaval, is made to stand in for the universal domain of society: the world of the shepherd becomes a microcosm.

In William Empson’s *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (1974), which has been viewed as one of the most influential and brilliant studies of its subject (Alpers “Empson”), the author suggests that “in pastoral you take a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one” (110). He implies that in the classic pastoral the simple existence of the shepherd in a tranquil landscape may entail connotations of a different sort, namely, that there is a concomitant sense of loss and pain found in a pastoral setting, which functions as a microcosm reflecting the multifariousness evident in an urban setting. In this respect, the particular lives of shepherds, when given greater consideration, become representative of a universal macrocosmic suffering of human kind; their surroundings serve to represent the political and moral volatilities, conflicts and tensions taking place in urban environments. The retreat to Arcadia as a blissful and innocent place becomes a magnifying glass through which tribulations are problematised in a simpler environment. Marinelli argues that “as happens frequently, Arcadia darkens with recollections of an external world of hard reality, that leisure becomes monotony, the poetry turns into complaint and elegy, and love, thwarted of fulfillment, becomes desire for death” (37). In this way the Arcadian myth of pastoral fulfillment coexists with the shadow of death that is ever present in the idyllic landscapes of Arcadia.

Generic formulations of the pastoral are concerned not only with place but also with time: to escape the suffering and loss of the present the pastoral mode seeks refuge in the past, calling upon an essential element of the pastoral, nostalgia. Nostalgia is derived from the Greek word *nostos*, “a desire to return home”, but has also been defined as a “sentimental longing for or regretful memory of a period of the past, especially one in an individual’s own lifetime” (OED “Nostalgia”). In this respect, the evasion of an overwhelming present through a return to a sanctified past is a feature of feelings of nostalgia, which has been described as a universal symptom and an “essential element of Arcadia” (Gifford 36). Svetlana Boym argues that feelings of nostalgia entail a pain of longing and loss due to an inadequate practice of remembrance. It further signals a desire to return to an original bliss, hoping to “rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps” (41). Nostalgia can only be felt by someone who has experienced loss and hence desires a retreat into the past. Therefore, the pastoral is a backward looking form, calling to mind a trouble-free, simpler, and vanished past. The nostalgic backward glance produces a juxtaposition of “two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life” (Boym xiii-xiv).

Within the realm of Arcadia the reality of the present may be concealed and hidden, as the focus remains on the mythologizing of the past. In this way the pastoral can incubate ideas of an idealized homeland that is borne out of innocent happiness, and for this reason it is associated with ways of imagining national identity and belonging. Rebecca D’Monte argues that the pastoral mode has been useful in preserving national myths, as “this longing for the past also helped to formulate a sense of nationalism [...] [and] a sense of national identity” (141). These national ideologies serve to strengthen feelings of belonging, consolidating discourses of race and ethnicity and affirming the collective bonds to an idealized and mythical homeland. Anthony D. Smith argues that

[n]ational identity [...] [is] directly influenced by collective perceptions, encoded in myths and symbols, of the ethnic ‘meanings’ of particular stretches of territory, and the ways in which such stretches are turned into ‘homelands’ inextricably tied to the fate of ‘their’ communities. (183)

One of the uses of the classic pastoral mode, then, is the production of national myths that return to the idealized landscapes of the past.

Postcolonial Pastoral

The postcolonial pastoral echoes and subverts certain common tropes of the classic pastoral mode; regeneration in nature, life in a conflict-free Arcadian landscape, relationship between man and nature in a privileged and mythologized location, and the backward look upon a trouble free past are all typical traditional motifs that are adapted and deconstructed in the postcolonial form. Contemporary fictional reworkings of the pastoral within South African and Australian literatures prove that some of these tropes gain purchase when used to critique settler colonialism.

The pastoral is a multifarious genre – “historically diversified and transformed” (Alpers *What* 26) – and it has evolved throughout literary history as a versatile, “broad and elastic” (Kane 274) form.⁶³ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s groundbreaking work on the pastoral in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals and Environment* (2010) takes up the adaptability of the pastoral within a postcolonial framework, and this sets the tone for my reading of *Remembering Babylon* and *Skinner’s Drift* and thinking about the pastoral in contemporary Australian and South African literatures more generally. They argue that

it is the very versatility of pastoral that helps to make it interesting, its very adaptability as an ideological tool that guarantees the multiple perspectives that are applied to it, as well as its own malleable form. The evidence suggests that pastoral will [...] be of interest to postcolonial writers, whether they are attacking its reactionary tendencies or are reworking it onto more socially and/or environmentally progressive forms. (120)

Lawrence Buell confirms that the pastoral has the potential for adaptation, and asserts that the “pastoral is a species of cultural equipment that western thought has for more than two millennia been unable to do without” (32). The pastoral has the capacity to reconstitute itself in a variety of forms, as “in origin and in practice the dynamics of

⁶³ See also Richard Hardin’s *Survival of Pastoral* (1979) and Paul Kane’s “‘Woeful Shepherds’: Anti-Pastoral in Australian Poetry” (2004).

pastoral texts are far more adaptable, capable as they are of fluid and complicated ideological negotiations” (James and Tew 13).⁶⁴

The capacity for self-renewal and reinvention in changing social and cultural contexts is essential to the renewal of the pastoral in postcolonial literatures. It moved out of the idyll of Arcadian pastures to occupy the ordinary country landscapes, claiming a “precise geographical spot” (Squires 2) and orienting itself toward realism.⁶⁵ When commenting on the evolving and adaptive nature of the pastoral mode, Marinelli suggests that

[i]t scarcely has reference to a literature about actual shepherds, much less about Arcadians. For us it has come to mean any literature which deals with the complexities of human life against a background of simplicity. All that is necessary is that memory and imagination should conspire to render a not too distant past of comparative innocence as more pleasurable than a harsh present, overwhelmed either by the growth of technology or the shadows of advancing age. (3)

That postcolonial forms of the pastoral novel can exist confirms its versatility and tests the limits of pre-established traditional oppositions. The pastoral has developed as a critique of previous historical versions, and in this way it undergoes a constant process of reinventing and reinvigorating itself.⁶⁶ Its “ideological grammar” (Buell) is “always contingent, always shifting, and there is no reason to dismiss it as an inherently conservative or complacent [...] form” (Huggan and Tiffin 85).

⁶⁴ Annabel Patterson argues against any definite definition of the pastoral. In *Pastoral and Ideology* (1987), she asserts that

[it] is not what pastoral *is* that should matter to us. On that agreement is impossible, and its discussion inevitably leads to the narrowing structures of normative criticism, statements of what constitutes the “genuine” or the “true” to the exclusion of exemplars that the critic regards as “perverse”. What can be described [...] is what pastoral since Virgil can do, and has always done; or rather, to put the agency back where it belongs-how writers, artists, and intellectuals of all persuasions have used pastoral for a range of functions and intentions that the *Eclogues* first articulated. (7)

⁶⁵ Squires suggests that “pastoralism becomes increasingly oriented toward realism and becomes, as it travels through the 19th century, increasingly broadened in scope” (48).

⁶⁶ In *What is Pastoral* Alpers argues that it was the Romantic poet William Wordsworth who put an end to the traditional continuity of the pastoral as he “took us out of the woods of Arden and into the world of the modern shepherd and, perhaps of a modern pastoral” (21). Wordsworth has reformed the pastoral and in his reinterpretation of the pastoral, “[t]he golden past and the pleasant place become a personal time and a personal landscape and yet retain the equivalent of mythic dimensions” (Toliver 258).

Postcolonial critics argue for a global pastoral, which calls into question stereotypical pastoral forms of European origin. For example, John Kinsella suggests that the pastoral mode is repositioned within the global postcolonial arena, where it thrives with its “own set of co-ordinates” (“Australian Pastoral” 134) and a propensity to bring out a multiplicity of politically interrogative and aesthetic variations. Within the postcolonial context the conventions and generic formulations of the pastoral are exposed as unstable: the idealization of shepherds and landscapes that formed the traditional framework of the pastoral is questioned and overturned. In particular, postcolonial writers focus on the uncertainties of idyllic life, portraying deep-rooted images of dispossession and loss that deny their protagonists a sense of harmony and contentedness. Huggan and Tiffin suggest that the

pastoral is a mode that appeals to a number of different postcolonial writers who have turned it to their own uses in a number of different regions of the world. While pastoral is traditionally a mode that tends to emphasize the fixity of place and the security of belonging, its stated certainties are by no means unchallengeable, indeed it is persistently troubled by anxieties of its own. (118)

Within the postcolonial framework the pastoral is taken to contact zones where “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (Pratt *Imperial Eyes* 4). The postcolonial version of the pastoral challenges systematic binaries, which are the root of colonial injustice and exposes categories of otherness or impractical paradises.

Postcolonial writers adapt and appropriate traditional features of the pastoral. Whereas traditional pastoral texts are drawn to binary representation, postcolonial texts challenge such oppositions. For example, the generic feature of the city/country binary is elaborated when placed within the discourses of colonialism. In the postcolonial pastoral the oppositions of colonizer to colonized, civilized to primitive, and civilized to savage – features that shape postcolonial theory – adapt and simultaneously challenge the city/country binary that organizes pastoral literature. The postcolonial pastoral depends upon the colonizer/colonized dichotomy in order for a Western conception of ‘self’, which is forged within this dialectic, to exercise and establish its own superiority. In

particular, the settler figure constructs itself within a discourse of difference and authority in opposition to the Indigenous people. This dialectic forms the grounds for contest to expose these assigned roles as unstable.

Moreover, a postcolonial version of the pastoral takes over the embedded instability of the traditional city/country binary. As mentioned earlier, Arcadia, too, can be beleaguered by the conflicts of urban life. Social distance, dispossession, loss contest its harmonious idylls. The case study of *Remembering Babylon* and *Skinner's Drift* will confirm how the seemingly fixed binary of settler/Indigene can be challenged, giving way to an unsteady opposition of settlers and Indigenous characters. They meet on troubled grounds and question established boundaries. These 'nervous encounters' lead to bouts of violence dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their homelands. Within the settler/Indigene dialectic the postcolonial pastoral may deconstruct utopian Arcadia, "stifl[ing] the idealization of serene landscapes and peaceful pasts" (Blanco 195) to bring to the fore the challenges of taking land in a foreign country. The settlers are introduced to a landscape of startling otherness already owned by its Indigenous population. In that sense, their unambiguous placement in nature is foreclosed, exposing the traditional privileging of Arcadia as a racialised discourse. Huggan and Tiffin suggest that the

pastoral, as is perhaps most evident in the former settler colonies, affords a useful opportunity to open up the tension between ownership and belonging in a variety of colonial and postcolonial contexts: contexts marked [...] by a direct or indirect engagement with often devastating experiences of dispossession and loss [that mostly affect the Indigenous people]. (85)

For the settlers, the overwhelming space resists a cohesive description and the darkness and mystery of landscape engenders an impossibility of comprehending the unspeakable. In *What is Pastoral* Alpers comments on the difficulty of dealing with geographical difference:

Even people whose lives have been made various by learning, sometimes find it hard to keep a fast hold on their habitual views of life, on their faith in the invisible, nay, on the sense that their past joys and sorrows are a real experience, when they are suddenly transported to a new land, where the beings around them know

nothing of their history, and shape none of their ideas – where their mother earth shows another lap, and human life has other forms than those on which their souls have been nourished. (391)

The otherness and indecipherability of a foreign landscape endangers the settlers' myth of an atavistic attachment to the motherland and this "fragmentariness of heritage" (Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass, and McCredden 24) threatens the settlers' visions of pastoral freedom. In postcolonial depictions of settler landscapes the colony/metropolis opposition – imagined by the traditional pastoral mode as the city/country binary – cannot be realized. John Docker and Gerhard Fischer argue that "white Australia as a settler-colony is shaped more by a myth of expulsion from the British Eden conceived as the motherland" ("Adventures" 9). In Australia, the settlers' quest towards the construction of a new-found land of dreams is therefore troubled, turning the barren and unfamiliar Australian landscape into a bleak battleground. On these contested and precarious grounds notions of settler identity are open to negotiations as tensions evolve in terms of belonging and entitlement. The partial rehabilitation of the traditional pastoral is evident in its postcolonial form as "the pastoral's capacity to ask fundamental questions about the nature of human rootedness, the possibility of reconciling with place and placelessness" (Huggan and Tiffin 120) is retained.

Huggan and Tiffin point out that the postcolonial pastoral assumes distinctive forms in settler literatures. In the settler postcolonial context, entitlement and belonging become critical. The ironies in the postcolonial framework are intensified "in contexts of contested entitlement and embattled ownership where the plaintive search for 'lost pastoral havens' might well be seen as belonging to the originary structure of colonial violence itself" (Huggan and Tiffin 85). In this sense the postcolonial pastoral becomes a spectral form conscious of the concealed violence that enabled a fashioning of nonviolent visions (85).

The legacy of violent pasts and compromised belonging characterizes white settler anxiety. Huggan and Tiffin argue that it is "the crisis of belonging that accompanies split cultural allegiance, the historical awareness of expropriated territory, and the suppressed knowledge that the legal fiction of entitlement does not necessarily bring with it the emotional attachment that turns house and land into home" (82). The settler's inability to

enter into a dialogue with overwhelming space in an unknown landscape and to establish a reciprocal with an unknowable wilderness is characteristic of his feeling ‘out of place’. David McDermott Hughes points out that African whites are viewed as “a population marooned, wandering, or scattered [...] or otherwise out of step with its surroundings” (159). Similarly, when referring to the settler’s condition in Australia Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs introduce the concept of Freud’s uncanny to suggest the settler’s anxiety of being at the same time ‘in place’ and ‘out of place’ in Australia.⁶⁷ They argue that

[i]n an uncanny Australia, one’s place is always already another’s place and the issue of possession is never complete, never entirely settled. [...] We can think about this process as a way in which ‘place’, as a designation which implies boundedness or restriction, is always at the same time in a condition of unboundedness. So one can never be completely in possession of place: one is always (dis)possessed, in the sense that neither possession nor dispossession is a fully realizable category. (Gelder and Jacobs 138)

Settlers are described to be (dis)possessed in an “unfamiliar familiarity”, an “unsettled settledness”, where the uncanny condition reminds them of an unsettledness stemming from a “taken-for-granted mode of occupation” (Gelder and Jacobs 24). The settler is placed between the Arcadian and the dystopian, stuck within a vision of placelessness on stolen grounds.

In South Africa and Australia the postcolonial pastoral takes on the form of the anti-pastoral to counter the traditional ideologies attached to the pastoral, suffusing Arcadian locations with terror and violence as the natural setting becomes the backdrop of a battle for landownership and survival.⁶⁸ The inclusion of Indigenous/subaltern characters in the contemporary pastoral fictions exposes the problematics involved in constructing white settler supremacy and gives way to legacies of trauma and haunting.

⁶⁷ Continuing on Otto Rank’s work on the uncanny, Sigmund Freud’s seminal essay “The Uncanny,” (*Das Unheimliche*) published in 1919 examines the theory of the uncanny relating to literature and real-life subjects. Freud argues that the uncanny “undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror” (368).

⁶⁸ In the eighteenth century anti-pastoral depictions of rural life emphasized the falseness of conflict-free Arcadian landscapes. Authors deliberately portrayed nature as a chaotic space that denied harmony and renewal and drew attention to labour forces that did not receive a voice in traditional pastorals. The anti-pastoral tradition includes works by Stephen Duck, *Thresher’s Labour* (1736), Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village* (1770), and George Crabbe, *The Village* (1783).

The postcolonial pastoral thrives in an anxious environment where self-appointed entitlements to land are endangered. J.M. Coetzee suggests that the pastoral succeeds in the South African context as it aims to reformulate a mythologized image of the peasant order offering a “transcendental justification for the [white] ownership of land” (*White Writing* 106). Hence, the postcolonial version of the South African pastoral interrogates and questions “the [sometimes violent and callous] propagation and perpetuation of self-justifying white-supremacist myths” (Huggan and Tiffin 105). Jane Poyner argues that “[t]he anti-pastoral, [...] dominated by ‘English’ South Africans, writes against this tradition. Humankind and nature no longer exist in harmony: the land is barren and hostile, the farming community its adversary” (*Paradox* 157). Thereby, the African veldt turns into an anti-pastoral space, a site of barbarism and degradation, where romantic myths are revisited and questioned on embattled grounds.⁶⁹ The uneasy coexistence of the Afrikaner and the African is explored on contested lands exposing an anti-pastoral scene. Huggan and Tiffin suggest that the postcolonial pastoral “opts for a deconstructive approach to the white-settler ideologies within which it remains bound, such as the ideology of the pastoral, the unquiet ghost of which may not eventually be pacified, but the self-serving potentially self-destructive elements of which are efficiently emptied out” (103). In this case the pastoral proves its mutability as it is flexible enough to deal with the particular anxieties of settler colonialism. It questions the embedded hegemony of white supremacy and land ownership in order to make way for a less one-sided approach to the colonial enterprise.

Traditionally, the pastoral in South African fiction has propagated and justified colonial subjugation and white settler land ownership, thereby celebrating the Afrikaners peasant agriculture. Indebted to the conventional pastoral framework, the *plaasroman* (farm novel) affirmed and explored a bond between the white Afrikaner farmer and the soil, “a bond that stands metonymically for the relations between culture, place, and nation”

⁶⁹ Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) takes up the anti-pastoral tradition to highlight a farm that is falling into decay to suggest its deteriorating relationship with nature. Moreover, her novel is considered to be a critique of colonial culture as a thriving South African farm was viewed as a symbol of the Afrikaner’s national identity. South African authors such as Nadine Gordimer in *The Conservationist* (1974) and J.M. Coetzee in *In the Heart of Country* (1977), *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), and *Disgrace* (1999) are part of this tradition, yet their disclosure of black labour further subverts the pastoral tradition of the *plaasroman* and highlights the farm as a contested space where the Afrikaner’s land entitlements are challenged by its original inhabitants.

(Warnes 120). It encouraged the white settler's imagined belonging to South African land.⁷⁰ The *plaasroman* – a dominant genre in Afrikaans fiction, occupying a central place in the history of Afrikaans literature – had its golden age between the 1920s and the 1940s during a difficult time for Afrikaner farmers, whose livelihood was threatened by debt, drought, and rinderpest. Christopher Warnes argues that the *plaasroman* followed “the pastoral tradition in response to a crisis in the Afrikaner rural order brought about by urbanization, which was seen as threatening the social basis on which Afrikaner self-concepts were founded” (123). In South Africa, then, the conventional association of the pastoral with nationalism and the ways of imagining an idealized rural community has led to a distinctive variant of the genre. Several writers took up the mode to celebrate the Golden Age of Afrikanerdom, praising the return to the land as an ideal to be conserved and imitated.⁷¹ However, the conventional association of the pastoral with dispossession and loss is also evident in South African writing. For example, Ampie Coetzee argues that “the *plaasroman* during the 1920s and until late in the 1940s was written out of a sense of loss. [...] The search for the meaning of the farm emerged from a disintegration: the expropriation of the farm” (15-16). J.M. Coetzee sums up the numerous ways in which the *plaasroman* took up the versatility of the pastoral mode in South African literature in response to capitalist culture that threatened to eradicate the trusted feudal values of an Afrikaner nation:

Afrikaans novelists responded in diverse ways: they celebrated the memory of the old rural values or proclaimed their durability or elaborated schemes for their preservation; they tracked the forces of change to their origins in history (capitalism), society (the Jews), or the cosmic order (God's will, the indifference of the universe); they denounced the rapacity of the new class of speculators; they satirized the pettiness, selfishness, and lack of family feeling of the *verengelste* (anglicised) urban Afrikaner. (*White Writing* 83)

⁷⁰ In this respect, Edward Said argues that “[l]iterature participat[es] in Europe's overseas expansion and therefore creates what Williams [in *Marxism and Literature* (1977)] calls ‘structures of feeling’ that support, elaborate, and consolidate the practice of empire” (14).

⁷¹ The most significant *plaasromane* (influenced to some extent by its German equivalent, the *Bauernroman*) during the so-called golden age were Jochem van Bruggen's *Ampie: Die Natuurkind* (1924), Daniel Francois Malherbe's *Die Meulenaar* (1926), and Christian Maurits van den Heever's *Somer* (1935). Sabine Moeller points out that that *plaasromane* featured parallel topics such as “the strife over inheritance, conflict between farms and land speculators, and the threat to traditional values posed by the cities” (38-39).

The *plaasroman* has been exploited to idealize, uphold and consolidate Afrikaner nationalism by reinforcing the nationalist narrative and cementing the settlers' sense of agency and power. The South African veldt is celebrated as the fountainhead for the Afrikaner's freedom; the *plaasroman* became the frontier which propelled national and racial myths contributing to narratives through which Afrikaners "established and represented themselves as a united people" (Weatherstone 136). By establishing their own literary voice Afrikaners strengthened and further propagated their political power as part of the construction of racial hegemony. The narratives of the *plaasroman* engaged in the discourses on land and power promoting the status of Afrikaners as an exclusive ethnic unit, part of a single and strong nation. In this respect, the South African critic Nicole Devarenne argues that tales of shared Afrikanerness "lent credibility to a story about Afrikanerdom's rural origins that provided an illusion of continuity in Afrikaner history, described an unchanging Afrikaner identity" (632) and held firm the notion that South Africa belonged to the white man.

In this way, the *plaasroman*, a version of the pastoral form, positioned Afrikaners in the South African landscape as proprietors. It located the settler in a space depicted as rightfully owned, "a separate kingdom ruled over by a benign patriarch" (Coetzee *White Writing* 6). The portrayal of the farm asserts "the time of the forefathers as an exemplary age when the garden of myth became actualized in history" (4). Coetzee suggests that the pastoral facilitated an "organic mode of consciousness [of] a people who, from toiling generation after generation on the family farm, have divested themselves of individuality and became embodiments of an enduring bloodline stretching back into a mythicized past" (6). Van Wyk Smith points out that the *plaasroman* "thematized the nexus of the 'boer' [farmer] and his 'plaas' [farm] as a timeless icon of national and numinous identity, not only validating an unquestioned right to land but expressing also the very soul of the Afrikaner's being" (18).

Also, the occlusion of black labour in the *plaasroman* affirmed the white settlers' myth that they were the owners of South African land by rights of lineage and labour. If black characters did appear in *plaasromane*, they were portrayed as "foils to white action or as inherently lazy, marginal picturesque figures who provide[d] local colour, comic relief, h[e]ld a horse or serve[d] a meal" (Moeller 39). Coetzee argues that the pastoral mode in South Africa

has a double tribute to pay. To satisfy the critics of rural retreat, it must portray labour; to satisfy the critics of colonialism; it must portray white labour. What inevitably follows is the occlusion of black labour from the scene: the black man becomes a shadowy presence fitting across the stage now and then to hold a horse or serve a meal [...] Blindness to the colour black is built into South African pastoral. (*White Writing* 5)

The representation of the black figure proves to be troubling in the African farm novel. Huggan and Tiffin argue that especially within the postcolonial pastoral framework it is the “problem of demography in which pastoral enclosure is consistently threatened by the encouragement of unwanted, unknown ‘others’ [whereby] in a final reverse the pastoral idyll collapses into an anti-pastoral scene of abjection” (99-100). The powerful persistence of the black figure on an Afrikaner farm is viewed as continually threatening, troubling the rise of South Africa’s segregated settler nation, which, like Australia, finds itself powerless in its attempt of burying a deeply seated and violent colonial history. In settler literatures, pastoral harmony is persistently denied due to an unreconciled relationship to the prior owners of the land. The Africans’ presence questions the justification of white existence and ownership, thereby disrupting a nationalist heritage. Moreover, the “displacement [of Indigenous Africans, which] is the secret precondition of the Afrikaner’s idyllic map of rural homesteading” (Barnard “Dream” 52), pulses up towards the surface and holds the truth of a silenced history: “a hidden violence, buried beneath the surface of civility” (Kossew *Writing Woman* 132). In this sense, the white South African pastoral remains tainted and flawed. In postcolonial versions of the African farm novel the black figure haunts the uncertainties of white male land ownership as “a black corpse which keeps floating up out of the earth to provide a reminder of an alternative history of (black) occupation and entitlement that obsessively re-emerges until it ends up capsizing the entire genre” (Huggan and Tiffin 99).

Postcolonial versions of the African farm genre intensify the settler’s powerlessness and helplessness located on what was, towards the end of the apartheid period, endangered farmlands. “[T]he mastering of the land that is the primal stuff of the Afrikaner *plaasroman*” (Poyner *Paradox* 157) is countered within the South African postcolonial pastoral: the settler’s promised land is exposed as an “anti-pastoral space, a site of

barbarism and degradation, a space repeatedly explored in white South African literature in which pastoral values and romantic myths have always coexisted uneasily” (Huggan and Tiffin 98). The farm – “the cornerstone of [...] [a farmer’s] identity” (Mengel *Genre* 157) becomes a place outside the control of its owner. Within this space his fears of the Other and possible intrusion are exacerbated. The postcolonial pastoral mode portrays an anxious white landowning class feeling threatened by the haunting black figure, farm attacks and “the real possibility that the reconfiguration of land ownership in the post-apartheid era may result in the definitive loss of valuable family property” (Huggan and Tiffin 104).⁷²

“Pastoral in Australia is about confrontation, recognition, conversation, and one would hope, reconciliation” (Kinsella “Australian Pastoral” 132-33).⁷³ Similar to South Africa, the Australian pastoral framework expresses tropes of settler/Indigenous conflicts, whereby “an ambivalent and contested sense of belonging and alienation” (Kossew *Writing Woman* 120) foregrounds the recognition of land rights. It also features themes of isolation and insecurity that are characteristic of the anti-pastoral mode. It tackles the contradictions and uncertainties of settler existence in Australia. John Kinsella points out that

[t]he Australian landscape is not European. If anything, it is really the Storm that belongs. Australia is a place of extremes. Furthermore, a sense of belonging in the land for a non-Aborigine is marred by guilt, that the European rural is laid over the Aboriginal land, working hard to obscure or obliterate memories of the past. (“Political Possibilities” 37)

The postcolonial Australian pastoral is haunted by the displacement and violent removal of the Indigenous peoples; “it is the figure of the dispossessed whose presence unsettles

⁷² The term “farm attack” is most commonly used to describe the “myriad assaults on white South Africans at their homesteads” (Moth 1). Incidents of farm attacks became very common at the fall of apartheid. After 1994, when the newly-formed government began to introduce land reforms cases of rape, torture, and murder were carried out by rural blacks against white farming families.

⁷³ My reading of *Remembering Babylon* takes up Kinsella’s mentioned thematic points concerning Australia’s contemporary pastoral; confrontation, recognition, conversation, and reconciliation are the topics that structure my argument of viewing Malouf’s novel as a postcolonial pastoral.

the affirmations of the pastoral song” (Indyk 838).⁷⁴ Within the colonial settler community the haunting figure of the Aborigine is a persistent reminder of dispossession. Nostalgic myths of belonging circulate in response:

In a context such as this pastoral nostalgia takes on an almost pathological quality, either conjuring up visions of pre-colonial harmony in a series of virtually unrecognizable pseudo-Arcadian settings or recuperating idealized images of European classical antiquity in order to superimpose a largely invented version of the old world onto an equally fabricated version of the new. (Huggan and Tiffin 86)

This evasion does not only point to the settlers’ troubled self-positioning within a dual framework of European and Indigenous histories, but also accentuates the impossibility of creating an idealistic Arcadian world. The Australian anti-pastoral depicts a lost Eden ravaged by the settlers and dispossessed of its original inhabitants. Consequently there can be no creation of a European idyll and hence a return to an Eden in Australia due to the fact that its landscape has borne witness to centuries of dispossession and death. Pastoral nostalgia is haunted by its misused rights that “help to make it possible, revealing a divisive history of entitlement that cannot be erased even when it is symbolically withdrawn” (Huggan and Tiffin 93).

The former Aboriginal custodians of the landscape haunt colonial grounds as powerful spectral presences. The persistence of the Aboriginal figure in the Australian pastoral threatens the fulfilment of the pastoral promise, disrupts the pastoral code, and causes a disruption in the preservation of an uneasy peace as it constantly argues for a revision of the pastoral order that entails an aboriginal claim to righteousness and priority. Thus, according to Ivor Indyk, the pastoral turns into a

⁷⁴ W.E.H. Stanner in *White Man Got No Dreaming* condemns the colonizers’ actions towards Aboriginal peoples. Their dispossession, Stanner suggests, has had irrevocable implications for the Indigenous population in Australia:

When we took what we call ‘land’ we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and the locus of life, and everlastingness of spirit. At the same time it left each local band bereft of an essential constant that made their plan and code of living intelligible. Particular pieces of territory, each a homeland, formed part of a set of constants without which no affiliation of any person, no link in the whole network of relationships, no part of the complex structure of social groups any longer had all its co-ordinates. What I describe as ‘homelessness’, then, means that the Aborigines faced a kind of vertigo in living. They had no stable base of life; every personal affiliation was lamed; every group structure; no social network had a point of fixture left. (41)

‘wild’ pastoral of the Australian bush and its Indigenous inhabitants [are] by nature undefined, unformed – it is felt as a [malevolent] force working against the traditional pastoral economy, unsettling and negating its priorities. [...] [T]he pastoral site has become a battleground, a site of literary contestation between some ‘wild’ aesthetic, as yet unformulated but whose allure is clearly felt, and the established principles of the pastoral form. [...] In reality these sites were bloody battlegrounds. (841)

There is an evident difficulty of finding a language to apprehend the wild aesthetic of Australia’s pastoral. The pastoral serves to penetrate and decode the Australian landscape and its original inhabitants as alien, impenetrable, and mysterious. The landscape – unfamiliar and strange to European eyes – could only be understood in the native language, which the settlers choose not to recognise. Hence, the settlers’ failure and unwillingness to comprehend the foreign landscape and its original inhabitants renders the land inaccessible and casts doubt over the settlers as the rightful owners of the land. Paul Carter in *A Road to Botany Bay* (1987) argues that “it was the Aborigines’ spatial command of the country which presented the greatest threat to white interests” (335-36); the Aborigines’ ability to read and understand the particularities of the landscape expresses their true belonging and existence in Australia. It further underscores their own sense of ‘owning’ the land: “‘Ownership’, in the Aboriginal sense, is circumscribed by extensive and intimate knowledge of particular places. Individuals who function as guardians of these places do so only by virtue of the knowledges they hold about the land” (Benterrak, Muecke, and Roe 147).

In the presence of the Aborigine, the settler becomes unsettled, a state which some critics identify as a “productive feature of the postcolonial landscape” (Gelder and Jacobs xvi). At the root of the settler’s ensuing angst stands the secreted enigmatic knowledge of the landscape, safeguarded in the hands of its rightful owners. The settler fears to acknowledge a “separation of belonging” (Goldie 12), which emphasizes a disconnection with the land and dislodges the false premise of the lawful owner myth.

In the following analysis two postcolonial novels take further this anti-pastoral form. Both adapt classical examples of the pastoral tradition. My partially Freudian reading

explores how concepts of identity, landscape, and memory function within the postcolonial framework to reveal the protagonists' troubled mental states. Landscapes described as barren and menacing turn into contested battlegrounds – “anti-pastoral scene[s] of abjection” (Huggan and Tiffin 100) – pressuring white characters to shift their identities and mark their borders to separate themselves from the Indigenous Other. Consequently, their self-induced isolation – physical and psychological – moves some to catastrophe and poses a threat to their survival. Memory plays a significant role as it accounts for the internalized dramas of consciousness weighing down on the protagonists and burdening them with a traumatic remembrance, which due to its shocking revelation, they are bound to forget.

The intrusive presence of Gemmy in *Remembering Babylon* serves as a catalyst for the settlers' feelings of unsettlement in an anti-pastoral setting. His initial appearance at the Queensland settlement disrupts the pastoral order by opening up differences and triggering the settlers' confrontation with identity, land and the Other. Gemmy carries within him the trauma of dislocation and rootlessness, an experience which the settler community fears. They recognise their inability to find connections to an Indigenous and foreign land. In *Remembering Babylon* Gemmy becomes the uncanny reminder of unhomeliness and colonial violence. Some characters, most notably Jock and Janet McIvor, enter into conversations with the landscape that suggest they are transformed by the encounter with Gemmy. The work of memory and remembering plays a crucial role pointing towards acts of reconciliation in *Remembering Babylon*. Through recollections of Gemmy Malouf takes the idea of haunting and traumatic memory induced by settler guilt and explores how this develops in the psyche of the characters, such as Lachlan and Janet McIvor, who have different memories and histories, to offer possible paths towards reconciliation.

Similarly, Fugard uses the pastoral mode to expose an anti-pastoral space in South African contemporary fiction that destabilizes notions of pastoral harmony. She rewrites the *plaasroman* to deconstruct the rural as a privileged site of white supremacy. Lorraine van Rensburg succumbs to the destructive forces of the postcolonial anti-pastoral where decline and death are most prominent. The trope of the garden foregrounds this theme of barrenness and gives way to nostalgia and loss. In contrast to the *plaasroman*, the novel does not depict Martin van Rensburg as a ‘benign patriarch’ in a symbiotic relationship

with the landscape, but a human gone feral; the farm in *Skinner's Drift* becomes a traumatic site where the slain body of a black child haunts and probes the uncertainties of white male landownership.

Fugard makes a radical break with the *plaasroman* tradition by shaping the narrative in terms of the points of view of the African labourers – Lefu, Nkele, and Mpho: voices that would have been intentionally left out in the traditional *plaasroman*. *Skinner's Drift* is situated in the rural South African hinterland of the Northern Province and Fugard focuses on the competing claims for land and different ways of belonging in this small community. In this way Fugard not only dislodges white identity from its self-centeredness, but produces a collective of individual voices that speaks of the dehumanizing injustices of race and class during apartheid, and the sudden power shifts that occurred in the post-apartheid period.

A Reading of *Remembering Babylon*

The opening of *Remembering Babylon* is one of the most familiar scenes in Australian contemporary fiction. Here, David Malouf explores the 'civilised' borders of the Australian settler nation in their encounter of the 'unknown', in the form of Gemmy Fairley. Gemmy, who embodies the otherness of place, a space cautiously avoided for its unfamiliar darkness, unsettles the settlers' pastoral visions of belonging and entitlement in a threatening landscape to expose a repressed colonial history of Aboriginal dispossession and loss. Gemmy, who is not an Aboriginal, but a British orphan raised by Aborigines, is identified as abject and marginalized, due to his physical disabilities. Half-white and half-black, Gemmy – portrayed and spoken of as a 'white' Aborigine – disrupts the settlers' perception of the Other due to his uncanny familiarity, unsettling them with their own potential to become like him. Moreover, at the edge of the frontier, the sight of Gemmy becomes a traumatic memory; interstitially placed - between and betwixt – he comes to haunt the memories of Lachlan Beattie and Jane McIvor, whose anxieties represent the problematic ambivalence of an emerging settler nation.

Confrontation with Identity, Land, and the Other

The postcolonial reading of *Remembering Babylon* as anti-pastoral reveals the conflicts involved as different kinds of advocacy are placed against each other. It deepens an understanding of “anti-pastoral, [in] attempting to tackle the contradictions and uncertainties” (Kinsella “Landscape Poetry” 34) of settler mentality. Gemmy’s breaching of the settlement’s physical barriers triggers this reading; identity, land, and the Other confront the settlers’ abilities to construct a terrain of power and the establishment of pastoral harmony in Australia. Gemmy Fairley’s appearance gives rise to a plethora of views concerning the character’s hybridity and his potential to confront the settlers’ status quo. His initial appearance in the settlement serves as the catalyst for the settlers’ negotiation of identity:

In intense heat that made everything you looked at warp and glare, a fragment of ti-tree swamp, some bit of the land over there that was forbidden to them, had detached itself from the band of grey that made up the far side of the swamp, and in a shape more like a watery, heat-struck mirage than a thing of substance, elongated and fairly indistinct, was bowling, leaping, flying towards them. [...] The stick-like legs, all knobbed at the joints, suggested a wounded waterbird, a brolga, or a human that in the manner of the tales they told one another, all spells and curses, had been *changed* into a bird, but only halfway, and now, neither one thing nor the other, was hopping and flapping towards them out of a world over there, beyond the no-man’s land of the swamp, that was the abode of every-thing savage and fearsome, and since it lay so far beyond experience, not just their own but their parents’ too, of nightmare rumours, superstitions and all that belonged to Absolute Dark. [...] It was a scarecrow. [...] He had the mangy, half-starved look of a black. (*Remembering Babylon* 2-3)

Malouf’s introduction of an in-between figure, a “white-black man” (*RB* 63), threatens to break down the symmetry of self and other, inside and outside the alleged boundaries, and ultimately endangers the settlers’ own perception of identity. Gemmy stands as the embodiment of spatial transgression; he blurs boundaries and tests binary oppositions. Drawing on Bhabha’s notions of colonial hybridity, Maria Cabarcos suggests that Gemmy’s hybridity “reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that [as an example

of] [...] other ‘denied’ knowledges, [he enters] [...] upon the dominant discourse and estrange[s] the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition” (Bhabha *Location* qtd. in Cabarcos 37). Gemmy’s indigenized appearance, Cabarcos further argues, serves to weaken the established bipolar categories of settler identity, whereas the “identity itself of the colonizers is at stake, [...] since they define who they are in opposition to the stereotype of the colonized, which in this psychological process of self-formation works as the colonizer’s other” (24). Gemmy, the uncanny hybrid Indigene, referred to as a “parody of a white man” (*RB* 35), exposes the settlers’ unstable identity.

The anti-pastoral constructs a contested site where binary distinctions are elusive. The colonizers’ established stereotypes of the fierce savage and the black bogey man lose their potency due to Gemmy’s peculiar resemblance to themselves. His alarming and (un)familiar presence, his “mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness” (*RB* 43), causes a disturbance to the conceptualization of the space beyond the boundaries of the settlement. His trespassing unsettles the settlers; he embodies “that which [the settlers] were attempting to escape by closing ranks within their community and by creating images of the colonial space and its inhabitants as separate, dark, and mysterious” (Cabarcos 26). To engage in the process of creating an enclosed settlement to protect their livelihoods the Queensland settlers exclude the Other. Mark C. Taylor argues that “exclusive structures [in turn] can become repressive – but that repression comes with consequences. [...] What is repressed does not disappear; it always returns to unsettle every construction” (1).

Malouf’s postcolonial pastoral form questions the settlers’ deliberate exclusion of the Other in this way. Huggan and Tiffin comment on the “problem of demography, in which pastoral enclosure is consistently threatened by the encroachment of unknown ‘others’” (99). The settlers’ erected borders and barriers cannot keep out the unknown world beyond the settlement. Its repression unsettles the inhabitants of the encampment and threatens to annihilate them. It is Gemmy’s alarming presence that exposes the settlers’ liminality and questions their uncertain subjectivity. As Gemmy’s ambivalent nature defies a characterization as Other, it forces the settlers, who have been defining their identity in contrast to the Indigenous otherness, to realign themselves. Malouf writes of the constant unease at the sight of Gemmy:

He had started out white. No question. When he fell in with the blacks – at thirteen, was it? – he had been like any other child, one of their own for instance. (That was hard to swallow.) But had he remained white? [...] [Y]ou had to put to yourself the harder question. Could you lose it? Not just language, but *it*. *It*. (RB 36)

Gemmy's presence inspires existential questions in the settlement. Yet their tone is one of crisis and unease. In this respect, Cabaracos' most intriguing argument – supported also by Veronica Brady and Cliff Lobe – considers Freud's term "the return of the repressed" to explain the settlers' fear of the unknown and the terror of possibly becoming like Gemmy.⁷⁵ Cabaracos argues that

when Gemmy jumps over the fence at the beginning of the novel he embodies the settlers' biggest nightmare: that the mystery and darkness of the colonial space is not only not contained within their assigned boundaries and their stereotypes, but that it is also aggressively gaining back the territory that had been tamed by the light of civilization. (36)

Gemmy's spatial transgression and his (un)familiarity elicit a fear in the settlers' minds due to their acknowledgement that the settlement might easily be trespassed upon. They repress thoughts of losing their identity and becoming liminal figures like Gemmy. The repressed unfamiliar threatens to become the familiar. It causes the settlers to rethink the supposed infallibility of their stereotypes; their notions of the frontier change. They view it as a dangerous space where they could be dislocated from their own society as their concepts of selfhood, home, and Englishness are forced to shift.

In the postcolonial pastoral the land turns into a battleground where nature stands as an opposing force – rather than a retreat – to capture the tensions over contested colonial grounds. *Remembering Babylon* captures an anti-pastoral space that oppresses and alienates its non-Indigenous inhabitants. "The Australian landscape is not European" (Kinsella "Political Possibilities" 37) and therefore George Abbot, Jock McIvor, and Ellen McIvor struggle to find pastoral harmony in a lost Eden. For the schoolmaster

⁷⁵ The return of the repressed is a concept established by Sigmund Freud as part of his psychoanalytic theory. Repression may be viewed as a defense mechanism, which is triggered to hold back suppressed memories or negative feelings that threaten a person's mental wellbeing.

George Abbott, this space is inherently cruel: “Everything that presented itself to his gaze in this godforsaken place told him how mean his life was, how desolate and without hope. [...] The place worked its defeats in a low way. It was on every side oppressive” (*RB* 46). Australia presents itself as a false Eden that bears no marks of seasonal change. Similarly Jock McIvor’s view suggests the “fierceness of its [the landscape’s] own sunlight” (68); the cruel territory demands “hard-bitten qualities of dourness and harsh self-discipline” (68). It sets itself apart by the description of its bushfires that bring to mind images of a “glowing furnace” (69) rather than Jock’s nostalgic and longed for tranquil Scottish plains covered under a “blanket of snow” (69).

In Australia experiences of the frontier question conventional pastoral ideals of rural tranquility. The settlers perceive the landscape as cruel and uninviting; a space very different from their homeland: “The conditions of their life up here were harder than any [Ellen McIvor] could have imagined at home because they were so different” (100). The colonial situation in *Remembering Babylon* deconstructs the pastoral’s representation of the landscape as pleasant and ideal; the idea of a perfect pastoral retreat disintegrates due to some of the settlers’ inability to cope with a landscape that harbours the unknown. For example, Ellen McIvor, surrounded by its immensity, observes that

[e]ven the openness she had longed for was a frightening thing. [...] If it was easy here to lose yourself in the immensities of the land, under a sky that opened too far in the direction of infinity, you could also do it [...] in a space no longer than five paces from wall to wall; to find yourself bargaining about the hut like a trapped bird. (*RB* 100)

Ellen’s entrapment is emblematic of the settler experience. Australia’s topography exposes fissures in colonial identity and exacerbates feelings of solitude. Veronica Brady contends that “for all the certainty [the settlers] assume, [they] exist in a state of liminality, on the frontier between the known and the unknown, self and other” (“Frontiers” 94).

In *Remembering Babylon* “self-accorded entitlements” (Huggan and Tiffin 104) promote and reinvent the settlers’ ideological white ownership of Australian land. In this respect, the Queensland settlers confront the land in order to remove all mysteries from the

topographical surface and place themselves at the beginnings of a national history. Thereby they are – to some extent – able to fight off their estrangement from the landscape. They attempt to conquer the fear of “los[ing] [themselves] in the immensities of the land, under a sky that opened too far in the direction of infinity” (*RB* 110) by working the ground and adapting it to their needs. To make this familiar the settlers engage with the landscape to ‘cleanse’ it of the uncanny, erasing any traces of Aboriginal ties to the land. The act of cleansing involves the systematic elimination of all that was strange and unfamiliar in order to remove the fear of the unknown. The settlers firmly believe that

only by the fiercest stoicism, a supreme resolution of will, and by feeling, clearing, sowing with the seeds we have brought with us, and by importing sheep, cattle, rabbits, even the birds of the air, can it be shaped and made habitable. [...] [I]f the land will not present itself to us in terms that we know, we would rather die than take it as it is. (118-19)

Thus, clearing and settling the land – extracting the maximum benefits from its soil – is thought to “secure hallowed ground for an emergent white settler society, and to forge racial myths of emplacement and belonging” (Huggan and Tiffin 86) within the postcolonial pastoral. Thereby, settlers can physically counter the Indigenous claim for a spiritual possession of land. In *Remembering Babylon* entitlement and belonging are created by the Queensland settlers to dispossess Aboriginals and pave the foundation for a subjugating culture that ultimately endangers the existence of the Indigenous by literally eradicating their presence from history.

Simon Featherstone suggests that for the settlers to feel settled in an unfamiliar environment the landscape had to be stripped of its natural features and any sign of “other” human occupation:

In Australia, the colonial ‘re-seeing’ resulted in the erasure of an ancient human geography. [...] The inability of colonists to see and understand Aboriginal methods of defining and managing their lands [...] led to a landscape long mapped and maintained by indigenous peoples being redefined as ‘wilderness’. [...] The transformation of a productive Indigenous geography into an unproductive

‘European’ landscape of desert and unmanaged terrain enabled a straightforward legal dispossession of Aboriginal land and culture. (205)

The land is rendered ready for settlement as it becomes familiar and known.⁷⁶ Settlers make room for themselves, creating a place that is habitable – more like home – simply, a place, which they can refer to as theirs. Faced with what she perceives as the unknowable darkness of the landscape Ellen McIvor holds on to things that are known and tangible, “clutching at whatever came to hand, a warm teapot, a startled child” in order to gain some consolation and certainty in the face of terror, which she imagines to sweep her away like a “cyclone [...] where nothing, not a flat iron, not the names of [her] children [...], could hold her down against the vast upward expanse of [her] breath” (*RB* 110). This domesticated and gendered perspective points to the different characters’ perceptions of the landscape. For Ellen the tangibility of domestic objects is emblematic of cultivated space.

Naming the unknown helped to create and possess the Australian landscape. Paul Carter argues that “by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a place with a history” (*Road* xxiv). By marking the Australian landscape with important British names the colonists instill it with a historical significance. Gareth Griffiths suggests that “land thereby becomes the subject of a speculative and competitive politics involving such culturally determined practices as naming, selecting of environmental features as foci of meaning, and intellectual ordering of natural phenomena” (305). For example, Malouf draws attention to the naming of the Queensland settlement after Queen Victoria. Naming the settlement after one of England’s monarchs not only implies the Empire’s omnipresence in the colonies and confirms the watchful surveillance of its stationed governmental representatives, but it ignores “pre-existing Aboriginal names and histories of the land” (Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall 5). Moreover, Paul Carter suggests that

⁷⁶ Mary Louise Pratt in “Scratches on the Face of the Country” (1986) argues that the colonists had the tendency to “verbally depopulate” (146) the colonial landscape in order to erase the existence of Aboriginal life and further the propagation of colonial supremacy in Australia. Colonial discourse was also advocated by “strategies of silence and concealment” (Bradford 15) whereby authors and historians engaged in a blatant erasure of Indigenous existence in their authored literature concerning settlements in Australia and New Zealand.

[t]he struggle for a name is also a struggle for power. In this sense the naming of places underlines the point that successful colonization depends not only on the physical exclusion of a former people, but on the suppression of their sounds, the successful reduction of their voices to a background chorus that might be (and frequently was) mistaken for frogs and crickets. (*Living* 124)

In this respect, Aboriginal names and histories are devalued and erased. Tony Birch argues that “[c]ontrol of the Australian landscape is vital to settler psyche. [...] In order to uphold the lie of ‘empty land’, Europeans have either denied the Indigenous people’s presence, or completely devalued its cultures. These hegemonic histories take possession of others’ histories to silence, manipulate and ‘deform’ them” (178).

The settlers’ quest for creating pastoral harmony in a new-found Eden is further thwarted by the confrontation with Aboriginal figures as uncanny spectral presences in *Remembering Babylon*. What is perceived as their outlandish and uneasy presence not only unsettles the settlers’ paradigms of belonging and ownership of land, but thwarts their possibility of tranquil harmony “as the explosive intensity generated by the convergence of disparate racial elements suddenly shatters the peace” (Indyk 849). The Aborigines are regarded as unpredictable devilish figures occupying the darkness of an unpopulated landscape. They are believed to threaten and devastate the settlement and are seen as dangerous invaders seeking to enter the settlers’ colony in order to wreak havoc upon the civilized. Malouf supports this vision of terror as the settlers in *Remembering Babylon* constantly struggle to fight off their mounting fears of falling prey to the unmanageable natives and ending up dead like some of the recent victims in central Queensland.⁷⁷ Especially in the presence of Gemmy, who embodies the savagery attributed to the Aborigines and who is thought to be “in league with the blacks [...] [–] [a]s infiltrator, as spy [–]” (*RB* 34) the settlers express panic and unease that begins to trouble the settlement. They are haunted by Gemmy, whom they believe to be an agent of

⁷⁷ Also the dexterity with which the Aborigines can throw a spear is much feared, prompting a wide array of written historical accounts by David Collins, founder of Hobart, of the alleged many murders in the new colony in 1798: “The natives were becoming every day more troublesome and hostile, several people having been wounded, and others, who were necessarily employed in the woods, driven in and much alarmed by them” (49). These reports helped to foster the terror and panic in the settlers’ minds and bolster support for the imperial dealings with Aboriginal people. In this sense, Heather Goodall argues that “[i]n the public domain [of Australia] the prevailing narrative reiterated the mythology of the innocent, murdered and mutilated white boy, killed by treacherous ‘hostile blacks’” (276).

the Aboriginal people. After spending some months with Gemmy, Mr. Frazer comments on the restlessness and agitation he feels when considering the ever looming attack of the Other:

Of course, it wasn't [Gemmy] you were scared of. [...] It was the thought that next time it might not be him. That when you started and looked up, expecting the silly smile, what would hit you would be the edge of an axe. He made real what till now had been no more than the fearful shape of a rumour lately had had a name and number to it: Comet River, nineteen souls. For at any moment – this was the fact of the matter – they might be overwhelmed. The stoutest of them, stepping out under the stars to take a piss before bed, all unbuttoned and exposed to the night, would feel his balls shrink at the crack of a twig, and tuck himself away without even troubling to shake the last drops off. Even in broad daylight, to come face to face with one of them, stepping out of nowhere, out of the earth it might be, or a darkness they moved in always like a cloud, was a test of a man's capacity to stay firm on his own two feet when his heart was racing. It brought you slap up against a terror you thought you had learned, years back, to treat as childish: the Bogey, the Coal Man, Absolute Night. And now here it is, not two yards away, a thing beside which all you have ever known of darkness, of *visible* darkness. (RB 38)

Imagined and dreaded, the shadowy and spectral presence of the Other undermines the pastoral order of the settlers. The Aborigine as a disturbing force, the manifestation of their utmost fears, occupies the settlers' minds in *Remembering Babylon* day by day as they fear the natives may annihilate the tenuous settlement and ultimately reclaim their occupied territory. In turn, it becomes impossible for the settler to accommodate the Indigenous within a harmonious pastoral order of rural tranquility.

Huggan and Tiffin argue that in Australia "pastoral reminiscences of an 'easy Eden dreamtime' are now made to confront a changed world" (93), which not only questions the settlers' security of belonging, but also makes them fear for their lives due to the uncanny presence of the Other in the landscape – a "visible darkness" (RB 38) that can shatter the maintenance of peace and order in the settlement. When Gemmy is visited at the settlement by a party of Aboriginals, Andy McKillop, who is terrified at the sight of Aboriginal people, spreads the rumour that Gemmy had been given a stone, reputedly

wrapped in bark, causing paranoia of an upcoming Indigenous attack among the other settlers: “Within an hour of the blacks’ visit Jock had news of it. First from Ellen who looked serious – she had heard it, in a panic, from Polly Mason – then, as he expected, from Barney, who could barely hold in the exasperation he felt” (RB 94). The Other’s uncanny presence disturbs pastoral harmony in a “wave of panic and suspicion” (113) and consequently unsettles and negates the settlers’ priorities. The postcolonial pastoral in Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* becomes a battleground where distinct cultures collide, disturbing the pastoral promise of peace. The Queensland settlement is troubled by the Indigenous figures who are “the embodiment of an aboriginal claim, a claim to priority” (Indyk 838) for their territories. Herein Malouf’s pastoral becomes entangled within the “cycle of possession, dispossession, and repossession” (Simpson 8) as the Queensland settlers take possession of Aboriginal lands by cutting off the natives from their birthplace.⁷⁸ In turn, they are continuously plagued by the idea that the Aborigines may murder them and retake their lands in an act of vengeance.

Entitlement

Due to their limited physical and spiritual claims to this foreign land settlers cannot claim any entitlement in *Remembering Babylon*’s anti-pastoral. Huggan and Tiffin argue that in postcolonial pastorals “entitlement operates as a legislative mechanism for the recognition of affective ties to land and place that are confirmed by historical continuity of association” (82). Human rootedness and the prospect of resolving issues of place and placelessness, thus, become relevant themes as the settlement in Malouf’s pastoral novel strives towards pastoral fulfilment, a mythical pastoral harmony. The settlers’ retreat from what they perceive as the unknown vastness of the Australian landscape exposes a set of

⁷⁸ The expropriation of Indigenous land, a purely racist matter, did not acknowledge the natives as the rightful owners of Australian land. They were dismissed as savages and wild beasts by colonizers. In a series of recollections published in 1854 Finney Eldershaw in *AUSTRALIA, As It Really Is* suggests that “peaceful efforts to reclaim these wandering hordes were all delusive” (63) and thereby calls for an indiscriminate slaughter of Indigenous tribes charging them with stealing and killing. Denying the natives human status he warned of the “imminent risks [...] [settlers] were still daily incurring in these first efforts to people and subdue the solitude and savages of this vast wilderness” (Eldershaw 62). During the nineteenth and early twentieth century settler-invader colonies held firm to the notion that Indigenous communities were to be exterminated. In one of his journal entries in 1829 George Augustus Robinson writes of the captain of a ship sailing off the coast of Tasmania: “He took every occasion to vilify the aborigines as a useless race, a nuisance upon the earth, reptiles who ought to be extirpated, worthless wretches, and similar shameful epithets” (qtd. in Plomley 84).

complex issues within the postcolonial pastoral. The colonial enterprise tests the settlers' mental steadfastness in a foreign land where the unfamiliarity of the landscape brings about unsettling anxieties and exposes "a crisis of ownership" (Huggan and Tiffin 85). *Remembering Babylon* employs the pastoral's capacity to ask fundamental questions about entitlement and belonging, for it is on pastoral grounds that settlers express "deep-seated uncertainties about proprietorship and belonging, together with a disquieting sensation of the unhomeliness of home" (Huggan *Australian Literature* 48). The strangeness and otherness of the landscape reaffirm the settlers' understanding of their being 'out of place': "They were isolated, at the end of the line" (*RB* 4). They comprehend that "[o]ut here the very ground under their feet was strange. It had never been ploughed" (8). In this sense, the indecipherable strangeness of the Australian landscape denies the settlers' topographical knowledge and a spiritual possession of the land. The pastoral prospect of gaining eternal happiness in a new found Eden is thus forever deferred. The Queensland settlers find it difficult to cope with the absolute unfamiliarity of the alien space and absence of geographical connections with their former homeland. They are in complete isolation, in "this outlandish part" (42) of the continent. Ashcroft asserts that their "destination is a mighty absence: 'Australia' as a new Eden, dreamed of, but unpossessable" (Ashcroft *Futures* 131).

The mysterious immensity of the indecipherable Australian landscape cannot be possessed due to the settlers' fear of what they perceive as the Other, the prior occupants. Malouf expresses the settlers' anxiety regarding their security of belonging as being derived from a permanent dislocation to a foreign and unknown land to which the settlers could claim no physical or ancestral ties:

The country he [(Gemmy)] had broken out of was all unknown to them. Even in full sunlight it was impenetrable dark. [...] Between lay tracts of country that no white man had ever entered. It was disturbing to have unknown country behind you as well as in front. [...] You lay listening to the crash of animals through its underbrush, the crack, like a snapped bone, of a ringbarked tree out in a paddock, then its muffled fall; or some other, unidentifiable sound, louder, further off, that was an event in the lands' history, no part of yours. The sense then of being submerged, of being hidden away in the depths of the country, but also lost, was very strong. (*RB* 7-8)

These anti-pastoral scenes represent the settlers' troubled connection with the land. The "impenetrable dark" of an "unknown country" embodies the colonizers' inability to read and understand the landscape. They are unable to enter into a dialogue with the landscape, where its "unidentifiable sound[s]" and their sense of ancestral disconnection cause them to fail to secure hallowed ground within an imperial hegemony. Julie McGonegal argues that "though the settlers have physical ownership of the land, military strength, and political and economic advantage, the unease that they feel arises out of something less tangible: their [...] lack of [...] ties to the land" (*Imagining Justice* 70). The settlers' "separation of belonging" (Goldie 12) is manifest within Malouf's postcolonial pastoral as the white settlers are stuck/lost in a state of unhomeliness that characterizes their placelessness in a foreign country.

Germaine Greer's psychoanalytic interest in the settler mentality in *Whitefella Jump* (2004) substantiates these postcolonial readings, as her focus on the settlers' 'pain of unbelonging' – caused by their arrival in an unfamiliar country – compares to the Queensland settlers' inability to cope with an unknown landscape in this novel. This pain of unbelonging is expressed by Malouf as the settlers comprehend that "[t]here was no way of existing in this land, or of making your way through it" (*RB* 58). Without the Aborigines' secret knowledge of the land they "were blind [...] [and] deaf" (58). The settlers' feelings of unfamiliarity in an alien space that cannot interact with them are referred to by Germaine Greer as a psychological malaise; settlers are unable to comprehend the unknown, uncanny, yet demanding foreignness of the Australian country-side, in which they are rendered helpless. Their "remitting and inadmissible psychic pain" (Greer 11), which derives from the traumatic experience of "migration [...] to a land from which there [could] be no return" is described as the settlers' pain of unbelonging (11). The pain bears witness to their inability to cope with the landscape and to thereby become its rightful owners. In this regard, settlers live in the constant danger of dislocation and displacement. Colonial space is figured as absence and void, a space that cannot be read. It lies outside discourse, denying a common understanding within the settler community. Thereby it endangers the coherence of settler subjectivity and prevents an intimate relationship with the land.

In Malouf's novel, the settlers view themselves as fundamentally alienated, having no hereditary or spiritual investment in the land's history, constantly fearing the "tracts of land that no white man had even entered" (RB 8). No pastoral freedom and true entitlement can be attained as the settlers know of no former ancestral ties. Although the theme of ancestral ties or the lack thereof has not been commonly addressed within the pastoral genre, it is one of the features of the postcolonial pastoral; the impossibility of inherited land connections in the settler community prevents the colonizers from feeling grounded in the foreign Australian landscape, inevitably causing them to feel disconnected and out of place. In this sense, Malouf has turned the pastoral to his own use to question the traditional mode's emphasis on fixity of place and the security of belonging. As the settled land has not been instilled with their traditions and their heritage, it emphasizes their isolation in a foreign land. Ellen McIvor addresses her haunting fears of loss and absence:

It was the fearful loneliness of the place that most affected her – the absence of ghosts. Till they arrived no other lives had been lived here. It made the air that much thinner, harder to breathe. She had not understood, till she came to a place where it was lacking, the extent to which her sense of the world had to do with the presence of those who had been there before, leaving signs of the their passing and spaces still warm with breath – a threshold worn with the coming and going of feet, hedges between fields that went back a thousand years [...] They would be the first dead here. It made death that much lonelier, and life lonelier too. (100-1)

For Ellen McIvor there are no signs of familiar life, nothing that reminds her of her Scottish home. Her first impulse is to assume that no other soul has lived on this tract of land before. In this respect, the postcolonial pastoral in *Remembering Babylon* challenges ideologies of the traditional pastoral – where connections to the land are celebrated – by emphasizing Ellen's uneasy ties to Australia and evoking the "possibility of subjective incoherence and possibly even destruction in the face of the unknown landscape" (McGonegal *Imagining* 71). McGonegal argues that due to Ellen McIvor's perceived genealogical alienation from the land, she feels disoriented and lost in a landscape that

has already been marked by a prior Indigenous claim on the land (71).⁷⁹ The lack of ancestral ties situates the settler within the anti-pastoral where she fears to lose her identity in a landscape “with the darkness infinitely expanding ahead and no visible marker on either side” (*RB* 79). This invokes the concept of Boym’s “restorative nostalgia”; the desire to reconstruct the lost home and to recover a lost past (41-42). The restoration of the past is crucial for Ellen in order to reclaim her Scottish identity in Australia. However, the anti-pastoral excludes any possible ties with a European homeland. Therefore, restorative nostalgia proves to be a troubling affair within the postcolonial pastoral of *Remembering Babylon*.

Ellen’s thoughts on life in an unknown and seemingly uninhabited territory bring to mind the concept of *terra nullius* and underscore her denial of native presence.⁸⁰ In the eighteenth century British settlers’ “legal occupation of Australia”, was justified by the belief that the land had been empty and had no rightful and capable owners who had appropriated the land as property. Elizabeth Webby points out that

in 1770 James Cook arrived to claim the eastern part of the continent for the British Crown and name it New South Wales. He apparently did so under the impression

⁷⁹ Uli Krahn explains that landscape in Australian literature has been used to define an identity of Australianness and fix the position of the settler within Australia:

Notions of place have been central in the cultural self-definition of settler colonies like Australia, since difference in place is the most visible marker distinguishing the colony from the imperial motherland. In Australian literary discourses, place is very much tied up with landscape, presumably as difference in landscape foregrounds the distinguishing difference of place. Landscape is thus used to emphasise the distinctiveness of Australia, from earliest colonial writings to the present day discourses of nationalism, literature and tourism. As landscape is supposed to define Australia, it is by extension used to define true Australianness. (29)

⁸⁰ Andrew Fitzmaurice suggests in “The Genealogy of Terra Nullius” (2007) that the term came to be associated with the dispossession of the Australian Aboriginals at the beginning of the twentieth century (4). The Latin term is derived from Roman law and means “land belonging to no one”. In this respect, Alex Zukas adds that a

key European justification for conquering foreign lands was the idea that these lands were “uninhabited.” Behind this justification was the application of the Roman legal concept of *terra nullius*. Western Europeans and their Euro-Americans cousins after 1500 adopted the idea of *terra nullius* (“empty lands”) to legitimize and popularize conquest and settlement of land in the Americas, Africa, and Australia. Empty land was often land previously unknown to Europeans (*terra incognita*). Europeans (and later Euro-Americans) mapped *terra incognita* and cited *terra nullius* as rationale for conquest, even in cases where lands were clearly not uninhabited. Within a larger public discourse on imperial projects from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, maps played a major ideological role in popularizing the deceptive notion of “empty” space as part of larger imperial projects. (49)

that there were few Indigenous inhabitants and that, since these few did not use the land in the European sense of cultivating it, they did not own it. (7)

Ellen's statement: "Till they arrived no other lives had been lived here" (*RB* 100) mirrors the colonial rhetoric of claiming ownership of an allegedly 'empty space': "[T]he educated person of the eighteenth century [believed] it was the cultivation of the soil that was the necessary badge of civilization" (McGregor 2). This generated the national myth of legitimate white settlement while the Aborigines were viewed as scattered unorganized tribes with no fixed domicile. This provides the colonists with the premise of a new beginning in a blank space and may enable their settlement to thrive without any compensation to the original owners. Thus, as Homi Bhabha argues, "the Colonial space is the *terra incognita* or the *terra nulla*, the empty or wasted land whose history has to be begun, whose archives must be filled out; whose future progress must be secured in modernity" (*Location* 246). In this respect, Ellen McIvor participates in the whitewashing of Aboriginal history: they erase any former space and time, positioning Aboriginals at the peripheries of history thereby denying them a rightful status as the sovereign inhabitants of Australia.

Conversation and Transformation

Remembering Babylon also suggests new conceptions of belonging in a foreign landscape, by addressing changing relationships between settlers and the environment. As we have seen, the Queensland settlers struggle to find harmony and spiritual ties with the settled territory. However, Jock McIvor and Janet enter into individual conversations with the landscape and reveal how new ecological connections can be made to create a new sense of belonging for some of the settlers. The presence of Gemmy triggers their transformation and changes them so they can begin to imagine ways they can immerse themselves in the Australian landscape. In this way Malouf's anti-pastoral explores both the alienation and the new possibilities that emerge from the frontier landscape.

At first, Jock is portrayed as failing to spiritually connect with the landscape and recognise its significance in terms of change and transformation; he can only find peace and harmony when recalling images of his homeland in Scotland: "If only he could wake

one day and find it, just for a day under a blanket of snow! What he missed where the marks of change” (*RB* 76). Yet, his encounter with Gemmy enables Jock to undergo a process of transformation. In the following passage in *Remembering Babylon* he becomes immersed in the Australian landscape: “Wading through waist-high grass, he was surprised to see all the tips beaded with green, as if some new growth had come into the world that till now he had never seen or heard of” (*RB* 107). In this way he comes to recognise the growth and transformation of nature that he had overlooked before:

When he looked closer it was hundreds of wee bright insects, each the size of his fingernail, metallic, iridescent, and the discovery of them, the new light they brought to the scene, was lightness in him [...] like a form of knowledge he had broken through. It [...] was also exhilarating. (107)

Here he “experience[s] moments of remarkable, preternatural connection to the natural world” (McGonegal *Imagining* 73). Jock’s perception of the landscape and his acknowledgment of the fauna as self-standing agents guide him to find a new knowledge that might become emblematic of other ways of engaging with this ‘new’ world.

Tending Mrs Hutchence’s beehives, Janet – Jock’s daughter – succumbs to the realm of the bees, which stand for the secret metaphysical knowledge of the land. By submitting to “their side of things” (*RB* 128) she gains certainty in the unknown landscape. They help her to comprehend the country: “without [the bees] she did not know how she would ever have discovered certain things or believed they existed” (127). Crucial is the scene where the bees fall upon her in a single cloud: “she had just time to see her hands covered with plushy, alive fur gloves before her whole body crusted over and she was blazingly gathered into the single sound they made, the single mind” (129). The bees cover her and become her second skin. This depiction of the bees and Janet’s surrender marks the protagonist’s submission to the land. Her openness introduces her to the mysteries of the landscape and she undergoes a metamorphosis. Upon their departure the bees leave her with a new body: “since the body she was now standing in, as her mind saw it, was not at all the old one [...] and what she saw was not herself, not a gawky child in pigtailed and a faded frock, but a charred stump, all crusted and black and bubbling” (131). Malouf describes her as a phoenix rising out of the ashes claiming a new maturity and a new life in Australia. Janet becomes aware of the possibilities and the knowledge the land has to

offer. The bees grow to be an important part of her life as she later in the novel devotes her existence to them. In this way, Janet is one of the few settlers in the novel able to accommodate herself to the mysteries of the Australian landscape, attempting to understand the land and its original inhabitants.

Work of Memory and Reconciliation

Memory and reconciliation play a crucial role in reading Malouf's contemporary postcolonial pastoral. The final chapter of *Remembering Babylon* goes back to the work of memory that is triggered by the opening scene, which is now recalled as a significant moment in childhood remembrance. I have argued that in the traditional pastoral mode of nostalgia – evoked through the flight from an overpowering present into a sanctified past – has been viewed as the essential building block of Arcadia. Nostalgia marks the desire to return to fundamental bliss, an attempt to fill the memory gaps. Yet, in Malouf's postcolonial pastoral the memory of Gemmy disturbs the sentimental yearning for the past, and Gemmy's body becomes construed as a depository for a traumatic event. Within the framework of the postcolonial pastoral in *Remembering Babylon*, nostalgia is invoked in order to dismantle rather than piece together memories of the past. Huggan and Tiffin argue that nostalgia in the postcolonial pastoral “remains haunted by the very privileges – abused privileges – that help to make it possible, revealing a divisive history of entitlement that cannot be erased even when it is symbolically withdrawn” (93). The desire to return to the past is characterized by a wish to forget and escape dreaded memories. In turn, the wilful forgetting of the past stirs up ghosts, namely the allegedly massacred black-white figure of Gemmy Fairley, who “as an indigenized white man [...] assembles a kind of Indigenous equivalence” (McGonegal *Imagining* 69), resurfaces in the memories of Lachlan and Janet as the haunting embodiment of the Aboriginal claim.

Consequently, they are forced to remember the violent dispossession of Indigenous people. As fifty years separate the temporal location of the last chapter from the novel's opening, the characters engage together in “this work of memory” to recall a “historical moment charged with significance” (Otto 556). Lachlan Beattie, a respectable politician and Janet McIvor, now a nun, meet at a monastery – “a walled retreat (the walls were ten

feet high, spiked at the top with shards of glass [...]), an impressive but dangerous reminder of a world they had set themselves apart from, though not entirely” (*RB* 166) – to remember Gemmy and attempt to heal the wounds of the past. Peter Otto argues that for these settlers Gemmy “is the focus of, and catalyst for, the remembering” (554) of a violent colonial past in which both have indirectly participated. Their memory of Gemmy carries the trauma of an Aboriginal loss, as the “separation from the land was inevitably a major trauma for Indigenous peoples – it was from this brutal amputation that all the other suffering would flow” (Collingwood-Whittick *Unbelonging* xxix). Jo Jones argues that Gemmy Fairley “is a kind of conduit between settler and Indigenous culture [...] [so that] the experiences of trauma [are] used to *enable* his indigenized identity” (73). Thereby, Gemmy can be viewed as partly relating to the trauma of loss of the Indigenous people.⁸¹

Both Lachlan and Janet look back upon Gemmy in order to retrospectively derive greater significance from their first encounter with him. They recall the moment when Gemmy “had [been] launched [...] out of the unknown world toward them, that the landscape itself had hurled into their midst, a ragged fragment of itself, or of its history or their own” (*RB* 176). Malouf depicts a gendered account of the characters’ personal views.⁸² Janet thinks of love and treasures the deep affection for the unknown intruder: “I sometimes think that that was all I ever knew of him. [...] [H]e was just Gemmy, someone we loved” (177). Lachlan, however, cannot shake off the memory when he first raised “the make-believe gun [...], a weapon with all the power of safety in it, of death too, and had pointed at the creature’s heart, and *yes*, he thought, *hit it*, and brought him down, and that was the start of it, and so long as the image had life in his head, it was not ended” (177). Their memories intersect, yet where Janet’s recollection suggests closure, a coming to terms with the past, Lachlan cannot forgive himself for having treated Gemmy inhumanely.

In Lachlan’s case *Remembering Babylon* overturns the notion that pastoral remembering – a flight into a sanctified past – evokes “a remembered time of intimate belonging” (Ingham 35). Instead his remembering becomes a troubling act. His child’s view and later

⁸¹ Jo Jones further suggests that “the suffering of Gemmy’s early years are the most powerful defining factor in the fraught cultural position he occupies in his later life[;] [...] the experience of trauma is [...] related to the status of this ‘in-between creature’” (74)

⁸² Malouf does this throughout in *Remembering Babylon*.

handling of the initial encounter with Gemmy resurfaces to suggest his indirect complicity in a violent past. The gun – representative of settler violence and suppression – positions Lachlan on embattled grounds as an agent of colonial power. From the onset the gun indicates Lachlan’s standing; he takes up the role of master and Gemmy becomes the subaltern. What further triggers the memory of Gemmy Fairley is Lachlan’s account of a “‘dispersal’ [...] by a group of cattlemen and two native troopers – too slight an affair to be called a massacre, and no newspaper had got hold of it” (*RB* 178), to “dispose” of another Aboriginal group of native men, women, and children.⁸³ To make way for white settlement “[t]he blacks had been ridden down and brought to earth by blows from a stirrup iron [...] – an effective weapon [...] for smashing skulls” (178). Although the story had been nothing new to him, having “elements in common with others he had heard” (179), Gemmy’s skeletal remains could have been among the bones found at the site of violence. Lachlan convinced himself “without proof” that somewhere at the site there lay the “bones of a man with [...] enlarged joints, the mark of an old break on the left leg, whose wandering at last had come to an end, and this was it” (179). In this respect, Lachlan acknowledges the significance of the meeting with his cousin and the retelling of his story, hoping that he could free himself of an unresolved burden and tie up “one of the loose ends of his own life, which might otherwise have gone on bleeding forever” (179). Yet, Lachlan’s wish to forget Gemmy, a “disfigured and ultimately ambivalent body of memories whose uncanny presence [...] makes the [settlers] remember the untenable binaries of colonizer and colonized, of white and black, of pure and impure, of civil and savage” (Lobe 183), is problematic.

Cliff Lobe argues that “this remembering – which is also a kind of forgetting – profoundly un-settles the political and discursive” (183), placing Gemmy at the cusp of a colonial history marked by dispossession, violence and murder. His uncanny presence and his alleged murder have developed into troubling memories, urging Lachlan Beattie to remember a forgotten past. In this sense, the Queensland settler hopes to forget the intrusive memory of Gemmy and his alleged murder in order to free himself of an anguished memory that not only binds him to Gemmy, but to the original trauma of colonization. In this sense, Lachlan’s and Gemmy’s pasts are implicated in the violent

⁸³ Lachlan’s account resembles the haunting story in Andrew McGahan’s novel *The White Earth* (2005), where the bones of massacred Indigenous people lie forgotten at the bottom of a waterhole waiting to be discovered and rightfully re-remembered and their ghosts laid to rest in the present.

and painful memories of dispossession and cruelty concerning the Aboriginal experience in Australia.

Gemmy's unrequited offer for the Aboriginal and white man to "meet on equal footing" (Indyk 847) makes an attempt at reconciliation. Yet, Janet and Lachlan's inability to recognise this offer would haunt them forever: "It would end only when they [Janet and Lachlan] were ended, and maybe not even then" (*RB* 180). McGonegal argues that because the settlers "imbue [Gemmy] with the ghosts of unknown 'Aboriginal' presences, his presence haunts them further" (*Imagining* 80). In this sense, the ghost of Gemmy and the settlers' feelings that he embodies the Aboriginal claim for entitlement and rightful existence weigh heavily upon them. Jacques Derrida argues that

[t]o weigh (lasten) is also to charge, tax, impose, indebt, accuse, assign, enjoin. And the more life there is, the graver the specter of the other becomes, the heavier its imposition. And the more the living have to answer for it. To answer for the dead, to respond to the dead [...] in the absence of any certainty or symmetry. (109)

It is the persistence of this spectral figure that disturbs Janet's and especially Lachlan's present, reminding white Australia that colonial racism and its enduring misgivings are "unfinished business" (Hodge and Mishra 23). As a ghostly apparition, Gemmy returns in the memory of the settlers as a haunting spectrality, a reminder of Aboriginal dispossession. Huggan and Tiffin argue that "spectrality is a common feature of white Australian (and other "settler colonial") representations of Aboriginal people, who are frequently co-opted for the task of cultural haunting" (130). Similarly, in *The Generations of Men* (1965), Judith Wright chronicles and reconstructs her ancestral connections, not only acknowledging her grandfather's struggle with a foreign landscape, but his uneasy recognition that the white man will forever be haunted for his evil colonial deeds:⁸⁴

Albert [Wright's grandfather] began to understand that this was where the danger lay, the mortal wound that the blacks had known how to deal in return for their dispossession. 'You must understand us or you must kill us,' they had said; an

⁸⁴ Judith Wright (1915-2000) was one of Australia's most celebrated and respected poets also known for her dedicated service as an environmentalist and social activist, especially as a campaigner for Aboriginal rights. See *Collected Poems 1942-1985* (1994).

understanding would have meant – something beyond the powers of the white men, some renunciation impossible to be made. [...] He imagined a whole civilization haunted, like a house haunted by the ghost of a murdered man buried under it. [...] Yes, they were all haunted – his generation. Perhaps his sons would be able to forgive, to lay [to rest] that ghost in themselves; perhaps it would remain forever at the root of this country, making every achievement empty and every struggle vain. (162)

The inability to put to rest the ghost that speaks of Aboriginal loss and dispossession carries great weight within Australian national history.

The wilful forgetting of the Queensland settlers is conducive to a national tendency to remember and forget selectively. J.M. Coetzee argues that the pastoral can be defined through its “retrospective gaze” (*White Writing* 4) that in the South African *plaasroman* has been directed towards the erasure of the native presence in order to sustain harmony and peace in the present. In the same sense, the postcolonial pastoral works to expose the problematics involved in the selective remembering of postcolonial nations when dealing with the past. *Remembering Babylon* suggests that the nation has not been built solely on remembering but rather on disremembering. Peter Otto argues that “[p]erhaps the most startling thing about this redemptive narrative is the magnitude of what it has to [forcibly] forget in order to remember, its transformation of a moment of violent dispossession into an anticipation of national unity” (556). The narrative implies that settlers suppress the dispossession of Aboriginal people in their narrations of nation. Australia becomes “caught in a destructive dynamics of forgetting” (Lobe 6) and the keeping alive of a fantasy of ‘white Australia’: a harmonic and democratic development through unity and purity of race.⁸⁵ Malouf’s depiction of Australia as an emerging nation within a

⁸⁵ In the mid nineteenth century prosperity of the colonies went hand in hand with the expansion of pastoral industry. Therefore the settlers’ desire to erase any other opposing moral claims to land was a strong incentive to the embracing of racist views of Aboriginals. Anthony Moran argues that as “early as the 1840s one can find public utterances in parliaments, newspapers, and in journals which indicate that forms of racism were used as ideological justification for the process of the colonization of Australia, and the replacement of Aborigines as a people, by a ‘finer’ white race” (78). At the beginning of the twentieth century the sentiment towards the natives had not changed. In order to keep the “finer white race” pure and untouched assimilation policies were dismissed and settler-invader communities were urged to keep Australia “white” for the next generations of colonists. In this respect, one of the editorials in *The Bulletin* written in 1901 reads:

postcolonial pastoral narrative suggests the settler-invader community is presented in a “uniquely ambivalent position” (Whitlock “White Diasporas” 91) where, in order to thrive, they must remember and forget selectively. The twentieth century has been viewed by Australian historians as the forgetful century, where nationalist historiography has been immersed in what W.E.H. Stanner refers to as the “cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale” (*Dreaming* 24).⁸⁶ The culture of forgetting is characterized by an amnesia gripping the Australian nation and suppressing troubling narratives of the past.⁸⁷ Gemmy’s presence is troubling and contradictory. His haunting presence questions the nation’s fantasies, burdening the “stability and integrity of the repeatable present [...], prevent[ing] a sense of completion and haunt[ing] the discourse on/of national unity, undermining the ideology of racial democracy” (Nunes 13).

Moreover, the settlers’ wilful forgetting challenges the traditions of the pastoral mode in nation and narration. D’Monte argues that in the traditional pastoral a deep longing for the preservation of national myths and an idealized past has “helped to formulate a sense of nationalism” (141). In *Remembering Babylon* national ideologies and the settler nation’s selective remembering are questioned. Within the postcolonial pastoral framework the settler invader nation struggles to secure ties to an alien landscape that thwarts the construction of a unitary nation. As long as the alarming memory of colonial violence and injustice haunts the minds of the settlement, “the legitimacy of the non-Indigenous community’s status in [...] [the] colon[y] will remain challenged” (Collingwood-Whittick *Unbelonging* xxxix).

If Australia is to be a country fit for our children and their children to live in, we MUST KEEP THE BREED PURE. The half-caste usually inherits the vices of both races and the virtues of neither. Do you want Australia to be a community of mongrels? (qtd. in Broome 93)

⁸⁶ See W.E.H. Stanner (1968), Henry Reynolds (1984), Ann Curthoys (2000), and Chris Healy (2008).

⁸⁷ As Leela Gandhi argues, selective forgetting is not unique to Australia, yet emblematic of colonial amnesia:

The emergence of anti-colonial and ‘independent’ nation-states after colonialism is frequently accompanied by a desire to forget the colonial past. This ‘will-to-forget’ takes a number of historical forms, and is impelled by a variety of cultural and political motivations. Principally, postcolonial amnesia is symptomatic of the urge for historical self-invention or the need to make a new start – to erase painful memories of colonial subordination. (4)

A Reading of *Skinner's Drift*

Landscape and Displacement

In *Skinner's Drift* Lisa Fugard draws on the *plaasroman* genre to address the wrongs of apartheid and its Afrikaner ideology of rightful land ownership. *Skinner's Drift* brings attention to the ways that the *plaasroman* is embedded in a colonial culture and its historical denial of the dispossession of African peoples in the first part of the twentieth century. While refashioning the tradition of the *plaasroman* by “advancing its historic and contemporary relevance” (L. Wilson 93), Fugard’s postcolonial version highlights an anti-pastoral space that challenges representations of a conflict-free Arcadia and supports Huggan and Tiffin’s premise that in the farm novel the alleged “pastoral idyll collapses into an anti-pastoral scene of abjection” (100).

The principal white protagonists in the novel, Lorraine and Martin van Rensburg, struggle to claim a sense of belonging in a space that refuses the conventions of pastoral representation. In contrast to the *plaasroman*, Fugard portrays the white characters’ failure to find ways of belonging to the landscape. Like *Remembering Babylon*, the challenging and threatening landscape in *Skinner's Drift* contributes to the characters’ deep-seated uncertainties concerning entitlement and belonging. In this postcolonial pastoral, the African hinterland is no welcoming, lush pastoral landscape, but a frontier that defies the settlers’ desire to thrive and establish a flourishing community. Fugard’s portrayal of the farm suggests “an anti-pastoral space, not the promising, vacant vastness so often celebrated in writing about the dominions, and South Africa in particular” (Van der Vlies *Textual Cultures* 62). Mairi Emma Neeves points out that Fugard chooses to describe Africa from the settlers’ perspective, as a brutal and erratic country comparable to a “wild creature, dangerous and unknowable, it is capable of providing life and claiming it” (*Skinner's Drift* 119).

Lorraine’s mourning for a lost home, which cannot be restored to her, shapes the representations of an anti-pastoral environment throughout the novel. Lorraine – an English immigrant to South Africa – feels incapable of finding peace inside “a cruel country [...] [:] miserable and rotten” (*SD* 240), where “nothing dies peacefully” (59).

She remains unable to assert an established presence in the African veldt due to her sense of unbelonging. For example, Neeves points out that the “drought appears as a motif of hopelessness, depression, and a growing fear for survival” (119) in a fierce landscape. Dust and thirst bring about feelings of despair and exacerbate Lorraine’s own hopelessness regarding life on the farm: “It’s hell out there. Everything is dying!” (*SD* 77). Even the long awaited rain does not offer solace, as we might expect, but brings her face to face with an unsettling reality: “We are in that in-between place. [...] Our world still looks the same: desolate, parched and it’s brutally hot. [...] I feel like I’m living in the tropics and yet when I step outside the garden it looks godforsaken, a strange and unsettling combination” (102). Instead of attaining pastoral harmony in South Africa, Lorraine mourns the loss of her home country and feels “like an outsider” (120), “as though she [is] drowning” (125) inside a wild and “insurgent landscape” (Weatherstone 147).⁸⁸ Ultimately, she concludes that “[t]his part of the world doesn’t want us anymore” (*SD* 127).

What Fugard suggests here is that the settlers feel threatened by the landscape. The postcolonial pastoral does not offer any solace to the settlers, but brings to the fore white settler anxiety underscoring their “separation of belonging” (Goldie 12) in foreign lands. Similar to George Abbot and Ellen McIvor, who dread to acknowledge the imposing isolation of the unbounded Australian landscape, Lorraine becomes trapped in the topographical strangeness as if “living in a cage” (*SD* 133) in rural South Africa. Stephen Gray suggests how the landscape in South African fiction is portrayed as defying the settlers’ symbiotic relationship with nature:

Landscape, in South African realist fiction, never merely sustains and magnifies man; it dwarfs and overwhelms; it remains unyielding and destructive, [...] worst of all [the land] disallows them from achieving man’s most sacred desire, the desire to take root in the land and belong. [...] [I]ts characters do not – cannot – belong. (150-51)

⁸⁸ Rosemary Weatherstone uses this collocation to refer to an alienating and destructive landscape which rebels against white settlers by denying them a peaceful and harmonious connection to the colonized land. The usage of “insurgent landscape” seems fitting in this context as Lorraine cannot civilize parts of the South African landscape to adjust it to mirror an English garden.

The trope of the garden and Lorraine's failure to maintain it are emblematic of the settlers' unfulfilled desire to detect pastoral harmony in an anti-pastoral space. Lucy Wilson suggests that "Lorraine plants roses in a desperate attempt to create an English garden in the unforgiving soil" (92). The joy that her rose bushes, which are an important "part of everyday life in England [and] a symbol of its royalty" (Hoppe 1) and bourgeois domesticity, have given her, "wither[s] into bitterness" (*SD* 148). The roses and this garden are metaphorical, indicating the failure to establish connections between a mythical homeland of nostalgic memory and the farm on Skinner's Drift. Moreover, Michelle Ramlagan argues that "the settler pastoral perpetuated a tradition of representing the region as a Garden of Eden to be tamed and developed" (38), yet the garden in Fugard's postcolonial anti-pastoral withers and refuses to be cultivated.

When broken by the daily challenges of life on Skinner's Drift, Lorraine understands that all her effort to feel at home is "doomed to failure" (*SD* 230). In a symbolic gesture that suggests her withering ties to England, she finally uproots the rose beds: "the dug-up flowerbeds looked like two large lumpy graves, [and] the surrounding garden desolate" (159). This grave site is proleptic, as it foreshadows Lorraine's violent death. Shelley Saguro argues that "[o]n the one hand, gardens can signify a pre-lapsarian and harmonic bliss; on the other, the inevitability of a failure and Fall. [...] [I]n postcolonial fiction [...] a garden [...] can serve to show the duress of toil [...] where nothing of pastoral pleasure is realised but only inescapable hardship" (x) and – in Lorraine's case – "punishment" (*SD* 160). After uprooting the roses Lorraine gets a "ferocious sunburn" (160), which she views as punishment for attempting to domesticate the South African landscape, which does not lend itself to Lorraine's cultivations.⁸⁹ As in *Remembering Babylon* the postcolonial pastoral does not represent an entry into an idyllic and harmonious sphere, and rather places these settlers into strange lands that elude their understanding. Neither Malouf nor Fugard offer their characters the solace of restorative nostalgia.

Anti-pastoral landscapes of abjection threaten the settlers' survival. For both the Queensland settlers and Lorraine, the foreign lands turn into unstable and embattled grounds resisting imperial hegemony: the landscape asserts itself against the settler/invaders. We see this in both of the novels read as postcolonial pastorals here.

⁸⁹ When Dr. Krieger visits Lorraine he suggests that the English are not made for this country: "[I]t's the English blood. [...] [The English] were not meant to live north of the Orange river" (*SD* 161-62).

Thus, the isolation and the intrinsic danger of the landscape result in catastrophe: Lorraine is accidentally shot on the farm in an accident provoked by her husband's relentless war with nature. In Malouf's novel the Queensland settlers, especially Jock and Ellen McIvor, fight for survival in a country that provides so little in terms of comfort and pleasure, but instead demands "stringy hard-bitten qualities of dourness and harsh self-discipline" (*RB* 68), their "youth burned out" (69) in the bushfire summers, constantly unsettling them in a "place where there were no sureties of any kind" (71).

A version of menacing anti-pastoral begins to emerge in *Skinner's Drift*. We see this in the representation of Martin van Rensburg as a character whose ruthless individuality is brought to the fore. In contrast to the *plaasroman*, where the white farm owner is portrayed as a benign patriarch in a symbiotic relationship with land and nature, Martin's relationship with the South African landscape on Skinner's Drift is one of ownership and brutal domination. The postcolonial pastoral does not cultivate an idyllic site managed by harmonious labour rather, it disintegrates into an anti-idyll: a troubled site, where the settler's desire for eternal rule is challenged. The anti-idyll within postcolonial pastoral introduces the realities of racialised violence, as rural lands become the sites "where the wilderness takes root once again in men's hearts" (Coetzee *White Writing* 3).⁹⁰ In this respect, Martin becomes corrupted by the "growing obsession with defending his land" (*SD* 30) and cleanse it of any foreignness which is commensurable with the scene in *Remembering Babylon* in which the settlers attempt to get rid of Gemmy by forcing him from their settlement.

Martin, the embodiment of the archetypal Boer hero, is described by Lorraine, who envisions him as the self-appointed despot of Skinner's Drift.⁹¹ "I've been thinking it's Martin that I'm scared of. His vitality, his violence, his mad passion for his land, his exhilaration in fighting, in claiming what he believes is his birthright – a piece of South Africa" (*SD* 208). His growing obsessions with defending his land are emblematic of the Boers' forceful legitimization of land ownership ever since the Dutch-speaking settlers of

⁹⁰ In the full-length quotation J.M. Coetzee compares the Afrikaners' fear of Africa to that of Joseph Conrad (reminding readers of *Heart of Darkness* and Kurtz, who falls prey to Africa's dark nature), arguing that "like Joseph Conrad after them, they were apprehensive that Africa might turn out to be not a garden but an anti-garden, a garden ruled by the serpent where the wilderness takes root once again in men's hearts. The remedy they prescribed against Africa's insidious corruptions was cheerful toil" (*White Writing* 3).

⁹¹ *Boer* is the Afrikaans word for farmer. *Boers* have been the descendants of the Dutch-speaking settlers of the Eastern Cape frontier in South Africa during the eighteenth century.

the eastern frontier settled on the South African frontier during the eighteenth century. When considering the Boers' fanatical sense of belonging J.M. Coetzee argues that

the founding fathers pay for the farm in blood, sweat, and tears, not in money; they hack it out of primeval bush, they defend it against barbarians, they leave their bones behind in its soil. Inherited ownership of the farm therefore becomes a sacred trust: to alienate the farm means to forsake the bones of the ancestors. (*White Writing* 85)

Martin van Rensburg considers himself as “would-be king of Skinner’s Drift” (*SD* 46), expecting the land would yield all that he hoped for whereas his farmhouse stands as a tool for patriarchal and imperial control. The land becomes a sacred site “where farmers and their wives and their dogs were buried, resting in the earth being reward enough for years of toil” (3). Indeed, “[f]or Afrikaners who consider themselves God’s chosen people, their farms are the seats to which their lineages are mystically bound, legitimating their claims of landownership” (Moeller 104). Propelled by a “lineal consciousness” (Coetzee *White Writing* 4) the *Boers* defended their conquered lands with a strong sense of inheritance to substantiate their legacy for future generations; this is the “transcendental justification for the [white] ownership of land” (106). The traditional *plaasroman* celebrates the Afrikaner’s ties to the land and propagates the notion of a just inheritance. Maurits van den Heeyer, one of the most productive writers within the farm novel genre, imagined the Afrikaners’ founding identity as defined by the past generations’ toil on the land, a tradition to be preserved and imitated. He writes of South Africa as the founding site “[w]here the slumbering might of all national cultures lies: [in] man, with his ties to the earth, with which he is mystically united by a dark love. [...] [H]ere is the soil of generations” (qtd. in Coetzee *White Writing* 79-80).

In the characterisation of Martin and Lorraine Fugard depicts two very different and gendered discourses of acquisition and belonging. For example, in claiming that Skinner’s Drift is “mine[;] [t]his is my land!” (*SD* 44), Martin seeks to control and tame his land with guns and brutality, whereas Lorraine attempts to civilize and reform by planting. He engages in excessive bouts of violence to maintain white authority. There are wild shooting sprees to hunt the animals on his farm, domesticating the wild and preventing it from entering the enclosed area of his land. Like the settlers in

Remembering Babylon, who work hard to erase what they perceive to be different or alien, Martin needs to eradicate his fear of the unknown and systematically eliminate all that is undomesticated and foreign. By killing wild animals on Skinner's Drift Martin creates a manageable space. This characterisation of Martin resembles the ruthless hunter Jacobus in another reworking of the *plaasroman*, J.M. Coetzee's first novel *Dusklands* (1974). Jacobus views himself as the "destroyer of the wilderness" (*Dusklands* 79) reducing wild game to controllable numbers:

We cannot count the wild. The wild is one because it is boundless. We can count fig-trees, we can count sheep because the orchard and the farm are bounded. The essence of orchard tree and farm sheep is number. Our commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard and farm. When we cannot fence it and count it we reduce it to number by other means. Every wild creature I kill crosses the boundary between wilderness and number. [...] I am a hunter, a domesticator of the wilderness, a hero of numeration. (80).

Similarly, Martin, who storms and rages across his enclosed farm first with a rifle, then an automatic machine gun, is bent on reducing the wild animals in order to domesticate his land. The animals are easy prey as they are "trapped in the headlights" (*SD* 187) of his *bakkie*⁹² and fall prey to Martin's machine gun. Martin uses his guns as a mouthpiece to enter into a violent dialogue with the landscape: "Because of his stutter Martin had never befriended words, spoken or written" (*SD* 18), yet he takes part in the deep-rooted violence of apartheid by communicating his needs with the firing staccato sounds of his machine gun. Martin's stuttering, described as "words [...] piled up inside him like rocks and if he was very angry he would throw one at you" (262) parallels his uninhibited tendency to use guns effectively to enter the violent colonial discourse: "Martin wasn't hunting anymore [;] [...] he was killing" (69).⁹³

Martin's antagonistic relationship with the land is further characterized by this enclosure of the farm, and its fortifications against 'intruders' from the neighbouring border of

⁹² *Bakkie* is a generic term in South Africa for any light utility vehicle.

⁹³ It is this insatiable force that propels him to shoot a black boy on his farm.

Botswana.⁹⁴ As in *Remembering Babylon* fences and barriers are erected to mark the contained landscape as a familiar and physically controlled space. Huggan and Tiffin argue that in the postcolonial pastoral “the farm is a space outside the control of its privileged [...] owner, and it increasingly becomes the site of his deepest fears and anxieties: fears of intrusion, depletion and eventually destruction of narrative” (100). In *Skinner’s Drift* the security around the farm further tightens as fears of imminent attacks loom over Martin’s enclosed space during the 1980s.⁹⁵ Threatened by attacks from Botswana “terrorists”, white farmers grow increasingly concerned about their security and survival.⁹⁶ Fugard’s depiction of farm murders not only addresses the social upheaval of the 1970s and 1980s but also points to the attacks that take place during the 1990s, after the fall of apartheid, where “stories of rape, torture, murder, and mutilation carried out by rural black men against white farming families have emerged as a talking point in the white community” (Moth 1).⁹⁷ Believing that “the border fortification was not sufficient protection, [...] along with his fellow farmers Martin replaced the simple fence that enclosed his house and garden with a twelve-foot-high security fence” (SD 90). After reported killings of white farmers “hacked to death with machetes [...] [,] their two sheepdogs shot in the head” (89), the van Rensburg family is gripped by a fear “that had lurked in all of their bellies, had made her father fence the house, stockpile the guns” (285). Thus, similar to *Remembering Babylon*, where the Queensland settlers fear the attack of the Indigenous within their erected borders, the grounds of Fugard’s pastoral turn into a bloody battleground for entitlement and survival, as white farmers dread being dispossessed of their lands. In this respect, Fugard’s farm novel portrays a beleaguered and endangered white landowning class facing the loss of their family property. J.M. Coetzee argues that farms may not only be viewed as a microcosm of *Boer* nationalist ideology but for Afrikaners the “farm assumes the scale of the fall of an ancient house,

⁹⁴ Jill Planche suggests that “[t]he settling of South Africa by the Dutch and British created for Africans a condition that shifts from open landscape, in which movement is ‘free’ [...], to areas that become formally contained, fenced, and controlled: physically in the rural and the urban environments” (1).

⁹⁵ Ewald Mengel argues in “Trauma and Genre” (2012) that “with the social unrest of the 1970s and 1980s, things visibly begin to change. The farm, which was hitherto presumed to be a safe place (like the family home), is increasingly penetrated by hostile forces: ANC rebels and marauding murderers see to it that the farmers cannot feel safe any longer” (158). In this respect, the farm in *Skinner’s Drift* is portrayed as a fortress defending itself from outer attacks.

⁹⁶ Botswana lies at the border of South Africa, separated by the Limpopo River in the south-east of the country.

⁹⁷ The term ‘farm attack’ has widely been associated with blacks assaulting Afrikaners at their homesteads. Due to the fact that white farmers enjoy greater economic power and subsequently maintain access to the police and the courts the mistreatment of blacks can more easily be silenced. Thus, there is no equivalent to farm attacks in regards to violence against black people.

the end of a dynasty” (*White Writing* 84). Therefore, to prevent the end of his rule and secure a future for his family on South African land, Martin begins to fight his own war, defending his land and his family (*SD* 55).

The fence turns into an instrument of containment, emblematic of colonization and especially apartheid’s restrictive practices and laws. Within the confines of his farm Martin aspires to sustain a unitary society characteristic of Afrikanerdom: namely, “for Afrikaners the farm, which they regarded as their land, represented the family unit” (Planche 69). The controlled land can be instilled with Afrikaner traditions and a familial heritage that counteracts feelings of placelessness. In this sense, the rural labour – partially defined by the construction of fences – emphasizes the fact that Martin’s sense of belonging is as much manually created as claimed. The walls are crucial in defining, on the one hand, the identity of the Afrikaner, his traditions and beliefs, and on the other the exclusion of the Other. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin suggest that the settlement/farm signifies “the figure of enclosure that marks the frontier between the savage and the civilized” (*Key Concepts* 180). In *Remembering Babylon*, too, fences and barriers signify ownership and assume the settlers’ possession over a piece of flagged property. This way, for both, the Queensland settlers and the van Rensburgs, boundaries define their worlds and encourage solidification of an ethnic unit. Yet, although steadfastly defended, fences and barriers in both novels are dangerously porous as fences can be breached and boundaries crossed. On both pastoral grounds the Other cannot be kept out and thus fear and anxiety overwhelms the settler/invasor and drives him to catastrophe, especially when the pressure from the outside begins to rise.

Black Voices

The most important transformation of the *plaasroman* tradition is Fugard’s inclusion of significant black characters: the labourers, Lefu, Nkele, and Mpho. Thereby, *Skinner’s Drift* exposes the inequality and racism that privileges the white farmers of the *plaasroman*. By including the voices and perspectives of formerly silenced black characters, Fugard challenges the grand narrative of the *plaasroman* by defying the built-in blindness to the colour black which has characterized the traditional South African farm novel (Coetzee *White Writing* 6). The genre is subverted by the active presence of

the population of black inhabitants who trouble white pastoral myths and fantasies; the characterization of Lefu, Nkele, and Mpho incorporates the voices of those who lay claim to land ownership and call into question the apartheid regime.

The “story of apartheid is, amongst other things, the story of the systematic elimination of thousands of voices” (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission* “Destruction” 201).⁹⁸ Lefu’s, Nkele’s, and Mpho’s voices undercut white authority on the farm, and threaten the authority of a single racialized group. Coetzee suggests that the traditional *plaasroman* erases the presence of black labour on Afrikaans farms due to the fear that “those [black] hands [could] make the landscape speak” (*White Writing* 9). The presence and labour of the black characters on Skinner’s Drift call into question the ownership of the land. African ways of mapping and knowing the land survive in the black community, which is feared as dangerous knowledge by the settlers. Fugard describes Lefu’s way of seeing his homeland which calls attention to black belonging.: “He saw the small veins in the ears of the bat-eared fox, hundreds of them, like the footpaths lacing Skinner’s Drift, the footpaths that he and his family and families before them made as they walked the land, the map the white people didn’t know” (*SD* 100). The settlers in *Skinner’s Drift* and *Remembering Babylon* comprehend that their understanding of the land lacks a profound belonging that remains alive in Indigenous and African ways of living. Thus for the Queensland settlers the “very ground under their feet was strange” (*RB* 8), and Martin acknowledges that he lacks the secret knowledge to find water supplies on his land. He can only penetrate these secrets with the help of black water diviners who have “another way of knowing [...] the country of water beneath the thirsty land. Underground pools and rivers. Dark water dripping endlessly down slabs of rock” (*SD* 46-47). Neeves argues that “this image of unobtainable water requiring special, mystical knowledge underlines the white farmers’ precarious hold upon the land: they depend upon black farm labourers for survival” (120).

The black labourers’ experiences in Fugard’s postcolonial pastoral communicate the collective suffering of African people, and break the silences of apartheid by bringing to the fore their testimonial accounts. Laurie Vickroy suggests that “many voices, emotions

⁹⁸ Desmond Tutu, considered to be South Africa’s moral conscience, has been acknowledged as one of the most central and influential figures for his role in South Africa’s struggle against apartheid. As South Africa’s Archbishop, Tutu was chosen to chair the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and investigate the crimes committed by both sides during the regime.

and experiences intermingle to produce individual and collective memory and to counteract silence and forgetting” (27). Fugard employs the individual voices of Lefu, Nkele, and Mpho to portray their suffering within a system that relies on their ongoing oppression. They suffer from extended periods of crises caused by “colonial-induced traumas” (Craps and Buelens 6) that devalue and endanger their lives. Laura Brown uses the term ‘insidious trauma’, to account for “the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly urgent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit” (107). Kai Erikson further suggests that trauma may result “from a constellation of life’s experiences as well as from a discrete event – from a continuing pattern of abuse as well as from a single assault, from a period of attenuation and wearing away as well as from a moment of shock” (457).

The black labourers, especially Lefu, suffer from systematic discrimination. The destructive power structures of apartheid dehumanize Lefu. He falters under the physical and psychic fatigue exerted by Martin’s authoritarianism. Lefu “with his tired aching body and the sadness his heart had accumulated” (*SD* 69) feels stupefied by the constant drudgery rendering him “a man with so little dignity” (263). Whenever his daughter comments on his fatigue, the only answer he can ever give her is “[t]oo much. [...] The words tumbled constantly from his lips, too much, too much” (88). Lefu’s powerlessness and hopelessness, his sheer acquiescence to the white establishment, mark him as a man who has been broken by apartheid. In this sense, Steve Biko’s description of the dehumanisation of the black man under apartheid seems fitting:⁹⁹ “All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity” (31). It becomes clear that, within the physical barriers on Skinner’s Drift, Lefu is denied any kind of self-determination. Jill Planche argues that the physical barriers of apartheid “create the psychological barriers of absence and a sense of nothingness” (3) and the characterisation of Lefu seems to substantiate this point about the psychology of the colonised subject.

⁹⁹ Steve Biko, a noted anti-apartheid activist, founded the Black Consciousness Movement. His writings empowered other black people during 1960s and 1970s. He was allegedly killed during police custody and thus became one of South Africa’s martyrs, a struggling hero fighting for the black man’s freedom.

The constant threat of death on the farm also causes ongoing traumatising. The apartheid state empowered the whites to dehumanize the blacks and treat them with utmost callousness.¹⁰⁰ Transgressions of any sort on Skinner's Drift are punished by severe physical penalty, even death. Blacks are treated like animals that can be shot, their bodies thrown away and left to decay on the grounds.¹⁰¹ Lefu is stunned when Eva forces him to ride one of the farm's horses as he knows that this kind of wrongdoing could cost him his life: "Martin van Rensburg did not want a black man sitting on any of his horses. [...] If he saw a black man riding his horse at five in the morning he would shoot him no questions asked" (*SD* 67-68). Even after Lefu finds out about the black child's murder he feels powerless to take action because of "having been taught never to question a white person" (69). The fear of death – ever-present in his mind – is prominent: "He had to say something, even if they were the words that took him to the prison of Pretoria where he would be hanged" (91). Shocked by Eva's threat – "there will be trouble. Big trouble!" (99) if he goes to the police about his discovery – Lefu remains silent, in fear of becoming another one of Martin's victims or being sentenced to death by the regime. Michela Borzaga argues that "living in the colony is like living in a state of war. It is a place of terror in which [...] [violence] reigns. [...] The colonized lives permanently in a paranoid state of alertness and fear" (84). Although insidious trauma is not a key aspect of the postcolonial pastoral in South Africa, it nevertheless carries great purchase on the enclosed and isolated farm grounds. Notions of ongoing oppression and the constant fear of death become more focused and prevalent within these confines. Mengel refers to the farm as "a symbolic microcosm that symbolizes the macrocosm of South Africa" ("Genre" 158), suggesting that the traumatizing conditions for black people within the farm mirror those of black South Africans in general.

Nkele, Lefu's granddaughter, struggles to fight back feelings of hopelessness within this dehumanizing environment. Her life on the farm as a black maid is characterized by an ongoing bitterness and powerlessness as the white people do not perceive her presence: Nkele, "the cleaning presence, who was almost a non-presence, so much that the white people would sometimes forget she was even there" (*SD* 157). The relentless erasure of

¹⁰⁰ Upon receiving the Jerusalem Prize in 1987 J.M. Coetzee criticized the unequal structures between white and black that were founded during colonization: "The deformed and stunted relations between human beings that were created under colonization and exacerbated under what is loosely called apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life" (*Doubling* 97-98). The stunted inner life causes the blacks to constantly fear for their lives.

¹⁰¹ This alludes to the killing of the black child on the farm, whose body is left to decay on the grounds.

blackness devalues Nkele's existence on Skinner's Drift, leaving her incapable of self-transformation. Nkele envisions nothing but years of toil and misery for herself and her son: "She imagined her son as old as Lefu stunted from years of saying *yes, baas!*, his head bobbing in obeisance, and she saw herself ancient and withered, useless and toothless, living in a hut somewhere, nothing but a burden with barely enough to eat" (178). She imagines how her oppressive life will continue to wear her down within a system that thrives on her subjugation.

Nkele's life represents the trapped existence of black people inside the constructed limits of white patriarchal authority. Toni Morrison argues that the colonial situation for black people has been designed by colonisers and distinguishes itself as "a way of life dreamed up for us by some other people who are at the moment in power" (qtd. in C. Davis 144).¹⁰² Nkele comprehends that her way of living has been predestined by the ongoing denial of agency to her people that not only casts them as outsiders in a white world but marks them helpless in altering the restrictive cultural circumstances of African life. In this respect, Vickroy argues that "situations of subjection and colonization have fostered many of the conditions for feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that create trauma" (32).

Nkele's feelings of vulnerability are exacerbated as she runs into Wynand, a member of the security forces on the farm: "During a run-in with him before Christmas, Wynand had cupped her chin, forcing her to look into his narrow eyes. 'Be careful, *Sissie*, walking in the bush.['] [...] [W]ith a squeeze of her breasts, he strolled off" (*SD* 172). Her vulnerability at the hands of Wynand, who acts as an emblematic figure of a white racist society dehumanizing the Other, exemplifies her inability to fight apartheid's systematic denial of black subjectivity. In the scene she is stripped of agency and her body becomes reduced and devaluated. Nkele is humiliated as she cannot defy the physical subjugation and in turn internalizes her repressed anger.

One way of venting her frustration is in quiet when cleaning one of the house carpets with a hockey stick: "She thumped and walloped it until clouds of dust and dog-hair filled the

¹⁰² Morrison writes in *Beloved* (1987) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) of the oppressive cultural circumstances black people are subjected to by white society. This kind of treatment suggests an ongoing victimization and constant denial of black lives in the wake of slavery and apartheid.

air and her arms ached. [...] Murdering a carpet was a deeply satisfying chore” (151). Fraught with frustration at being unable to change her situation Nkele expresses her anger by beating an object that belongs to the white farmers. Thereby she may be developing, what Vickroy refers to as a “defensive mechanism [that] allow[s] [her] a sense of agency, even if illusory, to help retain a sense of self” (25).

The rise of Mpho – Nkele’s son and Lefu’s grandson – as the most rebellious and vociferous character in opposing the apartheid system challenges the enforced silences of black voices maintained in the *plaasroman*. Witnessing how cruelly his grandfather has been treated on the farm, Mpho develops a rage over the years. He does not want to end up toiling for the white man like all the generations before him and decides not “to work for any of the *Boere*!” (SD 264). Mpho’s strong-willed attitude marks the rising opposition of the younger generation of blacks revolting against the tyrannical structures of apartheid to avoid the dreadful fates of their fathers and grandfathers. In *I Write What I Like* (2004), Steve Biko considered the generations of young Africans who were seemingly frustrated with their fathers’ lack of resistance to their dehumanization and their evident acceptance of white governmental power. These former generations “have today lost [their] manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, [they] look with awe at the white power structure and accept what [they] regard as the ‘inevitable position’” (Biko 30). Acknowledging the fighting spirit in his grandson, Lefu entrusts Mpho with his secret concerning the murdered child on the farm. Thus it is upon him to bring justice to the violated. Lefu urges his grandson to remember: “One day I will die and it is you who must remember the grave of this child” (SD 267), which refers to the black child Martin has shot on his farm.

Mpho’s act of remembrance moves beyond Fugard’s narrative as it represents the keeping alive of memory to counteract apartheid’s regime of silence. The conservation of memory works towards resolving the conflicts of the past. Mpho’s task to remember and later speak of the horrible story entails one of the TRC’s highest aims, to “restor[e] the dignity of victims and survivors of gross human rights violations” (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission* “Reparation” 188). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission dealt with victims who bore the burdens of a sordid past with the expectation that by giving testimony victims could heal psychologically and recover. Moreover, their testimonies unfixed the allegedly immutable histories of apartheid’s past and thereby unearthed its

dark legacy: they could finally speak “of undiscovered bodies, of bodies denied a proper burial” (Sanders 35). The TRC was involved in an exhumation project as they literally aimed to excavate the bodies of apartheid’s victims. Gail Reagon’s report on SABC-TV’s Special Report gives an account of some of the secret killings on South Africa’s farms:

The rich soil is turned endlessly. But the furious digging and scooping, digging and the scooping, is not to prepare the land for harvest; it is to unearth some of the secrets of the past: bodies – skeletal remains – of ANC activists thought to have disappeared, now known to have been killed and buried on South Africa’s death farms. (SABC)

Moreover, when the black family decides to properly bury the remains of the child “with stones that they placed on the smoothed grass” (*SD* 268) they inscribe the space with agency and lay a counterclaim to land ownership. The proper burial signifies the rightful recognition of black ancestry and “marks a historical shift in the ownership of the land from white to black” (Azzam 104). Indicated by the stones the burial ground not only takes back possession of the land but becomes a site to be commemorated. In *Ways of Dying* (1995), Zakes Mda writes that the “bodies of the dead would no longer be inscribed with family memories, but would be a possession of the community and the struggle” (151).¹⁰³ Indeed, the burial site in *Skinner’s Drift* turns into a contested space harboring a violent story of apartheid that supports Breyten Breytenbach’s claim that South African “earth is full of skeletons” (*Dogheart* 21) that need to be exhumed in order to give voice to the struggle of blacks.¹⁰⁴

When the novel shifts the narrative to after fall of apartheid in 1997, Mpho can finally voice his anger as he is empowered by South Africa’s democracy and the commissioning of the TRC. He writes a note for Eva to underscore his authority over the story of the killing:

¹⁰³ In Zakes Mda’s first novel *Ways of Dying* (1995) Toloki is a self-employed professional mourner who attends funerals in the townships of a violent and death stricken city in South Africa. The narrative of the novel lays bare the painful fates of black people during the height of the conflict between the apartheid government and the resistance movements.

¹⁰⁴ Breyten Breytenbach has been a fierce opponent of apartheid after not being allowed to come back to South Africa for having married a woman of another race. In Paris in the 1960s and 1970s he founded the group *Okhela* to combat apartheid in exile. Upon visiting South Africa in 1975 he was apprehended and had to serve nine years in prison. His poetry and prose have gained wide international recognition representing a milestone in the development of political and formal South African writing.

Martin van Rensburg Shot an African Child on the Farm Called Skinner's Drift

This is the storie. My grandfather found the body in the donga near the dam after the rains. He knew it was one of our people because the body had been thrown away. My grandfather had been riding horses with MISS EVA. He beried animals for her near the dam and when he told her about the body she would not look at him. My grandfather carried this storie for many years. When I was thirteen and a man he gave it to me. He told me to remember the child. He said it is my responsibility. [...] The white people think we are animals and they shoot us. They throw our bodies away. They think they are safe. But I am not afraid. This is my land. I speak now. I will tell them what happened. (*SD* 276-77)

The story of the child that has been passed on from Lefu to Mpho carries agency in the post-apartheid period. It has accumulated some relevant purchase at the arrival of the TRC propelling Mpho's intentions to bring Martin's wrongdoings to light. He holds the power to give meaning to a repressed story and break the silence about the killing of a black child on Skinner's Drift. In this sense, Mpho's story presents an alternative knowledge to the one-sided rhetoric of apartheid. As the "death of the nameless child comes to represent all the countless unspoken wrongs committed against the oppressed peoples of South Africa" (Neeves 122) Mpho's knowledge of a silenced narrative can finally bring justice to the victims. Besides, the story gives him the power to become the prosecutor of the whites.¹⁰⁵

Mpho's sincere dealing with the story, which has become "his business" (*SD* 290), stands in stark contrast to Eva's wilful forgetting. Yet, Eva's amnesia must be challenged in order to unsettle the stories of apartheid and set the record straight. The TRC was established to confront the amnesia of the old regime with African testimony, stating that "our efforts to remake the future depend crucially on how we remember – and forget – the past. [...] By reconstructing dimensions of local histories and translocal connections, we were disrupting elements of this amnesia" (Hart 9). Thus, Mpho's story represents one of these disrupting elements working against Eva's erasure. His work of memory carries the potential for healing as it may restore one of several truths in a new South Africa. The

¹⁰⁵ Franz Fanon argues that "the native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor" (*Wretched* 35).

story unveils the mystery of the murder by recuperating and exposing the buried parts of history. Shane Graham contends that the redressing and recuperation of memories is essential as it “challenge[s] those who would create new myths about the past and new spatial regimes of power” (*Mapping* 8). Without any interference, Eva would have left the story of the killing as something “shameful burrowing into her gut” (*SD* 35) – a memory to be discarded, thereby upholding a culture of amnesia propagated by the apartheid regime. Zakes Mda argues that confronting the violent past of South Africa is vital when facing the future, because “we cannot just sweep it under the carpet and hope that all of a sudden we shall live in brotherly or sisterly love, in a state of blissful amnesia” (“Theatre” 43).

Haunted Memories

In contrast to the *plaasroman*, Fugard’s postcolonial pastoral revolves around the trauma of the killing of a black child. Accompanied by Eva on one of his nocturnal shooting sprees across his land, Martin murders a small black child, confusing it with a jackal. In both, *Remembering Babylon* and *Skinner’s Drift*, the psychological legacy of the pastoral leaves the perpetrators haunted by repressed memories and an unfinished business concerning their complicity in a violent past. Whereas Lachlan attempts to look back upon a disturbing memory in order to come to terms with the past, Eva struggles to gain access to a traumatic experience. Her memory is distorted and disjointed – the full excavation too painful to comprehend. With the help of her mother’s diary she can enter repressed memories in the hope of uncovering the puzzle of the past. In this way Fugard collapses the temporal order of the linear plot, switching from present to past, mimicking Eva’s troubled psychological journey that depends on the recovery of her mother’s memories in order to trigger her own. The narrative moves forward only by means of retrospection, giving the protagonist insight into the past in order to help Eva gain an understanding of the present. Although Eva is the protagonist in *Skinner’s Drift* as much of the narrative is told from her perspective, Fugard employs the views of other characters through the use of third-person perspective, especially Martin’s view, in order to disorient the reader and further obscure the experience of the traumatic event. Apart from employing the individual voices of the black characters, the novel constructs Martin’s perspective of the murder deliberately as hazy and patchy in order to imply that he has

been drinking. After having shot a jackal on one of his drunken hunting sprees, Martin heads home with Eva sitting next to him in the bakkie, when he

s[ees] it running through the far reach of his headlights. He slam[s] on his brakes. The early moon ha[s]not set and he s[ees] it even when it dart[s] out of the light and he pull[s] out his pistol and fir[es] at it. ‘Dad! No!’ Eva crie[s] out. He pushe[s] her to the floor of the bakkie and t[ells] her to stay down. He switch[es] off the engine and walk[s] along the edge of the field. [...] By the time he f[inds] it he [is] beyond caring. He [is standing in front of it when he hear[s] the gasping and he fire[s] again. (*SD* 42-43)

Martin never directly identifies the corpse of the shot body as that of a child. His perspective is blurry and does not give the reader the required details to fully comprehend the severity of the incident. Afterwards, Martin and Eva deal differently with the incident, yet both suffer from a traumatic experience. Martin attempts to repress his murder of the child to never have to speak of it to anyone. Eva – determined to protect her father – also does not mention the crime and goes out to bury the body and, in this manner, conceal the past.

In her interpretation of this incident Mairi Emma Neeves views Martin and Eva as secondary victims of trauma, who experience traumatic distress and react differently to the violent occurrence. Martin “suffers for his crime” (Neeves 124) and “experience[s] flashbacks and nightmares, which are classic trauma symptoms” (118).¹⁰⁶ His affliction is described as he is “flung out of sleep, a buffalo of memory bearing on him, making him gasp, adrenalin shooting into his heart, his gut in spasms” (*SD* 36). Years after the incident, Eva also struggles to fight back the intrusive memories of the incident: “How she wanted to drown it with a few drinks, masturbate it away, crawl into someone’s arms” (35). Thus the haunting memory of the dead child bears heavily on both characters and they become bound to compulsively repeat the traumatic experience. Freud suggests that trauma victims are subconsciously driven to “repeat [...] repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past” (*Beyond* 602). Martin is possessed by the past and

¹⁰⁶ Martin and Eva, both secondary victims of trauma, bear the psychological consequences of their deeds, but their experiences cannot equal that of the child.

tends to repeat it compulsively as he continues to hunt at night, but takes up a machine gun to purposefully obliterate the animals on his land so that they can hardly be identified. Mosanku, a black labourer, suggests that Martin is “a crazy one” killing “impala [that] had been shot many times. The skins were torn and the meat was full of pieces of metal” (*SD* 87-88). After burying the dead child, Eva also enters the repetition compulsion by having to secretly bury every dead animal her father has shot in order to protect him, cover up a horrendous crime, and bury her own guilt. In response to Anne Whitehead’s comments regarding the individual’s return to traumatic situations, Neeves argues that Eva’s actions evoke “the Freudian notion that traumatized individuals repeatedly return to the scene of trauma in order to relive the event and master its effects on them” (119).¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in *Remembering Babylon* Lachlan remains preoccupied with his memory of the first encounter with Gemmy, hoping that he can come to terms with the fact that Gemmy has been murdered and that he can forgive himself for treating him inhumanely.

Neeves’ theory presents a psychoanalytic interpretation that focuses on Martin’s and Eva’s repetition compulsion after their involvement in the murder of a black child. Alternatively, the language of the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa introduced the concepts of victim, perpetrator and bystander to understand the responses to historical violence, and in this case, Martin van Rensburg could be viewed as a perpetrator within the apartheid regime, rather than a victim. His repression and wilful forgetting of the murder is emblematic of the Afrikaners regime that relied on forgetfulness and sought to eradicate the white man’s crimes against an oppressed people. Indeed the “tribal ethos of the Afrikaners consists of negation, suppression, withdrawal and reaction” (Breytenbach “Vulture Culture” 135). It is this system of silence, amnesia, or denial – all characteristic of Martin – that has continued to exclude stories of the oppressed and bury the sites of violence. Martin’s nocturnal killing – “he stood above the small body and fired two more shots” (*SD* 280) – and its subsequent dismissal matches one of Breyten Breytenbach’s descriptions of South Africa’s apartheid political regime: “apartheid is the white man’s night, the darkness which blurs his consciousness and his conscience. What one doesn’t see, doesn’t exist” (“Vulture Culture” 131). In this manner,

¹⁰⁷ Whitehead suggests that “[b]y continually returning to the traumatic situation, the individual can master the amounts of stimulus which have been broken through by binding them together and simultaneously construct a protective shield against trauma after the event” (*Trauma Fiction* 119).

Martin carries on pretending as if nothing had occurred that night by trusting that the child can never be found on his land. Yet, even after Eva – in an act of suppression – buries the child's corpse, the body is unearthed by the unexpected rain and returns to haunt the farm. In *Remembering Babylon*, too, Lachlan attempts to suppress the memory of his encounter with Gemmy in order to deny his complicity in a violent past. Like Martin, he tries to carry on with his life as if Gemmy had never been part of his past. However, Gemmy, and in Martin's case, the memory of the killing will be buried with the settlers and become embedded within the repressed archives of their countries.

The theme of dead bodies and historical topographical violence on Afrikaner farms stages a return to the tradition of the South African *plaasroman*. In *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), Olive Schreiner establishes the connection between the Afrikaans farm and the buried and repressed bodies and histories of Indigenous people that lie dormant beneath the farm's surface. Observing the farm on a small isolated hill Waldo recognises its significance:

When I was little, I always looked at it and wondered, and I thought a *great giant* was buried underneath it. Now I know [...] of the time when the strange fishes and animals lived that are turned into stone now, and the lakes were here; and then of the time when the little Bushmen lived here, so small and ugly. [...] It was one of them, one of these wild Bushmen, that [...] used to kneel here naked, painting, painting, painting; and he wondered at the things he made himself. [...] Now the *Boers* have shot them all, so that we never see a little yellow face peeping out among the stones. (Schreiner 15-16)

The buried *great giant* in Schreiner's *plaasroman* represents the hidden and repressed force of Indigenous presence on African lands. Schreiner reveals that the Afrikaner farm is haunted by a colonial violence that has forcibly buried the stories of a dispossessed people. In this respect, Malvern van Wyk Smith argues that "having powerfully sensed a deep disruptive presence on the farm, [Schreiner] leaves the giant buried to reemerge in several subsequent African texts" (28). One of these texts which develops Schreiner's theme is Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974). Gordimer's anti-pastoral *plaasroman* addresses the forced dispossession of Africans by placing the uncanny return of a black body as a haunting presence on a white man's farm at the heart of the narrative.

When the unidentifiable body of a black man is discovered on Mehring's farm, it not only calls into question the protagonist's claim of ownership and belonging, but the corpse reauthorizes black land legitimization; "it becomes symbolic of dispossession as well as of the buried history that the contemporary farm has covered over" (Kossew *Writing Woman* 128). Julie Hakim Azzam suggests that "[t]he discovery of the corpse makes plain the narrative's trajectory: the displaced and unknown body 'returns' to the land in order to claim it as its rightful birthplace, which necessitates that the white usurper must be 'overthrown,' bringing about the return of the land to its original inhabitants" (92). The uncanny return of the black body on the farm land reminds Mehring that Africa has a history before colonization, one that defies the claim of *terra nullius* and accounts for the black man's heritage:

Come to think of it all the earth is a graveyard, you never know when you're walking over heads – particularly this continent, cradle of man. [...] Their ancestors. No one knows who they were, either. [...] Doesn't exist unless one happens to know – always knows, down here, that it's there, all right. (*Conservationist* 148)

Thus, the notion of the farm, which is characteristically bound to Afrikanerdom, turns into a "fragile one that constantly treads over the buried and *unheimlich* historical narratives or bodies, of the Indigenous past" (Azzam 95). James Graham further suggests that "in refusing to return to the earth in the course of Mehring's narrative, the black body seems to be asserting a primordial claim over it" (63).

Similarly, the return of the corpse, "the small skull and the delicate curve of ribs" (*SD* 98) strips Martin of any inherent rights of possession. It threatens to deny Martin's authoritarian grip over the farm. Huggan and Tiffin explain this development as "the reverse process of white pastoral entitlement" (100) which topographically undoes the Afrikaners' logic of land privilege; nature works against the Afrikaner in the postcolonial pastoral and arguably "makes the forgotten, repressed elements of the past known and visible, which, despite its romanticized representation, underscores the unnaturalness of farm life in the *plaasroman*" (Azzam 102). The dead body on Skinner's Drift questions the Afrikaners' legitimization of land ownership and brings a violent and silenced history to the surface. As in *The Conservationist*, the land on *Skinner's Drift* causes the skeleton

to resurface. Martin's tenure on the farm suggests a failed domesticity that cannot control the land that is literally reverting to its original black inhabitants.

Within the postcolonial farm novel, *Skinner's Drift* exposes the ghosts of the pastoral and bears witness to the corrosive legacy of an unjust system. Fugard does not offer any clear resolution to the plot, and the body is left to haunt the pastoral grounds of the farm. In *Remembering Babylon*, too, the haunting site where Gemmy was massacred carries great significance for Lachlan as it reminds him of the colonial violence and dispossession of the Indigenous community in Queensland. Both writers suggest that the theme of haunting in the postcolonial pastoral constantly reminds the settlers of an unfinished business, namely the settlers' failure to confess to the innumerable acts of dispossession and loss. In *Skinner's Drift*, readers are left in the dark as to whether Mpho has decided to speak at the TRC about the child's murder and its buried body or whether Eva has chosen to come clean and bear partial responsibility for the murder and the furtive burial. Either way, the hidden skeletal remains will continue to bear witness to the violence of colonialism.

Shane Graham argues that the "memory of landscapes operates very much like bodily memory: involuntary and fragmentary, and composed largely of blind spots, ruptures, and present absences. In this regard, the memory of landscapes is a kind of traumatic memory – a memory made up of wounds and [...] trauma" (*Mapping* 145). The burial site of the black child points to a traumatic memory that cannot be simply disremembered as it is forever inscribed into South African land. Thus, the haunting body becomes part of the "ghosts of the pastoral past [that] continue to haunt the present and stand as uncanny threats to any future changes" (Azzam 130). In this sense, the remains do not only draw attention to the bloodshed of apartheid, but to a longer history of violence during colonialism. The body calls for the remembrance of former colonial traumata. Neeves argues that Fugard thereby establishes "the notion of cyclical violence, the thoughtless dispersal of life that comes to define the systematic racism and oppression of [colonialism and] apartheid" (122).

J.M. Coetzee questions "whether it is in the nature of the ghost of the pastoral ever to be finally laid" (*White Writing* 81). It is the ghost's stubbornness and restlessness that defines Fugard's postcolonial pastoral, ever reminding those who are haunted of black

peoples' dispossession, loss, and their physical and psychological devastation caused by colonization and apartheid.

Conclusion

The traditions of the pastoral mode are adapted and reworked in these postcolonial fictions. The generic structures of the pastoral – devised to represent human rootedness – have engendered nostalgic myths of belonging and entitlement. Utopian idylls of Arcadian happiness have served to convey an intimate environmental interrelatedness between the individual and the land. These depictions portray idealized serene landscapes and peaceful pasts, propelling the individual to find serenity in nature. Within settler nations and their narrations the pastoral formulated a sense of nationalism, consolidating notions of mythical homelands, thereby strengthening national ideologies that in turn propagated fixity of place and security of belonging.

Postcolonial writers take up the mode in order to rework and attack the themes of entitlement and landownership on colonized grounds. Thereby they expose the settlers' troubled relationship with a foreign and antagonistic landscape that forecloses enlightenment and denies the construction of a harmonious idyll. Settler protagonists are introduced to a terrifying and unknowable landscape that harbors the mysteries of the Other. The uncanny presence of the Other negates the settlers' priorities within the postcolonial pastoral. The pastoral thus turns into a battleground where two distinct cultures clash as they enter the violent "cycle of possession, dispossession, and repossession" (Simpson 8).

The analysis of two Australian and South African postcolonial pastorals confirms how both settler nations rely on the denial of the Indigenous presence – by the erection of fences and barriers – in order to strengthen their ties with a newly occupied land and propagate the legal fiction of entitlement. Yet, it is the foreignness of the landscape and the uncanny presence of the Other that disturbs their pastoral idylls, ultimately causing them to collapse "into an anti-pastoral scene of abjection" (Huggan and Tiffin 100). The anti-pastoral scenes depict the fragile and nervous grounds of imperial hegemony, exposing the settlers' feelings of unsettledness and unhomeliness.

The two novels suggest the white landowners' failure in creating a sense of belonging in securing hallowed ground for a deeply racist society. The erection of boundaries fails to keep out the present absence of the Other, isolating the characters within their farms and settlements. Moreover, *Remembering Babylon* and *Skinner's Drift* introduce white characters whose isolation and unease contradict the values of an emerging nation. Their relationship with the land reveals a complex and troubled connection. Ellen McIvor and Lorraine van Rensburg fail to connect with the Indigenous landscape that works against them. Memory, which is inscribed in the landscape, turns out to obsessively haunt Lachlan and Martin and Eva, burdening them with a violent past that disrupts their sense of belonging. These traumatic sites call for a revisiting and re-remembering in order to lay the ghosts of the past to rest.

In both postcolonial pastorals remembering turns into a painful and troubling act. The possibly massacred body of Gemmy and the buried remains of the black child, both bearing the trauma of a colonized people, cannot be laid to rest, and challenge the non-Indigenous community's status. Thus, Gemmy, who has been imbued "with the ghosts of unknown 'Aboriginal' presences" (McGonegal *Imagining* 80), and the child represent the embodiments of Indigenous claims to priority which the settler nations attempt to forcefully disremember. Both novels question this selective remembering of postcolonial nations and suggest that the specters of the Other will continue to haunt the grounds of the pastoral as long as the perpetrators refuse to respond to the dead and thereby institute a less exclusivist sense of belonging.

Chapter III: Making Use of History in Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2001)

The Australian writer Kate Grenville and the South African writer Zoë Wicomb adapt the genre of the historical novel to reconsider ways of narrating the history of colonization in these two southern settler colonies. Their novels – albeit in very different ways – engage with diverse experiences of colonization and settlement and enter into contemporary debates in Australia and South Africa that deal with literature and history and authors' interpretations of the past in the present. In *The Secret River* (2005) Grenville uses realist techniques to return to the history of first settlement, and in *David's Story* (2001) Wicomb draws on postmodern strategies to reconsider the legacies of apartheid. Both of these historical narratives engage with the settler histories of these nations in a context where historical fiction is an agent in processes of reckoning and reconciliation. *The Secret River* and *David's Story* explore how discourses of reconciliation shape a return to the traumatic history of the colonial past in Australian and South African writing.

The Historical Novel – Possibilities and Dynamics

The historical novel genre traditionally interrogates the impact of the historical process on societies and nations. Since Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) and *Ivanhoe* (1819) – considered to have consolidated the dawn of the historical novel – the genre has participated in debates about ideologies of nationhood; it has questioned foundational myths of history, and uncovered forgotten pasts.¹⁰⁸ Sigrun Meinig argues that

historical novels are either characterized by the appearance of historical characters, by the portrayal of events of great political and historical significance, or, most frequently, by a certain time span that has elapsed between the (historical) time of the narrated and the (later, possibly contemporary) time of narrating. (42)

¹⁰⁸ Georg Lukács suggests that *The Princesse de Clèves* (1678) by Madame de La Fayette can be considered as one of the first European novels with historical themes. For additional information on the beginnings of the historical novel see Georg Lukács' *The Historical Novel* (1982), Ewald Mengel's *Geschichtsbild und Romankonzeption: Drei Typen des Geschichtsverstehens im Reflex der Form des Englischen Historischen Romans* (1986), Monika Fludernik's "History and Metafiction" (1994) and Jerome de Groot's *The Historical Novel* (2009).

Ann Rigney adds that

what defines the historical novel as a genre is precisely the interplay between invented story elements and historical ones. As novels, they are written under the aegis of the fictionality convention whereby the individual writer enjoys the freedom to invent [...] a world “uncommon to reality.” As historical novels, however, they also link up with the ongoing collective attempts to represent the past and invite comparison with what is already known about the historical world from other sources. [...] They are not “free-standing fictions” [...], they also call upon prior historical knowledge, echoing, and/or disputing other discourses about the past. (19)

The genre has the capacity to introduce previously untold histories into understandings of the past, thereby “passing freely into new possibilities” (Fleishman 255). In the genre of the historical novel the writer has the capacity to narrate a version of the past through the interaction between an imaginative version that draws on character and plot and one that uses historical elements that draw on verifiable people and events. This opens the way for the genre to question a fixed and totalizing narrative that lays claim to a singular and authentic account of the past. At this point it must be said that of course the novel and, more importantly, the historical novel have also been used as political instruments to legitimate and self-enfranchise historical narratives that justify nationalist or even totalitarian narratives.¹⁰⁹ The historical novel thus, is, as I have suggested, an ideological form that can be used to serve different purposes. In this sense I agree with Robert Young’s suggestion that “histories can be told in many forms” (*White Mythologies* 1) to suit the political inclinations of its writers and readers. Due to history’s perceived “elasticity” (Barkan x) the historical novel can enter the political struggle for contested and competing meanings within national discourses. The genre can shape a complex account of the past by recreating myriad facets of the past to invite readers to “imagine the past ad infinitum” (Jenkins 49). Alternatively it can offer compelling narrations of the nation understood in terms of homogenous and essentialist identities.

¹⁰⁹ Georg Lukács argues that the novel has been used to legitimate an ideological image of the bourgeoisie. To comment upon this Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga have argued that the novel and “history [are] not the special province of the bourgeoisie” (280) but may also be advocated to challenge mainstream narratives. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1997) Edward Said views the novel as a means by which the West was able to justify its colonial expansion; an instrument adopted as a propaganda tool.

In the following section of the thesis I will argue that the historical novel is a dynamic form able to offer alternative imaginings of actual historical circumstances. It may revise and investigate historiography and draw on historical discourses that actively explore different experiences and interpretations of the past. Jerome de Groot suggests that “historical fiction has always problematised the writing of and understanding of history” (113). Historical fiction writers contribute to the historical record by presenting narratives that may “call upon prior historical knowledge, echoing and/or disputing other discourses about the past” (Rigney 19). Thereby comprehensive and coherent accounts of the past can be submitted to scrutiny in order to present a sceptical portrayal of official histories – grand narratives – that have played an authoritative role in the imperializing project. However, historical fiction can also participate in a narrative recreation that can question the received history in order to introduce different readings of the past, “widen[ing] the applicability of the term historical novel” (Boccardi 4). For contemporary writers like Grenville and Wicomb, the historical novel can provide a useful instrument for disrupting totalizing historical discourses:

The historical novel has emphasized its strangeness as a form, and its possibility for involving complex and dissident readings. [...] [It] fundamentally challenges subjectivities offering multiple identities and historical story lines. [...] From its beginnings as a form the historical novel has queried, interrogated and complicated fixed ideas of selfhood, historical progression and objectivity. [...] Historical fiction might be a disruptive genre, a series of interventions which have sought to destabilize cultural hegemonies and challenge normalities. (De Groot 139)

Histories Within Postcolonial Fiction

The interplay between fiction and history in the historical novel has the potential to make a significant intervention, as de Groot suggests. In particular, historical novels that draw on postcolonial critique can challenge singular and authoritative accounts that have been privileged in the historical records. Postcolonial historical fictions can participate in contemporary debates about the meanings of the past in settler societies by “summoning a history of violation [...] tak[ing] the form of historical revisionism, the recuperation of

the silenced past [...] or other attempts to counter dictates of official scripts with alternative pasts” (Moslund 16-17). In this way, imperial histories can be problematised and remediated to bring about an awareness of the different and occluded experiences of the past. Postcolonial historical novels tend to challenge hegemonic narratives by entertaining versions of the past that engage with conflict and trauma. It follows, then, that postcolonial historical fiction creates new knowledges that may – as Gerald Gaylard suggests –

correct history, not only supplementing conventional history, but altering it in the process, a process that is often painful because it challenges cherished certainties. This [...] also counters the reification and concretization of history, for history is seen to be in flux and constantly open to interpretation and creative intervention. (193)

Especially in postcolonial fiction, resuscitation and revalidation is crucial to reframe established structures and delegitimize dominant cultural ideology. At this point it seems useful to turn to Brian McHale’s terminology concerning the postmodern historical novel.¹¹⁰ Although Linda Hutcheon uses the broad term “historiographic metafiction” to capture all of the historical novels in the postmodern era, McHale’s coinage of the “postmodern revisionist historical novel” in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987)¹¹¹ serves to identify more closely the focus upon a revisionist history that plays a role in the empowerment of marginalized groups in a way that “revises the content of the historical record, reinterpreting the historical record, often demystifying or debunking the orthodox version of the past” (90).¹¹²

¹¹⁰ I am aware of Linda Hutcheon’s work on *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and her coinage of the all-encompassing term, historiographic metafiction. However, at this point McHale’s terminology is more suitable to define the postcolonial historical novel as – similarly to his evaluation of the postmodernist historical novel – it grasps more closely the revisionist agenda of the genre which aims to reframe the historical record working against history’s official truth claims.

¹¹¹ Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* is definitely not a postmodern historical novel in the sense that Wicomb’s *David’s Story* is. However, *The Secret River* revises history and reinterprets the historical record in order to create a more inclusionary space that overtly portrays the violence and suffering of the Indigenous people.

¹¹² Linda Hutcheon views the emergence of the historiographic metafiction of postmodern and postcolonial historical literary narratives as essential, as they

[d]isperse [...] [the] interplay of different, heterogeneous discourses [...] What has surfaced is something different from the unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography as we have traditionally known it: [...] we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the

Along these lines, Elisabeth Wesseling views postmodern revisionist historical novels as literary discourses that follow strategies to rewrite history from the point of view of the oppressed. In this way they support beliefs that collective memory can be expanded and history as the official political discourse of the past confronted:

[They] rewrite history from the perspectives of groups of people that have been excluded from the making and writing of history [...]. They do not merely foreground groups about which official historiography tends to remain silent, but also allot them more power than they actually possessed.¹¹³ (162)

Sharing the “postmodernist skepticism about rendering the past objectively” (Gaile “Re-mythologizing” 38) postcolonial writers also resist dominant discourses – grand narratives, such as official histories – to open a textual space for a marginalized people to come into view as equal historical subjects. De Groot argues that these “revisionist views of history [...] reclaim the past on behalf of a variety of unheard voices” (140) and, as Slemon Stephen in a similar context suggests, offer “resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems” (10) to help dismantle the institutions and conditions of traditional Western hegemony.¹¹⁴ Consequently, the postcolonial revisionist historical novel – being in the same dialogue with history as its postmodernist counterpart – engages in political rewriting that aims to reinvigorate a former colonized culture and inscribe silenced voices into historical memory by dislocating the imperially centered

winner, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and [...] of women as well as men. (*Politics* 66)

In this respect, within the textual space of historiographic metafiction an entry into the past is provided for marginalized groups to deconstruct their consigned positions and to revise history from the perspectives of the disempowered.

¹¹³ Wesseling’s quotation usefully suggests that revisionist novels may, as well, distort the past for its ideological ends.

¹¹⁴ In *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) Graham Huggan suggests how popular the theme of revisionist history has become for writers of contemporary historical fiction:

One such theme, sometimes considered to be a gauge of the Booker’s [Booker Prize committee] postcolonial leanings, is revisionist history. More than half of the prizewinning novels to date [2001] investigate aspects of, primarily colonial, history or present a counter-memory to the official historical records. (111)

within fictional space.¹¹⁵ Bill Ashcroft argues for the importance of a literary revisioning project that aims to destabilize the “master narrative of History” (*Transformation* 98):

The remedy is not ‘re-insertion’ but ‘re-vision’; not the re-insertion of the marginalized into representation but the appropriation of a method, the re-vision of the temporality of events. This is interpolation in its fullest sense, and is crucial to the political interpretation of post-colonial experience because it is an attempt to assume control of the processes of representation. (98)

Ashcroft’s remarks sustain Elisabeth Wesseling’s comment that revisionist literature can encourage a shift in the formation of historical awareness. Interpolation is a productive form that intervenes within literary discourses to resist the appropriation of colonial culture. Ashcroft suggests that interpolation is a form of intervention that “operate[s] from the fractures and contradictions of [historical] discourse itself” (*Transformation* 102). This occurs particularly when postcolonial representations of history appeal for authority on behalf of the subaltern. These interpolations set out to challenge the discrepancies between authoritative and subaltern knowledges, and recognise the unsaid and unseen pasts of the oppressed and dispossessed.¹¹⁶ This use of fiction in revising the past enables a narrative expansion that exhumes ‘othered’ voices eliminated in the course of colonial conflict and violence. Counter histories and counter discourses underscore the importance of alternative memories to question and challenge “[a] colonial culture [...] which has no memory” (Jacobson 7) and is inclined to stifle the truth concerning its violent past. In this respect, Robert Young argues that “to write about histories of the tricontinental countries [...] is to write about lapses in history in itself, [of] spaces blanked out by that ruthless whiteness” (*White Mythologies* 1).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ The genre of the historical novel within postcolonial literature plays a central role in advocating the formation of historical awareness. Sheenadevi Patchay argues that postcolonial “literature may inspire a shift in discursive ‘truth effects’ from serving and conserving existing borders in the collective imagination to keep challenging these borders” (28). It may, as de Groot writes, “encourage revelation in that it can change the past; it also encourages a particular set of responses and approaches” (10).

¹¹⁶ According to Bill Ashcroft, interpolation “involves the capacity to interpose, to intervene, to interject a wider range of counter-discursive tactics in the dominant discourse without asserting a unified anti-imperial intention or a separate oppositional purity” (*Transformation* 48). Ashcroft regards this as a subtle tactic to suggest the transformative energy of postcolonial discourse.

¹¹⁷ In “What is the Postcolonial” (2009), Robert Young suggests that tricontinental countries (Africa, Asia, Latin America) produce postcolonial literatures that carry “insurgent knowledges” stemming from alternative and silenced pasts of subaltern and marginalized groups (13).

The interrogation and recuperation of the past in postcolonial revisionist historical novels give substance to former colonized peoples as it overtly addresses the archival lacunae of colonization and its traumatic histories. Postcolonial writers such as Chinua Achebe, Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, J.M. Coetzee, Margaret Atwood, Peter Carey, Salman Rushdie – to name a few who are engaged in the rewriting of colonial histories and present a counter-memory/counter-discourse to the historical record – offer their opposing histories in new terms which resist the teleological view of colonial history. The genre of the postcolonial revisionist novel draws attention to “how accepted history has been disrupted and how untold atrocities have been uncovered in a fictional context” (De Groot 140).¹¹⁸ Their “little narrative[s] [(*petit récits*)]” (Lyotard 60) – imaginative micro narratives that challenge grand narratives as they construct their own realities and alternative truths – have gained a powerful currency in the dismantling of the colonial discourse.¹¹⁹ Homi Bhabha, who has been influenced by the postmodernist theorist Jean-François Lyotard, argues that the construction of subaltern histories is crucial:

[T]hey have been able to release into this discourse, into the sphere of their concerns, forms of historical contingency, small events, *petits récits*, a number of what I would call enunciatory sites. So there is a very complex re-writing of what the history of a colonized nation would be, what the history of a transformative, anticolonial moment would be. (“Question” 106)

For Bhabha, the historical novel proves to be flexible to the extent that it provides *petit récits* with the capacity to open histories of colonization to subaltern stories. Patchay adds that the

excavation of *petit récits* in fictional writing also creates new knowledges, subverting the traditional western hegemony over historical accounts. [...] A corollary of this subversion is that through the insertion of small stories into history, the horizon of the remembered past broadens and begins to admit many more previously disregarded histories. (7)

¹¹⁸ See examples of South African literature in Ann Harries’ *Manly Pursuits* (1999); Zakes Mda’s *Heart of Redness* (2000); in Australian literature see Xavier Herbert’s *Poor Fellow, My Country* (1975); Andrew McGahan’s *White Earth* (2004); in Caribbean literature see Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* (1984); Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988); Edwidge Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!* (1996) and *The Farming of Bones* (1998).

¹¹⁹ Lyotard’s *petit récits* is commensurable with Ashcroft’s term, interpolation, as both engage in subverting and exposing the grand narratives of official history.

Postcolonial historical novels introduce “small stories” that challenge the official historical records. These stories speak of the larger implications of experiences within colonial histories that problematise the past. Postcolonial narratives can draw upon counter memories that call attention to “the political effects of the continuing presence of the past – and particularly of past hurts – in the present” (Radstone 32). The representation of traumatic memories within postcolonial novels is a way of introducing subaltern histories into narrations of the colonial past. As Laurie Vickroy suggests, this involves “the potential value of fiction in conveying experiences of historical and social value that have either been suppressed, forgotten, or overlooked by traditional historical scholarship” (11).

Contemporary South African and Australian postcolonial historical novels have taken opportunities to explore the different meanings of history, and to bring to life new ‘sites of enunciation’ that attend to subaltern and Indigenous accounts.¹²⁰ They bring to light the trauma of the dispossessed to question perceived ‘truths’ of national histories. By expanding the archives of histories of the nation, contemporary writers use the historical novel to “produce a patchwork of stories that might not claim final authority, but that would be greater in the sum of their parts than any attempt at encompassing historical narrative” (Van der Vlies “Archive” 583). South African and Australian contemporary literatures invite comparison due to their ongoing attention to the past and their turn to new historical narratives. In this respect, Sue Kossew argues that

[one] of the striking issues of comparison between the new South Africa and Australia at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is the renewed sense in each nation of coming to terms with the past. [...] What both these national narratives of past suffering performed was an attempt to heal past wounds by recounting the violence and personal loss that had been unheard or

¹²⁰ In a recent issue of *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Jodi A. Byrd and Michael Rothberg discuss the differences and similarities “Between Subalternity and Indigeneity”, suggesting that models of subalternity within Africa do not speak to the settler colonies of Australia and New Zealand. However, they argue that the critical purchase of these categories also gives way to many opportunities for dialogue. The “subaltern/Indigenous dialogue”, they suggest, “is, among other things, a dialogue within and about incommensurability” (Byrd and Rothberg 4). As I am working with two settler contexts the commensurability of these two different concepts and the ideas of dialogue remain crucial to my study, however their point about the ways that subaltern and Indigenous knowledges and perspectives and their claims to sovereignty challenge settler nationhood is to be noted.

actively buried and hidden. Both have had profound effects on their societies – hopefully, leading to an awareness of reconciliation and redress of past and present injustices – but also on literary production which has had, too, to come to terms. [...] [F]iction [...] has shown a significant engagement with the process of reconciliation by exploring issues of memory, history and recovery. (*Writing Woman* 12)

Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* and Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* indicate some of the major trajectories of the contemporary South African and the contemporary Australian historical fiction, and in particular its concern with reconciliation and the significance of postcolonial memory. Barnor Hesse's definition of "postcolonial memory" traces some of my own foci of interest when reading South African and Australian historical fictions comparatively: "what I call postcolonial memory takes the form of a critical excavation and inventory of the marginalized, discounted, unrealized objects of decolonization and the political consequences of the social legacies" (165).

The re-narrativization of South African history, particularly pertaining to the apartheid period, has been a prevalent pursuit of South African writers, and there is a preoccupation with the unfinished business of their country's collective history. Ewald Mengel argues that

[h]istorical novels are extremely popular in the contemporary South African context. After the fall of apartheid with its biased and one-sided view of history, different ethnic groups have felt the need to rewrite and re-appropriate history from their own perspective. This also applies to writers who feel that the role of women has been ignored, and that they have been written out of history – black or coloured women. In most cases this goes along with a challenge and critique of formerly established apartheid views and a shift of focus from the centre to the periphery. ("Genre" 147)

The literary revisionist project in contemporary South African fiction broadens the representations of alternative accounts to include the stories from the margins. The role of historical fictions in rethinking the past indicates their importance in post-apartheid literature: "History provides one of the most fertile silences to be revisited by South

African writers” (Brink “Interrogating” 22).¹²¹ André Brink emphasizes the importance of rewriting and revising South African history, especially in the context of the TRC’s truth finding mission by arguing that “one might even say that unless the enquiries of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are extended, complicated, and intensified in the imaginings of literature, society cannot sufficiently come to terms with its past to face the future” (“Stories” 30).¹²² By shedding new light on South Africa’s apartheid history, writers of the post-apartheid historical novel may “become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action” (Fanon *Wretched* 222). South African historical novels, such as Lauretta Ngcobo’s *And They Didn’t Die* (1990), Elleke Boehmer’s *Bloodlines* (2000), and Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* (2001) not only illuminate and supplement a forgotten history, but their stories, which carry historical resonances within the nation, go further and point to the shortcomings of the TRC in respect to its “fractured, incomplete, and selective truths” (Posel 10). Ngcobo and Wicomb respectively resuscitate stories of black and coloured women’s courageous struggle and sacrifice during the apartheid period in order to ultimately challenge the TRC’s claim “to establish the truth in relation to past events” and to provide the South African nation with as “complete a picture as possible” (qtd. in Graham “Truth Commission” 11).¹²³ Furthermore, Jacobus A. du Pisani and Kwang-Su Kim argue that the TRC failed

to deal adequately with local histories and that the important variations and permutations of the liberation struggle, as manifested in the different townships [were] not adequately accounted for in the final report. [...] The TRC’s truth finding mandate was complex enough. [...] [W]hat made this mandate much more

¹²¹ André Brink is one of South Africa’s leading novelists and among the country’s most distinctive voices significantly contributing to the cause against apartheid. His concern with apartheid is especially expressed in his early novels: *Rumors of Rain* (1978), *A Dry White Season* (1979), *States of Emergency* (1988), and the *Wall of the Plague* (2000).

¹²² I am focusing closely on the TRC and its claim to find the truths concerning the horrors of the apartheid regime as Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* aims to point out the shortcomings of the nation’s truth finding mission in relation to coloured women tortured and raped within ANC ranks.

¹²³ In *And They Didn’t Die* (1990) Ngcobo writes of the black women fighters that fought the apartheid regime in KwaZulu-Natal from 1950 to 1990. Wicomb covers the story of Dulcie Olifant who was tortured within the ANC’s own ranks in *David’s Story* (2001). Stories of internal violence, especially torture, were not given a narrative in the TRC due to a fear of destabilizing an emerging unitary nation. In *Bloodlines* (2000), Boehmer engages in excavations of the hidden South African past to foreground the TRC’s failure to include within a prophesized grand narrative of liberation the shifting and elusive status of the coloured identity. *Bloodlines* focuses “on the ‘coloured’ people whose own history so vividly resists the apartheid notion of separateness and racial purity [...] to reveal a hidden or silenced aspect” (Kossew *Writing Woman* 138-39).

problematic from the outset was that the TRC had to pursue historical truth not for its own sake, but in the service of reconciliation and nation-building. (81)

In an attempt to create a more complete picture, the historical novel in South Africa aims to imaginatively acknowledge and restore the unselected and discriminatory truths crucial to building a collective national memory. South African novelist and poet Christopher Hope finds that the post-apartheid period has evinced a “growing desire for [...] tales and fictions from the badlands and backwaters of South African history” (4), as new narratives and “novel truths”¹²⁴ (Gready 156) have to emerge to acknowledge and even correct the distorted relationship between the margin and the center and quarrel with the master narratives of official history.¹²⁵ However, as Wicomb points out, these “novel histories” cannot be definitive because “in rewriting history you don’t come up with definitive authoritative assertions [...] [O]ur new representations are themselves contingent, open to revision” (“Washing” 28). Similarly, Hayden White argues that historical records are “fragmentary and always incomplete [...] ... The events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others” (“Artifact” 194).

These *petit récits* may carry within them so-called “rival histories” (Gallagher “Backward” 378) that investigate official historical forces to develop their own presumptions – however traumatic and unsettling – concerning the retrieval of the nation’s past.¹²⁶ J.M. Coetzee observes a tendency in South African literature throughout

¹²⁴ André Brink similarly refers to South African writers who are constructing a “new version of history” (“Stories” 39) and truth in order to address unvisited sites of national and collective memory in South African fiction.

¹²⁵ In the case of South Africa, Paul Gready argues that the outcome of the TRC could not accommodate the emerging nation by facilitating closure and a final truth concerning the period of apartheid. Consequently,

[v]oices from literature and cultural studies provoked heated controversy around the time of the publication of the TRC’s initial set of reports in 1998 by calling for the debate in relation to the past to remain open and encompass the full spectrum of viewpoints and opinions. Their lexicon was one of fragments, necessary incompleteness, and multiple versions. (Gready 159)

¹²⁶ Rival histories within postcolonial literary discourse not only play a crucial role in engendering national unity, but according to Aitor Ibarrola-Armendáriz, they promote a marginalized group’s healing process:

There is widespread consensus among scholars in the field of memory and trauma studies that the appearance of new, subaltern narratives exposing institutional crimes and the suffering they caused are among the most effective instruments to counter official distortions of the events and accelerating the healing process of the afflicted group. (16)

the end of the twentieth century to view the historical novel as undercutting the authority of historical discourse and undercutting the received incomplete version of history; it

operates in terms of its own procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history. [...] [I]t evolves its own paradigms and myths in the process [...] perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history. (“Novel Today” 3)

Lewis Nkosi adds that “South African literature has always been a literature of protest and social commitment in whose mirror the nation hopes to catch a glimpse of its face even if only to later reject or denounce what it sees there as an outrage” (434). It is the outrageousness of the past – a period where horrors happened – that post-apartheid writers address in their historical novels in order to prompt the nation to face the traumata of South African history. Shane Graham argues that there has been

an outpouring of postapartheid literature written to facilitate South African society to come to terms with a past that is plagued by paradoxes and whose horrors elude all attempts at representation. [Therefore] the need for imagination in reconstructing and bringing closure to the past [is indispensable]. (“Truth Commission” 12-13)¹²⁷

Within the postcolonial historical novel, South African writers commonly apply similar narratives and techniques to communicate a traumatic past. The representation and decipherability of this past preoccupies the present as traces of violence, ruptures, and dispossessions continue to surface. Narratives are shaped around apartheid’s blind spots and give some meaning to the traumatic loss that is the “impossible history” (Caruth “Trauma and Experience” 5) of colonization and apartheid. In this respect, Ewald Mengel argues that trauma narrative shapes the reader’s understanding of the past:

¹²⁷ André Brink views South African literature as essential in opening up new possibilities for accessing a troubled past and initiating the nation’s healing process:

I recognise the regenerative powers of South African literature: not simply to escape from the inhibitions of apartheid but to construct and deconstruct new possibilities; to activate the imagination in its exploration of those silences previously inaccessible. (“Interrogating” 27)

This structural pattern occurs again and again in many variations and seems to have become a distinguishing formal structure of the South African trauma novel. It goes without saying that it mirrors the temporal structure of trauma as such: its causation lies back in the past, but the consequences are continually felt in the present. (“Genre” 148)

Since “trauma fiction and postcolonial fiction are, more often than not, closely related” (Herrero and Baelo-Allue xv), readers encounter fragmentation, disorder of linear chronology and non-closure in both fictional fields, which are not mutually exclusive after all.¹²⁸ Narratives imagine a troubled past – fragmented and traumatizing – that challenges the realist mode of historical fiction. George Levine underscores “the aesthetic (and psychological and even moral) inadequacy of realist attempts to register things as they are in all their particularity as opposed to exploring interiority and the mysteries of the self” (13).¹²⁹ When inscribing trauma within their narratives writers use a more effective and favoured narrative method to challenge the realist mode of the historical novel; they do not use traditional methods that relate to an ordered reality characterized by chronology and linearity.

My analysis of Zoë Wicomb’s novel *David’s Story* (2001) focuses on the ways that the protagonist’s obsession with the past and its traumatic legacies shape the narrative. David’s interrogation of the past in order to comprehend the intricacies of the present moves him – not exclusively – to the story of his comrade Dulcie, which has become a wound of which “he could not speak” (*DS* 145). The act of understanding the traumatic past through the redeployment of an impossible history – a history that defies meaning – turns out to be problematic, and “*David’s Story* is a text that resists ‘-telling-’” (Poyner “Secrets” 124). The fragmented and anti-linear narrative works with divergent temporalities, and it looks back upon the past in order to clarify the uncertainties in the present. In this way, Wicomb problematises histories that are secured by the official documentation and suggests that some memories of South African history eschew fixity

¹²⁸ In *Trauma Fiction* (2004), Anne Whitehead argues that literary narratives about trauma borrow from postcolonial fiction using similar stylistic devices to recover a silenced memory and unearth a forgotten history of the marginalized.

¹²⁹ See also Virginia Woolf’s essay “Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1923).

and cannot be accessed in a rational way.¹³⁰ Wicomb has rendered her postmodern narrative with regard for “memory’s temporalities” (Radstone 138). In “Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory” Susannah Radstone comments on “the non-linearity, circularity or timelessness of memory,” arguing that “if historical time is bound to linearity, studies of memory reveal that its own temporalities tend to be antithetical to this – for they may move against historical temporality’s linear flow” (138). In following the tracks of traumatic memory, Wicomb’s narrative mimics and follows David’s memories that circulate around Dulcie’s undecipherable story, leaving the reader disoriented and unsettled as the whole truth of what really happened to Dulcie remains elusive. What remains accessible are only the blind spots and lacunae that tell of traumatic experiences. *David’s Story* complicates narratives of the ‘new’ South Africa in post-apartheid, and addresses the findings/shortcomings of the TRC and the discontinuity and fragmentation of South Africa’s truth and reconciliation process.

Similarly, Kate Grenville’s postcolonial historical novel *The Secret River* mourns a lost past – albeit in a linear narrative that is not ‘realist’ in the conventional sense – to challenge the amnesia of official histories of settlement in Australia by “re-examining the historical archive” (Mead 550).¹³¹ Grenville writes out of a current tradition of postcolonial historical novels that seeks to acknowledge the nation’s violent history by focusing on the dispossession of the Indigenous population. Fiona Duthie argues that “[m]ore recently, Aboriginal history has become central to national discourse and debate. Over the last twenty years there has been a huge expansion in the range of histories [and] fictions [...] [to] explore some of the fissures and absences in earlier historiography” (208-9). Thus, contemporary writers have added their own *petit récits* to reformulate the depiction of Australia’s colonial history to incorporate most particularly the experiences of Indigenous Australians. Recent examples include: Thea Astley’s *A Kindness Cup* (1974); Robert Drewe’s *The Savage Crows* (1976); Debra Adelaide’s *Serpent Dust* (1997); Peter Watt’s *Cry of the Curlew* (1999); Alex Miller’s *Landscapes of Farewell* (2001); Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish* (2001) and *Wanting* (2008). In various ways these texts open a narrative space that addresses the conflict between European settler-invaders and Aboriginal people. These contemporary fictional writings attempt to

¹³⁰ In my analysis I will clarify how Wicomb addresses the fact that the torture of (coloured) women within the ANC’s ranks has not been publicly recognised.

¹³¹ In “Tasteless Subjects” (1992) David Carter argues for the inclusion of realism in postcolonial contexts due to its potential for resisting imperial ideologies.

include the marginalized and dispossessed within Australia's historical landscape and "resist sentimentalizing Australian pasts in relation to colonial settlement" (Johnson 14). They actively engage the reader to question the shortcomings of the official historical record and undermine the border between history and fiction; they "refuse the view that only history has a truth claim" (Hutcheon *Poetics* 93) and blur the line between factual and fictitious historical documentation. In this way they rework and interrogate the "cultural malaise of historical amnesia" (Pierce 305) which suppresses accounts of the racial violence that was part of Australia's colonization.¹³²

The country's national imaginary is reshaped by literary narratives that open up a discourse of new historical 'truths'. Peter Pierce argues that recent historical fiction in Australia "is complex and contestable[;] [there are] strenuous attempts to confront a past whose richness has always been longed for but not always believed in; to assume burdens of imaginative understanding, not fawning guilt" (313). The neo-historical fictions mentioned above revise and interrogate the forgotten archives of the colonial encounter with their explicit portrayals of violence against Aboriginal people: Watt's graphic detail of the brutal 'dispersal' of the Nerambura tribe in *Cry of the Curlew* (1999); Astley's treatment in *A Kindness Cup* (1974) of an actual incident that took place in North Queensland around 1900 concerning an Aboriginal mother throwing herself off a cliff with her baby after being chased down by white vigilantes, and Robert Drewe's detailed depiction of an entire Aboriginal tribe being pushed over a cliff in *The Savage Crows* (1976). These novels reinvent history through fiction as a means to challenge the written official records that kept silent about the dispossession and killings of Aboriginal people.¹³³ As postcolonial narratives of atrocities they set out to unsettle and destabilize the image of Australia as an "extraordinary peaceable" (Pettman 7) nation. They overtly lay bare the "brutal two hundred year history of settler colonialism" (Aberdeen and Matthews 89) that has not entirely been acknowledged by official accounts of Australian

¹³² See also Hayden White's "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" (2002).

¹³³ In the following passage Robert Drewe's protagonist George Robinson describes in gruesome detail the fallen bodies of the Toogee people after being pushed over a cliff by white settlers:

The ledge was strewn with Toogee bodies – men, women and children lying amongst their scattered food baskets in a morass of blood and ripe fruit. The Dorsetman and the second Scot moved among them, swinging bodies over the cliff onto the rocks. Blood ran down the cliff face, congealing in the sand and probing like fingers into porous crevices. The split bodies of the Toogee sailed over the cliff edge and flopped like oozing sacks on to the golden, green and orange-hued rocks. (148)

history. These alternative accounts call for social justice as they revisit colonial violence to reclaim and salvage what has been erased from imperial records. Consequently, Australian settler-invaders are “made to concede [their] part or complicity in the terrors – and errors – of [their] own past” (Gandhi 10). This attempt to ‘set the record straight’ takes up W.E.H. Stanner’s argument about Australia’s “national cult of forgetting”:

Inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so. (*Dreaming* 25)

The histories that have given substance to Australia’s national cult of “disremember[ing]” (Stanner *Dreaming* 25) have defined the foundational premises of a white Australia.¹³⁴ Like a number of her contemporaries, Kate Grenville in *The Secret River* seeks justice for a dispossessed people and positions her novel as a testimony to the “secret river of blood” that runs through Australia (*Dreaming* 26).¹³⁵

The analysis of Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* that follows explores the author’s return to nineteenth century scenes of frontier violence around the Hawkesbury River. As she relays – through a linear-teleological passage of time – the life story of William Thornhill, Grenville includes within her imaginative interrogation of archival evidence the uncertainties and buried secrets of Australia’s colonial history.¹³⁶ The encounter between white settlers and the Indigenous Darug community culminates in a massacre that remains archived in traumatic memory. In this sense, *The Secret River* works against

¹³⁴ In response to Stanner’s lectures Bain Attwood adds that “[c]oming to terms with this past has been difficult in Australia, then, not just because of the nature of its past but because of the nature of its history-making during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which assumed a form of forgetting or disremembering” (“Unsettling” 243).

¹³⁵ Kate Grenville’s title for her novel was greatly influenced by W.E.H. Stanner and his Boyer lectures in 1968.

¹³⁶ In *Geschichtsbild und Romankonzeption* (1986) Ewald Mengel constitutes three types of historiographic understanding: the linear-teleological (objective view of history); the cyclical (objective view of history), and historiography based on contingency (subjective view of history).

the classic realist narrative mode, as Grenville does not offer its readers a definite conclusion to her character's journey:

The movement of classic realist narrative towards closure ensures the reinstatement of order, sometimes a new order, sometimes the old restored but always intelligible because familiar. Decisive choices are made, identity is established, the murderer is exposed, or marriage generates a new set of subject positions. (Belsey 75)

I will argue that Grenville's inclusion of the trauma of the Darug people destabilizes her narrative, since their violent deaths cannot be suppressed by the main character or the landscape upon which the trauma of the massacre is inscribed. Catherine Belsey argues that realism carries out the work of capitalist ideology supporting a strict political agenda. Yet, by subverting and reconstructing the traditional narrative, *The Secret River* represents a resistance to the imposed ideology as the haunting legacy of trauma is not finalized within a closed narrative but remains unfinished business beyond the telling of the story, and in fact proceeds through what is now a trilogy of historical novels.¹³⁷ Mariadele Boccardi argues that the traditional historical realist novel is characterized by "[t]he organization of narrative into a beginning, middle, and end [to] construct [...] a textual temporality which imitates the temporality of events in the real world and also complements the actual temporality" (9). However, when writing about the legacy of the traumatic experience Grenville is able to expand the conception of nation past its predictable historical and political implication.

In this respect, Grenville, like Zoë Wicomb, challenges recent attempts at reconciling with a violent past. Kate Mitchell argues that Grenville has written about an originary, violent trauma

that indelibly shaped Australia [...] in order to confront a contemporary trauma that stems from the stalling of the nation's reconciliation process. The novel dramatizes not only frontier conflict, but also the attempt to forget this past and white Australia's complicity in its ongoing structural effects. (254)

¹³⁷ See Kate Grenville's "Colonial Trilogy": *The Secret River* (2005); *The Lieutenant* (2008); *Sarah Thornhill* (2011).

The following analysis of *The Secret River* will partly raise questions regarding the complicity of contemporary Australian citizens in Indigenous dispossession. It will focus on Grenville's attempt to inscribe traumatic and unsettling memory within the realist historical novel.

A Reading of *The Secret River*

Narrative and Implication

In *The Secret River*, the first of a trilogy of historical novels set in the colony of New South Wales, Kate Grenville explores the colonial past and the traumatic legacies of colonialism. By using the story of her convict ancestor as a lens, Grenville draws on fiction to explore Australian national memory and established narratives of settlement. The novel, written from the perspective of the fictitious protagonist William Thornhill, is loosely based on personal research regarding her family's history. It relates to the experiences of her ancestor Solomon Wiseman, the author's great-great-great grandfather, a Thames boatman sent as a convict to Australia in 1806. Her investigative memoir *Searching for the Secret River* (2006) offers some biographical insight into this convict's life on unfamiliar colonial ground, the trials and tribulations of his family, and Wiseman's ascent to wealth and social recognition.

This life-story appeals to many of the enduring Australian archetypal myths that have shaped the history of the nation. For example, this account of Wiseman draws on national myths of the exiled almost-innocent convict and the bold and daring pioneer as a self-made man:

My mother had told me stories about the first of our family to come to Australia – my great-great-great grandfather was a lighterman on the Thames, pinched a load of timber and was transported there for the term of his natural life. Within six years of arriving here, he'd become a free man and 'taken up land' on the banks of the Hawkesbury River. He went on to make buckets of money, built a fine stone house, and called himself "the King of the River". (Grenville "Secret History" 149)

This familiar foundation narrative – echoing the established mythical tale of the peaceful settlement of Australia and the subsequent epic frontier life of the pioneer – seemed to Grenville to be filled with inconsistencies and untold implications. As Ashcroft argues, “[t]he history of empire is itself a narrative of a nation providing a memory – its own history” (*Transformation* 93). Yet, within the genre of the historical novel Grenville attempts to contest the fixity and closure of the imperial history that kept alive colonial stereotypes originating in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Following biographical research into Wiseman’s history, Grenville’s mother’s story needed to be re-conceptualised; she noticed that this family tale had been “full of gaps [...] I realized that, like Lord Nelson, the family story had been holding the telescope up to its blind eye” (*Searching* 19). The allegedly heroic tale of her ancestor appeared too ‘soft’, especially after her exchange with the Murri Aboriginal writer Melissa Lucashenko, who questioned the phrasing of the story. When Grenville tells about her ancestor Solomon Wiseman and how he had “taken up land” on the Hawkesbury, Lucashenko interrupts: “What do you mean ‘took up’? [...] He took” (28).¹³⁸

Lucashenko’s comment reminds the readers that Wiseman stole the land from its original inhabitants. She also suggests that the self-made success story, the calculated act of settlement, is predicated upon the violent dispossession and destruction of Aboriginal people. Yet, Grenville finds no evidence in her research of her ancestor’s contact with the Indigenous Aboriginals: “In the hundreds of pages of documents by and about Wiseman, there was absolute silence on the matter of the original inhabitants” (*Searching* 95). She acknowledges that there is a much larger story to be told, one that moves beyond her mother’s myopic version of family history. Consequently, for Grenville, *The Secret River* does not only serve as a revision of the sanitized version of her family history, but also, as she suggests, it counters the nation’s tendency to “draw [...] a curtain over [...] the

¹³⁸ Grenville comprehended how the inherited story might not be as “simple” and straightforward as acknowledged by herself and her family. This raises her interest to make further enquiries about her ancestor’s act of taking possession of land. Here she dwells on the obvious, yet significant difference between take up/take that Lucashenko indicates:

Took up: you took up something that was lying around. You took up something that was on offer. You took up hobbies and sports.

Took had many more possibilities. You took something because it was there like a coin on the ground. You took offence or flight or a bath. Or you took something away from someone else. (*Searching* 28-29)

secrets [...] in the cupboard” (qtd. in Koval), namely the white-washing of foundation narratives and accounts of frontier violence.¹³⁹

The Secret River revisits nineteenth century scenes of frontier violence in order to portray the dark side of Australia’s national history as perpetrated by white colonists. Grenville’s postcolonial revisionist historical novel moves within a linear teleological narrative yet aims to include the uncertainties and incomprehensibilities of history as a way of presenting “how the historical event is represented in a discourse that is *somewhat beyond control*” (Bhabha *Location* 18). The chronological progression of Australia’s colonization is thereby thwarted due to the presence of trauma in fictions about history. Similar to other earlier Australian novelists, such as Xavier Herbert, Tom Keneally, and Katharine Susannah Prichard, Grenville integrates the trauma of the Aboriginal massacres into the genre of the historical novel to question stereotypical and fixed notions of the Other. Grenville tells the story differently by “integrat[ing] difference – otherness and the others – into [her] story” (Meinig 364). In this sense, I will argue that through the representation of the Darug people and the inflicted trauma – an event which cannot proceed through to its completion, but remains beyond the comprehensibility of its victims and, in the case of *The Secret River*, beyond the closure of the narrative – Grenville adopts postcolonial transformations of the historical novel. Readers do not encounter a static and closed framework in *The Secret River*, but rather an open and fluid portrayal of the history of the settler nation that, due to the incomplete nature of trauma, continues to have an effect in the present.

This narrative of the destructive effects of first contact challenges the nation’s “cult of forgetfulness” (Stanner *Dreaming* 24). Sue Kossew argues that Grenville reassesses “what it means to be a white Australian” (“Voicing” 9): “it is only by uncovering the

¹³⁹ In her interview with Ramona Koval, Grenville expresses her desire for readers to acknowledge

the fact that Australian history does have a series of secrets in it. There are cupboards in Australian history that we have just drawn a curtain over; we sort of know they’re there but we sort of don’t want to look at them. Other parts, we’d drawn the curtain back with great pride – Gallipoli. The first planting of the flag by Captain Cook, the gold rushes – all that stuff. We’re happy to look in those cupboards, but there are other cupboards that make us uncomfortable, and for 200 years we’ve just chosen not to look at them too closely. So this is a book, in some way, about those cupboards, it opens a couple of those cupboards and looks into them in a judgement neutral way, but I hope a clear-eyed way, because my feeling is that until we are prepared to look at all those slightly hidden, slightly secret places in our history, we can’t actually make much progress into the future. (qtd. in Koval)

painful scars of the past, the text suggests, by voicing the ‘Great Australian Silence’ that a process of reconciliation and shared belonging can begin” (“Voicing” 17). Taken from W.H. Stanner’s lectures *After the Dreaming* (1968), the title of the novel refers to Stanner’s comment about the national past: “there is a secret river of blood in Australian history” (26).¹⁴⁰ One of Grenville’s personal aims is to position her novel as a counter-remembrance/counter-discourse to white settlement stories, and to challenge national memory by “put[ting] the shadows in”, in order for this settler nation “to grow up as a society” (“Woman” 20). She does this, as we see here, by deliberately taking Stanner’s historical accounts as an intertext for her fiction. Julie McGonegal argues that

while non-Indigenous fiction may function as a too convenient site for the retelling of secrets in its capacity for aesthetic distance and detachment – and should therefore supplement rather than supplant other forms of truth production – it nevertheless constitutes a complex archive for reading settler culture’s ways of grappling with such history. (“Canadian” 73)

In the imaginative reconstruction of the past *The Secret River* recognises the past trauma of the Indigenous Darug community to contribute towards the process of reconciliation in a postcolonial nation that comprehends the need to come to terms with the traumatic violence of its past.¹⁴¹ By introducing William Thornhill into Australia’s colonial history, Grenville explores the colonizers’ implication in acts of violence and dispossession in the course of first settlement.

Grenville writes the novel through William Thornhill’s perspective in order to draw white Australian readers into the perpetrator’s position; to tempt them into identifying with Thornhill’s acts of dispossession and murder of Aboriginals and the ensuing silencing of these acts. Grenville deliberately chooses to craft the novel from Thornhill’s point of view to give the reader an “over the shoulder” perspective of the protagonist’s world. In her writing journal she confesses that “first person wasn’t going to work. That stately voice

¹⁴⁰ Grenville’s *The Secret River* grounds itself in a series of germinal series of historical essays that established some key concepts for addressing historical memory in settler society and that also link her to *David’s Story*. See Bain Attwood’s “Unsettling Pasts: Reconciliation and History in Settler Australia” (2005), Marilyn Mobley’s “A Different Remembering: Memory, History, and Meaning in *Beloved*” (1993).

¹⁴¹ The Indigenous writer and critic Tony Birch argues that only a nation that is able to come to terms with its violent past and “accept histories that relinquish [its] amnesia” (185) can establish itself with a “mature national identity” (185). Birch’s status as an eminent writer and critic lends authority to this perspective.

didn't belong to an illiterate Thames lighterman. If the book was to be in the first person, the voice would have to become much rougher, less literary, to be convincing" (*Searching* 164-65). Therefore, by deciding on the third person subjective, Grenville may partly write in the protagonist's voice to reveal Thornhill's inner conflicts and thereby place the readers closer to the character: "I wanted the reader to be right there with him" (Grenville *Searching* 163). Nina Liewald adds that Grenville's "[c]haracter focalization tends to hint at a subjective view of history or a focus on individual consciousness, and simultaneously invites the reader to identify with the experiences of the internal focalizer, who in this novel happens to be the protagonist William Thornhill" (16). Moreover, Grenville has characterized William Thornhill as a person making difficult choices in a country he has been forced into. Driven by the demands of a new place Thornhill is pushed to act in a certain way:

The pressures that might push a person towards one response or another was the heart of the story I wanted to tell. Fear, compassion, government policy, peer pressure, miscommunication, self-interest – all these went into the mix. (Grenville "Secret History" 151)

Readers may identify more easily with a character that has been exposed to these pressures to conform to the politics and practices of the settler colony. In this respect, Kate Mitchell argues that readers can to a degree connect with Thornhill because

Grenville's depiction of him thus accounts for some of the specific cultural reasons that might make him active in both seizing land and violently driving away the traditional owners. The effect is to invite the readers' understanding of these events [...] acts they might have committed themselves. (262-63)

The narrative – told exclusively through a white perspective – may indirectly call upon the readers' complicity in the dispossession and ruin of the Aboriginal people in Australia. Susan Lever argues that *The Secret River* "confronts the implication of white settlers in the destruction of Aborigines" (514). This raises critical awareness concerning the nation's past, implying a probable complicity of contemporary Australian citizens in Indigenous dispossession. It echoes Tessa Morris-Suzuki's eloquent argument about the moral relationship between the past and the present:

‘Implication’ means the existence of a conscious connection to the past, but also to the reality of being (in a legal sense) ‘an accessory after the fact’. It is the status of those who have not stolen land from others, but who live on stolen land; the status of those who have not participated in massacres, but have participated in the process by which the memory of those massacres has been obliterated; the status of those who have not injured others, but allow the consequences of past injury to go unaddressed. ‘Implication’ means that the prejudices which sustained past acts of aggression live on in the present, and will lodge themselves in the minds of the present generation unless we make the effort to remove them. (qtd. in Hokari 97)

The Secret River confronts arguments that contemporary Australians carry no responsibility for colonial violence and thereby engage in the debates around Australia’s so-called history wars. As Lucashenko’s challenge to Grenville suggests, Thornhill’s history raises questions about the legitimacy of codes of citizenship and belonging that fail to address Indigenous dispossession. While readers may not be able to fully identify with Thornhill and his repression of Indigenous dispossession they are nevertheless left to “assume belated ownership of the shameful knowledge of white inflicted genocide” (Mitchell 261).¹⁴² In *The Secret River*, readers are offered glimpses of an alternative history that is in need of witnessing and commemoration. Emil Angehrn suggests that “historical commemoration is related to the revolutionary act in its resistance to that which exists” (qtd. in Meinig 350). In this sense, *The Secret River* resists a unified historical narrative that is fixed in its portrayal of a single ‘truth’ of the past, in order to acknowledge the violence of the Australian frontier.

Moreover, Grenville admits that in writing *The Secret River* she “was trying to be faithful to the shape of the historical record, and the meaning of all those events that historians had written about. What I was writing wasn’t real, but it was as true as I could make it”

¹⁴² Sarah Pinto uses *The Secret River* as a case in point, arguing that

it is not historical understanding – that is, understanding of a specific time and place – that many historical novelists seem to seek. Rather, novelists seem intent on using stories of the past to shed light on aspects of humanity that are presumed to have resonances across time, space and place. (“Rethinking” 192)

This relates to Grenville’s earlier comment that she placed Thornhill under certain universal pressures that were common across histories of settlement.

(*Searching* 191). Eleanor Collins argues that this aspect of the novel makes for a compelling read, whereby the narrative “expose[s] the mutual dependency of [...] [fact and fiction] and the inherently difficult relation between what really happened and any attempt to narrate, interpret, and give meaning to what happened” (43). *The Secret River* blurs the line between factual and fictitious historical documentation and supplements historical documentation by assuming an imaginative understanding of Australian historiography. Grenville presents history “in a different way, which is the way of empathizing and imaginative understanding of those difficult events” (Grenville “Question” 70)¹⁴³ of the Australian nation. Therefore, by reimagining the past, Grenville offers a narrative of settlement that is marked by frontier violence, a story that subverts the versions of Australian history that have been intent on displacing racial conflicts, whilst acknowledging the germinal contribution of historians like Stanner. Through Thornhill’s perspective the readers may gain an imaginative insight into the controversial approach of settlers towards the Indigenous community in New South Wales. This other side of history – a history of violence and dispossession of the Darug community on the Hawkesbury River – becomes a story that has not yet been told. One of the achievements of *The Secret River* is to indicate how violent colonial histories can be told through adaptations of the historical novel that include a multitude of possible “truths”. In this respect, Sigrun Meinig observes that postcolonial historical novels reveal

that the possibility of understanding the past – rather than finding its ‘truth’ in the one story of history – lies in the processuality of a story-telling which reminds us that history is characterized by diversity and controversy. History suffers from being presented as a unified entity in terms of [...] fixity. (353)

The Secret River calls attention to imaginative storytelling – a *petit récit* – that admits disregarded histories that have an effect upon the continuing presence of the past, postulating “a history of movement and interconnection” (Meinig 353). Sigrun Meinig’s term “historical understanding” (38) in combination with Paul Ricoeur’s notions

¹⁴³ With comments such as these, Kate Grenville has made herself vulnerable to criticism by historians who oppose her problematic belief that her novel may through empathy claim greater historical authority than history itself. Inga Clendinnen argues that Grenville’s use of applied empathy in the search for historical understanding cannot be tolerated due to the fact that when writing history the writer cannot indulge in empathy as it impedes historical understanding (20-23). Further comments on some of Grenville’s controversial comments regarding history will be made during the course of the analysis, which also draws attention to ways that Grenville acknowledges her debt to contemporary histories of settlement.

concerning narrative understanding – “forged by our familiarity with the narratives transmitted in our culture” (4) – is helpful here as it suggests that the debates surrounding the postcolonial historical novel may contribute to a more inclusive understanding of Australia’s present culture and history. *The Secret River* is embedded within the archives of Australia’s colonial history; its incidents and characters are “based solidly on history” (Grenville “Historian”). Although it was not made absolutely clear by the author at the onset of having published the novel, *The Secret River* is a fictional work with many historical references that gives readers a possible access to an imaginative past that disrupts the narratives of accepted history – and may even establish what Stella Clarke considers “the novel as national confessional” (8).¹⁴⁴ Grenville dedicates the novel to “the Aboriginal people of Australia: past, present and future.” By portraying the planned massacre of the Darug community by the settlers – focalized through William Thornhill’s white perspective – the reader is drawn to recognise the complicity of contemporary Australians in colonial dispossession of the Indigenous people. Thornhill’s perspective contributes to the alternative and competing stories of settlement that have been suppressed in the stories of nation and narration. *The Secret River* proposes a different narrative of settlement that does not aggrandize the heroic struggle of white pioneers and settlers, but rather, offers a story that discloses the violence of the Australian frontier by admitting and confessing to terrors of the past. Eleanor Collins rightly suggests that one may view Grenville’s novel as Australia’s alternative story, whose narrative possibly competes with the national myths of frontier settlement:

Perhaps the story of Australia is not one of pioneer optimism, of hard work forging a nation. Perhaps it is not a story of colonial escape from the British class system to a fairer, more innocent world. Perhaps, instead, it is a tragic, ironic story of limitation, cultural dissonance, and loss. (47)

¹⁴⁴ Several discussions that have established important considerations in readings of literature and history surround the critical reviews of *The Secret River*. Grenville’s novel sparked anew the debates concerning the so-called ‘history wars’ due to her claims of having provided historical truthfulness when writing about Australia’s history (see Interview with Ramona Koval). Inga Clendinnen and Mark McKenna rightly criticized the novelist’s project which claimed historical authority: “She discovered she could write history after all. The novel is a serious attempt to do history, but value added history. [...] Grenville sees her novel as a work of history sailing triumphantly beyond the constrictions of formal discipline” (Clendinnen 17). Grenville’s fictional historical account, they agreed, could not make authoritative, legitimate, and valid claims regarding Australia’s colonial past as only history proper could offer real claims to a real past. For more information concerning the historians’ debates see Clendinnen’s “The History Question: Who Owns the Past” (2006); James Bradley’s “History Question: Correspondence” (2006); Felicity Collins’s “Historical Fiction and the Allegorical Truth” (2006); McKenna’s “Writing the Past” (2006); and, finally Grenville’s response in “The Question of History: Response” (2007).

Although *The Secret River* is a fictional narrative of colonization it may still unearth some insights and probable truths about Australia's history. As narrative lies at the heart of "historical understanding", the novel – to put it in Grenville's rather controversial words – "put[s] flesh on history's skeleton" (qtd. in Waldren 3) and communicates an alternative form of historical documentation, one that is not explicitly bound to a "truthful and faithful depiction of the past" (Pinto "History" 192).¹⁴⁵ Yet, by supplanting the official history of the nation, which is made to be singular, authoritative and non-contradictory, Grenville's imaginative novel creates an enunciatory site for disregarded histories. In this sense, Grenville can turn her fictional narrative to deal with the complex issues of first contact, the aftermaths of trauma, and the troubling nature of the loss of the Indigenous community depicted in *The Secret River*.

A Desire for Land

Grenville does not give an impression of noble beginnings, yet in narrating the settler nation from Thornhill's perspective, she foregrounds a frame of mind that is implicated in a violent history of transportation and settlement. The narrative starts off with Thornhill's life in London and his sustained struggle against poverty. This account of beginnings serves to substantiate Thornhill's psychological drive to own a place of his own and to draw from it sustenance and protection. His longing for a home, which will be of greater importance once deported to Australia, is marked in London when Thornhill communicates "the feeling of having a place [like Sal's]. Swan Lane and the rooms within it were a part of Sal's very being, he could see, in a way no place had ever been part of his" (*Secret River* 18). Grenville is alert to the issues of class and the dispossession of the poor in *The Secret River*. The narrative further follows his fight to keep his wife and family fed in an unjust British class system that leaves Thornhill no choice but to commit a crime.¹⁴⁶ Thornhill is portrayed as a victim in a cruel urban society that

¹⁴⁵ This comment is vulnerable to criticism as Grenville places *The Secret River* above historical authority suggesting that she may have written a better, more complete history than historians. Yet, Grenville is not the sole supporter of this belief. Jo Jones argues that "Malouf and Grenville have expressed their belief that fiction can bring the reader 'closer' to the events in the past, and that the process of imaginatively 'fleshing out' history creates a more insightful version of the past" (69).

¹⁴⁶ As in many contemporary Australian historical novels, such as Barbara Hanrahan's *The Albatross Muff* (1977), Bryce Courtenay's *The Potato Factory* (1995), and Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), London is portrayed as a dismal, cold and unjust place representing nineteenth century Britain as socially divided.

transports him as a convict to Australia. Sheila Collingwood-Whittick argues that the dark part of Thornhill's life in London, the subsequent transportation as a convict to New South Wales and his "taking up" of land for himself and his family lead to the inevitable dispossession of the Darug people:

[e]xtreme poverty, the English class system and a ruthless justice that passes sentences of death or transportation on the perpetrators of minor, poverty-generated theft – this is the bleak and punitive social background from which Thornhill is shown to be trying to escape when he takes part in the extermination of natives who stand in the way of colonization. ("Haunting" 132)

Taking these events into account, Grenville includes different layers of trauma in the narrative. Thornhill's story is emblematic of the framing of the history of the nation's origins in various narratives of trauma. He is portrayed as a victim of the English class system struggling to make ends meet. As the "almost-innocent convict" (E. Collins 39), he avoids the gallows and hopes to establish himself with his family in a cruel and unforgiving environment in a penal colony. To some extent this narrative of the innocent convict adheres to Australian myths that have been part of establishing the nation's identity and consolidating the image of the ex-convict as an honorable pioneer and settler. When considering Thornhill's pre-history in England, Sheila Collingwood-Whittick suggests that Grenville's protagonist can be viewed as a traumatized victim who has been subjected to "nightmarish conditions" ("Haunting" 132-33) and hardships that account for the trauma of poverty and transportation. However, as the narrative progresses Thornhill becomes aware that as a free man he could "own [...] a stretch of ground [...] and name [...] it after himself!" (*Secret River* 109). The appearances of the Darug people along the Hawkesbury River threaten Thornhill's emerging sense of independence and potential prosperity:

[A]wareness of prior landowners and their competing needs deflates the optimism otherwise promised by a tale of liberal individualist self-improvement. Once we know of the Darug, the Thornhills cannot build a home and gain the material comforts their pioneer story demands without also building narrative tension and a sense of impending violence. [...] One of the discomforts of *The Secret River* is the pressure of weighing the Thornhills' considerable suffering in an unjust class

system against the Darug people's unimaginable suffering in an unjust colonial racial system. [...] [T]here is a sense in the novel's structure that one system of harshness and lack has led directly to the other. (E. Collins 39-40)

The encounter with what is perceived as 'empty land' on the one hand, and the Darug community on the other, is the turning point in the novel, signaling the Thornhills' dispute with the original inhabitants of the land. Thus, Thornhill's story is emblematic of the convict settler experience during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and it draws into view the ways in which narratives of settlement might account for the experiences of Indigenous people. As a historical novel, *The Secret River* engages imaginatively with these narratives holding various traumatic histories that remain embedded within Australian nationhood. Before focusing in particular on the final tragic conflict between Thornhill and the Aboriginal people I consider how *The Secret River's* narrative draws attention to Thornhill's lust for land ownership, which in turn sets up the frame for the climax of the novel, the massacre of the Darug people.

William Thornhill arrives in New South Wales as a convict. In the settler colony Thornhill comes to associate land ownership with a freedom he could scarcely imagine as a poor working man in London. In the colony, land is at the settlers' disposal so long as no other white man had already laid claim to it: "All a person need do was find a place no one had already taken. Plant a crop, build a hut, call the place Smith's or Flanagan's, and out-stare anyone who said otherwise" (*Secret River* 125). We know from the beginnings of the novel that, as a labourer, Thornhill's aspirations to property and prosperity in England remain almost impossible to satisfy. In the colony he can aspire to land ownership, and even gentility. Grenville suggests the revolutionary meaning of this for Thornhill by focusing on how he sees the land to which he lays claim. When he first encounters the piece of ground upon the Hawkesbury River, an urge to own land drives him. Thornhill's evolving erotic relationship to the land signifies the obsession he feels at the sight of 'untouched' and 'uninhabited' space:

A chaos opened up inside him, a confusion of wanting. No one had ever spoken to him of how a man might fall in love with a piece of ground. No one had ever spoken of how there could be this teasing sparkle and dance of light among the trees, this calm clean space that invited feet to enter it.

He let himself imagine it: standing on the crest of that slope, looking down over his own place. Thornhill's Point. It was a piercing hunger in his guts: to own it. To say *mine*, in a way he had never been able to say *mine* of anything at all. He had not known until this minute that it was something he wanted so much. (*Secret River* 110)

There is no thought of Aboriginal existence or prior claim here. Thornhill's mind is clearly driven by the desire to possess and thereby satiate his hunger for land. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower argues that *The Secret River* "centres on a settler's relationship with the land and on his desire to supersede Indigenous ownership" (145). Aboriginals do not even enter his imagination as they have been 'disimagined' by the colonial discourse of the British Empire. In this sense, political ideologies of the late eighteenth century furthered imperial domination through the power of imagination that supported Eurocentric visions of 'blank space' and 'empty land'. Driven by Western spatialization of property and the settlers' cultivation of land, Thornhill readily disregards any reflections on rightful Aboriginal land ownership. Land seems readily available to Thornhill, an opportunity to possess and prosper; a chance to inscribe his own identity and culture. Aboriginal rights and their notions of land and their tribal associations with it are rejected. The lands of the Darug are dismissed in favour of the colonizers' role as the dominant owner of 'new' territory. Thornhill's perspective recognises no visible marks of previous tenure or cultivation. He sets up borders and boundaries to proclaim his sole right to the land:

There were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them. They had no fences that said *this is mine*. No house that said, *this is our home*. There were no fields or flocks that said, *we have put the labour of our hands into this place*. (*Secret River* 96)

Thornhill's desire to possess and control is represented in terms of a gendered and sexualized dynamics. In her essay on "Possession and Race Representation in Grenville's Colonial Narrative" Odette Kelada regards Thornhill's physical desire for land and his subsequent taking of it as metaphorical rape. This suggests Thornhill's control of Aboriginal land is a form of gendered violence driven by the need to rule and possess.

Rape, argued to be the act of the conqueror,¹⁴⁷ is a sexual invasion of the body resulting in the traumatic experience of its victim. As I have argued in earlier chapters of this thesis, rape is a recurrent theme in settler writing, and it encodes Indigenous dispossession in complex ways in both Australian and South African contemporary novels. Kelada argues, the “implication I contend, of this Aboriginal body/land conflation is that, if Aboriginal people are the land and Thornhill is possessing the land in a sexualized maneuver, this constitutes a metaphorical rape” (9). Similarly, Thornhill’s forceful incursion into the personal inner space of the landscape without Aboriginal consent bears the marks of a violation of the body/landscape. For Kelada, the act of rape relates to the subsequent eruption of violence that produces the Aboriginal trauma of dispossession and murder. This analysis focuses on the gendered and sexualized discourse of Grenville’s novel in its representation of colonization; Thornhill’s intrusion is described as a movement “into the very body of the land” (*Secret River* 133), where Grenville uses sexualized imagery to portray the journey and reveal Thornhill’s desire as he gradually takes possession:

Thornhill saw it ahead: the high ridge square like a sperm whale’s head, and the river below, which swung around the low point of land that was about to become his. Thornhill’s Point. [...] [I]n a frenzy of longing [h]e leaped into the bow, grabbed the sweep and leaned his weight against it, feeling the strength in his own shoulders warm through his flesh, forcing himself against the river. [...] [T]hrough a mouth gone stiff with passion, he hissed [...] [;] the keep had settled deep into the mud [...] bursting out at last onto dry land. [...] His own, by virtue of his foot standing on it. [...] He was barely breathing. [...] Mine. (135-37)

By penetrating the river Thornhill is driven by uncontrollable lust to ultimately reinscribe and encode the landscape with this own body. This representation of conquest of the land as rape promotes Thornhill’s process of colonial subject formation in terms of dominance and submission; a violent conqueror staking his claim. Kelada suggests that Grenville’s “language of a mouth stiff with passion, the reiterated desire to possess and the culmination of the literal erection inherent in the name ‘Thornhill’s Point’” (9) recount the protagonist’s desire to assert his dominance over the Indigenous inhabitants by

¹⁴⁷ See Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975).

symbolically assaulting the body of the landscape. In this case, rape becomes the act of taking and thereby occurs as a demonstration of colonial rule.¹⁴⁸ Annette Kolodny discusses this gendered and sexualized trope more subtly in the *Lay of the Land – Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, suggesting that settlers in North America experienced and described the landscape gendered as feminine. In this respect, European representations of land yielded to a hierarchical discourse that viewed the Indigenous landscape and its original inhabitants as weak and subordinate and the Western self as dominant and strong. Kolodny argues that in the North American context land could be “master[ed] and alter[ed] [...] becoming an object of possession [...] turn[ing] quickly to violation” (65). Similarly, the evocation of Thornhill’s characterization of the Australian landscape as submissive and awaiting domination constructs the Indigenous people of the Hawkesbury – portrayed as “part of the landscape” (*Secret River* 229) – as weak and subservient.

Kelada’s analysis draws attention to the powerful gendered and sexualized discourse that Grenville uses to represent Thornhill’s possession of land on the Hawkesbury. However, as earlier discussions of rape and race in settler writing in this thesis suggests, this trope problematically represents Indigenous people as passive victims. In this way the trope of colonization as rape can minimize the history of conflict and resistance that occurred as Indigenous people were dispossessed and dispersed; it can overstate the agency and authority of the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.

On the Hawkesbury River, Thornhill encounters land as “a place of promise [...] [;] the blank page upon which a man might write a new life” (*Secret River* 134) and establishes his presence through several acts of belonging. This frontier provides the space for ‘new beginnings’ for him, his family and ultimately the colonial enterprise. This craving for

¹⁴⁸ William Charles Wentworth, an Australian explorer, poet, and politician was an eminent figure during the eighteenth century in New South Wales. In his poem “Australasia” (1823) he not only advocates the colony’s right for self-government, but also partly uses the language of power and dominance – recalling and justifying the eighteenth century image of Thornhill as usurper and violator – when referring to the colonizers’ right to penetrate and violently impregnate the Australian land:

Arts crown’d with plenty and replete with joy:
 Be theirs the *task to lay with lusty blow*
 The ancient giants of the forest low [...]
 With cautious *plow to rip the virgin earth*
 And watch her firstborn harvest from its birth. (Wentworth 15, italics mine)

property entails an urge to begin anew and remake himself and create the inhabited world in his own image. Nicholas Blomley argues that “[t]o say mine, in other words, is to reconstitute himself as an autonomous subject, capable of exercising dominion, rather than being the object of another’s power” (209). Blomley’s point draws attention to some of the complexities of identity and belonging in Grenville’s novel. Thornhill is, after all, a man who has only recently gained his freedom to become an agent, a landowner, and a potent husband and father.

The naming of the space, “Thornhill’s Point”, further draws attention to Thornhill’s successful reconstitution, underlining the suppression of his earlier status prior to his arrival. Here, space is inscribed to create an imperial landscape through the act of European naming. The Anglicization of the Australian landscape relies upon the disregard of a pre-existing cultural identity, and functions as a symbolic appropriation of land promoting the British language as an agent of power. If the “struggle for a name is also a struggle for power” (Carter *Living* 124), Thornhill thrives as the symbolic maker of what he refers to as his “new-coined world” (*Secret River* 138). He also sets out to physically create his belonging as he makes indicative cuts on the surface of the chosen piece of land:

In the centre of the clearing he dragged his heel across the dirt four times, line to line. The straight lines and the square they made were like nothing else there. They changed everything around them. Now there was a place where a man had laid his mark over the face of the land. It was astonishing how little it took to own a piece of land. (138)

Whereas Kelada draws attention to the violent possession of land, here we see a turn to reason, to calculation and logic in the establishment of the settler claim.¹⁴⁹ The physical markings upon the land refer to his claim. He proclaims ownership as an illiterate man by literally writing on the land to inscribe the beginnings of his new life. Thus, the land on the Hawkesbury functions as Thornhill’s space of standing and opportunity: “what marked a man’s claim was a rectangle of cleared and dug-over dirt and something

¹⁴⁹ There is some irony in his assertion, “it was astonishing how little it took to own a piece of land” (*Secret River* 138) since, as a matter of fact, it took Thornhill his whole life to deal with his unsettling claim to land ownership.

growing that had not been there before” (*Secret River* 144). This disregards earlier inscriptions, the markings and claims already placed on the landscape. The rock carvings, with the fish engraving and the portrayal of his own ship, have stood there – “he had to recognise a human hand at work” (160) – to depict his arrival on the river. Thus, “he hears himself exclaim, a high blurt of indignation. It was the same tone he had heard from a gentleman in Fish Street Hill when William Warner had lifted the watch out of his pocket” (160). The return to memories of London at this point in the novel suddenly draws the old and new worlds into the same frame, and returns us to the beginnings of the narrative. Thornhill feels fooled and robbed at the thought that someone else might have taken what should have been his land. He fails to scrape the evidence off the face of the rock as it has been forever etched onto its surface.

This rock comes to play a symbolic role in representations of the conquered. Ultimately, towards the end of the novel, Thornhill builds his villa over the same rock in order to deny and erase any sign of prior occupation. In this way, he eradicates any evidence of Aboriginal existence, which furthers the process of denial and forgetting. Kate Mitchell argues that the “image of a house erected over the stone with its carving of a fish conveys a sense of purpose, of deliberately [sic] concealment; it gestures toward the ‘cult of forgetting’ upon which white Australia was founded” (278). Furthermore, Larissa Behrendt adds that “Grenville’s symbolism is a striking reminder of the history that lies beneath our modern Australian state and of the ways in which that history has sometimes been deliberately suppressed to give the impression of more noble beginnings” (4). Grenville incorporates the portrayal of previous Aboriginal habitation to not only suggest its existence, but also to represent ongoing belonging. The rock is a reminder of claims that disrupt any easy pastoral narrative of settlement on the Hawkesbury.

Silence, Trauma and Suppression

Within the revisionist historical narrative of *The Secret River*, Grenville represents how silences shape both private and public histories. Thornhill is a colonizer, a husband and a father. Familial relationships play an important role in the narration of conquest and settlement in *The Secret River*. For example, several violent encounters between the Darug community and the settlers – climaxing in the massacre scene – are omitted in the

negotiation of memory and forgetting narrated in Thornhill's relationship with his wife Sal. In this respect, Kate Mitchell argues that *The Secret River* "dramatizes the way in which Australian Aboriginal history has been passed down as a series of silences and omissions" (260). Throughout this postcolonial historical novel Grenville uses their relationship in order to comment on the way violent histories concerning the savage treatment and killings of Aboriginals have been silenced. In turn, she suggests that the settlers' prosperity within the colony is predicated upon the omissions and oppressions of these violent stories in the process of establishing a settler nation. One of the silences between Thornhill and Sal focuses on Thornhill's visit to Smasher Sullivan's hut, one of the points where the narrative creates a very explicit depiction of the possession of not only land but also Indigenous women. This point is an important one. Rape is not only a metaphorical projection in this novel; it is part of the reality for Indigenous women in the contact zone. At Sullivan's, Thornhill observes the seriously hurt Aboriginal woman kept in chains as a sexual slave: "a black woman, cringing against the wall, panting so he could see the teeth gleaming in her pained mouth, and the sores where the chain had chafed, red jewels against her black skin" (*Secret River* 262). Thornhill tells himself that he would not speak of it to Sal out of fear that she might judge him for not intervening. Describing the incident to his wife "saying the words, would make him the same as Smasher. [...] He had done nothing to help her. Now the evil was part of him" (264). He believes that telling the story would make him complicit with Smasher's crime. Thus, by denying the memory of the incident Thornhill hopes to absolve himself from guilt. He adds yet another silence to his relationship with Sal: "The thing about having things unspoken between two people, he was beginning to see, was that when you had set your foot along that path it was easier to go on than to go back" (160). The exchange of silence is a way to absolve himself from guilt and make life easier for him.

This is an important point in the development of the plot and the characterization of Thornhill as a colonizer. As I suggested earlier, responses to the suffering of Indigenous people in historical fiction are problematic. Thornhill is not a character that triggers an empathic engagement in the reader. However, here we see how issues of guilt and complicity affect Thornhill, and this suggests ways in which Grenville's novel is able to speak powerfully to contemporary Australian readers. Grenville describes how Thornhill tries to distract and disassociate himself from the atrocious images of the imprisoned Aboriginal woman. He makes an effort to move on with the ordinariness of domestic life.

He concentrates on his trading success along the river and the upcoming harvest of the corn. In avoiding Smasher, he hopes to “put the picture of the woman and the red jewels of blood on her skin away in some part of his memory where he did not have to see it” (266). Mitchell argues that the

endorsement of the banal everyday is an attempt to cover over the memory. [...] [T]his sequence, which shifts from Thornhill’s guilt to his trading success, establishes a clear link between the two, making the point that the success of the colony was built upon silences such as Thornhill’s. (263)

Grenville’s portrayal of Thornhill’s silence comments upon the suppression of violent memories that produce doubt and shame in the colonization of Australia.

Another critical episode in Grenville’s focus on Thornhill as a colonizer who is also subjected to the violence of the penal colony occurs at his encounters at the scene of the murdered and dying Aboriginals, who have been poisoned by one of the settlers at Darkey Creek. This is one of the most traumatic and graphic episodes in Grenville’s novel, and a focus of the characterisation of Thornhill, who once again attempts to repress and silence the memory of the incident. Intrigued by an “absence” and “dense silence” (*Secret River* 287) ashore at Darkey Creek, Thornhill discovers several Aboriginals lying dead on the ground. Evidently, they have been poisoned by the flour; Thornhill observes the corners of their wide open mouths are coated with “pale stickiness” (288). Upon investigation of the crime scene, he comes across a dying boy “still spindly in the arms and thin in the chest [...] [...] from his mouth hung tendrils of the vomit that was all around his head and the lower part of his body was shiny where it had emptied itself” (288). Turning away from the dying boy, Thornhill returns to his ship and sails away, promising that he will never speak of this appalling incident to Sal or anyone else: “He knew he would never share with Sal the picture of this boy. That was another thing he was going to lock away in the closed room in his memory, where he could pretend it did not exist” (290).

In this way Thornhill deliberately represses the knowledge of the traumatic experience and more importantly the trauma of the Darug community; Grenville’s strategy of representing this horrific scene through the eyes of Thornhill is, however, a provocative

one. In this respect, Kate Mitchell suggests that “the reader, in contrast, participates in Thornhill’s repression but assumes belated ownership of the shameful knowledge of white inflicted genocide” (261). These repressed and untold stories, then, do not only concern Thornhill and Sal, but the contemporary Australian nation:

The reader is asked to recognise his or her complicity but is prevented from identifying fully with Thornhill, because of his lack of empathy and his refusal to act as an ethical witness, a role that the twenty-first century reader expects of him/herself. The effect is that the novel thus combines affect with critical awareness, so that rather than collapse the difference between (contemporary white Australian) self and (nineteenth-century British colonial) other, the novel inhabits the space between the two. If Grenville courts the reader’s empathy, it is empathy of the “unsettling” kind. (Mitchell 265)

Grenville’s narrative presents the negotiation of memory and forgetting practised both individually and on a national scale during the nineteenth century. However, despite himself Thornhill bears witness; it is through him that the present-day reader is confronted with frontier violence. Moreover, Grenville suggests that the implications of the past still carry great weight in the present.

The question of how the postcolonial historical novel might represent the massacres that occurred in the process of Australian colonization and settlement is an important one.¹⁵⁰ Grenville suggests that for Thornhill and the other settlers the killings feel like an unavoidable development: “[T]heir lives, like his, had somehow brought them to this: waiting for the tide to turn, so they could go and do what only the worst of men would do” (*Secret River* 313). The ordinariness and inevitability of racial violence in the process of white settlement is associated with the natural rise and fall of the sea level. In this way

¹⁵⁰ There has been a surge of revisionist history from the 1970s especially in Australia. See Henry Reynolds’ “The Other Side of the Frontier” (1976); Henry Reynolds’ and Noel Loos’ “Aboriginal Resistance in Queensland” (1976); Reynolds’ “Aboriginal-European Contact History” (1978); *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981); *Why Weren’t We Told?* (1999); Bain Attwood’s *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History* (2006); *Possession: Batman’s Treaty and the Matter of History* (2009); Raymond Evans’ *A History of Queensland* (2008); Victoria Haskins’ *One Bright Spot* (2005); Jackie Huggins’ *Sister Girl* (1998); Ann Curthoys’ “Disputing National Histories” (2006); “Genocide in Tasmania” (2008) and Ann Curthoys’ and John Dockers’ “Genocide: Definitions, Questions, Settler Colonies” (2001). Grenville admits that her work is indebted to the works of Australian historians. She points out that when writing *The Secret River* she “was trying to be faithful to the shape of the historical record, and the meaning of all those events that historians had written about” (*Searching* 91).

Grenville underscores the ways that massacres seem to be an inevitability, part of a process of historical change through actions “that could never be undone” (321).¹⁵¹ The scene of the massacre, which occurs during nightfall, is brutal and uncompromising. Again Grenville records the violence through the sensibility of her central character, Thornhill. The massacre etches itself forever in Thornhill’s mind: “[H]is life would not go on as it had before. The William Thornhill who had woken up that morning would not be the same William Thornhill who went to bed tomorrow night” (314). Grenville places an emphasis on the transformation only her protagonist would undergo, hinting at the fact that he would once again not share the memory with those not involved in the massacre. Afterwards Thornhill does not speak about the brutal experiences, adding to the silence in his relationship with his wife Sal. This silence becomes “part of the new thing that had taken residence with them on the night he had come back [...] [;] a space of silence between husband and wife. It made a little shadow, the thing not spoken of” (329). The silencing does not only involve Thornhill and Sal. Grenville suggests the readers are complicit in the repression of violent memories and in the national cult of forgetting. The silence that has materialized from the repression of the massacre becomes

a little shadow, the thing not spoken of. They were loving each other still. She smiled at him from that sweet mouth. He took her hand to feel its narrowness in his own and she did not resist. Whatever the shadow was that lived with them, it did not belong just to him, but to her as well: it was a space the both inhabited. But it seemed there was no way to speak into that silent place. Their lives had slowly grown around it, the way the roots of river-fig grew around a rock. (*Secret River* 339)

The shadow that resides among them is described metaphorically as a rock, a solid entity formed by the imposed silence about the massacre. As described earlier when considering

¹⁵¹ From this passage onwards Grenville makes intertextual references to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*: Thornhill’s deed that “cannot be undone” (5.1.75) refers to Macbeth’s killing of King Duncan and his subsequent cover-up of the crime. Sal’s subsequent request to Thornhill to wash the blood off his hands (*Secret River* 338) parallels that of Lady Macbeth’s: “A little water clears us of this deed” (2.2.65). Interestingly, Grenville takes the Shakespearean reference further describing both as king and queen of the Hawkesbury River: “William Thornhill was something of a king. [...] His wife had become something of a queen” (*Secret River* 328). Towards the end Thornhill and Sal mirror Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as both couples reach the higher echelons of society due to their involvement in an evil deed. By embedding the intertextual reference Grenville suggests Sal’s complicity in the massacre and the propagation of its silencing.

the rock as the basis of the Thornhill's house, the rock figuratively carries at this point a similar connotation: unperturbed by the duration of time and commonly recognised for its hardness, tenacity and its resistance to acids, the rock is used by Grenville to imply that the solidified body of silence will not resolve itself. It has become an unyielding part of their lives. The symbol of the rock – their house is built upon a rock with Indigenous engravings – will outlast them and the following generations of Thornhills. In both instances rocks are portrayed as belonging to the origins of the Indigenous landscape. They stand as historical markers and witnesses. Due to their lasting endurance and impregnability rocks determine Aboriginal land ownership and bear witness to the dispossession and genocide of Aboriginal peoples.

The relationship between the silences of official histories and those that are held within the intimate relationships of the family, such as that between Sal and Thornhill, proliferate in *The Secret River*. Fiona Probyn-Rapsey argues that Thornhill and Sal are in a “complicitous relationship [...] [...] [as] [...] [w]hat remains is unspoken between them, his guilt and her complicity now form the grounds of their shared history” (73). Although Sal stayed at home during the massacre, her indifference and lack of concern mark her involvement in the crime. The couple shares an ongoing complicity that arises out of their repression of the traumatic event which affects not only the Thornhills at a domestic level, but also the settler community and its descendants. In this sense, the space of silence draws in the contemporary white Australian readers who are beneficiaries of the nation's history. Within the postcolonial historical novel historical trauma remains alive; as a troubling memory of the past it stays active, writing itself back into the present. Due to the open-endedness of the narrative, which suggests the ongoing haunting of trauma, *The Secret River* symbolically reveals that the persistence of traumatic experience cannot be fixed in history. Yet, it continues to reverberate “*somehow beyond control*” (Bhabha *Location* 12) into the nation's present. This idea of the active persistence of trauma and guilt becomes vital to Grenville's trilogy; it emerges forcefully in the most recent sequel to *The Secret River*, *Sarah Thornhill* (2011), which raises questions of generational guilt and complicity.

Grenville also indicates how official reports contributed to Australia's national amnesia by suppressing the full story of the massacre. In the novel Grenville includes the journalistic accounts in the *Gazette*, which tells the settler account, and distorts and

dismembers the truth by putting the blame of the incident of the so-called “affray” on the Aboriginals:

The *Gazette* had run a piece about the day up at Blackwood’s. [...] Sal told Thornhill what it said. The natives had been guilty of depredations and outrages. There had been an affray and the settlers had dispersed them. (*Secret River* 337)

Grenville’s protagonist keeps the truth to himself, knowing that the *Gazette* “did not mention the woman [he] could not forget, baring her teeth at him in the gloom, the blood so bright on her skin” (337). In this way Grenville imagines how silences from the Australian frontier have been passed down as the nation’s official history. The negotiation of memory and its apparent misrepresentation and silencing of the truth occur on a public level, where they carry authority and legitimacy. The *Gazette*’s dissemination of false truths proliferates the silences of myriad traumatic experiences of Australian Aboriginals. Although never alluding directly to a trauma of the Darug community, Grenville conveys the Aboriginal traumatic experiences as a “hollow” that accounts for the spaces of silence throughout *The Secret River*.

Memory, Complicity and Haunting

The Secret River offers one way of portraying the difficult scenes of trauma within the postcolonial historical novel. It addresses the corruption of frontier memory and imagines a space of silence that holds the traumatic memory of the Darug people. Grenville argues that she had intended “to create a hollow in the book, a space of difference that would be more eloquent than any words I might invent to explain it” (*Searching* 199). The hollow represents the dispossession and destruction of the Aboriginal people. It gestures to the horrors of the past and the silence that W.E.H. Stanner described when referring to the forgetting of colonial stories of injustice within Australia’s historical records. Grenville incorporates this lingering presence of the trauma of the Darug people caused by the massacre within a “fluid portrayal of history” (Meinig 11) where trauma becomes part of a history marked by its processuality rather than its fixity. Due to the “relentless recall of the traumatizing event to the present” (Meinig 350), trauma enables Grenville to open up a more fluid space which stands in stark contrast to the fixity often found in the traditional

historical novel. *The Secret River* is in need of witnessing as it focuses on the most violent and traumatic events of settler colonialism to enforce a re-examination of the present with enduring and affective accounts that reach into later generations.

The haunting legacy of trauma in the *The Secret River* moves beyond the telling of the story. It presents traumatic instances of frontier violence and imagines how these violent conflicts have been omitted and erased from Australia's cultural memory. As a historical revisionist novel, *The Secret River* counters the forgetting of the past and contributes to a more complete historical understanding at a time when reconciliation discourse addresses the ambiguities and suppressions of a violent past. The graphic portrayal of trauma within the narrative of the historical novel looks to include stories of violence in national history. As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, Australian authors such as Peter Watt and Richard Flanagan – together with Grenville – refuse to sentimentalize Australian colonial history. Their historical novels purposefully create narrative space for graphic violence and the ensuing trauma of the Indigenous people. In *The Secret River* it is especially the massacre of the Darug people that stands at the epicenter of the individual and collective work of forgetting, accounting for the uneasy coexistence between settlers and the Aboriginal characters.¹⁵² Having researched two large-scale killings at the beginning of the nineteenth century, namely the Waterloo and Myall Creek massacres, Grenville integrates these into the fabric of the story and highlights her fidelity to the historical record in order to blur the lines between historical fact and imagined fiction and lend some credibility to her own portrayal of Australia's darkest side of history and its subsequent erasure.¹⁵³

Trauma and its suppression haunt the landscape and the protagonist in *The Secret River*. The landscape bears witness to the atrocity committed on the Hawkesbury River. To erase

¹⁵² Grenville is adamant that the plot had to reach a climax accounting for the violent aspects of the frontier. In *Searching for the Secret River*, Grenville explains that the “scenes of violence were the most difficult I’d ever written. Even now I don’t want to look at them too closely. They had to be written because the story needed to include this aspect of the frontier” (162).

¹⁵³ The Waterloo Creek massacre in northern New South Wales took place in 1838. Due to the fact that the perpetrators were brought to trial, Grenville was able to find essential information on the reporting of the killings. Although the historians’ views differ on the number of Aboriginal fatalities (4-300 fatalities) it was reported that a large group of Aboriginal people had been ambushed by the mounted police as a retaliatory act for the killings of five stockmen. The Myall Creek massacre – close to the Waterloo Creek – has also received some historical coverage. In June during the same year around thirty Aboriginals, mostly women and children, were hacked to death and their bodies burned. The settlers responsible for the crime were sentenced to death.

all signs of the massacre the perpetrators burn the bodily remains on the site. However, there are still some marks that cannot be deleted, and they belong to the history of the landscape. These inscriptions contain traumatic memory. Thornhill recognises the violent history that is imprinted upon the landscape:

He would glance over at where river-oaks circled a patch of bare yellow earth beside the lagoon, marking where the bonfire had burned into the night. Something had happened to the dirt in that spot so that not so much as a blade of grass had grown there ever since. Nothing was written on any page. But the blankness itself might tell the story to anyone who had eyes to see. (*Secret River* 340)

This is in sharp contrast to the earlier representations of land, where Thornhill is represented as a conqueror, omnipotent. Here the 'blankness' of the space holds its own memory of the massacre. Sue Kossew argues that "[t]he suppressed past with its uncomfortable truths can only be read in the landscape" (*Writing Woman* 155). Thornhill becomes aware of this as he identifies an indefinable void that marks the ground and hangs over the site. Here, Thornhill is portrayed as powerless and unable to take possession of a wounded landscape. His tenuous grasp is exposed, and he is incapable of suppressing the 'legible' silence of the traumatic event. The Indigenous landscape is presented as having a life of its own upon which Thornhill cannot exert his will. Moreover, the landscape offers itself as a witness to anyone who is prepared to read the ground. As a postcolonial historical revisionist novel *The Secret River* writes about lapses in Australian history to invite readers to become contemporary witnesses to a past traumatic incident. Mitchell views

Grenville's novel as a memory text, both offering itself as a technology of memory and redirecting our understanding of Australia's landscape as unmarked sites of mourning [...] It writes the past into our present cultural memory [...] re-mapping the places that bear mute, unmarked witness to traumatic events. (273-79)¹⁵⁴

By bringing the past into the present, Grenville's memory text calls upon her readers to mourn and thereby acknowledge the hollow of remembrance in her revisionist historical

¹⁵⁴ *The Secret River* may also be read as a postcolonial anti-pastoral novel where the landscape is portrayed as working against the settlers' abilities to take possession of Australian lands.

novel. Julie McGonegal argues that “[t]his blankness – the secret gaps, occluded histories, and suppressed memories – constitute the forgotten colonial archive that must be opened if reconciliation is even to begin” (“Canadian” 75). The readers are invited to affectively respond to this site of memory to become open to a more inclusive understanding of the past. Their empathetic unsettlement operates to “recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others. [...] [A]ffectivity [is] a crucial aspect of understanding in the historian or other observer or analyst” (LaCapra *Writing History* 40-42). In Grenville’s words, the readers’ imaginative empathy is called upon, as *The Secret River* presents “an experience for a reader in which they could understand what that moment of our past was really like” (“Secret History” 152-53). LaCapra argues that

[n]arratives in fiction may also involve truth claims [...] by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible “feel” for experience and emotion, which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods. (*Writing History* 13)

This suggests the particular power of fiction to draw readers into landscapes of trauma. The pain and anguish of the Darug is mediated through the frame of trauma and witnessing. Like other episodes of genocide in history, the dispossession of Indigenous people in Australia enters literary texts in ways that can evoke powerful feelings of empathy.

The final images of Thornhill as the king of the Hawkesbury portray him as an unsettled figure haunted by the unreconciled truth of the trauma of the Darug people. After claiming the piece of land from the Darug, Thornhill has a house built with a “wall—higher than a man, and with only one gate in its perimeter—[that] kept out everything except what was invited in” (*Secret River* 332). A staircase that could be “hinged up after the manner of a drawbridge, with convenient slits the size of a gun-barrel” (329) means his home bears the look of a fortified mansion, defensive and foreign. Although he feels as the king of his own estate, having everything one could wish for, he still is a troubled man, who, as Lyn McCredden suggests, has been “complexly rendered [...] [in a state] much more volatile and driven than mere nostalgia and regret” (23). Thornhill cannot erase the massacre from his memory. The images and the appalling sense of complicity

and guilt haunt him years after the incident. Grenville describes him as unsettled, ever vigilantly observing the borders of his large stretch of land with a telescope in hand, “watching [...] everything that went by on the river” (*Secret River* 328), and being unable to “understand why it did not feel like triumph” (349). It is the uncanny landscape’s “emptiness” (348), the blankness of the space, that unsettles his psyche, leaving him with a “hollow feeling” (349) beyond the ending of the novel.¹⁵⁵ Thornhill’s state of mind is distraught and troubled as he is being haunted by his complicity with a violent past with which he cannot come to terms. Probyn-Rapsey argues that “complicity takes on a spectral presence reminding us of links with the past and the present and responsibility to the future” (79). She then moves on to suggest that both, complicity and hauntology, can be described in similar terms, namely in the same way the political theorist Wendy Brown chooses to define them:

The phenomenon remains alive, refusing to recede into the past, precisely to the extent that its meaning is open and ambiguous. [...] To be haunted by something is to feel ourselves disquieted or disoriented by it, even if we cannot name or conquer its challenge. The logic of haunting is thus a logic in which there is permanent open-endedness of meaning and limits of mastery. (152)

Probyn-Rapsey’s coordination of complicity and hauntology is productive as it also suggests that complicity arises due to the haunting of the Other and the unfinished business of the past. Justin Edwards argues that

to be haunted is, in a sense, to be called upon, for the phantom presence returns to collect an unpaid debt. In postcolonial writing, this unpaid debt often refers back to the imperial dominance of and territorial appropriation that forces the voice of the

¹⁵⁵ In terms of reconciliation the uncanny in Australian literature and particularly in *The Secret River* plays an important role as it engenders the problematic of attaining the nation’s ‘fully-fledged reconciliation’ with the past. In this respect Gelder and Jacobs agree that the attainment of reconciliation vs. the impossibility of reconciliation is productive within the Australian imaginary:

We often imagine a (future) condition of ‘reconciliation’ [...] but the ‘uncanny’ can remind us of just how irreconcilable this image is with itself. It is not simply that Australians will either be reconciled with each other or they will not; rather, these two possibilities (reconciliation; the impossibility of reconciliation) coexist and flow through each other in what is often, in our view at least, a productively unstable dynamic. (24)

colonized into the unconscious of the imperial subject and thus haunts the colonizer across generations, time and space. (121)

The open-endedness of *The Secret River* does not only attest to the temporally dynamic and processual nature of the narrative, but it also suggests that the trauma of the Darug – revealing itself by constantly calling upon the settlers’ bad conscience and guilt in silencing the violence of the frontier – will continue to haunt and unsettle the structures of the nation’s past, present and future. Thornhill believes that the memory of the Darug people and any signs of their prior settlement will not outlast his children’s children as they will never find out about the fish that has been inscribed into the rock which lies covered underneath the floorboards:

Under the house, covered by the weight of Mr. Thornhill’s villa, the fish still swam in the rock. [...] It would not fade. [...] It would remain as bright as the day. [...] Sometimes, sitting in the parlour in the red velvet armchair, Thornhill thought of it underneath him, clear and sharp on the rock. He knew it was there, and his children might remember, but his children’s children would walk about on the floorboards, and never know what was beneath their feet. (330)

Yet, by arguing that the fish “still swam in the rock” – not fading – Grenville suggests that the memory and hidden history of the Darug will remain intact, and outlive the Thornhills as a counterforce to the relegation of the past. The image of the fish, permanently etched into the rock, carries powerful historical and cultural meaning, functioning as an active reminder of the past that still lingers on. The processuality of trauma moves beyond the closure of the narrative and affects the lives of later generations, as portrayed in Grenville’s sequel, *Sarah Thornhill* (2011), where the main character must carry the dark legacy of her ancestors’ past. It does not only haunt the Thornhill household by provoking the remembrance of the dispossessed Aboriginal people, but also will continue to stay alive to counteract renewed forgetting on a national scale. This image, thus, functions as a site of memory or to use Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer’s words, as “points of memory” (358). They argue that these points account for the intersections between

past and present, [...] personal remembrance and cultural recall [:] The term point is both spatial – such as a point on a map – and temporal – a moment in time; and it thus highlights the intersection of spatiality and temporality in the workings of personal and cultural memory. (358)

The rock stands as a point of memory that generates remembrance and crosses temporal and spatial divides. Within Grenville's postcolonial historical novel it keeps the violent and traumatic memories of the Darug people actively entangled within the nation's contemporary cultural memory. With its image of the fish the rock embodies a solid part of national recollection dynamically inscribing itself into an emerging national identity and thereby unfixing the static nature of the traditional portrayal of history.

The body of Long Jack, the last surviving member of the Darug on the Hawkesbury River, represents the active physical lingering of the past traumatic experience of a dispossessed people. After the massacre Jack stays on Thornhill's estate as a historic reminder of the horrible incident. His body, which has borne witness to the atrocity, carries the visible marks of trauma. Grenville uses the body as a vehicle to express the evident suffering of colonial violence. Elleke Boehmer argues that "[t]he silenced and wounded body of the colonised is a pervasive figure in colonial and post-colonial discourses" ("Transfiguring" 268). Thornhill's descriptions of Jack's body function as testimony to frontier violence and evidence of the lingering despair of the Aboriginal people:

Smasher's shot had not quite killed Jack. The place on the side of his head where the bone as well as skin had been blasted away could still be seen. It had bound itself together lumpily. The shot had done other damage too, that had left one leg dragging and his whole body crooked and effortful, warping sideways as he moved along. There was something wooden about his face now. The shot had broken him in some central way so that his face showed nothing: no pleasure, not even pain. [...] He was so thin now he was like a bundle of sticks gathered up on the ground. Thornhill did not remember him so skinny, his ribs standing out in the barrel of his chest, the shoulder blades prominent, the flesh between fallen away. (*Secret River* 342-43)

Jack has not only sustained psychological wounds, but the incident of the massacre has also visibly marked him. The shot has forever transformed his body. His external wounds testify to the pain his body carries. Viewing Jack's wounds from Thornhill's perspective, as the novel suggests, the reader may bear witness to the discernible injury, and hence to the trauma of the Darug. This "testimonial body" (M. Brown *Screams* 126) functions as a traumatic testimony, which exposes the historic violence of the frontier in Australia and writes itself back into the national memory as a counterforce to forgetting. The vivid presence of the trauma stands as the indisputable truth of frontier violence, revealing the moral ambiguity of settler positionality and troubling the past of non-Indigenous Australians. Jack literally embodies a legible traumatic testimony. His body becomes "a recording surface" (Deleuze and Guattari 10) upon which the trauma of the massacre is inscribed. Although Thornhill describes Jack as inactive, inert and unchanging, Jack's mutilated body becomes the voice that speaks for the unspoken truth of the massacre. It stands as documented proof, exposing a trauma inflicted upon the wounded and atrophied body and further signals to the unaccounted and silenced victims of the Darug community that – as testimonial bodies – relentlessly haunt the nation's past and present.¹⁵⁶

A Reading of *David's Story*

Refashioning a Difficult Past

Like Grenville's attempt to revise the historical novel in contemporary Australian literature, Zoë Wicomb in *David's Story* uses the historical novel to revisit the past. Wicomb creates a fictional counter-history, focusing partly on the disremembering¹⁵⁷ of

¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Alex Miller's *Journey to the Stone Country* (2003) and Carmel Bird's *Cape Grimm* (2004) employ the supernatural in order to suggest the ongoing haunting presence of Aboriginals, who call for the unearthing of silenced massacres of the nineteenth century in Australian history.

¹⁵⁷ W.E.H. Stanner is one of the first to introduce the word "disremember" into the field of memory work suggesting that the cultural memory – including the violence and dispossession of the first encounter – of Australian Aborigines has been intentionally erased and forgotten. Stanner criticizes white Australia's attempts at decentering the Aborigines from history in order to have to claim no responsibility for the injustice committed in the past. Also Toni Morrison uses the term in *Beloved* (1987) to imply that Sethe's haunting daughter Beloved has been "disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her" (274). In this respect the North American author suggests that disremembering occurs deliberately to avoid the 'bad memories' concerning a disturbing and violent incident (for further information on the term's usage in *Beloved* see also Marilyn Mobley's "A Different Remembering: Memory, History, and Meaning in *Beloved*"). For my analysis of *David's Story* I will be using the

women's stories in colonial and apartheid South Africa. Michael Meyer argues that "[t]he novel expresses the need to re-write history, reflect on the construction of representation, make the absence of those marginalized [women] visible, and acknowledge the inexplicable in memory and history" (362). Moreover, Wicomb writes back to suggest alternative narratives and account for stories by and about women that have been suppressed and erased in canonical literature. Wicomb aims to deconstruct and decentre national myths by presenting new versions of history. She "invite[s] a questioning of the relations between what is forgotten and what is remembered" (Hesse 164). Thus, her remembering of the South African nation, especially the period of the anti-apartheid struggle and the lesser known Griqua history,¹⁵⁸ aims to narrate an alternative cultural past, one that cannot be told in a realist fictional narrative but rather as a fragmentary narrative with gaps and unanswerable questions that resist telling.¹⁵⁹ I have pointed out that in her linear realist narrative Grenville works against her ancestor's myopic version of history in order to point to the fissures and gaps within a sanitized version of Australian national history that has drawn a curtain over acts of violent dispossession and the destruction of Aboriginals. Likewise, Wicomb engages – although in very different fashion – in the revision and retrieval of South African women's silenced histories. As

aforementioned term to imply that the incidents of rape and dispossession of coloured women in South Africa have been disremembered in order to omit – especially in the case of rape against women within ANC ranks – any wrongdoing of the ANC while leading the nation out of apartheid.

¹⁵⁸ Griqua refers to the descendants of the Khoisan people, one of South Africa's earliest Aboriginal inhabitants. The Khoisan people formed through the Khoi people (Hottentots) and the San (Bushmen). The Griquas were forced to retreat from the Cape of Good Hope due to the landing of Dutch and British colonists in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Many moved into "less populated and less inviting parts of the country" (Driver Afterword 220), establishing themselves as a Griqua people, "even though they had by that time been joined by runaway – and later, freed – slaves (brought to South Africa from Madagascar, Mozambique, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia), as well as people of mixed racial origin and a few whites" (220). Stephané Robolin argues that

[m]uch of Griqua history is marked by large-scale uprooting and migration from one settlement to another: from Griqualand West to Griqualand East (Nomansland) where Kokstad was founded in the 1860s, then Beeswater (south of the previous Griqualand West), as well as treks to Touwsrivier (on the Robberg peninsula), Krantzhoek, and Kliprand. (*Remapping* 181)

The Griqua considered the history of their people as a composition of racial mixture. During the apartheid and post-apartheid periods they have been referred to as "coloureds".

¹⁵⁹ Wicomb uses her own fabricated history of the Griquas in order to counter the conservative general histories of South Africa. Whitewashed accounts of coloured people's history marginalise and suppress their agency portraying them as powerless and faceless. Mohamed Adhikari argues that within these one-sided historical accounts "[c]oloured people and their ancestors are little more than bystanders to the unfolding drama of the South African history, or impediments to the noble struggle of hardy, pioneering colonists to tame the wild landscape and maintain a civilised existence in barbarous surroundings" (8). He lists the following works as substantial white supremacist propaganda canonizing the coloured as people of the margins: D.P. Botha's *Die Opkoms van Ons Derde Stand* (1960); Floors van Jaarsveld's *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa* (1975); C.F.J Muller's *Five Hundred Years* (1981).

Annie Gagiano argues, the “novel seems to set out ambitiously [...] to give recognition to the role of the so-called coloured South Africans in the anti-apartheid struggle, and especially, secondly, to highlight the participation of women from that group in the struggle” (816). Wicomb, who descends from the Griqua community near Beeswater, redresses the one-sidedness of history and the lacunae of hegemonic narratives to explore the elision of women’s stories. In particular, she refers to accounts of Saartje Baartman, an historical figure and Griqua woman, and Dulcie Olifant, a fictional anti-apartheid fighter within ANC’s militarized ranks.¹⁶⁰

Wicomb’s refashioning of a new historical ‘truth’ questions the established history and bears witness to the complexity involved in the retrieval of silenced histories and their buried voices. Compared to *The Secret River*, *David’s Story* is multifaceted: it engages readers in the process of bearing witness to the difficulty of revealing silenced histories. Thereby one can recognise the constitutive gaps that stand in for the incompleteness when presenting the unacknowledged and marginal of history. In her afterword to *David’s Story*, Dorothy Driver recommends Wicomb’s text for its attempt to address the unrepresentability of certain historical gaps:

Zoë Wicomb’s novel rises, then, to the challenges of storytelling in our postmodernist and postcolonial times. It uses material from a dubiously documented South African past, which it has fashioned into a narrative not seamless and entire to itself (as an earlier, realist tradition would have it) but fractured and fissured, and self-critical, even self-mocking, both of its own postmodernist play and of its occasional desire to be other than this. Astonishingly, despite a dominating wryness, the novel nonetheless satisfies readerly demands for a story; one might even want to say that it “brings history alive”. (217)

The fabrications in Wicomb’s historical narrative not only counter traditional approaches to history and but reflect on a troubled history’s “impossible seam” (Spivak 208) which Gayatri Spivak defines as a “radical series of discontinuous interruptions” (208). In her renarration of Griqua history Wicomb reveals the imbalances, “the ready-made absences”

¹⁶⁰ Derek Attridge argues in “Zoë Wicomb’s Home Truths” (2005) that due to Wicomb’s personal connection to Griqua genealogy “the novel acknowledges, both in its content and the very fact of its emergence from Wicomb’s pen, the compulsion to seek for a historical and genealogical grounding for one’s sense of identity, even as it offers a telling critique of such enterprises” (159).

(*David's Story* 2) and uneven processes of representation which are part of the dynamic makings of history. In this sense, *David's Story* stands in stark contrast to the aesthetics of *The Secret River* as Grenville writes a historical novel in the realist tradition to redress issues of nation and narration.

Wicomb leaves the reader to engage with a self-reflexive historiography and to encounter a narrative that actively reconstitutes the past in the present. Michael Green writes that “the past only comes alive in the relation to the present when it is constructed as resistant to the present; only when this is achieved can the present and the past be aligned in such a way as to reveal whatever community of interests they may share” (137). Green’s notion of a challenging past suggests the way in which Wicomb employs the protagonist David Dirkse and his amanuensis to bring into play the unreconciled stories of Saartje Baartman and Dulcie Olifant that disturb and disrupt the linearity of the present. Judging by his following account of the contemporary novel, J.M. Coetzee would agree that Wicomb employs her novel to self-mockingly comment on the mythic quality of South African history making. In his terms one can view *David's Story* as

a novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history. [...] [A] novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths [...] perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history – in other words, demythologizing history. (“Novel Today” 3)

Through David’s engagement with several histories the reader witnesses the complexity involved in retelling a difficult past that recursively affects the present, resisting a totalizing and one-sided historical account. Wicomb consciously reinvents history by including unrelenting silences and gaps, to suggest the incompleteness of the nation’s storytelling, and recognise alternative narratives concerning women’s stories that make up new myths and ‘truths’. Wicomb’s use of fragmentation and disorder works against a linear chronology. By addressing apartheid’s blind spots, *David's Story* “foregrounds the postmodernist position that narrative is a constructed artifice, [...] that histories are arbitrary” (Barris “Silence” 31). In *The Secret River*, Grenville writes of her compulsion “to make sense of things. The desire to find a pattern could overwhelm the reality that there might not be one” (*Searching* 38). Both authors write within the genre of the

historical novel to inscribe alternative truths of their nations' pasts, yet they approach the task of representing trauma very differently. Wicomb's postmodern narrative mimics the discontinuous temporalities of memory that are antithetical to the linearity of historical time, whereas Grenville retains a chronological 'pattern'.

Representing Trauma: David Dirkse and Women's Stories

Before I turn to an in-depth analysis of *David's Story* to clarify the ways in which the author constructs a multi-layered narrative that brings the past of victimized women into the present I will briefly reflect on Wicomb's interweaving of trauma into accounts of history to suggest their untranslatability and incoherence. In *The Secret River*, Grenville incorporates what she refers to as a "hollow. [...] [A] space of difference that would be more eloquent than any words [she] might invent to explain" (*Searching* 199) the trauma of dispossession and violent death of the Darug people. The presence of past traumata is noted through silences and gaps inscribed on the landscape, and sustained between individuals, and placed at the margins of historical accounts. Similarly, Wicomb addresses the highly controversial politics of representation of Saartje Baartman and the silencing of the anti-apartheid guerrilla fighter Dulcie Olifant. The South African author goes even further than Grenville to suggest the ultimate impossibility of representing traumatic events. Wicomb highlights the "predicaments and the limits latent in the process of retrieval" (Kang 35), whereby some histories simply remain effaced and suppressed. The traumatic kernel within Wicomb's literary narrative reveals a story of "puzzling distortions" (*DS* 92) that is beyond linguistic recognition and closure. David's story, according to Wicomb, is an "inchoate story [...] [that] can't be told" (qtd. in Willemse 144). In contrast, given that Grenville's aim was "to tell the unvarnished story as truthfully as [...] [she] could" (146),¹⁶¹ her realist narrative remains partially intact, despite the inclusion of the massacre that challenges ways of representing trauma in narrative, both fictional and historical.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ This can be viewed as a problematic statement by Grenville as the massacre of the Darug has been imagined and fictionally constructed through archival research of other known massacres.

¹⁶² The open-endedness due to the inclusion of trauma in *The Secret River* suggests a break with the traditional realist narrative.

When dealing with David Dirkse's accounts of the past, this analysis will focus on the traumatic gaps and ruptures in storytelling whereby trauma is interwoven into the narrative fabric of David's story. In different plot lines Wicomb explores two distinct periods. The narrative present is set in the more recent past in Cape Town, following the release of Nelson Mandela in 1991. Amidst a transitory period marked by political turmoil David Dirkse, a guerrilla fighter serving the armed wing of the African National Congress,¹⁶³ attempts to narrate to an amanuensis the last decade of his life, which also leads him to become – for reasons which will be dealt with in the course of the following analysis – invested in exploring and discovering his coloured Griqua heritage. As a Griqua, David finds himself on insecure and volatile grounds “where things are in a state of transition” (*DS* 79) during a political interregnum which has not yet dissolved the old regime, nor has the African National Congress (ANC) been able to establish democracy in South Africa. While his search for a fitting modality of belonging is placed at “the edge of a new era” (*DS* 184), his self is in transition and requires refashioning. Thus, David feels he must go to Kokstad, embark on a genealogical search to investigate his Griqua roots, and forge an identity for himself in the nation's troubled times of transition. In the following analysis I will briefly consider David's quest into Griqua history to contextualize David's escape from the truth concerning Dulcie Olifant's trauma of sexual torture and rape. There is an interesting association here. As in *The Secret River* the idea of a quest for origins and truth is important. Grenville performs this in the paratexts she places around *The Secret River* rather than making it part of the novel itself. David's story of Griqua history uses the history of the Griqua as a decoy to cover over the truth of Dulcie's history. In turn, this narrative disjuncture suggests how Wicomb points to the colonial erasure of traces of its own violence.

During the transitory period, before the nation would emerge as the ‘new South Africa’, David feels that he has lost his only valid identity as the movement's liberation fighter. Thus, in a process of retrieval he embarks on a quest to claim his original Griqua roots. He is adamant about upholding a national identity that negates the negatively stereotyped

¹⁶³ In 1991 Nelson Mandela was released from Robben Island and F.W. de Klerk established a four year transitional period in South Africa. David Dirkse has been part of the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) movement that trained their resistance fighters carrying out undercover work against the apartheid system. The transition from 1991 up to first held democratic elections in 1994 is known as one of the bloodiest periods in twentieth century South Africa. The nation verged on anarchy amidst shifting allegiances and loyalties as the CODESA, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa began the process to establish an interim constitution that would ultimately contribute to the setting up of the first nonracial elections.

definitions of the Griqua as a “drunk, lawless, uncivilised” (*DS* 22) and miscegenetic race.¹⁶⁴ Michele Ruiters argues that during the official dismantling of apartheid coloured groups began to reconstruct themselves

particularly in opposition to their apartheid-era incarnations, presenting themselves [,] [...] redefining their identities on their own terms, both in relation to an emerging national identity and in relation to other identities within the South African context. (105)

Likewise, David feels the need to reach back into history in order to discover a sense of belonging and to connect his coloured identity to an authentically African identity. His wife Sally, also of Griqua descent, discourages him from thinking that he might find answers for his identity crisis, and believes that there is nothing to be gained by digging into a forgotten Griqua past:

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. [...] [W]hy burden ourselves with the dreary stuff of roots and tradition? [...] It's rubbish David. There's nothing to reclaim. We are what we are, a mixture of this and that [...] It's ridiculous going around looking for Griqua history and traditions when you know that they're just ordinary coloured people like everyone else, just ordinary gullible people who fell for the nonsense of that madman Le Fleur. (*DS* 27-28)

Yet, not wanting to be thrown into the same category as the coloureds, David looks back to his fictionalized ancestor, the Griqua chief Abraham Stockenstrom le Fleur (referred to in the novel as Le Fleur), who sought to establish the Griqua identity as one of the purest

¹⁶⁴ Insecure and perplexed about his ancestral lineage David speaks for all the Griqua arguing that “[w]e don’t know what we are; the point is that in a place where everything gets distorted, no one knows who he is” (*DS* 29). Due to his looks, especially the colour of his green eyes, David is bound to seek an earlier kind of belonging:

[T]urning an eye inward he finds a gash, a festering wound that surprised him, precisely because it is the running inward that reveals a problem on the surface, something that had stared him in the eye all his life: his very own eyes are a green of sorts – hazel, slate-quarry, parkside, foliage, soft-fern, whatever the colour charts may choose to call it, but greenish for God’s sake – and that, to his surprise he finds distasteful, if not horrible. (*DS* 12)

His green eyes, which he considers to be somewhat of an injury, marginalize him as an outsider carrying the social stigma of colouredness in South Africa.

and first peoples of southern Africa. Le Fleur advocated the purity of Griquaness at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century, claiming their right to legal land ownership: “Griqualand for the Griquas and the Natives. This is our land. We will wipe out the stain of colouredness and gather together under the Griqua flag those who have been given a dishonourable name” (42). Gagliano argues that David fails to find a national hero in Le Fleur; he is not an “honourable precursor in an African liberation struggle, [but] a vain poseur, eventually even a collaborator with the white Afrikaner father of apartheid General Louis Botha” (817).

David’s journey into Griqua history is less an attempt at unearthing the details concerning his cultural roots than an opportunity to purge a more recent and disturbing past that centres around a traumatic story. Thus, the Griqua history is a diversion from the telling of Dulcie Olifant’s tale. His amanuensis, responsible for writing the story of his life, figures that all the Griqua business is “a digression from the real subject of his narrative” (*DS* 34). Only through bits and fragments does David disclose these troubling memories, which through the intrusion of traumatic flashbacks, bring him back to “disconnected images, snippets of Dulcie” (80) and his time of being tortured at the Quatro detention camp.¹⁶⁵ Little is known of Dulcie apart from the fact that, as a MK commander, she used to be in the same movement as David; she was also tortured at the Quatro camp. The details of her character are blurred and fragmented. The amanuensis, who thinks of Dulcie as a mystery that needs to be reconstructed, attempts to put together some facts regarding David’s unsettling “exercise in avoidance” (*DS* 33):

Dulcie is surrounded by a mystique that I am determined to crush with facts: age, occupation, marital status, what she wears, where she was born and raised – necessary details from which to patch together a character who can be inserted at

¹⁶⁵ The Quatro detention camp near Quibaxe in northern Angola was run by the ANC during the 1970s and 1980s. Here, the ANC detained the dissidents within its own ranks. Dorothy Driver argues that Quatro camp was established due to the fact that

there had been growing tension among guerillas about the increasing lack of democracy in the ANC. South African guerillas deployed in Angola wanted to fight in South Africa, against their real enemy, rather than against UNITA, the Angolan rebel army supported by the South African state. But in an atmosphere of paranoia – exacerbated by the unmasking in 1981 of a spy in the ANC high command – even those who simply wished to discuss general camp problems were often detained on suspicion of espionage. (Afterword 236)

David was held at the Quatro camp in 1984 due to his involvement in a mutiny which challenged the absence of democracy in the ANC.

suitable points into the story. But David cannot and will not answer such questions.
(78)

David's inability to answer questions surrounding Dulcie's mystery lies in the untranslatability of trauma. In an interview Wicomb adds that Dulcie "is in a sense the necessary silence in the text; she can't be fleshed out precisely because of her shameful treatment which those committed to the Movement would rather not talk about" (qtd. in Meyer and Olver 190-92). Since David argues that

I don't see the need to flesh her out with detail, especially the kind invented by you. You see, she's not like anyone else; one could never for instance, say that she's young or old or middle-aged. I think of her more as a kind of [...] scream somehow echoing my story. (*DS* 134).

The representation of Dulcie as an indescribable metaphorical scream throughout David's narrative becomes characteristic of her elusiveness and David's inability to articulate and connect the words and images that would define the 'truth' surrounding her traumatic experience.

The 'Truth' About Saartje Baartman and Dulcie

This analysis of the exclusion of Griqua women throughout South Africa's history will concentrate on two emblematic characters within the narrative of *David's Story*: Saartje Baartman, and Dulcie Olifant. I will first explore the figure of Saartje Baartman, placing her within the context of the impossibility of representing excluded women's stories and the limits in retrieving the stories of Dulcie Olifant and other women who have been historically reduced to silence. Although not a Griqua, but an enslaved Khoi woman brought to Cape Town and then Europe to be displayed as an exotic and outlandish spectacle, Baartman is at the foundation of David's story, suggesting the loss of women's subjectivity on their own account. When speaking to his amanuensis David argues that his story must start with and include the historical figure of Baartman, "the Hottentot Venus placed on display in Europe. One cannot write nowadays, he said, without a little monograph on Baartman; it would be like excluding history itself" (*DS* 1). Placed at the

beginning of *David's Story*, Baartman's name evokes the tragic story of a young Khoi woman, who was first orphaned by a Boer commando in the late eighteenth century only to turn into the colonizers' slave. Then, on account of her presumed corporeal particularity,¹⁶⁶ Baartman was exhibited as the "Hottentot Venus" in London and Paris during the height of colonialism. She became what Gillian Whitlock refers to as

an object of imperial curiosity in Georgian London; an erotic wonder signaling all that was strange, alien, sexually deviant and excessive; an explicit spectacle of flesh and touch; an individual frozen beyond history and time as the authentic tribal subject to the ethnographic eye; and the Indigenous missing link in the natural history of humankind. (*Postcolonialism* n.pag.)

After her death her bodily remains were entrusted to the French scientist Georges Cuvier for scientific examination. Fascinated by Baartman's anatomy, Cuvier generated a plaster cast of her body and had her brain and genitalia displayed at the Musée de l'Homme.¹⁶⁷ Wicomb points out that

[t]he Baartman case [...] neatly exemplifies [...] the inscription of power in scopic relations; the construction of woman as racialised and sexualised other; the colonisation and violation of the body; the role of scientific discourse in bolstering both the modernist and colonial projects. ("Shame and Identity" 93)

Her history tells not only of an individual's tragic fate, but also implies a plethora of stories of slavery and dehumanization following colonial dispossession and violence throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁶⁸ However, many of these

¹⁶⁶ Baartman was viewed as an African spectacle due to her accumulation of fat in the buttocks, termed 'steatogypia' and her elongation of the genital labia ("Hottentot apron").

¹⁶⁷ Saartje Baartman's remains were returned to the homeland in 2002. Responding to her repatriation the South African Minister of Art, Ben Ngubane, gave the following account of this emblematic figure:

Sara Baartman's life and death epitomizes the wrongs of the particular colonialism that our part of the globe was subjected to. Identified as an object of curiosity by an English surgeon, Sara was lured to Europe, there to be paraded as a supposed freak and used as an object of sexual pleasure. She died impoverished in Paris at the beginning of the century that saw the emergence of the eugenics movement, that spewed forth theories of race and superiority, and in which the genesis of Nazi ideology and our own apartheid system was laid. ("Parliamentary Briefing")

¹⁶⁸ When considering the different contexts in which Baartman as the Hottentot Venus has been textualized Louise Bethlehem argues that

accounts have been suppressed. Due to the fact that there has been “no legitimate evidence of Baartman’s voice” (Gordon-Chipembere qtd. in Altnöder 61) her subjectivity has been lost and buried within a culture of science and spectacle that fed on the entertainment via exotic curiosities.¹⁶⁹ Pumla Dineo Gqola argues that

although volumes have been written about her, very little is recoverable from these records about her subjectivity. This is because for most of those who have written about her over the centuries, she has been the body used to illustrate some other academic point that has little to do with her personhood. (“Epicentres” 47)

Although David mentions Baartman’s name only a few times in the novel¹⁷⁰ □ once in the beginning and then when speaking of his own history making and the reason for the inclusion of Baartman within his story – the figure retains symbolic significance for the occlusion of colonized women’s voices. When asked by the amanuensis “what on earth has Baartman to do with your history?”, he argues that there is “[n]othing wrong with including a historical figure. [...] She may not even have been a Griqua [...] Baartman belongs to all of us” (*DS* 135). In David’s story Saartje Baartman becomes the essential absent presence: emblematic of women’s struggle to find a voice within the era of colonization and unavoidable when speaking of southern Africa’s national history. Zoë Strother argues that Baartman has not only become a “symbol of imperialist exploitation for many South Africans [...] [but] a late twentieth-century icon for the violence done to women of African descent” (33). In this sense, her subaltern figure acts as a precursor to the other women’s characters in Wicomb’s text and signifies a traumatic history of enslavement that is not over.

First of all, it is the elusiveness of this iconic figure within the narrative that represents Baartman as a powerful silence that cannot be contained. When commenting on African’s

Baartman has repeatedly come to be positioned in contemporary scholarship as the exemplary victim of European racism in of it most patriarchal guises. Once a cultural cliché, the female Hottentot body, this particular Hottentot body, fuels textualities and visual imaginaries as seemingly unrelated as early nineteenth-century vaudeville, late twentieth-century feminist scholarship, documentary film, visual, installation and performance art, and cyberpunk. (55)

¹⁶⁹ See Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Christine Blondel’s *Science and Spectacle in the European Enlightenment* (2008).

¹⁷⁰ See Page 1, 134 and 135 in *David’s Story*.

women's subjectivities and their silences, Nthabiseng Motsemme argues that "the mute always speak" ("Silences" 1): "[T]hose who are oppressed often generate new meanings for themselves around silences" ("Meaning" 5). Wicomb creates a silence around Baartman which speaks volumes. It moves beyond the mythologizing of Baartman's persona as construed in conventional hegemonic narratives. When commenting on women's bodies Anne McClintock has observed that in nationalist discourse, "women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of the national tradition (inert, backward-looking, and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity" (263). Yet the description of Saartje Baartman in *David's Story* resists the placement of her body within a continuous historical account. Through David's narrative Wicomb positions Baartman in a fragmented history with "many beginnings [...] miscalculating more than a hundred years, which no doubt is due to the confusing system of naming centuries" (*DS* 1). Baartman moves freely and unfixed across a history which is essentially not over, endlessly being redeployed within an unpredictable narrative. Viewed as an "individual frozen beyond time" (Whitlock *Postcolonialism* n.pag.) and space during colonization Baartman is depicted as 'unfrozen' in Wicomb's narrative. By revisioning Baartman's story of representation, Wicomb calls history into question, implying that Baartman's history remains incomplete; a narrative with no origin or finality, where "writing history requires that the imagination perform differently, chaotically, in a manner that messes up centuries" (Gqola "Epicentres" 52). Moreover, the figure's "physical absence from the text" ("Epicentres" 57) echoes throughout David's story and bears witness to the impossibility of unearthing the 'truth' concerning Saartje Baartman. Wicomb's scheme is to thereby suggest the remembering of disremembered and dismembered women's bodies in colonial history, tracing the origin of their silencing and their unregistered resistances which are ongoing and unfinished.¹⁷¹

In this respect, Gqola argues that

¹⁷¹ After being on display at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris for almost 200 years Saartje Baartman's skeletal remains were repatriated and given a state burial in the town of Hankey, Eastern Cape in 2002 where Baartman was born in 1789. Her grave site has been declared a national monument and a as a "reminder of the injustices black South Africans have endured over the past three and a half centuries" (Crais and Scully 3). Connie Rapoo argues that Baartman's remains "symbolically articulate the legacy of the violent sacrifice of Africa through colonisation and slavery" (145). She further underscores the importance of the repatriation act as it gives back power and agency to South Africa's people within a postcolonial context: "That South Africa recently constituted its anti-apartheid statehood makes the reburial a significant act of postcolonial identification. [...] The acts of removing her body from display, venerating her properly, interring her body 'on African soil', and appeasing her spirit express African agency and determination" (Rapoo 145). Further references to Baartman's repatriation will be made in the text proper.

[t]here can be no disclosure which brings us closer to her and this acknowledgment is a crucial precursor to any project which does not re-objectify her and continue to erase her subjectivity and the agency whose demonstrations are lost to us. Writing on her which does not recast her as a ‘freak’, reading her in ways that parade her as the ultimate icon of alterity, can only draw attention to the reality that we know nothing about her. Yet her [absent] presences continue to haunt us in Wicomb’s text. (“Epicentres” 59)

The act of haunting suggests Baartman’s intrusive and elusive spectrality that affects the telling of David’s story. Baartman moves freely throughout history as a fluid entity. Wicomb unhitches her from the constraints of the conservative hold of history. Thereby, within the narrative’s discourse level, Baartman is made to float in timeless, delineated space, bleeding from one century to the other.¹⁷² Due to the fact that little is known about her subjectivity, Baartman becomes part of the fundamental unspeakability of South Africa’s history. Her story refers to the trauma of muteness and wordlessness that cannot be expressed, yet the essentially wordless memory of her suffering is transferred into other women’s stories. Ultimately, Baartman’s story of being a slave and/or freakish spectacle to the Empire holds a collective traumatic memory of other censored and oppressed women throughout history. Gqola implies that “Wicomb’s text points to the activity of alternate storying and suggests the pervasiveness of sublimated histories of struggle which reside in spaces that do not easily give up meaning” (58). Wicomb positions the readers to view the failure of representation of Baartman due to dispossession, dehumanization, and effacement of her body as a significant cultural marker: the enveloping originary trauma of the South African imaginary affecting later generations of African women. Saartje Baartman is chosen as the affective precursor to the suffering and silencing of women across different generations to suggest the ongoing effects of slavery and colonization. Moreover, the repercussions of the originary trauma do not fall silent, but haunt and bleed beyond the closure of the nation’s imperial imaginary, indelibly shaping South Africa by writing the nation’s traumatic history into contemporary cultural memory. The process of the impossibility of representing the story

¹⁷² The word ‘bleed’ is used in the sense Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* refers to it, namely to suggest how certain panel images may “hemorrhage [...] and escape [...] into timeless space” (103) continuing to affect the narrative beyond its consigned space. In this respect, I argue that Saartje Baartman’s and her tale of slavery and suffering cannot be constrained to one event in history, but as put forward by Wicomb it moves freely and bleeds beyond history affecting other generations of women.

of Baartman becomes part of South Africa's traumatic history, extending beyond the individual to reverberate and shape the lives of others, especially those of African women in the form of a traumatic memory.

The telling of the traumatic events of women's stories lies precisely in Wicomb's conscious elision of Saartje Baartman's tale of suffering and later on Dulcie Olifant's story of traumatic experience. She makes visible the constant erasure and the impossibility of claiming the knowledge of the original traumatic event. The narrative can never be complete in *David's Story*, whereas – as André Brink would argue – “this one must be eventually constructed around its own blind spots and silences” (“Stories” 37). Wicomb addresses that thing of absence which cannot be described or uttered by theorising what Yee Kang refers to as the “predicament and the limits latent in the process of retrieval” (35). The elliptical structure of the narrative bears witness to the unspeakability of David's story, where stories of violence against women remain hidden within South Africa's national history. Shane Graham argues that in the case of Dulcie “one of the central concerns of *David's Story* is the impossibility of telling stories about apartheid's bloody past and the superficiality of linear telling as a mode of conveying psychological damage” (“Space-Time” 130). Whereas Grenville explicitly describes the traumatic event of the massacre as the originary trauma of the colonized from the focalized point of view of William Thornhill, implying that it affects later generations of Indigenous peoples and the colonizers, Wicomb does not disclose the traumatic memory that carries the truth concerning Baartman and/or Dulcie. In this sense, the postcolonial history novel may offer an array of alternative imaginings of real historical circumstances. It also proves to be flexible to the authors' dealings with traumatic experiences. Both authors convey experiences that may have been forgotten by historical scholarship. Through the genre of the historical novel they write their countries' traumatic histories into contemporary history. Grenville writes out of a “*necessity* [sic] of (re)presenting that secret” (McGonegal “Canadian” 73) conveying trauma through a depiction of graphic images, haunted landscapes and characters, and wounded bodies. Wicomb, however, revisits history to write of the impossibility of conveying a traumatic experience. The postcolonial historical novel allows for these permutations, claiming a space that integrates the trauma of the marginal and dispossessed and contributes to the many ‘truths’ within nation and narration.

The troubling memory of Baartman is described as “promiscuous” in *David’s Story*. Thus, the memory of a woman’s dispossession and the suppression of her subjectivity becomes loose, turns into a “promiscuous memory, spiralling into the past, [to] mate [...] with new disclosures to produce further moments of terrible surprise” (*DS* 194-95). The emblematic and disturbing memory points to an imperfect erasure of Baartman’s story. When commenting on the harmful memories in *David’s Story*, Stéphane Robolin argues for their importance to dismantle colonial regimes of rule as they are

[n]either unified nor fixed, memories appear to play mischievously. [...] [Therefore,] these memories are violently suppressed (epistemologically or physically) by the powerful, who aspire to remain sovereign over the political (and therefore discursive) field. [...] Their [(promiscuous memories)] presence and consequent actions disrupt the established, normalized order. (“Remapping” 201)

The insidious memory of Baartman’s traumatic experience lingers on to disrupt the normalized order of David’s narrative. It defies his linear account of history by calling into question the unequal process of women’s representation under colonialism and – in the case of Dulcie Olifant – also apartheid. Moreover, this memory reverberates in David’s telling of another women’s story, namely that of Dulcie. When attempting to speak of her, David must go back to the figure of Baartman:

Because of his inability to speak of her, he has promised to make notes on Dulcie. [...] What is clear from the sheaf of paper he hands over to me is that having tried and failed, he chose to displace her by working on the historical figure of Saartje Baartman instead. (*DS* 134)

Shane Graham argues that Baartman’s story has crystallized into an “ur-text [...] of a sort for the situation of the women in David’s life [...] whose later incarnations include Dulcie, the narrator, and David’s wife Sally (called ‘Saartje’ as a child)” (“Space-Time” 130). Clearly, this emblematic historical female character cannot be avoided when telling the story of another’s trauma. Ken Barris notes that through Baartman “a continuing history of abuse of black women is [...] represented” (“Silence” 34). The traumatic kernel that speaks of Baartman’s silencing and resonates across generations of African women is symbolized by Dulcie’s festering wound. Dulcie, whose story of unacknowledged pain

and suffering stays buried within the story level of David's tale, remains at the core of David's personal coming to terms with the past.

The troubling story of Dulcie Olifant cannot be told within David's story, yet her emblematic figure – comparable to that of Baartman – speaks of the disremembering of women's bodies that are bound to haunt the history of South Africa's nation, particularly that of apartheid. Dorothy Driver suggests that

Dulcie is a figure for the refusing subject. [She] is portrayed as both a real-life fictional figure and a narrative projection who gathers into herself the history of women's subordination under colonialism, apartheid, and the anti-apartheid struggle. ("Sign" 532)

Wicomb intentionally seems to link Baartman and Dulcie in order to suggest the predicaments involved in the process of retrieving a troubled women's history that cannot be told. It is no mere coincidence that Wicomb has chosen to name her elusive character Dulcie Olifant as both the first and last name are charged with historical and symbolic significance. In the context of apartheid – where Wicomb has placed Dulcie – the mysterious character's first name brings to mind the prominent, but tragic figure of Dulcie September. September, who had been one of the foremost anti-apartheid activists in South Africa during the sixties and seventies, was assassinated outside the ANC office in Paris in 1988. Due to the fact that "nobody has ever been charged with her murder" (Gqola "Epicentres" 59), Dulcie September's death and the facts concerning the accountable perpetrators remain unknown and thus beyond the recognised knowledge of South Africa's national history. In this respect, Gqola argues that "Wicomb's text charts a pattern of Blackwomen's [sic] presences which has been inarticulable in the conventional hegemonic languages of white supremacy or African nationalism" (59). In *David's Story*, Dulcie's complete tale, a narrative crucial to fully comprehending how her body was traumatized during her stay at the Quatro camp, remains unspoken and beyond David's storyline. Within the nation's history, her story is buried and cannot be unearthed. Yet, as her last name suggests – Olifant, archaic spelling of elephant – Dulcie is the elephant in the room that David cannot bear to deal with. Although Wicomb is a very subtle author and this may well be unintentional, one may still suggest that in this respect her story becomes the obvious truth that is being ignored and remains unaddressed as South Africa

gradually moves from a transitory state into the new post-apartheid South Africa where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was starting to unravel some of the truths concerning the buried violence of apartheid. Yet, some truths could simply not be unearthed. In this case, Wicomb might refer in *David's Story* to a telling comment made by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his foreword to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, which Shane Graham contextualizes in his analysis of *David's Story*:

Desmond Tutu, Chairperson of the Commission, refers to the past as a “jigsaw puzzle” of which the TRC is only a piece, and alludes to a search “for the clues that lead, especially, to a truth that will, in the very nature of things, never be fully revealed”. (Tutu qtd. in “Truth Commission” 11)

Wicomb addresses David's inability to speak of the truth concerning Dulcie and thereby positions Dulcie's story within a plethora of accounts that cannot be told, or as Archbishop Tutu puts it, “never be fully revealed” (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission* “Chairperson” 4). In *David's Story*, the amanuensis justly acknowledges that David cannot write or speak of the truth surrounding Dulcie:

Truth, I gather, is the word that cannot be written. He has changed it into the palindrome of Cape Flats speech – TRURT, TRURT, TRURT – the words speed across the page [...] trurt, oh trurt, of the trurt, [...] TRURT ... TRURT ... [...] the trurt in black and white ... colouring of the truth to say that ... which cannot be said the thing of no name ... towhisperspeakshouthollercolour [sic]. (*DS* 136)

The word “truth” is misrepresented by a similarly sounding phrase to obliterate its original meaning. Thus, the truth surrounding Dulcie – an emotionally charged subject matter avoided for its unsettling content – is circumvented by David and lingers within the incomprehensibility of words and meanings. Dulcie's tale of trauma “lacks the appropriate syntax [...] and affective mode of expression that would constitute a true narrative” (Obourn 223). Moreover, language – inadequate and unreliable – is ruptured and fails to represent a fully disclosed story concerning Dulcie. The truth seems to lie in the inaccessibility of language and the impossibility of getting to the truth of Dulcie's traumatic event. David, who believes that Dulcie's experienced trauma will ever “stare [...] him in the face, the truth he cannot bear” (*DS* 116), equates her tale with “the horror”

(114).¹⁷³ Thus, the truth concerning Dulcie can also be viewed as an appalling tale that cannot be told due to its ghastly effect on David. Yet, what is so unsettling about the story of Dulcie that this elephant in South Africa's new national space must be ignored and tabooed?

Dulcie's story of rape and torture takes place within the ranks of the ANC liberation movement, ultimately defying the heroic and unblemished accounts of apartheid's defeat. Due to the fact that murder and torture of black soldiers were part of the controversial ANC Quatro camp tactics to snuff out any potential uprising among the party's structures, the story of the rape and possible murder of Dulcie Olifant cannot be told as it troubles the purportedly flawless record of the ANC's liberation struggle. In this respect, Derek Attridge argues that by describing such unsettling

events *within* the liberation movement, Wicomb has chosen to place [these] at the centre of the novel – albeit a shadowy centre – a part of South Africa's recent history that many who, quite rightly, wish to celebrate the achievements of the ANC would prefer to leave unexamined: the treatment of individuals and groups who did not conform to the requirements laid down by the Movement. She is interested, in particular, in the position of women and of coloureds, and in the treatment of dissidents, in Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC. ("Truths" 161)

Dulcie stands as the representative figure in the "shadowy centre" of *David's Story* to rightfully contest the official erasure and the new nation's failure to recognise the great physical and psychological burden placed on coloured women within the Movement. To place the untold and ineffable story of Dulcie's rape and torture into the centre of the novel suggests Wicomb's attempt to rival official accounts of history – to use Coetzee's expression, in order to "demythologize" ("Novel Today" 3) history's hegemonic and one-sided quality. The author's alternative account accuses the ANC's covert tactics which aimed to erase 'problematic' stories prior to the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. As a matter of fact, abuses and torture, especially

¹⁷³ In this sense, Wicomb may well be using an intertextual reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to suggest that the truth and horror concerning the colonial exploitation of Africa is linked to the exploitation of Dulcie's body within the Movement. Thereby a link can be established between Baartman and Dulcie whose horrific truth lies beyond language and recognition. The interlinking of their bodies within a traumatic history of women will be dealt with when referring to both Baartman's and Dulcie's bodies in history.

“sexual abuse did, indeed, remain largely unspoken within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC’s) public hearings, which aimed to produce national unity during the political transition” (Samuelson “Disfigured” 844). Moreover, this alleged ignorance towards problematic and shameful accounts within ANC ranks has given rise to much controversy in 1998 in South Africa as it mirrored the shunned methods of pro-apartheid proponents. Stéphane Robolin reports that

[p]reviously pro-apartheid figures predictably sought to remove traces of their actions from the report. But in a peculiar reversal, the leadership of the now-ruling ANC and its powerful head, President Thabo Mbeki – fearing irreparable damage to the credibility of the blossoming government – moved to strike from the public record the disturbing details of the ANC camps. This suppressive gesture [...] conjured up the censorship of the former regime. (“Loose Memory” 313)

In both *The Secret River* and *David’s Story* official recordings of history omit certain stories of violence. By obliterating those parts of history that would damage the reputation of white settlers, Grenville implies that the past actions of aggression and violence – although erased from the records – still live on in the present, bearing witness to an unfinished business of the past. Consequently, stories of violence are active in Australia’s nation-building process, suggesting that white settlers are implicated through the covert wrongdoings of their ancestors. Wicomb also suggests that the unaddressed silences buried inside the Quatro camp, especially the silenced trauma of coloured women, are part of South Africa’s nation and narration. The censorship of these stories implies that there are also some proponents of the ANC who need to own their part as perpetrators of violence within their own ranks. Thereby, in *David’s Story*, Wicomb questions the “Commission [who] sought to celebrate a heroic and selfless past that gave birth to the new South Africa” (Motsemme “Mute” 911). Rita Barnard views *David’s Story* as a bold feat, since Wicomb overtly “addresse[s] the shameful lacunae of the resistance struggle” (“Rewriting” 657). How can an allegedly noble and selfless past be celebrated by leaving out the voices of the silenced victims of the ANC? How can the past act as a redeeming force if coloured women’s stories of rape and torture are not being

told within the context of creating South Africa's rainbow nation?¹⁷⁴ By writing about the impossibility of giving voice to Dulcie's traumatic story Wicomb points to the unfinished business of South Africa's collective history. Meg Samuelson argues that "[i]n [a] national context dominated by the ritualistic act of 'giving voice', *David's Story* explores the limitations of discourse in articulating topics such as sexual violence" ("Writing Women" 772). Ultimately, Wicomb implies that Dulcie's untold trauma – the unbearable event of torture and rape – is part of the production of the emerging South African nation. If we view *David's Story* as an alternative historical account vital to South Africa's history, then Dulcie's trauma becomes the void – a story of untold suffering – within the national narrative.¹⁷⁵

Dulcie's story of rape and torture is the central event in *David's Story*. It holds the untold truth of Dulcie's trauma. Dulcie as the discursive "black hole of trauma" (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 3) – the presence of an absence – remains unintelligible, untranslatable and unrepresentable in David's story. Ewald Mengel argues that

this untold tale is at the centre of the novel; it is the 'black hole' around which the imagination of David, the first-person narrator and the reader are circling continually. It transpires that it is a story of suffering, torture and guilt, written with the blood of a woman's body. ("Truth and Reconciliation" 311)

Yet, this "black hole" is emblematic of the official and documentary gaps that have been encased within South Africa's collective history. Wicomb's historical novel attempts to unearth the hidden history of the TRC. Thereby, she can "democratize the historical record [and] create an archive for the future and an alternative form of historical documentation" (Minkley and Rassool 91) that entails the trauma of women's silences.

¹⁷⁴ The term "rainbow nation" was coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe the new democratic post-apartheid South Africa that would blossom with all its different ethnicities forming as a national unity secured by universal patriotism. Karen Press argues that

[t]he idea of creating a national culture must be seen as a political need, arising from a desire on the part of the government or the leadership of a liberation movement, to create an independent, unitary nation out of a diverse range of social groups that were previously seen (and saw themselves) as separate political entities. (23)

Wicomb questions the idea of forming a 'new' South Africa without involving all political entities and their unsettling pasts.

¹⁷⁵ This is suggested at the end of the novel with the imagery of the "black eyed Suzies" (*DS* 212) upon which I will comment later on.

Thus, Dulcie, “the necessary silence in the text” (Wicomb qtd. in Meyer and Olver 190) remains the embodiment of the untranslatability of trauma. The amanuensis in *David’s Story* compares Dulcie’s tale to the “black-eyed Suzies” (*DS* 212), whose dark centre diminishes into a void:

Instead of the apparent protrusion of a fleshy cushion of stamens and stigmas, there is only a dark hole, an absence burnt into that bright face, an empty black cone that tapers towards a dark point of invisibility, of nothingness. (212)

Similarly Dulcie’s story contains a lost origin which bears no fleshed out narrative that can be put into a story. Thereby the truth about Dulcie remains partly erased and hidden, buried out of sight. Mengel suggests that the truth can only be told through “indirection, approximation, circumlocution or substitution” (“Truth and Reconciliation” 313) resulting in David’s circuitous narrative involuntarily and mechanically inserting disconnected images of Dulcie. Yet, as Mengel further argues, this is the only way of telling the truth in *David’s Story*: “[T]he truth can only be told by simultaneously reflecting on the difficulty of coming to terms with it [,] [...] to express the inexpressible, to speak about the unspeakable” (“Truth and Reconciliation” 313).

In this sense, the whole truth of her cannot be ascertained. Her story is an ever-present haunting aspect in David’s life. He wishes to contain and encapsulate her tale of untold suffering, yet

Dulcie and the events surrounding her cannot be cast as a story. [...] There is no progression in time, no beginning and no end. Only a middle that is infinitely repeated, that remains in an eternal, inescapable present. This is why David wants her simply outlined, wants her traced into his story as a recurring imprint in order to outwit her fixedness in time. (*DS* 150)

Trauma, an event which is characterized by its inaccessibility and unavailability inside the victim’s mind, remains beyond the range of the comprehensible. The victim wrestles with an abstracted past that cannot be understood, as the psychic disruption caused by trauma prevents the traumatic memory of the past being positioned or fixed within a linear cohesion. Danielle Mortimer argues that “[t]he repetitious nature of trauma means

that it is circling the central event, generally without directly touching it [...] [T]rauma loses its centre as there is no longer an origin, to repeat, to circle” (141). Thus, David struggles to restrain the story of Dulcie within a narrative containing a beginning and an end as the traumatic experience of Dulcie “lacks the appropriate syntax, plot, time frame, and affective mode of expression that would constitute a true narrative” (Obourn 223). In this respect, Brink refers to two types of historical novels, one that is “shaped around notions of a beginning, middle, and an end, [where linear] chronology [within] narrative lies at the heart of the very process we call history” (33). However, Wicomb introduces another portrayal of history, in Brink’s words “a radical new view of the very concept of ‘history’” (“Stories” 33). Wicomb’s account of a “new” history portrays her narrative as a jigsaw puzzle that cannot be solved and defies the traditional fixity of an unfractured, unified and sanitized past. The trauma of Dulcie – “a dark hole” (*DS* 212) within the narrative – reconstitutes the fragmentation and silences of historiography. Grenville’s way of re-visioning an imaginary historical narrative in *The Secret River* is also not as radical and innovative in the postmodern sense as Wicomb’s, yet Grenville manages to portray open-endedness in her depiction of traumatic haunting. There is a similarity between the hollow in Grenville’s novel and the description of Wicomb’s dark space. Both authors include an unidentifiable void that represents the unspeakability of trauma and travels beyond the narrative. The ending of *The Secret River* is deferred to suggest the processuality of an imagined traumatic history that carries implications in the present. Both novels, however, defy the fixity of the traditional historical novel: Grenville’s narrative resists closure due to the haunting of trauma; Wicomb makes use of circularity, fracture and elision, to suggest the timelessness and inexpressibility of traumatic memory.

This untranslatable event, which occurred somewhere around David’s time as a liberation fighter in the anti-apartheid movement, repeatedly haunts him as he cannot purge it from his past. David, who might have taken part in the rape and torture sessions as one of the “lover-torturers” (Driver Afterword 240), can only divulge snippets of Dulcie’s trauma.¹⁷⁶ When attempting to narrate some facts concerning Dulcie, David “confesses, even if a

¹⁷⁶ In her extensive afterword to *David’s Story*, Dorothy Driver questions David’s role as Dulcie’s romantic lover, yet suggests that he may indeed have been participating in the torture and possible rape of Dulcie: “To what extent is David himself responsible for Dulcie’s death? Is he one of the men in whose nightly visits Dulcie finds it impossible to retrieve her own will, her own desire and voice?” (240). Pointing to the line where Dulcie “would not have been surprised to see those hands [(David’s)] withdraw dripping with blood” (*DS* 199) Driver implies that David might have tortured her and also used her as a sexual object in “service to the struggle” (Afterword 240).

story were to be figured out by someone, it would be a story that cannot be told, that cannot be translated into words, into language we use for everyday matters” (*DS* 151). There are only a few, disconnected but telling scenes of Dulcie’s rape and torture that are performed by men within the ANC’s ranks. Their violent invasions into Dulcie’s private chambers mirror their physical intrusions, which Dulcie was by then trained to anticipate:

The 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 Securialarm system. She wakes up and with every sense aquiver [...] Bessie, her old dog who barked feebly on their very first visit was summarily shot. [...] Now, they come without a sound [...] So that her sleeping body bolts upright as she waits the long seconds [...] Then she arranges herself on her back with her eyes open, her hands folded behind her head, looking straight ahead at the door. [...] One of them carries a doctor’s Gladstone bag filled with peculiar instruments and electrical leads. (*DS* 81-82)

In this scene Dulcie seems helpless when terrorized by a group of men during their nightly visits in her house. After having managed to violently overcome all erected barriers the perpetrators are determined to physically overpower her and violate her body. The act of rape marks one of the brutal attempts to subjugate and suppress women’s agency within the ANC’s ranks. Dulcie comprehends that “fucking women was a way of preventing them from rising in the Movement” (*DS* 179). It is this “unspoken part of a girl’s training” (112) that has been left unsaid at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The fact that one of them is carrying a doctor’s bag with instruments implies that Dulcie might have been the victim of sexual torture. Ultimately, these are some of the silences that Wicomb draws attention to that “exclude [...] the stories of violence against ANC women by ANC men” (Driver Afterword 239). The hearings, which aimed to unearth all the buried silences of violence, failed to fully address the violence targeted at women. Driver argues that “few women, and no active female combatants, came forward to testify” (Afterword 239). The chair of the Commission for Gender Equality in South Africa and one of the representatives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Joyce Seroke, implied that the hearings “only began to scratch the surface” of the atrocities against women. Yet, there were a number of

“gruesome stories of sexual torture and violence” (qtd. in Farr 28).¹⁷⁷ Thus, Wicomb’s novel deals with the limitations of the TRC hearings to grant women, and especially female liberation fighters, such as Dulcie Olifant a proper space to speak of their recurring stories of sexual torture and rape. Dulcie’s story is emblematic of the hushed-up stories of women’s torture within the ANC’s ranks: “Dulcie is the unwritten, pressing story of our times. Dulcie’s story is a story of what has not yet been said about violence and betrayal, political commitment and love, and representation of truth” (Driver Afterword 232). Problematic for the ANC’s prestige and reputation this story of violence stays “wrapped in secrecy [and] can’t be unwrapped at this stage” (*DS* 79).

Bodies of Trauma

Dulcie’s body is forever inscribed by the torture and terror that has left indelible marks on her back. The scars on her back bear witness to the trauma caused by torture and speak of the untold stories of tortured women in ANC camps:

Her back is strong, broad, almost a square depending on where one considers the back to end. This square is marked with four cent-sized circles forming the corners of a smaller inner insertion of a red-hot poker between the bones. The smell of that singed flesh and bone still, on occasion, invades, and then she cannot summon it away. Each circle is a liverish red crinkled surface of flesh, healed in the darkness under garments that would let go of the blood. (*DS* 19)

The trauma of physical torture has deformed Dulcie’s body. Yet this dismemberment and fragmentation is most clearly portrayed by David towards the end of the novel as he has left drawings of the tortured in one of his notebooks for the amanuensis to observe:

There are the dismembered shapes of a body: an asexual torso, like a dressmaker’s dummy; arms bent the wrong way at the elbows; legs; swollen feet; hands like claws. There is a head, an upside-down smiling head, which admittedly does not

¹⁷⁷ Fiona C. Ross in *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (2002) addresses the facts that surround women’s inability of speaking about certain forms of silence and suffering that some had to bear witness to during apartheid.

resemble her, except for the outline of bushy hair. I have no doubt that it is Dulcie who lies mutilated on the page. (*DS* 205)

These defiled and mutilated images of Dulcie point to the violence of representation when attempting to render the unspoken trauma of the female guerrilla fighter. Driver argues that Dulcie becomes the “unrepresentable body in pain [...] [which bears witness,] absorbs and gives back the threats and promises of a violently oppressive and violently revolutionary past, a past that has not yet quite passed” (Afterword 218).

When comparing the individual experience of Dulcie, her abstraction in history and her ongoing trauma of the past, then it becomes evident that there is a link between the representation of Baartman’s body and that of Dulcie. Both have been omitted from history. Baartman’s body was mutilated and showcased in Europe to serve as spectacle for over a century. However, as I have previously pointed out, she becomes emblematic of an oppressed and censored subjectivity that accounts for the dispossession and dehumanization of sublimated women’s histories (*Gqola Slavery* 80-83). Her body, which carries the original trauma of dispossession, connects to Dulcie’s dis-figurement. In this respect, Shane Graham evokes the idea of “a system of corporal mappings” (“Space-Time” 132) employed by Wicomb to trace the traumata of women throughout Africa’s violent histories. Thereby, the author re-remembers and interlinks the heritage of carnage bodies upon which trauma has been inscribed.¹⁷⁸

Trauma, or more specifically, bodily trauma serves as the linking device between generations of violated women’s bodies that are part of the emerging South African nation. Besides, the bodies become images of the nation. From the anthropological viewpoint Mary Douglas points out that “the human body is always treated as an image of society and [...] there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension” (10). Within the South African context, the post-apartheid nation has been compared to a victimized and wounded body. Tutu spoke of “a

¹⁷⁸ The relatively recent return of Saartje Baartman’s skeletal remains marks a new valence to South Africa’s re-birth. Saartje Baartman’s repatriation becomes an integral part of the reconciliation as her ghost can be finally laid to rest. The restoration of her dignity entails the restoration of dignity of black South African women and men performing “reparations of communal disruption and cultural dissolution” (Rapoo 138). Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee argue that “the body of Saartje Baartman [...] is being used as a vehicle in nationalist claims for land and recognition made by some groupings in the coloured community” (8).

wounded people” when referring to the collective pain of the South African nation. Louise Bethlehem argues that the South African nation has viewed itself as a victimized body due to the fact that the “TRC persistently legitimated itself [laying] claim to a vision of the nation as a physical body” (78). In this sense, the tortured and violated bodies of Saartje Baartman and Dulcie Olifant can be viewed as part of the national historiography of South Africa. They are the suppressed political texts of the national narrative. As embodiments of personal memories of colonial and apartheid trauma they haunt the emergence of an unfolding nation. The return of Baartman’s body to African soil in 2002 has marked the reclaiming of a national icon that has long been anticipated by the people of South Africa, as the repatriation speaks of healing and reconciliation redefining the identity of an emerging nation. Lydie Moudileno argues that Baartman’s return is a reminder of centuries of injustice and the “key to understanding the nation’s present” (206). The repatriation of Baartman’s body performs a work of commemoration – a “recuperation of colonial memory” (Moudileno 202) that recalls the memory of sexual violence and slavery as her body represents “the truth about individuals, relationships, institutions, and structures that dehumanized a black South African woman and created the ‘Hottentot Venus’” (Lewis 102). In this respect, the memorialisation of Baartman’s remains in her place of origin articulates the nation’s entry into a postcolonial phase that aims to reconcile with the wounds of the past.

There is noticeable similarity in the way Grenville and Wicomb represent traumatized bodies. Trauma theory draws attention to some features concerning the unhealed wounds that linger on the body as traumatic memories of a violent history. In this sense, Grenville’s depiction of Jack’s body, which carries the inscribed scars of violence, testifies to a suppressed historical trauma: the scars speak of the untold massacre of an Indigenous people. Both, Grenville and Wicomb – although in their own specific ways¹⁷⁹ – use physically violated characters as testimonials of dispossession, loss, and violence. Within the terms of trauma theory the bodies of Long Jack, Saartje Baartman and Dulcie Olifant all expose a historical violence to contest the erasure of marginalized bodies which were subject to exploitation, brutality and torture. Using the genre of the historical novel the authors introduce bodies as “recording surface[s]” (Deleuze and Guattari 10) to ‘write back’ and open new spaces that speak of the underside of history and counteract

¹⁷⁹ Wicomb employs a very allusive and postmodern representation of women’s traumata.

the forgetting of these bodies within national historiographies. These scarred bodily surfaces not only confront the past to stand witness and rival official history, but as traumatic sites they also remind the perpetrators of their culpability. The female authors have recovered these bodies to position them as evidence to past violence, charging their perpetrators with the infliction of trauma. This indictment becomes essential within literatures dealing with the movements for reconciliation in South Africa and Australia in the recent past. The revisioning of these historical novels promotes the recovery of testimonial bodies and their suppressed memories which are indispensable in the development of reconciling a postcolonial nation such as South Africa and Australia.

David's Story re-vision history to unearth bodies that serve as landscapes of memory. Baartman's and Dulcie's bodies bear witness to losses and disfigurements within South Africa's collective imaginary and internalize the brutality of violence against women. Shane Graham argues that Wicomb's mappings and entanglements of historical traumata are "a project of symbolically and metonymically linking physical bodies [...] with memories of the past" ("Space-Time" 132) to suggest ongoing traumatisation in the violation of women's bodies. Ron Eyerman refers to the impact of past cultural trauma that greatly influences and even burdens the characteristics of some societies.¹⁸⁰ Thus, Baartman's body becomes the critical site of memory bearing the traumatic kernel of dispossession and violence of slavery that links with and is echoed in Dulcie's violated and mutilated body within the context of torture and rape at the ANC's Quatro camp. Both these abused bodies carry the corporal evidence of trauma. As such, their stories are both abstracted screams echoing through David's story. These screams, which bear the truths of physical and emotional pain and loss, have been contextualized within a history of violence perpetrated against women. Yet, by remaining unnoticed and unheard, they haunt David's narrative to attest to unspoken South African histories. Both these characters are described in the amanuensis' words, who has difficulties in controlling the haunting depictions of Dulcie and Baartman within David's story, as "protean subject[s] that slither [...] hither and thither, out of reach, repeating, replacing, transforming [themselves]" (DS 35). Wicomb portrays these female characters as fluctuating,

¹⁸⁰ In *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African-American Identity* (2002) Eyerman explores the cultural event of slavery as the original trauma of African-American Identity. He argues that the traumatic occurrences during slavery up until the late nineteenth century in the United States have formed and deeply inscribed themselves in the present African-American society. Moreover, Eyerman suggests that the event of slavery can be viewed as a continuous event "lived and living [...] inherited and transmitted" (188).

erratically transforming and replacing other females across history. Consequently Baartman's story and Dulcie's history may be transferred to other stories of violence perpetrated against women. They are not made to be read as single fates of women but they mirror and echo other silenced stories across generations of black and coloured women, especially those during the apartheid regime. Due to the fact that there are a myriad of stories of black and coloured women whose traumatic events and voices have remained beyond recognition and representability during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings Wicomb questions the healing process of the emerging and often sentimental evocation of the rainbow nation. If the voices of these violated women remain unheard, then there can be no recognition of the trauma that occurred. Therefore the collective of a society cannot work through these losses to move towards a regenerative process. In this respect, Antonius Robben argues that

[p]eople cannot mourn their losses when others deny that those losses took place. [...] The contest of memory denies conflicting parties sufficient room to work through their traumas, hinders them from gradually standing back from the past and proceeding from testimony to historical interpretation and from re-experience to commemoration. (2)

As pointed out earlier, the TRC hearings denied and/or suppressed violence against women within the ANC liberation movement. Excluding these stories from the archives of history denies the healing process of the South African nation and challenges the emergence of a unitary people. The TRC, which was viewed as the "grand narrative of liberation" (Wicomb "Shame" 94) fails to deliver the promise of freedom and reconciliation for some women. The unaccounted traumata of Baartman and, in particular, Dulcie in *David's Story* refuse to be written and inscribed into the emerging South African nation. The TRC represented "the melding into a peculiarly South African oneness" (Farred 114) by disregarding the problematic stories of internal ANC violence. Fiona C. Ross, who attended several TRC hearings and collected data on women's testimonies, argues that "violence visited upon young women and girls was seldom given focused attention" (62). Thus, within the postcolonial historical novel, Wicomb criticizes the nation-building project by exposing the failure of the grand historiographic narrative of the TRC that excluded and erased women's stories such as Dulcie's in order to conceal some of the "shortcomings of a national discourse of inclusion and unity" (McCann 39).

Conclusion

Using the postcolonial historical novel Grenville and Wicomb point to the official erasures of colonial violence in whitewashed historical discourses. The malleability of the historical novel enables innovative ways of portraying history which involve “a new writing of history, a recuperation of the past in new terms. [...] [T]he recovery of memory necessary for the formation of a truly postcolonial society” (Gallagher “Backward” 385).

Although in very specific ways, both authors problematise the official knowledges of their nations’ historical documentation by admitting alternative and ignored histories. Official reports of history are viewed as unable to include silences and gaps, thereby contributing to Australia’s and South Africa’s national amnesia. Thus, Grenville and Wicomb revisit lapses in history to allow for a narrative space that tells of dispossession, violence, and death.

As mentioned in the analyses of the two novels the authors follow different narrative techniques, yet both imagine history through fiction to expand collective memory and point to the unfinished business of their countries’ historiography. Whereas Grenville exemplifies traumatic events of frontier violence and their haunting legacy beyond the telling of her realist narrative, Wicomb comments on the nation’s failure to translate the silences of the past by focusing on her narrative’s impossibility to provide access to the decipherability of women’s historical traumata. Together *The Secret River* and *David’s Story* call for a democratization of their nations’ historical records in order to demand belated justice by including the complexities, silences, and lost histories of the past. In this respect, the authors trace the problematics involved in national stories of reconciliation that do not encompass a narrative space for disregarded histories.

The analysis also points to differences in the authors’ dealings with alternative histories. *The Secret River* is a more reader-oriented novel directly communicating an imaginary history of Australia’s dark legacy. Grenville’s revisionist history is made to be accessible to a wide range of readers. Her novel fits in well with David Carter’s defining features of a middlebrow writers’ culture: “commitment to realism, empathy, and intimate communication between writer and reader” (“Middlebrow” 194). Wicomb, however, is

more experimental in writing *David's Story*.¹⁸¹ She places her novel firmly within postmodernist and postcolonial times, offering her readers a “fractured and fissured, and self-critical, even self-mocking” (Driver Afterword 217) imaginary history of South Africa’s past. Readers are not given easy access to a troubled past that puts forward only a “provisionality of truth” (219). Dorothy Driver argues that *David's Story* presents its truth and meaning “so elliptically and with such rich ambiguity that any critical response to the novel must find itself hard put to follow standard conventions of exposition and analysis” (219).

One of the key differences between the two narratives is their approach to portraying trauma within the genre of the historical narrative. Grenville prefers a linear realist narrative that evolves out of a necessity to directly narrate the experiences of trauma, yet does not include a definite ending that would adhere to the traditional structures of the historical novel. The trauma of the Darug community lingers; its affective accounts reach into later generations beyond the telling of *The Secret River*. Grenville opens up a fluid and processual space that stands in stark contrast to the fixity of the linear narrative encountered in a traditional historical novel. In *David's Story* the event and the extent of the traumatic experience are never truly revealed. As Wicomb’s postmodern narrative mimics the discontinuous temporalities of traumatic memory it remains antithetical to the linear portrayal of history. The narrative disjunctures point to the impossibility of gaining full disclosure of the traumatic event that, in the case Dulcie Olifant, refuses to be presented.

¹⁸¹ This does not suggest that all of Grenville’s oeuvre lacks experimentalism. Her earlier work, such as some of the short stories in *Bearded Ladies* (1984) and *Lilian's Story* (1985) are considered more innovative and experimental than the *The Secret River*.

Conclusion

The ongoing project of comparing Australian and South African contemporary fictions is an important one. The comparative reading of this thesis draws on the energy and ideas generated by a number of critics who suggest that both “southern spaces, and the field of post-colonial studies, undoubtedly deserve” to be placed within a comparative body of work (Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall 18).

My study has been inspired by this criticism to undertake a close and comparative reading of selected contemporary Australian and South African novels which links them in a dialogic reading across southern spaces, histories and cultures. The dialogic reading opens up lines of communication between two separate literatures and points out relationships that further the understanding of contemporary Australian and South African literary topics in a postcolonial context. The transnational parallels that are of particular concern in this thesis emerge out of the historical links to colonization and the ongoing processes of postcolonialism. These are contemporary fictions written out of an urgency to revisit and come to terms with the difficult histories of their nations. As postcolonial narratives they address the legacies of conquest and dispossession in settler states.

My dialogic reading of these novels sets out to explore the connections and intersections across what are in some instances very different fictions. The thesis aims to expose how the troubled sense of the past and the contradictions of settler existence on contested grounds are a vital context for contemporary postcolonial criticism. By focusing on selected genres and their transformations within postcolonial contexts, transnational parallels between ostensibly remote fictions become evident. This thesis suggests that traditional formulations of genres are adapted and appropriated within postcolonial contexts. The genres selected for this project originate in European literary traditions; however, in contemporary postcolonial fictions they undergo adaptation and appropriation. The *Bildungsroman*, the pastoral and the historical novel engage with the complexities of trauma, land, and history and emerge transformed by the postcolonial world.

Genres are immersed within socio-historical contexts, and in Australian and South African literatures their traditions are transformed. For instance, the *Bildungsroman*

chapter in my thesis reveals how the genre's generic characteristics, for example, the characters' completed personal development, are undone when faced with the traumatic experiences of violence in the colonies. Perdita and Faith do not succeed in completing their *Bildungs*' processes, which is indicative of their failures to reconcile with a traumatic past. Gail Jones and Rachel Zadok expand the boundaries of the traditional *Bildungsroman* as they address the historical and social intricacies of the legacies of colonization. The writers' departures from the traditional *Bildungsroman* in the postcolonial context relate the protagonists' unsuccessful integrations into society with the failures of these societies to respond to demands for reconciliation and social justice.

The chapter on "Postcolonial Pastoral" surveys the traditions of the pastoral mode, yet simultaneously points to departures from traditional generic structures in fictions by David Malouf and Lisa Fugard. The pastoral has traditionally served to consolidate and strengthen national ideologies, maintaining tropes such as fixity of place and security of belonging. Both Australian and South African settler literatures propagated images of an intimate environmental interrelatedness between settler and land, and asserted the settlers' prerogative to find serenity in nature. In the postcolonial pastoral, however, these traditional aspects cannot be sustained. The genre is reworked by postcolonial writers to expose the settlers' troubled relationship with a landscape that is antagonistic, and denies the harmonious idyll of settler pastoral in order to represent Indigenous peoples as belonging to the land with rights of prior possession. The presence of Gemmy, a hybrid who appears in a colonial Queensland settlement in *Remembering Babylon*, troubles the generic traditions of the pastoral: the settlers begin to question their sense of belonging, and their ability to disremember the existence of Indigenous peoples which haunts them within an emerging settler nation. Haunting recurs in South African postcolonial pastoral writing, too. For example, Fugard responds to the socio-historical structures of apartheid/post-apartheid in South Africa by challenging and transforming the *plaasroman* genre. In *Skinner's Drift* the settlers' failure to connect with the South African landscape and recognise the presence of African people also produces a haunted pastoral, where the ghosts of murdered Africans surface into the present.

Traditional formulations of Western genres have proved inadequate in translating the traumatic experiences that have arisen out of the legacies of colonization. Postcolonial modifications of these genres reflect on these inadequacies. They respond to the

impossibilities of pinning down the ‘truth’ of the past and the ongoing legacies of trauma experienced across Australian and South African histories. In “Making Use of History”, a chapter that reads fictions by Kate Grenville and Zoë Wicomb comparatively, I examine how the historical novel is transformed to challenge singular and authoritative accounts of history. These adaptations of the genre respond to the untold stories of injustice and violence in colonial histories, and the debates about the historiography of settler accounts of the past. *The Secret River* revisions Australia’s colonial history to speak of untold colonial atrocities that cannot be contained and still haunt the nation, whereas *David’s Story* comments on the impossibility of gaining a complete knowledge of the atrocities committed during apartheid. Wicomb exposes the incompleteness and selectiveness of apartheid and post-apartheid histories and the impossibilities of separating victim, perpetrator and beneficiary in recent processes of truth and reconciliation. In this way, the historical novel genre is embedded in contemporary postcolonial debates in South African literature and criticism. It responds to the dilemma that emerged in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: conventional history cannot grasp the truth concerning the traumatic absences of marginalized women across South Africa, which remain unarticulated within the discourses of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Across the three genres selected for this study – the *Bildungsroman*, the pastoral, and the historical novel – there are cross-cultural parallels that emerge through a comparative reading, and some of these suggest areas that require further research. For example, in the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* transformations of the traditional genre in this case study bring to the surface issues related to representations of rape, particularly inter-racial sexual violence. The issue of rape and its unspeakability is dealt with in both *Sorry* and *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*. This primary trauma of Indigenous/African women remains unspoken in these fictions, and it is suggested it remains unreconciled within nation and narration more widely. Both postcolonial *Bildungsromane* focus on the development of the white protagonists, ultimately ignoring the rape-inflicted trauma upon Mary and Nomsa, the Indigenous and African characters who are subjected to sexual abuse. In this way the novels alert readers to the limitations of national reconciliation discourses in contemporary Australia and South Africa. Especially, Gail Jones’ novel *Sorry* has been criticized for its cursory representation of the psychological suffering of Indigenous people. It has been suggested that Mary’s character only serves to account for Perdita’s traumatic experience: “Perdita is represented as psychologically complex while Mary is

an anemic character. The rape she suffers is merely a vehicle for exploring Perdita's traumatic amnesia" (Kennedy "Trials" 346). These systematic and unaddressed inequalities point to the failure to fully recognise the traumatic history of a colonized people. This is a burning issue in *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* as well. Although there have been no noteworthy critical reviews on the portrayal of Nomsa, her character remains – similar to Mary – unequally represented in the novel.

The transformations of the pastoral in postcolonial contexts – illustrated in this thesis by the analysis of *Remembering Babylon* and *Skinner's Drift* – suggest affinities in their depictions of landscape, borders and memory. Malouf and Fugard have turned the pastoral to their own uses to emphasize that the traditional formulations can and perhaps must be questioned and overturned in fictions set in Australian and South African landscapes. Their postcolonial versions of the pastoral expose the settlers' uneasy existence on land that is described as foreign and hostile. Anti-pastoral landscapes set the scene for these fictions to address the settlers' failures to find secure points of belonging. Their feelings of unsettlement are highlighted on ambivalent and contested grounds. The erection of borders suggests the settlers' troubled connection with the colonized lands and further contributes to their self-imposed isolation. Memory – particularly a difficulty to disremember ethnic atrocities – challenges the settlers' claims to land entitlement, and the trauma of the dispossession of the Indigenous/African peoples remains haunting, and resists forgetting.

Reading *The Secret River* and *David's Story* comparatively as postcolonial historical novels in this thesis highlights their parallels in terms of reshaping of history that attempt to disclose a hidden violence, and it is suggested that this is characteristic of troubled histories of the nation more generally. The genre's malleability allows for an interrogation of historical certainties and cultural hegemonies. Grenville and Wicomb make use of the historical novel to call attention to different readings of the past that critically excavate alternative accounts of history. These fictional transformations of history suggest gaps in official historical archives that have failed to include specific stories of dispossession, violence, and death. They engage with recent complex discourses of national reconciliation to comment on unreconciled issues in coming to terms with the past. By returning to history through fiction these texts enter into conversation as they comment upon failures to address the trauma of the past that surfaces in the present.

Comparative readings of Australian and South African fictions not only draw attention to specific similarities between the paired texts and their transformations of generic themes, as I have suggested above, but also underscore the notion that the prevalence of the topics concerning history, land, and race invite general comparisons across these settler nations. This thesis suggests that these shared affinities point to the continuing anxieties in contemporary postcolonial fictions.

The theme of land contestation carries purchase across Australian and South African contemporary fictions and suggests shared national anxieties. On the one hand, land remains crucial to the settlers' obsession with the issue of legitimacy. The theme of land settlement "has been a trope of embedded ideology" (Kossew *Writing Woman* 120) maintaining the idea of legitimacy and belonging. Especially, in *Remembering Babylon* and *Skinner's Drift* settlers are described as domesticating the landscape in order to claim land and inscribe their presence on the foreign landscape. On the other hand, land holds the traumatic memories of dispossession and death which are emblematic of the long decades of Indigenous/African resistance. Landscapes become sites of memory that record and counteract renewed forgetting. In both literatures, the theme of land ownership is an ambivalent one; it suggests the settlers' physical hold over the settled land as well as their uneasy sense of belonging due to the presence of prior inhabitants.

In the recent past both Australia and South Africa have been deeply concerned with movements of reconciliation and social justice as ways of responding to the legacies of colonialism and the structural inequalities that continue to exist. My thesis points to the connections in the "politics of race and reconciliation" (Whitlock "Departure" 161) across these nations; parallels which Whitlock views as productive and contributing to a more inclusive articulation of national anxieties. The relevance of race in these selected Australian and South African novels highlights the inequalities between colonizer and the colonized. Racial suffering imposed by imperial power structures connects these novels as they speak of the collective and individual experiences that have played a crucial part in the national processes of remembering, forgetting, and reconciliation. These novels record a history of racism and its resistance to contemporary concerns with reconciliation and collective healing. All six novels comment on the limitations of reconciliation discourses in the recent past, which have failed to integrate particular injustices within

national historical archives. The fictions selected for this thesis insist on the traumatic nature of settler colonialism, and the necessity for fictions that draw readers into engagements with 'the colonial present'.

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Appendix

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die folgende Arbeit vergleicht ausgewählte Literatur aus Australien und Südafrika, um transnationale Verbindungen herauszulesen. Durch die Anwendung postkolonialistischer Theorie und der Trauma Theorie werden spezifisch traditionelle Gattungen auf ihre Stabilität und Wandelbarkeit im Zusammenhang mit den Romanthemen der kolonialen Vergangenheit sowie den fortwährenden Prozessen der Aufarbeitung von ethnischen Gewaltverbrechen geprüft. Die Dissertation richtet den Schwerpunkt auf die Überarbeitungen, Neugestaltungen, und Wandlungen dreier Gattungen: Bildungsroman, „Pastoral“, und historischer Roman.

Die These belegt, dass die Gattungsumsetzungen die jüngsten literarischen Ausführungen aus Australien und Südafrika aufzeigen und auf die traumatischen Vermächtnisse der Kolonialgeschichte reagieren. In beiden Ländern haben die akuten Forderungen nach Rekonziliation und sozialer Gerechtigkeit intensive Debatten in der Geschichte und Romanliteratur ausgelöst. Sie sind dafür verantwortlich, dass diese Disziplinen neue Wege ergründen können, die zum besseren Verständnis von traumatischen Ereignissen der Kolonialzeit beitragen. Durch das komparative Lesen einer Reihe an ausgewählten Werken werden in dieser Dissertation themenspezifische Gemeinsamkeiten, Techniken und Inhalte herausgearbeitet, um diese beiden Literaturen, die distinktiv ungleiche nationale Vergangenheiten haben, zusammen zu führen.

Das erste Kapitel, „Representation of Trauma in Two Selected Bildungsromane“, beschäftigt sich mit der Gattung des Bildungsromans. Es untersucht deren kontemporäre Wiedereingliederung und die Transgressionen der traditionellen literarischen Grenzen, um die seelischen Erlebnisse von Kindheitstraumen im postkolonialen Kontext zweier Romane zu ergründen. Gail Jones' Roman *Sorry* (2008) und Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* (2005) heben sich von den traditionellen europäischen Normen der Gattung des Bildungsromans ab. Durch ihre Berücksichtigung der Altlasten der Kolonialzeit fechten sie die traditionell vorgegebenen Bildungspassagen ihrer Protagonisten an. Diese erreichen nämlich nicht das Ende ihrer Bildungsreise, sondern bleiben an der Verarbeitung des erlebten Traumas haften.

Das zweite Kapitel der Dissertation „Postcolonial Pastoral“ analysiert die Wandlungen der „Pastoral“ Gattung im postkolonialen Kontext. Dabei wird auf die Flexibilität deren traditionellen Themen, wie Landschaft, Grenzen und Erinnerung eingegangen, um Berührungspunkte innerhalb der Trauma Theorie offenzulegen. Die zur Analyse hervorgebrachten postkolonialen Romane von David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and Lisa Fugard's *Skinner's Drift* (2005) greifen die traditionellen Themenbereiche der Gattung wie Zugehörigkeit und Nostalgie an, um die Gefühle der Verunsicherung der Ansiedler hervorzuheben, die sich in „anti-pastoralen“ Szenen mit traumatischen Erinnerungen und indigener Enteignung auseinander setzen müssen.

Die jüngsten australischen und südafrikanischen Geschichtsromane zweifeln offizielle nationale Geschichten an, indem sie sich mit den Altlasten der Kolonialvergangenheit auseinander setzen. In diesem Sinn richtet sich das dritte Kapitel, „Making Use of History“ an die alternativen Interpretationen von Siedlungsgeschichten in Australien und Südafrika, die auf Vergangenheitstraumen basieren. In dem letzten Kapitel werden Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) und Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2001) analysiert, um hervorzuheben, wie diese die Geschichtschreibung ihrer Nationen überarbeiten, damit sie eine gewalttätige und zum Schweigen gebrachte Vergangenheit wiederherstellen. Beide Schriftsteller integrieren traumatische Erinnerungen in ihre Erzählungen, um nach Gerechtigkeit für enteignete Völker zu streben.

Die folgende Dissertation konzentriert sich auf Romane, die zu den aktuellen postkolonialen Debatten über Kolonialismus, Trauma und soziale Gerechtigkeit beitragen, um wichtige Impulse zur einer neueren Denkweise in der Analyse von postkolonialer Literatur ans Licht zu bringen.

Curriculum Vitae

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Education

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Work Experience

- Feb. 2012 – Aug. 2012 Research Assistant to Prof. Christa Knellwolf-King (part of the Lisa Meitner Program – FWF Austrian Science Fund)
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- Oct. 2011 – May 2012 Working as a substitute teacher in English at the American International School, Vienna
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List of Publications

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