

**Race Trouble: An exploration of race relations in *Zebra Crossing*, *Coconut*  
and *The Book of Memory* by Meg Vandermerwe, Kopano Matlwa and Petina  
Gappah**

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## DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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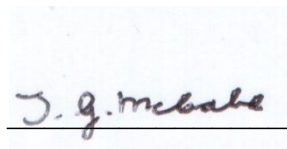
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## Abstract

Despite the formalised abolishment of both apartheid and colonialism, it would in many respects be remiss to conclude that the legacy of these systems of oppression do not continue to exert some level of influence on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals and groups. Alistair Fraser (2007) refers to this phenomenon as the “colonial present” (836) which “highlights the endurance, persistence or reactivation of particular *colonial-style* relations” (836, italics in original), alluding to a framework of relations that persists in the post-colonial and post-apartheid setting that is characterised by inequality and oppression despite systemic changes to national systems of government and the introduction of policies that have sought to redress past racial inequalities and introduce racial equity. In *Coconut* (2007), *Zebra Crossing* (2013) and *The Book of Memory* (2015) by Kopano Matlwa, Meg Vandermerwe and Petina Gappah, my central research question is to investigate how the conditions of race relations that were set up in the colonial past continue to influence the colonial present as it is depicted in the novels. While much research has been done in examining the respective eras of colonialism and apartheid, focus has often not been placed on the nuances of conflict, anxiety and competition that characterises these new spaces as it relates to issues of identity, belonging, exclusion and interracial interaction. Complicating this transition into a new democratic dispensation in both Zimbabwe and South Africa is the intrusion of the past into the present, in the form of the influence of whiteness that problematises racial relations, creating situations of crisis and conflict. To determine to what extent the practices that characterise the everyday lives of individuals and groups invoke the legacy of apartheid and colonialism and what effect this potentially has on race relations as it is depicted in the novels, the perspective of race trouble, conceptualised by Durrheim, Mtose and Brown (2011), is used as a central framework. Within

the perspective of race trouble, three constructs will be used to analyse the novels, namely that of discourse, practices and ideology. Ideas regarding the nature of discourse, with particular emphasis on whiteness as an institutional construct, will be primarily used in examination of *Coconut*, while the notion of everyday practices will be used to analyse *The Book of Memory* and finally, ideology to look at *Zebra Crossing*. Within the construct of practices, I primarily explore the nature of the practices that characterise the everyday lives of the characters in constructing notions of place identity and a sense of attachment to various environments and how these environments influence identity, self-perception and belonging. In *Zebra Crossing*, I analyse how dominant ideology constructs subjects to behave and think in certain ways, with the concept of 'othering' providing a tangible link between the presence of ideology and the emergence of the subject.

## Table of Contents

<b>DECLARATION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>THE INTRUSION OF THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT:.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>OUTLINE OF THE STRUCTURE OF THIS PROJECT:.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW: THE PROBLEM OF THE POST-COLONIAL AND POST-APARTHEID CONTEXT ....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>WHITENESS: MAPPING ITS CONSTRUCTS AND UNDERSTANDING ITS CONTINUED INFLUENCE .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PERSPECTIVE OF RACE TROUBLE.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: DISCOURSE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY</b>	
<b>KOPANO MATLWA’S <i>COCONUT</i> .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>THE NATURE AND CONSTRUCTION OF DISCOURSE .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF DISCOURSE .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>WHITENESS AS A DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCT .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>THE NEGOTIATION OF APPEARANCE:.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>LANGUAGE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PROBLEMATIC IDENTITY POSITIONS:.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>WHITENESS AS A POSITION OF POWER IN THE CONTEXT OF INEQUALITY:.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>STIGMA AND IDEOLOGY IN THE EMERGENCE OF ‘ACCEPTABLE’ IDENTITY POSITIONS:.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>CONCLUSION: .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: PRACTICES AND PLACE</b>	
<b>PETINA GAPPAH’S <i>THE BOOK OF MEMORY</i>.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION:.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>CONTEXTUALISATION: THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF</b>	
<b>IDENTITY AND RACE RELATIONS.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>PLACE-IDENTITY: .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>EXPLORING THE ASSOCIATION OF IDENTITY, SENTIMENTALITY AND STIGMA TO PLACE .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>MUFAKOSE TOWNSHIP .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>MUFAKOSE TOWNSHIP: ARRANGEMENTS OF SPACE AND SYSTEMS OF RELATIONS THROUGH THE PROCESS</b>	
<b>OF CATEGORISATION .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>HIGHLANDS POLICE STATION AND CHIKURUBI MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON .....</b>	<b>88</b>

UMWINSIDALE AND ‘SUMMER MADNESS’ .....	93
OVERSEAS .....	96
CONCLUSION .....	98
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: IDEOLOGY, SUBJUGATION AND OTHERING</b>	
<b>MEG VANDERMERWE’S <i>ZEBRA CROSSING</i>.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION TO SUBJUGATION AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE OTHER.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>SUBJUGATION AS PERFORMATIVE: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PRACTICES AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE EMERGENCE OF THE SUBJECT .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>ROUTINES OF CONDUCT, IDEOLOGY AND GENDERED SELF-IDENTITY IN THE PRODUCTION OF THE SUBJECT .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>OTHERING: EXAMINING EXCLUSIONARY BEHAVIOUR AND ITS ROLE IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION. ....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>THE ‘HOME COUNTRY’: INCLUSION, EXCLUSION AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING ON A NATIONAL SCALE .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>WHITENESS AND THE ATTAINMENT OF POWER AND STATUS IN THE CONTEXT OF MARGINALISATION .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>CONCLUSION: .....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>THE PERSPECTIVE OF RACE TROUBLE: UNDERSTANDING RACE RELATIONS IN THE POST-APARTHEID AND POST-COLONIAL SETTING .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>REFERENCE LIST .....</b>	<b>131</b>

## Chapter One: Introduction

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South Africa as a country is well known for its history of racial inequality, conflict and disparity. The term ‘apartheid’, translating literally as ‘separateness’, elicits on a global scale, vivid images in one’s mind’s eye of the most decrepit levels of violence and oppression that was inflicted on blacks at all levels of the apartheid South African state. This ranged from the white National Party (NP) government and its state sponsored policies of division, inequality and violence against black people to the common, inter-personal practices of everyday life, which included carrying pass books when entering geographical areas that were reserved for whites to the conduct and behaviour that was expected of blacks when interacting with whites, which was characterised by submissiveness and complete docility. As a matter of clarification, this study, when referring to the racial categories of individuals or groups, utilises the terms ‘white’ or ‘black’ for the sake of greatest simplicity. While the project recognises the controversy attached to racial terms, such debates over the appropriateness of certain racial terms over others is beyond the focus of this study. What is indeed of focus is the *series of effects* that arises from the labelling of groups and individuals according to racial attributes and how individuals and groups themselves negotiate this racial grouping as opposed to the nature of the actual terms themselves – which nevertheless is not a central concern of any of the novels explored in this project. I utilise the term ‘black’ in an inclusive sense to refer to all racial groups who were not classified as ‘white’ during the period of apartheid and colonialism – such as Indians and ‘coloured’ people, which is a colloquial South African term used to refer to ‘mixed-race’ individuals. The above explanation is however purely for the purpose of clarity with regard to use of terms, as individuals of the Indian or coloured race do not feature within any of the novels examined.

It is difficult to locate the emergence of apartheid to an exact time or location, as this grand system in which blacks – referring to all races that were excluded from the racial classification of ‘white’ – were systemically disenfranchised, violated and subordinated did not suddenly manifest itself in one moment after being completely absent in society the moment before. While the NP won the South African national elections in 1948, this marked the beginning of them simply enforcing and eventually adding onto discriminatory policies that were already in existence, such as the 1913 Land Act. (“Apartheid”, 2010) For centuries the rudimentary fundamentals of separateness, inequality and prejudice, all of which were common to apartheid,

have characterised the lived experiences of black people in South Africa, creating a long standing and historically charged precedent of hostility, conflict and distrust that informs much of the nuanced relations between black and white people in post-apartheid South Africa.

(Durrheim 2011:1)

Despite the formalised ending of colonialism in Zimbabwe in 1980 and the emergence of the ZANU-PF as leaders of the newly independent country, Zimbabwe remains a racially textured terrain that is the sum of decades of intra- and inter-racial conflict, negotiation and tense co-habitation. (Herbst 1989:43) This is because of the fact that the significance and implications of various narratives regarding the state of politics, the economy, racial interaction and restitutive dispensation, with particular regard to the issue of land and its redistribution, are continually fought for within and between races in Zimbabwe. Conflict regarding equality, belonging, racial interaction and redress continue to characterise social life in Zimbabwe as people attempt to work through the issues of the past.

### **The intrusion of the past into the present:**

Accounting for this status quo of the intrusion of the past into the present, Durrheim *et al.* (2011:21) comments that it seems as though:

Transformation in South Africa has been profound and yet it seems as though many things have barely changed at all. Certainly, apartheid is no more; South African society has been desegregated and inequality has been deracialized. However, old patterns of inequality and segregation persist and new patterns have emerged that continue to be structured around race. We are accountable to black leadership in public and many private organisations and our ordinary lives are filled with cross-racial encounters of various kinds and complexions. And yet old hierarchies reach into the present as the racial underclass (and much of the working class) remains insecure, exploited and under-resourced.

This subtle and contested nature of racial relations is highlighted effectively in an incident that took place on live television. On a Saturday evening on 19 May 2018, during a live DSTV broadcast of a post-game rugby analysis between the Lions and the Brumbies, Ashwin Willemse, a mixed-race or otherwise known as a ‘coloured’ male, was one of three former Springboks who was acting as an analyst on the show, abruptly walked off the set of the Super Rugby program



for reasons that were not entirely forthcoming at the time. Before walking off, however, Willemse stated that:

You see, I think it's important for me because you know, I've played this game for a long time, like all of us here, and as a player, I was labelled a quota player for a long time. I worked hard to earn my own respect in this game. So, I'm not going to be patronised by two individuals who played in apartheid – a segregated era – and come and want to undermine... So, I think for me, I've had my fair share. I can't work with people that undermine other people. And you can sit and you can laugh about it, but you know exactly what happened. And it's fine, it's fine. I don't mind being ridiculous. I'm glad it happens on air so that people can see, because you two sit here – no, it's fine. (Mohamed, 2018)

The quote references two of Willemse's co-hosts on the show, Nick Mallet and Naas Botha – both white males – who played for the Springboks in the 1980s at the height of apartheid. What is referred to as a “quota” in the above quote references a transformative policy of player selection for national, provincial and district sports teams in which it is mandated that a certain number of players from each race group must be included in the training and playing squad. The incident caused a national debate about the justifiability of Willemse's actions and whether or not there was indeed a patronising and racial element at play between Mallet and Botha that was subtly directed at Willemse. Opinions regarding the incident were divided along racial lines, with supporters of Willemse's actions identifying the incident as being motivated by racism and citing Mallet and Botha as probably being inclined to having racist tendencies due to being white and having associations with apartheid due to playing rugby during the era. Supporters further concurred with Willemse that a patronising workplace element is likely to be at the root of the incident, with supporters sharing their own experiences of being undermined in the workplace. Detractors of Willemse claimed that Willemse was oversensitive with no evidence of racism or subordination being visible during the broadcast.

Following this incident, Supersport, the channel on which the program was broadcast, conducted an investigation in an attempt to elucidate the sequence of events that led to the incident and to determine whether it was caused by patronising dynamics and an element of racism between the analysts. In a meeting between the three analysts, it was revealed by Willemse that a comment by Botha after the game but before going on air, in which he told Willemse that “it's all yours” and then proceeded to laugh, was the cause of his walkout (Basson & Burnard, 2018). Botha's

comments appear to form part of a wider environment of banter between the analysts, with jokes and laughter being familiar forms of interaction between the individuals. The comment came after Willemse was unable to offer his opinions during the pre-game analysis due to a technical failure which allowed only Mallet and Botha to offer their opinions on the game. Botha had then also proceeded to offer his apologies to Willemse for not being given the chance to offer his opinions. While off-air, Mallet reportedly asked the host of the show and the producer to cross to Willemse first after the game to give him the opportunity to share his views, with his walkout occurring shortly after.

This very recent incident is of interest as it demonstrates a number of critical elements and highlights a number of important features of race relations in post-apartheid South Africa which can further be extended to post-colonial Zimbabwe. Our lives are explicitly and implicitly troubled by race much of the time, and this is poignantly realised in the abovementioned incident involving Ashwin Willemse. There is nothing explicitly or even perhaps implicitly racist about the conduct of Nick Mallet or Naas Botha, with suggestions that the three analysts even share an informal workplace relationship that is characterised by mutual humour and teasing (Mohamed, 2018). Despite no visible markers of prejudice or inequality, Willemse was convinced that the conduct from his co-analysts, which was at worst ambiguous and interpretable in a number of ways and at best an example of friendly banter, was instead motivated by an underlying racist tendency that manifested in patronising comments. Why was this the case? Much of the reason involves the backdrop of historical racial oppression that took the form of apartheid that informs the inter-racial relations between the three colleagues and is alluded to in Willemse's comments that Mallet and Botha were "individuals who played in apartheid – a segregated era" (Mohamed, 2018). Mallet and Botha would deny any attributes of racism in their conduct, and would perhaps even accuse Willemse of attempting to identify racial issues where there are none.

This anecdote, which reflects the persistence of racial tension, distrust and the stigma associated with whiteness post-apartheid raises one of the central questions which acts as the overlaying motivation for this project. I seek to determine to what extent do the practices that characterise the everyday lives of individuals and groups invoke the legacy of apartheid and colonialism and what effect this potentially has on race relations in the novels *Coconut*, *Zebra Crossing* and *The Book of Memory* by Kopano Matlwa, Meg Vandermerwe and Petina Gappah respectively? A

complicated and profound question to answer, one of the main tools that this project will use to reveal the significance of the behaviour, attitudes and identity developments of the characters in the novels is the perspective of race trouble, which has been conceptualised by the prominent South African social psychologist Kevin Durrheim (2011), with the assistance of researchers Lyndsay Brown and Xoliswa Mtose in the book *Race Trouble: Race, Identity and Inequality in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Durrheim et al. (2011:27) defines the phenomenon of race trouble as “a social psychological condition that emerges when the history of racism infiltrates the present to unsettle social order and create situations that are individually and collectively troubling.”

A significant aspect of this research question centers around the concept of practices, which refers to the ways in which individuals conduct themselves and orient their behaviour in the context of normal, everyday scenarios. The emphasis here lies in the mundane – actions that individuals partake in consciously and unconsciously that shape their perspectives, identity and the environments around them. In this regard, it is necessary to make the distinction between two modalities of practice – talk and embodied. While the distinction is somewhat academic, as activities relating to talk are facilitated through embodied acts, it is necessary to examine the two constructs respectively due to their separate significance within this project. Practices of talk such as simple acts of communication allow individuals and groups to make meaning of their world, interpret situations and position one’s self in relation to others in racially significant ways. Language is used to depict and gloss environments, construct individuals as racial beings – otherwise known as racialisation – and facilitate systems of relations. It is through the medium of talk that narratives are created that depict the nature of individuals and groups and frame the social parameters in which people are viewed and how they consequently act. It is in this way that instruments such as prejudice and stereotypes are formed. While the actual veracity or inaccuracy of stereotypes are of minor concern to this project, what is of interest is the notion that “stereotypes allow people to position themselves as group members in contrast to other groups, to explain and justify relations between groups, and to account for themselves as individual participants or group members.” (Durrheim 2011:114)

Moreover, it is important to note that instances of prejudice, stereotype or discrimination are rooted in socially shared discourse. This refers to the idea that humans partake in collective forms of understanding and comprehension in every activity that they engage in. This collective ‘consciousness’ has a definite foundation and starting point in our use of language and other communicative instruments, which flows between institutions and people and perhaps most importantly, makes a tangible difference in “the way in which people comprehend and make sense of their social world [and] has consequences for the direction and character of their inaction and action.” (Purvis & Hunt 1993:474) One of the key characteristics of discourse is its central role as a tool for understanding the manner in which language not only influences social relations and experience, but also produces social subjects in the specific contexts in which they operate. Michel Foucault (1981) provides an interesting account of the emergence of these social subjects through the mechanism of ‘interpellation’, where individuals and groups are ‘hailed’ by ideological constructs to behave, perceive and think in certain ways – congruent with the requirements, either implicit or explicit, of the particular ideology.

To briefly talk about the distinction between discourse and ideology, while both concepts refer to participation in social life and shared understandings, ideology places emphasis on broader external influences outside of one’s immediate context, while discourse tends to be more contextually specific and individually determined. For example, within *Coconut*, while the broader ideology of the value of whiteness and white constructs are foregrounded as an overarching theme of the novel, the focal characters of Ofilwe Tlou and Fikile Twala negotiate this influence through the employment or rejection of discourses that are specific to their context that either at times reinforces or undermines the overarching ideology.

The material aspect of discourse and ideology are the practices that animate everyday life. This refers to the tangible effects of discourse and ideology on the behaviour of individuals and how they construct their immediate environments to cater to specific ideologies and discourse. It is in this sense that discourse and “ideology is ‘real’, or material, rather than fictional or delusory, and is thus unavoidable in that it simply describes the framework of meanings and values within which people exist and conduct their social lives.” (Purvis & Hunt 1993:479)

The novels under discussion offer a rich exploration of these issues across the contexts of both Zimbabwe and South Africa post-colonialism and post-apartheid. *Coconut*, which has garnered

critical acclaim as the winner of the European Union Literary Award for 2007, offers a thought-provoking depiction of the condition of black identity as it attempts to define itself in the nuanced social, political and economic landscape of the post-apartheid dispensation. Of particular interest in this novel is its concern with how the main black protagonists grapple with issues of belonging, racial identity and the lingering influence of white ideals within the institutional and cultural realm. In a multitude of ways however, this is complicated by the characters resistance of imposed discourse and their ability to reflect upon, assimilate or reject ideology, cultural and contextual expectations.

*Zebra Crossing* and *The Book of Memory* both utilise albino characters, Chipo and Memory, as their central protagonists. Both characters provide the unique opportunity to examine the process of racialisation and identity development from a new perspective due to their rejection of conventional categories of classification. *The Book of Memory*, set primarily in Zimbabwe, however also traversing across an international spectrum, is a coming of age narrative that focuses on the main protagonist, Memory. The novel is a gripping tale of how Memory negotiates poverty, discrimination, prejudice and unique environments as she attempts to grapple with finding a cohesive sense of self as an albino in post-colonial Zimbabwe. *Zebra Crossing*, similarly, highlights the plight of the main albino character, Chipo, and her less than savoury brother, George. Set during the context of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the novel foregrounds the perceptions and actions that were characteristic of apartheid and colonialism and their continued influence in the treatment of immigrants coming into South Africa.

One of the main ideas that Durrheim *et al.* (2011) proposes through the perspective of race trouble is that there is an inextricable link between the ideologies of oppression, segregation and racism that individuals were subjected to during colonialism and apartheid and the nature of race relations as it is shown in the novels. While South Africa attained democracy with the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first black president in 1994 and Zimbabwe with Robert Mugabe as president in 1980, through the fall of oppressive regimes in both countries individuals and groups were expected to suddenly work together, relate and interact in environments that were no longer defined in terms of privileging whiteness. Compounding this sense of unease was the attempt by both the South African and Zimbabwean government to reconcile the binarism between promoting political and social upliftment while simultaneously attempting to avoid the

complete exclusion of those who were previously advantaged. In the case of South Africa and Zimbabwe, black individuals now had the ability to move away from their previous positions of being subservient to white interests and had the opportunity to embrace identity positions that were previously unavailable to them. What role the identities of whiteness and blackness would assume in this post-apartheid context became a point of inquiry for researchers and is a point of investigation for this project.

Within the perspective of race trouble, three constructs will be used to analyse the novels, namely that of discourse, practices and ideology. Ideas regarding the nature of discourse, with particular emphasis on whiteness as an institutional construct, will be primarily used in examination of *Coconut*. The story is told in the format of a first-person narrative, and I place specific focus on this key feature of the novel as the manner in which the two main focalisers, Ofilwe and Fikile, describe events, the diction that they use and the unique internal monologues that they each utilise to reflect on events in the novel – signposted by italics – is paramount in analysis of the characters engagement with contextual discourse and their subjective perception of it. This is a key feature of the perspective of race trouble, as rather than analysing the truth or falsity of discourse, the emphasis lies in the effect that discourse has and the potential race trouble that it produces.

The notion of everyday practices will be used to analyse *The Book of Memory* and finally, ideology to look at *Zebra Crossing*. Within the construct of practices, I primarily explore the nature of the practices that characterise the everyday lives of the characters in constructing notions of place identity and a sense of attachment to various environments and how these environments influence identity, self-perception and belonging. *The Book of Memory* also takes the format of a first-person narration and this is important to the notion of race trouble as it places Memory, the main protagonist, in a position to most intimately recount the significance of the events of the novel. This is particularly evident in her vivid descriptions in the environments that shape her personality and alter her racial identity and her perception of the conflict between blacks and whites in the novel. The manner in which community members from Mufakose Township, Umwinsidale and other characters in the novel construct her racial identity is of some significance, as this does influence her overall impression of self, however I place more emphasis on her introspective interpretation of herself and the changes in her disposition,

outlooks and attitudes that she recognises in herself. The lexicon of place-identity is closely tied to Memory's journey of discovery, as she attaches sentiment and meaning to the locations across which she transposes herself, but I place focus on how these environments leave an impression on her identity, creating trouble as she attempts to negotiate the multiplicity of these racial influences. I extend upon the discussion of everyday practices that the chapter on *Coconut* focuses on primarily through this introduction to place-identity. While place-identity indeed falls under the notion of everyday practices, the distinction with place-identity is that the starting point of it is immaterial – as people come to associate emotion with location and begin to romanticise its attributes, which is where I focus in *The Book of Memory*.

In *Zebra Crossing*, I analyse how dominant ideology constructs subjects to behave and think in certain ways, with the concept of 'othering' providing a tangible link between the presence of ideology and the emergence of the subject. The notion of 'othering' is an important feature of this novel as it references both the material and immaterial aspects of race trouble. The process of 'othering', by virtue of its exclusionary framework, highlights collective schools of thought that are held at a broader level, such as at the realm of the national, and that are also acted upon in patterned ways that are reflective of these broader ideologies. The structure of the narration in *Zebra Crossing*, which takes place in the format of the first-person with the main albino protagonist of Chipu as the focaliser, personalises and problematises othering in her specific context as an albino. One of the main thematic concerns of the novel is the pervasiveness of racial grouping and ideas regarding belonging, exclusion and ownership of space. Chipu, as a character who subverts identity categories, becomes the focus of aggression, prejudice and oppression, and to connect this to the perspective of race trouble I analyse how these emotions are linked to the apartheid context. A material consequent of the presence of pervasive ideology in the South African society shown in *Zebra Crossing* is the production of the subject – defined as an individual acting in a subjugated state in conformance with ideology. While I analyse a number of events in the novel to illustrate this, a telling indication of the ability of subjective states to alter behaviour are the instances where Chipu adopts prejudicial behaviour towards other marginalised individuals in the novel, where I examine the diction used as well as the timing of these instances to reveal the conflict that they produce.

These ideas, as outlined here for all three novels, will however be elaborated on further in the actual chapters themselves. Considering this, a key research aim that motivates the undertaking of this study is to achieve a greater comprehension of the challenges that key characters in each of the novel face in navigating the respective, unique requirements that accompany the post-apartheid and post-colonial contexts. This includes how characters balance the expectations of conduct and thought that is associated with the racial category that they belong to with attempting to embrace new, pluralistic identity positions. It includes attempting to interact and co-exist with whites in a harmonious manner – despite their racial category continuing to be associated with the painful stigma of the past.

Moreover, I aim to account for the troubled nature of interaction, engagement and relationships between blacks and whites that have persistently transitioned from apartheid and colonialism to the post-apartheid and post-colonial environment.

Related to this is the research question of whether whiteness continues to be considered as a dominant construct that is associated with power and privilege and the extent to whether this is responsible for the conflict between races in the books.

### **Outline of the structure of this project:**

To briefly highlight the ordering of this project, Chapter Two will act as a literature review and outline of the methodology with which this project will be approached. While the notion of race trouble will be utilised as an overarching perspective to examine the novels, a number of scholars such as Rosemary Marangoly Gold (1996), Alistair Fraser (2007), Judith Butler (1993,1990), Aretha Phiri (2013), Richard Dyer (1997), Michael Foucault (1972), Gugu Hlongwane (2013), Homi Bhabha (1994), Ruth Frankenberg (1993) and Jessica Murray (2012) contribute extensively to the critical lexicon of this project and are highlighted, among others, in the literature review.

Chapter Three explores *Coconut* by Kopano Matlwa with a specific focus on discourse, the characters negotiation of whiteness as institutionally embedded and the adoption of their own traditional cultures and traditions. Ideas regarding a loss of tradition due to the perceived dominance of western ideals is also analysed as well as the quest of the characters in achieving a



sense of ‘authenticity’ in embracing traditional values and customs. Closely tied to this are issues of appearance and how the characters reject and assimilate certain aesthetic prescripts.

Chapter Four looks at Petina Gappah’s *The Book of Memory* and highlights the malleable nature of racial identity as it pertains to albinism and changing contextual variables. Notions of place identity and belonging also form significant points of focus in this chapter. Tying these notions together is the idea of practices, which animates environments and links them to the development of identity.

Chapter Five examines Meg Vandermerwe’s *Zebra Crossing* with emphasis placed on the idea of ideology, identity and issues of belonging and exclusion in the context of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The Chapter explores the significance of place, practices and discursive constructs in the production of the subject. A further point of focus in the chapter is the idea of ‘othering’, which forms the basis for the idea of subjugation and categorisation and which creates the primary conflict within the novel.

Chapter Six will act as the concluding chapter in which analysis made throughout the project will be assessed and interpreted in order to determine what can be concluded with regard to the perspective of race trouble as it pertains to the plot developments of the novels.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review and Methodology

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### **Literature Review: The problem of the post-colonial and post-apartheid context**

The domain of race relations within both the international and local spectrums is a popular point of study for scholars who have sought to understand the often unequal, complicated and contradictory dynamics of relations between people. This can be attributed largely to the historical prevalence of pervasive systems of oppression and conflict that have gripped many parts of the world at one time or another. Of interest to scholars was the attempt at gaining an understanding of the social mechanism and phenomenon behind instances of prejudice, racism and inequality as well as investigating the nature of interracial contact following periods of racial inequality, such as apartheid and colonialism.

Robert Park (2000:106) in the book *Theories of Race and Racism* offers an insightful perspective on what is meant by the term 'race relations', stating that "it includes all the relations that ordinarily exist between members of different ethnic and genetic groups which are capable of provoking race conflict and race consciousness or of determining the relative status of the racial groups of which a community is composed." What this refers to is that in an instance of contact between individuals and groups, any and all actions that isolate the racial aspect of an individual's identity and renders it meaningful, whether it be with regard to the relative status of that race, or the connotations associated with that race. The definition is concerned less with the nature of actual actions or behaviour between people as opposed to the racial effects that it produces. Characteristic of a racial encounter or of 'race relations' are actions within the encounter that produce a heightened sense of one's race and the accompanying weight of meaning associated with that race. Moreover, when race relations are spoken of, these relations reflect pre-existing social orders such as hierarchy and power. When two individuals or groups engage in race relations then, it is always from a position of inequality, and this in itself produces conflict and tension as participants in race relations become aware of this, particularly if they fall within the category of the disenfranchised or less powerful. Instances of race relations then are not arbitrary encounters with no social meaning or impact. Monumental systems of oppression with far reaching consequences, such as apartheid and colonialism, were founded off of the

backs of instances of race relations where discourse and power relations were formed that laid the foundation for systems of racial inequality.

In the case of South Africa, the year 1994 marked an unprecedented and anxious embrace of democracy, nonracialism and pluralism that sought to ratify and promote the ideals of unity and peace that had been espoused by Nelson Mandela and the election of the first democratic government under the leadership of the African National Congress. Aretha Phiri (2013:164) notes that “this post-apartheid discourse, heavily exploited, signaled a re-invented socio-political ideology and racial landscape...but the heady euphemisms [belied] the continued racially and socio-economically stratified lived reality of [the] majority [of] South Africans.” Adam Habib (2008:xi), in the preface to the book *Racial Redress & Citizenship in South Africa* acknowledges this ambiguity in stating that:

The single biggest question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is how to build the bridges of solidarity that enable the emergence of a common citizenship and a cohesive human community...yet, as if this challenge is not huge enough, South Africans are burdened with an additional one: the task of building this human solidarity in a context of inequality. Our society is divided by the burdens of our historical legacy...the consequences of that history live with us today.

Despite the formalised end of both apartheid and colonialism, it would in many respects be remiss to conclude that the legacy of these systems of oppression do not continue to exert some level of influence on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals and groups. Alistair Fraser (2007) in his paper “Land Reform in South Africa and the Colonial Present”, refers to this phenomenon as the “colonial present” (836) which “highlights the endurance, persistence or reactivation of particular *colonial-style* relations” (836, italics in original), alluding to a framework of relations that persists in the post-colonial and post-apartheid setting that is characterised by inequality and oppression despite systemic changes to national systems of government and the introduction of policies that have sought to redress past racial inequalities and introduce racial equity in the political, social and economic arenas. Irrespective of this, race trouble appears evident in the form of racial anxiety, suspicion and consequent conflict. What appears to be the enduring effects of colonial ideology, which is described by the notion of the colonial present, is mentioned by Homi Bhabha (1994:67) as “crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that informs the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural

hierarchization.” He further notes that the goal of colonial discourse is “to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.” (70) This lends credence to the idea that the motivation for the construction of racial groups was for the attainment of power, in which certain attributes of inferiority could be associated with certain race groups in order to justify their domination.

To comment briefly on the origins of race generally, Bernard Boxill (2001:1) in his introductory chapter to the book *Race and Racism* states that the invention of race was postulated likely in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries following the French and American revolutions and the social upheavals which followed – such as the inclination towards imperialism and the exploration of uncharted continents. Boxill suggests that the tentative foundations of race were formulated to account for the phenotypical distinctions between European explorers and the individuals and groups that they were encountering on different continents. (3) Boxill (2001:5) rejects the popular notion that race was initially invented in order to justify the system of slavery, as he notes that “by the time Europeans started enslaving Africans, slavery was already an ancient human institution, and there were already many rationalizations for it. Although, Boxill states that the distinctions in appearance between Africans and Europeans likely resulted in Europeans feeling little to no affirmation or sympathy towards them – likely contributing to the idea that Africans were suited to slavery. (10)

Robert Bernasconi (2000:83) concurs with Boxill’s sentiment of the mutually-exclusive nature of slavery and the emergence of race, reiterating the fact that the exploitation of Africans that was carried out by the Spanish or the English, for example, did not require the construction of an advanced system of racial classification. Bernasconi argues that one of the first individuals to conceptualise the notion of race is the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Working to systematically classify and organise the raw data that was provided to him by travelers, he attempted to explain differences in skin colour through reference to four fundamental races – “Whites, Blacks, Hindustanic and Kalmuck.” (91) Kant also advocated for the idea of racial essences in which races could be distinguished by immutable characteristics or predispositions that were unique to each race – terming this as a racial ‘seed’. (91)

The influential scholar W.E.B. Du Bois (2000:105) adopts a similar understanding of races that are separated by more than aesthetic differences, alluding also to the idea of racial predispositions. Attempting to define race, he states that “it is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, tradition and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life.” There are however a number of problems with Du Bois’ conception of race, as Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) observes. Appiah (1992:33) states that the proposal of a common history in order for individuals to be considered as part of the same racial group is not forthcoming, as individuals ordinarily classified under the same racial group often have vastly contrasting histories, with similarities at only the broadest of levels. The reference to racial group members as belonging to a “vast family” (Du Bois 1992:105) brings with it the possibility of members of the family joining by choice or choosing not to join by choice, producing an inaccurate depiction of the racial ‘family’. (Appiah 1992:31) Finally, Appiah comments on how there is nothing to indicate that members of the same racial group possess the same instincts or inclinations and that more often than not, this is not the case. (35)

While the early tradition regarding ideas around race centered around the school of thought of essentialism – that racial categories originate from a unique ‘essence’ that all its members possess – more recent understandings of race position it as a social construct. This proposes that the emphasis regarding race needs to be placed less on the possibility of its biological origins and more on how race is a malleable construct that is given changing meaning based off of changing contexts and changing practices.

Margo Hendricks (2000:19) notes that “race is a fluid, transforming, historically specific concept parasitic on theoretical and social discourses for the meaning it assumes at any given moment...in order to invest race with meaning, modern societies must frame visible (and, quite frankly, minor) differences among people in terms of antithesis.” The colonial environment, which is in many respects applicable to the contexts of South Africa and Zimbabwe as they are depicted in the novels, is characteristic of extreme imbalances of power and influence, where major inequalities separate dominant groups from those who exist on the periphery. Derek Hook (2005:11) states that “we find here a massive attention paid to otherness, to the generation of knowledge of cultural and racial others.”

Central to the establishment of intergroup conflict particularly in the context of limited resources is the idea of competition. The renowned social psychologist Herbert Blumer (1958:5) states that:

The source of race prejudice lies in a felt challenge to this sense of group position. The challenge, one must recognize, may come in many different ways. It may be in the form of an affront to feelings of group superiority; it may be in the form of attempts at familiarity or transgressing the boundary line of group exclusiveness; it may be in the form of encroachment at countless points of proprietary claim; it may be a challenge to power and privilege; it may take the form of economic competition. Race prejudice is a defensive reaction to such challenging of the sense of group position. It consists of the disturbed feelings, usually of marked hostility, that are thereby aroused.

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Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*, which utilises the main albino character of Chipo, is exemplary of this. The novel centers around pertinent issues of xenophobia in the context of the 2010 FIFA World Cup and the process of assimilation that ties individuals' and groups' sense of self with various environments. As a migrant in *Zebra Crossing*, Chipo is painfully aware of her status as an outsider – stating that “refugee sounds like flea. That is how, we are warned, many at Home Affairs view us. Like fleas that need to have their heads squeezed off.” (Matlwa 2007:36) Foregrounded furthermore throughout the novel as a central theme is the discursive and embodied practice of ‘othering’ in perpetuating prejudice and oppression between groups, which acts as a biting ironic contrast to the image of unity and peace that is promoted during the

World Cup. Within *Coconut*, ideas regarding belonging and exclusion appear to operate within a far more nuanced landscape of subtle social cues, culture and ideology. The negotiation and interpretation of this is a constant source of anxiety for the main protagonists within the novel such as Ofilwe, who notes while sitting in the restaurant that is aptly named Silver Spoon:

*Oh, how it nauseates them if we even fantasise about being black, truly black. The old rules remain and old sentiments are unchanged. We know, Lord, because those disapproving eyes scold us still; that crisp air of hatred and disgust crawls into our wide-open nostrils still. (Matlwa 2007:31-2, italics in original)*

Within the post-colonial and post-apartheid environment, much of this tension results from the fact that individuals of different races are expected to work together, interact and co-exist in spaces that are no longer defined in terms of white monopoly or authoritarian leadership. Instead, various races must co-exist as colleagues and equals despite existing within broader societal processes, such as prejudice and racial conflict, that do not appear to lend themselves towards promoting unity and equality.

#### Whiteness: Mapping its constructs and understanding its continued influence

Implicit in research that relates to race and interracial relations in the post-colonial and post-apartheid eras is the concept of whiteness. A central question that has assisted in motivating the research for this project and that has been of interest to scholars is the question of what exactly whiteness is, what role it would assume in the post-apartheid and post-colonial setting and what influence this would have on race relations, identity and newly prioritised agendas of redress and reconciliation? While whiteness as a domain of social, political and economic dominance was complicated with the emergence of independence in Zimbabwe and democracy in South Africa, remnants of white privilege continue to linger within the new democratic dispensation. For Ofilwe in *Coconut*, this takes the form of suffocating, prescriptive dictates on behaviour:

*We do not eat with our naked fingertips, walk in generous groups, speak merrily in booming voices and laugh our mqombothi laughs. They will scold us if we dare, not with their lips, Lord, because the laws prevent them from doing so, but with their eyes...and we will pause, perplexed, unsure of what that means, for are we not black, Father? No, not in the malls, Lord. We may not be black in restaurants, in suburbs and in schools. (Matlwa 2007:31, italics in original)*

While there are certainly contextual differences between South Africa and Zimbabwe, in both contexts races exist within transformed spaces that require individuals and groups to negotiate new challenges and ways of interaction.

Commenting on *Coconut*, Gugu Hlongwane (2013:9) believes that it “offers a timely investigation of the power of whiteness, even in a South Africa where the black majority now governs.” Hlongwane, throughout her article, places the overarching imperative of her research on the pervasive influence of whiteness and what she believes as the characters desire to be white, noting that being “uncomfortable in their own black skins, they desire the very whiteness that is the cause of their agonizing identity complexes.” She states that while unequal racial systems continue to exist, she acknowledges that “it’s no longer open season for colonial whiteness and how it, in the past, shaped the global environment.” (11) She does however depict whites as “angry and negrophobic” who have lost their former privileges and zones of comfort. She states that within the context of *Coconut*, many of these issues play out within the schooling system, which she characterises as exclusive, private and predominately white. (12) She argues that an overwhelming culture of whiteness, which is pervasive, domineering and exclusive, makes it difficult for black individuals to see their value. She describes the two main characters in the novel as possessing “psychic scars of oppression” (14) that has resulted in a loss of native culture and self-resentment. She concludes by saying that:

One of the important points of *Coconut* is that the private school system Matlwa describes in her novel is not necessarily ‘well-functioning’ in the sense that her characters are spiritually dysfunctional and impoverished even as they learn in the lap of luxury. Because these characters are not taught a positive African history, they die in white environments where they are of the right class but the ‘wrong’ skin colour. Matlwa’s black characters – both young and old – are dazzled by perceptions of a radiant whiteness. (Hlongwane 2013:14)

Within the international community, critical whiteness studies began in the late 1990s with Richard Dyer (1997) in his pioneering book, *White*. He observes that while extensive research had been undertaken before *White* on issues of racial representation, the phenomenon of white culture had been largely ignored. (1) He comments that for “as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people.” (1) The implication of



this is the creation of a normative/other dichotomy in which white individuals are seen as representative of the common interests of humanity while individuals whose race is at the forefront of their existence can only speak for their race. One of the ways that white culture is constructed as normative and sensical in *The Book of Memory* is through the portrayal of black spaces, experience and culture as characteristic of abnormality. This is achieved through the association of the townships with mysticism, magic and superstition. Memory, the novel's main protagonist, notes that:

As you travel around the country, you will find that a lot of people believe in the power of witchcraft and dark magic. Jimmy is full of stories from her village in Chipinge about wives who put spells on their husbands so that when they go with other women, their genitals disappear. (Gappah 2015:81)

Dyer asserts that “the point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train”. (2) While Dyer is articulate in his call for the exposure of whiteness for the purpose of undermining its hegemony, he recognises that there exists the potential for attention to facilitate the reinforcement of its constructs. He states that “my blood runs cold at the thought that talking about whiteness could lead to the development of something called ‘White Studies’...the point of looking at whiteness is to dislodge it from its centrality and authority, not reinstate it” (Dyer 1997: 10).

This tension between the inclination to expose the invisibility of whiteness while avoiding its reinforcement is captured effectively by Sara Ahmed (2004), where she states that “if whiteness becomes a field of study, then there is clearly a risk that whiteness itself will be transformed into an object. Or if whiteness assumes integrity as an object of study, as being ‘something’ that we can track or follow across time and space, then whiteness would become a fetish, cut off from histories of production and circulation.” Sentiments of a similar nature are echoed by a number of other scholars, including Aretha Phiri (2013), Ruth Frankenberg (1993) and Fine, Weis, Powell and Wong (1997:xi). Fine, Weis, Powell and Wong (1997:xi) explain that they “worry that in our desire to create spaces to speak, intellectually or empirically, about whiteness, we may have reified whiteness as a fixed category of experience; that we have allowed it to be treated as a monolith, in the singular, as an ‘essential something’”.

Melissa Steyn (2005:121) understands whiteness to refer to “an ideologically supported social positionality that has accrued to people of European descent as a consequence of the economic and political advantage...whiteness is the shared social space in which the psychological, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalised, and rendered unremarkable.” MacMullan (2009:54) adds that instead of being “a real, received, and antecedent racial group”, the white race was “slowly created through violence, legislation, and other practices of exclusion and privilege”. Sally Matthews (2015:118) indicates that “a consideration of the history of race shows that whiteness does not describe membership of some clearly defined ‘sub-species’ of humanity, nor does it refer simply to the possession of a particular set of characteristics.” The fluidity of whiteness as a social construct is observed by Theodore Allen (1994:27), where he states that “historically, ‘racial dissimilarities’ have not only been artificially used, they are themselves artificial. In colonial Hispanic America, it was possible for a person, regardless of phenotype (physical appearance), to become ‘white’ by purchasing a royal certificate of ‘whiteness’.” This observation is also noted by Roediger (1991) as well as Bonnet (1997:175), who adds that “the notion that a group of people were ‘white’ did not imply that they belonged to a discrete biological entity with a set of immutable ‘racial’ attributes.” The idea of whiteness as a mobile vessel with mutable characteristics is poignantly portrayed in the character of Grandma Tlou in *Coconut*, who appears to have internalised white values and concerns. It is noted that:

Grandmother Tlou took a week off from work at the Department of Education after she had heard the news of the sudden death of Diana, Princess of Wales...Grandmother Tlou commenced packing away all her clothing of colour, including her trademark Emporium scarves, into the spare bedroom downstairs, committing herself to dress in black until such a time when it would be appropriate to cease mourning. (Matlwa 2007:18)

Despite allusions of fluidity within the international context, the lingering institutional embedment and interrelated societal positioning is commented on by a number of scholars. Ruth Frankenberg (1993:1), in her book *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White women, race matters*, states that “first, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint’, a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society.” Continuing, she adds that “whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically,

politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination.” (6) Sally Matthews (2015:118, italics in original) adds that whiteness:

refers most saliently to the occupation of a *particular societal position*: whites are those who occupy a dominant position as a consequence of colonial expansion and who are advantaged by societal hierarchies...on the flip side, black people are those who are disadvantaged and oppressed by these same societal hierarchies...to be white or black or coloured or Asian...is most saliently a term that points to the position that one occupies within a stratified society.

This suggests that while white values manifest with the presence of white people themselves, whiteness forms part of wider areas of concern in the post-colonial and post-apartheid eras that require remedy through the dismantling of systemic racial advantages and discrepancies through redress – which has the potential to produce conflict, affect notions of identity and so forth. The allusions that have been made to structure, position, stratification and hierarchy I deduce are all facilitated and maintained through a particular systemic framework that privileges white culture, values, standards and behaviour. In *Coconut*, Ofilwe believes her family is subjugated by these covert prescriptions of whiteness, noting:

I hate it, Lord. I hate it with every atom of my heart...I am furious. I do not understand. Why, Lord? Look at us, Lord, sitting in this corner. A corner. A hole. Daddy believes he enjoys this food. Poor Mama, she still struggles with this fork and knife thing. Poor us...it is pitiful. What are we doing here? Why did we come? We do not belong. (Matlwa 2007:31)

Phiri (2013:168) comments that “blacks are subject to a covert ethos of whiteness... [which] is illustrated in the Tlou’s inability to perform a thanksgiving ceremony at their home”. She further adds that this can consequently result in a “*crisis of identity*” (171, italics in original) in which individuals have to engage and grapple with a multitude of influences in order to attempt to achieve a coherent sense of self. Whiteness however appears to confer privilege to those who subscribe to its dictates, which is alluded to by Jessica Murray (2012:91), who explores how appearance features in the identity construction of the characters. She notes that the legacy of apartheid and colonialism continues to be impactful with particular regard to a woman’s relationship with her hair (92). She acknowledges that while the characters in the novel possess a minimal amount of agency in wrestling with external influences, they display an uncomfortable relationship with white standards of beauty and are ultimately subordinated. Murray interestingly

notes how “the mostly peripheral white female characters in *Coconut* are also shown to engage in certain ‘preparations’ to alter their appearance.” (96) An example of this is the owner of the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop, who “clicks her gel-tipped French painted nails” (Matlwa 2007:149) as she gives instructions to the staff. While white standards of beauty subjugate both black and white women to varying extents, Murray argues that blackness is repeatedly depicted as ugly and inferior (99).

Considering the destructive force that many scholars have attributed to whiteness, a school of thought termed as racial eliminativism has formed that advocates for the elimination or abolition of racial taxonomy, terminology, ideologies and discursive constructs as a referent for identity. Eliminativists such as Noel Ignatiev (1997) deny any biological basis to race, acknowledge its destructive force and consequently call for its abolition. Ignatiev (1997:2) notes that:

We hold that so-called whites must cease to exist as whites in order to realise themselves as something else...as workers, or youth, or women, or whatever other identity can induce them to change...the white race is neither a biological nor a cultural formation; it is a strategy for securing to some an advantage in a competitive society.

Steyn (2005:122) however adopts a differing perspective on the ‘invisibility’ of whiteness, noting that “the particular historical and political configuration in South Africa has meant that whites have never experienced their whiteness and the advantages it afforded them as invisible...throughout the apartheid era white South Africans knew they were racialised, and some of their earliest memories recount differences in how they were positioned relative to ‘others’.” She notes further that “despite the way in which white people experience their social space as culturally neutral and individually determined, whiteness has definite cultural content, characterised by assumptions, belief systems, value structures and institutional and discursive options that frame white people’s self-understanding.” (2004:144) This sentiment is in contrast to widespread perspectives of whiteness, which portray it as cultureless, empty and used as a mechanism for societal advancement.

One of the consequences of the historical baggage of whiteness is the stubbornly persistent association of whiteness with racism. The pertinence of this association does not discriminate according to economic status, class, age, education, creed or religion. Individuals are however not passive recipients of potentially harmful labels. Accusations of racism and prejudice are

negotiated, engaged with, denied, rebutted and are met with anger, irritation, conflict and counter-accusations. Debates about the nature of racism and who its perpetrators are position all involved individuals in racial terms, sometimes explicitly, but “more often, it is implicit, as we come away from situations and encounters with a sense of unease, fear or suspicion, wondering whether our actions or treatment by others was influenced by race” (Durrheim 2011:24).

Melissa Steyn (2005:120) observes that race relations now involves “redirecting the academic gaze: from ‘racism’, the way in which the center constructs the margins, to the way in which the center constructs itself.” The implications of this are two-fold: First, Steyn observes the necessity of previously dominant ideology in reconstructing itself in order to remain relevant and congruent with societal paradigms that are no longer constructed on the basis of oppression, inequality and segregation. Second, this then opens the possibility for the center to be challenged and potentially undermined by emerging races that historically existed at the periphery. In *The Book of Memory*, this is portrayed through the area of Umwinsidale, which appears to exist as a ‘white’ safe haven that is isolated from the broader political and social environment of Zimbabwe. While the community here feigns their incorporation with wider society and liberal ideology, such as through the employment of black staff, the true nature of the community is revealed through the fact that black individuals in this location exist only to serve the purpose of being hired as maids and helpers. Alexandra, the daughter of Lloyd, despite harbouring racial prejudices, attempts to fly a ruling party flag in her car so as not to appear as a detractor. The necessity for whiteness to exhibit change from its position of power is reinforced by Matthews (2015:113), who states that “a non-racist South Africa is only possible if white

South Africans no longer consider themselves superior to other South Africans and no longer expect to occupy a central and dominant position in South African society.”

The social psychologist Herbert Blumer, as far back as 1958, in his article entitled *Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position* posited the notion of prejudice and antipathy as originating from a sense of group position, as opposed to individual sentiments. Adopting a collectivist approach, he argued that “prejudiced individuals think of themselves as belonging to a given racial group. It means, also, that they assign to other racial groups those whom they are prejudiced. Thus...a scheme of racial identification is necessary as a framework for racial

prejudice.” (Blumer 1958:3) He further notes that fundamental to group positioning is the establishment of positions of dominance and subordination between the groups and a motivation by the dominant group to maintain these distinctions – which is based on “(1) a feeling of superiority, (2) a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien, (3) a feeling of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, and (4) a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race.” (4)

These patterned ways of thinking that are influenced by shared social conventions allude to the presence of broader frameworks of ideology that are systemically embedded, whether pervasively or not and exert influence on individual and group mentality and behaviour. An extension of this is the phenomenon of ‘othering’, which has been researched critically by scholars such as Robyn Wilkinson (2016) and Gina Robson (2010) and refers to the description of subordinate groups in inferior terms by superior groups in order to create a distinction between the two groups. What is of interest is the ability of ‘othering’ in influencing the formation of identity and placing individuals and groups in positions of opposition with each other. In *Zebra Crossing*, this process of ‘othering’ is depicted multifariously. Chipo, the main protagonist in the novel, is an albino and arrives in South Africa from Zimbabwe with her brother George in order to seek a better life. Robyn Wilkinson highlights the intertwined and pervasive instances of othering that occurs throughout the novel. Chipo, due to her fair complexion, is ostracised and excluded in both Zimbabwe and South Africa and is often treated with ridicule, suspicion and a condescending fascination that is laced with myth, superstition and mysticism. Wilkinson (2016:36) however notes that even “within this immigrant community there is a constant rhetoric of ‘othering’ that allows each ethnic group to remain separate and distinct, by constructing all others as different and inferior.”

This occurs further between Chipo and her brother George, who looks to exploit and ridicule her at every available opportunity, disguising it under the pretense of being a paternalistic figure. Wilkinson (2016:42), highlighting the biting irony of the situation, notes an instance in the novel where “despite being the victim of prejudice all her life, Chipo immediately starts speaking about David and Jeremiah as ‘other’ once she learns about their sexual orientation”. Sandra Saayman (2016:73) places the main focus of her research on the central question: “Is literature able to represent the migrant in ways that transcend myths and stereotypes?” She notes that “*Zebra*

*Crossing* stands apart by featuring Chipo, a young Zimbabwean migrant who is also an albino, as [sic] main character.” (78) She however concludes that due to her representation as the ‘other’:

Chipo has double outsider status as migrant and albino, she fails in places to fill out as a credible three-dimensional character...Chipo’s naivete leads to her betrayal by fellow Zimbabweans (including her brother) who will exploit popular superstitions about albinos to sell her ‘clairvoyance’ during the Soccer World Cup betting frenzy. At the end of the novel she is their prisoner and the excipit [sic] suggests ‘the Tanzanians’ murder her to obtain her albino body for the purposes of sorcery. Thus stereotypes related to crime, betrayal, sorcery and the supernatural culminate in the final pages of *Zebra Crossing*. (Saayman 2016:78)

Jenny Robson (2000), for example, in her novel *Because pula means rain* also invokes these ideas critically in the form of her main albino protagonist, Emmanuel. Within the novel, the narrative revolves around Emmanuel’s journey in attempting to find belonging in his local community. He finds himself in a position of exclusion and ostracisation as the stigma surrounding his skin condition places him on the periphery of daily existence. A central conflict within the novel is the challenge that Emmanuel faces in reconciling his outward ‘white’ appearance with the indigenous Setswana ‘blackness’ that he feels internally and that defines his character. Emmanuel however, through negotiating the influences of the various environments that he finds himself in, concludes that embracing both polarities of his identity is the best solution for him.

Identity as linked to context and space and the nature of race, with particular regard to albinism, to mould to environmental variables is depicted extensively in *The Book of Memory*. The novel also poignantly depicts race trouble through illustrating not only the strained status of whites within Zimbabwe and their interactions with members of other races, but also the attitudes of prejudice and intolerance that circulate within the racial groups of the previously disadvantaged. This phenomenon of intra-racial conflict is also explored extensively in *Zebra Crossing*, which juxtaposes the 2010 FIFA World Cup, a symbol of positivity and unity, with the issue of migrancy, racial identity, belonging and exclusion.

While Blumer alludes to the idea that instances of racial prejudice involve more than the enactment of stereotypes and negative feeling and instead rely more on a commitment to a relative status positioning of groups in a racialised social order and that race prejudice lies

ultimately in a felt challenge to a sense of group position, a number of scholars have adopted differing views.

Writing for *Alteration* in his article ‘*There is a racist on my stoep and he is black*’: *A Philosophical Analysis of Black Racism in Post-apartheid South Africa*, Bernard Matolino (2013) postulates the notion that the concepts of prejudice and a felt challenge to a sense of group position might be mutually exclusive phenomena – in the sense that it is possible for a racial group, with particular reference to white people, to hold prejudicial views but not feel a threat to relative group position. He commences his investigation by posing the question as to whether it is possible for black individuals to be racist or not. Through conducting ‘thought experiments’, which is a philosophical method of inquiry which allows for the illustration or assessment of points or ideas through the construction of abstract mental scenarios, Matolino conceives of three situations in which black people might be thought of as being racist or at the very least, prejudiced.

The first situation involves an organisation that is thought of as favouring black people through specifically catering for their holistic advancement at the exclusion of white people. The possible motivation for this is stated as being an antipathy towards white people and blaming them for the condition of black people due to their role in systems of racial inequality that characterised the past. (Matolino 2013:62) He then constructs a second situation “where black people engage in acts of violence against white people”, targeting white people exclusively through acts such as crime because of reasons such as their role as oppressors in the past or simply due to the desire to appropriate and redistribute wealth from white people. (62) In the final situation, he imagines a scenario where a black person or group of black people in official or national capacity explicitly discriminate against white people – either through the promotion of separate development that favours black people or through the enactment of policies or laws that discriminates against or disenfranchises white people. (64)

Despite the escalating nature of the three thought experiments, Matolino notes that he does not consider any of the scenarios to be instances of effective prejudice or racism as they should be “of such a nature that the victims...feel the impact of the perpetrator’s behaviour as truly significant to cause them genuine discomfort, fear or feelings of real exclusion.” (65) For Matolino, whites view the culture, living conditions, attitudes and behaviour of blacks in a



condescending manner, viewing their way of life as inferior – deducing that “...by virtue of white belief that blacks are inferior, they are not likely to take black racism that seriously.” (68) He further adds that black individuals do not have the social capital to make perceived acts of racism or prejudice meaningful to whites. This, he concludes, is due to two main reasons: First, whites tend to occupy more superior positions economically, socially and politically. Second, there is no historical precedence of prejudice against whites as there is against blacks, making acts of racism baseless and consequently meaningless. (72) While Matolino focuses on the idea of black racism, what this perspective interestingly alludes to is the notion that the threat of positional encroachment by a group that is deemed to be subordinate is not a necessary condition for the incitement of prejudicial behaviour from the group deemed to be dominant if the threat is not judged to be legitimate. The concept of race trouble suggests that all races in the modern era are troubled by race to varying degrees, irrespective of historical status or classification. The veracity of these claims will also be explored within the course of this project.

Adopting a similarly anti-humanist approach to Blumer while however differing on the significance of social structure and perceptions of threat and encroachment in catalysing prejudice, Gerhard Mare (2001:76) centers his article around the question of how race informs the structuring of identity and interracial relations. He states that the very act of racialism, which refers to the categorisation of individuals into racial groups, is a sufficient basis for the construction of ideals surrounding exclusion, inclusion and racial prejudice. He states that:

Race thinking refers not only to the manner in which we make sense of social relations, actions and events, but also the way in which we perceive our own group membership and those of others, the way in which we share identities with some and are distinguished from others – the making of boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. (Mare 2001:77)

Mare notes that one of the primary functions of racialism is the creation of what he terms as ‘stories’, which refer to discursive constructs that “provide us with common sense” (78) regarding the nature of people, social situations, environments, behaviour, interactions and racial groups. Mare believes that these ‘stories’ are either reinforced or undermined by ideology, which interpellates individuals to behave and think in accordance with its prescribes. These ‘stories’ then facilitate racialised conceptualisations of morality and hierarchy but also undermine the possibility of alternative social orders and visions of society. (79) Most importantly, one of the

main functions of 'stories' is to provide a heuristic tool that offers explanations of daily phenomena. Mare (2001:79) observes that because of 'stories' "there is no need for every situation to be perpetually encountered and defined again."

Prominent South African political activist and race theorist, Steve Biko (1987), in the book *I Write What I Like* conceptualises an alternative approach to racial ideology and the path to potential reconciliation. In contrast to Gerhard Mare, who alludes to the underpinnings of prejudice, exclusion and discrimination as arising from racialism and segregation, Biko notes the issue of racial oppression and inequality as being resolved ideally through the paradigm of the black consciousness movement, of which he was the founder. The black consciousness movement was:

In essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression---the blackness of their skin---and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the "normal" which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness therefore, takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life. (Biko 1987:49)

For Biko, the racialisation of individuals is believed to be a positive step in the attainment of black emancipation. He observes that the black population have been downtrodden politically, socially and economically and have "been oppressed by an external world...through laws that restrict [black people] from doing certain things, through heavy work conditions, through poor pay, through difficult living conditions and through poor education." (Biko 1987:100)

In many respects, these sentiments are accounted for within the perspective of race trouble as black individuals attempt to assert their identity in spaces of racial interaction as compensatory for the subordination that characterised the past, in which their identities were systematically denied to them or given to them through the assertion of stereotypes and assumptions, as discussed in an earlier section. This is evident in the novel of *Coconut*, in which Ofilwe comes to display scorn towards elements of whiteness, such as the use of English or acceptable displays of

behaviour, beginning then to make a conscious effort of embracing what she believes to be more authentically 'black' behaviour, such as speaking in her native language.

Accompanying this is the self-stigmatisation that the black individual attaches to himself or herself – with regard to his or her worth, value and status. Biko states that this is because of the inherent worth and value that black individuals associate with whiteness. (100) Biko attributes this sense of self-stigmatisation partly to the role that culture, religion, economics and education have played in placing the black individual in a state of disadvantage and consequently, subservience. He writes that “in all aspects of the black-white relationship...we see a constant tendency to depict blacks as of an inferior status...our culture, our history...have been battered nearly out of shape”. (92) This is visible partly through the character of Fikile in *Coconut*, in which she attaches herself to behaviour associated with whiteness in order to attain the power and status that is linked to it. While Fikile displays scorn towards black individuals, she doesn't appear to retain the same sentiments regarding herself as a black woman – she is complimentary of herself and is proud of what she regards to be her preferable appearance and mannerisms.

Biko's response however to self-stigmatisation is the idea of collective self-actualisation, where the emphasis of freedom from oppression lies in the power of the group, as opposed to the individual, in resisting white influence and hegemony. The ideology of black consciousness centers itself around the idea that “at the heart of this kind of thinking is the realisation by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.” (68) In order for black people to regain their sense of self and value, Biko believes that it is necessary for racialisation to occur as “once the various groups within a given community have asserted themselves to the point that mutual respect has to be shown then you have the ingredients for a true and meaningful integration.” (21) While contexts of inequality and oppression exist, it is necessary first for the black population to establish their value and the conditions of their treatment before any meaningful interracial contact can occur. Elaborating upon this, Biko writes that “what is necessary as a prelude to anything else...is a very strong grass-roots build-up of black consciousness such that blacks can learn to assert themselves and stake their rightful claim.” (21) There are two other main reasons why Biko privileges racialisation. First, he is wary of those who he terms as “white liberals”, stating that by:

adopting the line of a nonracial approach, the liberals are playing their old game. They are claiming a "monopoly on intelligence and moral judgement" and setting the pattern and pace for the realisation of the black man's aspirations. They want to remain in good books with both the black and white worlds. They want to shy away from all forms of "extremisms", condemning "white supremacy" as being just as bad as "Black Power!". They vacillate between the two worlds, verbalising all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skillfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privileges. (Biko 1987:21)

Biko further believes that at best, liberal whites can only offer a sort of condescending paternalism in which they attempt to frame the struggle, behaviour, reactions and methodology on behalf of black people. This is potently realised in *Coconut* through the character of Belinda, who attempts to help Ofilwe in moulding her behaviour and use of English. Belinda frames the mispronunciations and behaviour of Ofilwe as problematic, however for Ofilwe, this is a non-issue. While Belinda thinks that she is being of help, she however appears to only further entrench Ofilwe's anxiety with regard to adopting constructs of whiteness and her scorn towards Belinda's behaviour.

Second, Biko supports an emphasis on racial distinction for the purpose of achieving black recognition, stating that "while we progressively lose ourselves in a world of colourlessness and amorphous common humanity, whites are deriving pleasure and security in entrenching white racism and further exploiting the minds and bodies of unsuspecting black masses." (50) For Biko, the mental and physical emancipation of the black person, facilitated through the black consciousness movement, first requires a recognition of the black demographic as an autonomous body capable of independent thought and action which, at least initially, requires isolation from parasitic and oppressive forces. He posits that this cannot be meaningfully achieved if black people are not granted the space to assume their rightful place in the world.

### **Methodology: An introduction to the perspective of race trouble**

Our lives are explicitly and implicitly troubled by race much of the time and this appears to be due largely to the backdrop of historical racial oppression that took the form of apartheid and colonialism that continues to inform much of the interracial relations that can be witnessed in the contexts of Zimbabwe and South Africa as they are depicted in the novels by Kopano Matlwa,

Petina Gappah and Meg Vandermerwe entitled *Coconut*, *The Book of Memory* and *Zebra Crossing* respectively. Within all of the novels race and group membership are depicted as being at the centre of social life. Perceptions and ideas about racial groups have implications for appropriate relations between individuals within those groups. Inherently, group membership as it pertains to race necessitates issues of ownership, belonging and exclusion as individuals attempt to compete for limited resources, opportunities and for place within spaces and groups. This is however made complex by the fact that racial categories appear to be more a matter of group consensus as opposed to a set of immutable, aesthetic characteristics.

Race and social standing continue to define the social outlooks and available opportunities for many, making the legacy of colonialism and apartheid impactful in the national status quo. Transformative post-apartheid and post-colonial policies, such as Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE), Affirmative Action (AA) and racial quotas, which have sought to give equity of the country to the previously disenfranchised, are themselves marred by controversy as they attempt to reconcile the binarism of promoting the political and socio-economic empowerment of the previously disadvantaged while simultaneously attempting to cater to those who were advantaged under the systems of apartheid and colonialism, which has resulted in much contention. In *Coconut*, the controversy of these policies is alluded to by Ofilwe:

When Daddy's company, IT Instantly, won the post office tender in which Daddy had invested numerous golf balls, a thousand glasses of JC, endless swipes on the Diner's Club card and a professionally gift-wrapped ten diamonds and steel limited-edition Mitchell bracelet in, Koko advised that a thanksgiving ceremony would be fitting. (Matlwa 2007:71)

While these frameworks of redress have achieved limited success, they have also been the source of much interracial trouble and anxiety, with some black individuals coming to resent these policies of redress due to the stigma and corruption that is attached to it – in which black individuals who are employed under these frameworks are seen as 'transformative appointments' as opposed to being hired on the basis of their skillset.

While it is difficult to deny that much has been done in attempting to transform the lives of ordinary black South Africans since 1994, the burden of poverty continues to be overwhelmingly carried by the black population (Durrheim *et al.* 2011:17). A phenomenon that is unique to the post-apartheid context is the occurrence of an economic stratification within the black

population, with a rapid growth of the black elite and middle-class financial brackets, with the black middle class increasing by 78 percent in comparison to an increase of the white middle class by 15 percent between 1991 and 1996. (17) While changes have definitely occurred, this transformation has often not reached the lower economic echelons of black society, with many still living without employment, proper housing and access to basic amenities and infrastructure. While unequally transforming the lives of the black population, policies of redress have left the white population feeling sidelined, displaced and particularly targeted by transformative policies that they believe amounts to ‘reverse-racism’ and is motivated by a desire to ‘take revenge’ on them for the past. With particular applicability to Zimbabwe, whites have responded by either immigrating *en masse*, by accepting the new political and economic dispensation, by disengaging with local and national developments and living as much of an isolated existence as possible or by moving into closed-off communities in affluent areas, as in the case of Lloyd’s family residing in the isolated location of Umwinsidale in *The Book of Memory*. (Gappah 2015:38)

All this indicates that solving the impasse between necessary transformation and holistic racial inclusion is a practical challenge in which interested stakeholders pit various notions of redress, fairness and non-racism against each other. (Durrheim *et al.* 2011:16) These ideological conflicts are the source of much race trouble, as the outcome of these confrontations have real-world social consequences that dictates primacy, prospects and available opportunities. These interactions however do not occur in a vacuum, but are rather informed and influenced by the historical weight of racial discrepancy that positions people in “racially aligned practices of engagement” (194). The theory of race trouble can therefore be formally defined as:

a social psychological condition that emerges when the history of racism infiltrates the present to unsettle social order, arouse conflict of perspectives and create situations that are individually and collectively troubling. (Durrheim *et al.* 2011:27)

This project views the notion of race as a performative construct – being achieved in the performance of everyday practices. While the terms ‘performance’ and ‘performative’ might ordinarily be glossed as having the same meaning, there is indeed a subtle distinction between the two terms that is noteworthy for the purposes of this project. Judith Butler (1990), in her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, provides an excellent framework for the distinction between these two terms. The concept of performance refers to the assumption of the individual in a particular

role – which can be likened to an actor on stage fulfilling a particular persona or character. The legitimacy of the role that the individual plays is necessitated upon the routines of conduct and everyday actions that characterise that particular role in that particular context. In *The Book of Memory*, for example, Memory recognises the various roles that she must adopt in order to fit into the various contexts that she encounters. Within Umwinsidale, she moulds her personality attributes to the values of whiteness that dominate the environment, however outside of that environment within the prison, her attitude towards whiteness and the privilege that it incurs is far more antagonistic – viewing whiteness with scorn and lamenting over the influence that she recognises that it has had on her. If this concept is applied to race, it follows then that the actual attributes of race, such as the intonation of an individual’s skin, hair type and so forth are meaningless without the social performance and contextual background that gives it meaning and significance through the process of racialisation. Racialisation here can be defined as the active process of categorisation into racial groups through which phenotypical traits are rendered significant and meaningful in a specific context.

The notion of performativity, on the other hand, refers to the ability of something to produce a series of effects. In this manner, it is prudent to state that performativity as it pertains to race highlights the idea that the process of racialisation and the concept of race incurs with it social ramifications that place impositions on the racialised individual, such as expectations for conduct or attitude that are either realised or not through tangible practices that are engaged in on an everyday, normative basis. It is the implications of this process of meaning that is given to these differences in phenotypical traits and how this is influenced by the post-apartheid and post-colonial context that is a point of focus for this project. Butler (1990:xv) notes that “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.” Within *Cocunut*, Ofilwe and Fikile are profoundly influenced by their various contexts that leads them into conducting themselves in certain patterned ways of behaviour that are consistent with expected norms. Fikile, despite originating from a humble background – for example having to use a plastic bucket to bathe herself from water that she collects outside of her residence and boils (Matlwa 2007:118) – she carries herself as an individual far removed from that setting and as someone emanating from a more wealthy background and radiating the values of whiteness, which is aligned with the requirements of her

workplace, The Silver Spoon Coffee Shop. While this results in Fikile adapting more explicitly to these contextual cues, such as altering her appearance through coloured contact lenses and skin lightening cream (117), it is also evident in the more nuanced choices of behaviour that she makes and attitudes that she holds, such as the stereotypes that she believes regarding black men on the train that she uses to travel to work as potential rapists and criminals (129), or how she crosses the road to avoid having to interact with street vendors as she walks the last part of her journey to work. (140) She classifies herself as racially different from the black people around her, stating conclusively “*I am not one of you. You are poor and black and I am rich and brown.*” (140, italics in original)

Race is something that the characters in the novels therefore ‘do’, as opposed to being a feature of society that exists outside of them. Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn (2004:4) in their introductory chapter to *Under Construction: ‘Race’ and Identity in South Africa Today* state that “race is given meaning by the political economy in which it is located. It needs props, a social and economic script, and co-stars, before it can assume its commonsensical proportions. In addition, it is most obviously registered visually, which implicates an audience in the meaning of the social stage in which ‘race’ is performed.” This alludes to the idea, which will be explored in more detail throughout the project, of the idea of race as a collaborative effort and not a fixed category that is not subject to change and negotiation. I however refer to Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2008:405, italics in original) in *The New Social Theory Reader* for an encompassing definition of race which this project privileges as authoritative:

The effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle...*race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.*

Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called ‘phenotypes’), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process.

In *The Book of Memory*, race as a position that signifies social conflict is vividly realised through the main albino character of Memory, whose racial identity, which operates from a position of liminality between traditional racial categories, produces race trouble in and of itself as she attempts to negotiate her sense of self in relation to the various environments and influences that



she finds herself exposed to throughout the novel. As she is exposed to various environments, from her township home in Mharaphara Street to the luxurious tranquility of Umwinsidale and Lloyd's house that she affectionately terms as 'Summer Madness', she adopts the mannerisms of her respective environments with her racial identity being influenced accordingly. In *Coconut*, both the central protagonists, Ofilwe and Fikile, undergo subtle but significant shifts in their racial identities and systems of beliefs in order to fit into the socio-political requirements of their immediate environments.

Attempting to examine this phenomenon, Kevin Durrheim, Lyndsay Brown and Xoliswa Mtose have conceptualised the perspective of race trouble in the book *Race Trouble: Race, Identity and Inequality in Post-Apartheid South Africa* which acts as a pioneering contribution to the field of modern-day race relations in the post-apartheid and post-colonial context. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:22) notes that "post-apartheid interactions continue to be troubling in racial terms. They take place in a context where the memory of racism is still fresh and where the legacy of apartheid is visible in concrete form in the shape of persistent racial inequality and segregation." This project uses the concept of race trouble to interrogate the negotiation of identity, place and belonging that is necessitated through the post-apartheid and post-colonial contexts of South Africa and Zimbabwe as it is portrayed in the novels.

The perspective of race trouble is used as a tool to reveal the potential connection between the legacy of apartheid and colonialism and the practices, behaviour and attitudes that characterise the everyday lives of the individuals and groups that are depicted in the novels. The perspective of race trouble uses three elements to engage in a close reading of the novels – namely the ideas of discourse, practices and ideology. It is important to note that while each of these concepts are examined individually within each chapter, as has already been alluded to they are certainly not mutually-exclusive analytical constructs, but are rather inextricably intertwined and entail each other.

The ordering of the texts, where I examine *Coconut* first, then subsequently *The Book of Memory* and finally *Zebra Crossing* is motivated by the applicability and appropriateness of the three constructs to each of the novels and their nature in extending upon one another. Both discourse and ideology refer similarly to the same element of social life, that individuals simultaneously participate in and construct shared forms of comprehension or understanding that organises

activity and identity. The main distinction between discourse and ideology is however two-fold: First, while constructs of discourse include broader society in its critical lexicon, in comparison to ideology, more focus is placed on the individual's subjective engagement with discourse and how this influences the nature of discourse and its employment. Second, discourse uniquely "derives its significance from its central role in the linguistic turn in modern social theory by providing a term with which to grasp the way in which language and other forms of social semiotics not merely convey social experience, but play some major part in constituting social subjects." (Purvis & Hunt 1993:474) It is for these reasons that discourse theory is most appropriately applied to Matlwa's *Coconut*. The main thematic concerns of the novel, as the title insinuates, examine issues relating to competing modalities of racial identity, the negotiation of whiteness and the new challenges of being a black individual in the context of a post-apartheid setting, which includes the main characters' search for their 'authentic' selves.. This process of negotiating identity, place, competing for resources and managing interracial interaction in newly defined spaces of contact in which equality appears to be the emphasis is troubling for all involved individuals. Racial identity, it is argued, is a discursive construct, and like all discourses, it is continually in the process of being altered, reinforced and undermined by contextual variables. More than this, however, is the idea that is postulated by the perspective of race trouble, which is that issues of racial interaction, trust and unity as they are depicted in the novels, with particular applicability to *Coconut*, are not straightforward or uncomplicated but cut across political, economic and social lines and reject neat compartmentalisation or easy conclusions.

A recurring feature of *Coconut* is also the employment of stereotypes, assumptions and prejudices that is associated with racial identity that allows for individuals and groups to quickly assess the nature of people and situations, without having to take the time and cognitive effort to conduct new appraisals of situations and people. With this, however, comes the real potential for complete errors in judgement and perception and the perpetuation of prejudices and inequalities that ultimately become pervasive due to continued use. The other main issue with this, as will be further elaborated on later in this chapter, is its tendency towards reification, which refers to the unexamined association of characteristics with certain individuals and groups. An example of this occurs in the second half of *Coconut* in which the waitron, Ayanda, encounters a rude white customer who comments that "if it wasn't for us you wouldn't be able to read so don't you

patronise me.” (Matlwa 2007:150) While the comment is most certainly egregious, is it without a doubt racist? Despite there being arguments for it being or not being racist, the fact that Ayanda automatically assumed that the comments were racially motivated and consequently replied with an expletive that was directed at the customer indicates the potential danger of assumptions and stereotypes in assessing social cues and everyday situations. I examine how discursive constructs such as reification and stereotypes contribute to the themes of the novel and the manner in which they influence the development of the characters.

While I place particular focus on the main characters of Ofilwe Tlou and Fikila Thwala, I also reference many of the supporting characters in the book, such as Kate Jones, Granny Tlou, Ayanda and Tshepo. I examine a number of events within the plot of the novel and seek to determine the nature of discourse that is employed in those specific instances and how this not only affects the behaviour and attitudes of the characters, but how it also reinforces or undermines the overall thematic concerns of the book, such as the hegemony of whiteness and racial identity. I look to scholars such as Michel Foucault (1972), Judith Butler (1993, 1990) and Purvis & Hunt (1993) to supplement the chapter’s exploration of discourse and Durrheim *et al.*’s race trouble.

I analyse Gappah’s *The Book of Memory* under the analytical category of practices, as it fits most appropriately with the nature of the novel but moreover, it is the mundane practices and events that characterise everyday life that are at the root of race trouble. *The Book of Memory* centers itself around its main albino protagonist, Memory, who is accused of the murder of her white, informally ‘adoptive’ father Lloyd Hendricks. The title of the novel derives from the journal/book of events that she is asked by her appeal lawyer to keep, where she recollects the series of events leading up to the death of Lloyd. This death acts as a central conflict in the novel and is foregrounded as a central theme. It sets up the coming of age tale of the novel, as Memory traverses a number of environments, from the streets of Mufakose township to the plush farmlands of Umwinsidale and eventually to Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison, where she awaits a retrial. Each of these environments, with the varying demographics of people, contrasting spatial arrangements and attitudes and cultures that characterise these contexts all contribute to the character development of Memory and the changing perceptions and nature of her racial identity. In Chapter 4 where I explore this novel, I comment on and contrast the

aesthetics of the various environments, from the monotony and degradation of Mufakose Township, with its dusty streets and “families [who] lived together all packed one on top of the other, like sardines in a tin” (Gappah 2015:37) to the “tranquility” (38) of Umwinsidale. Part of the reason for the distinctions in each of the environments, I propose under the perspective of race trouble, is due to the legacy of colonialism in Zimbabwe and the systematic segregation that took place – where whites were placed in favourable locations in the centre of economic and social activity, while blacks were placed on the periphery of civilisation in unfavorable, harsh conditions, without access to basic amenities, such as housing, electricity and water. As I explain in more detail in a historical contextualisation at the beginning of the chapter, this was justified through discourse of blacks as degraded, uncivilised and unworthy of equal rights to whites, which facilitated through individuals like Cecil John Rhodes, proposed whites as being the superior race. Practices, which can take a variety of forms, from the attitudes that people have, the way they organise themselves, to the manner in which they construct and alter their surroundings, is affected by discourse, as people begin to embody and believe instances of discourse that encapsulate a context. Discourse and these tangible practices exist within a causal relationship and I examine how discourse that originates from the colonial context continues to influence the practices that are seen within the novel, such as prejudice, exclusion and stereotypical discourse that becomes associated with place. I supplement this lexicon of race trouble through the theory of place identity in a seminal text that is postulated by Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983) in order to understand the process by which places acquire connotations and meaning for people and how this is racially troubling for individuals, especially those who are associated with malice, evil and backwardness by virtue of the location in which they reside, as indicated by Alexandra’s attitude towards Memory when she first arrives in Umwinsidale. (Gappah 2015:158)

More than this, I explore racial dynamics in the novel through analysing the strained relationship of whites with the surrounding black community and how Memory oscillates between embracing aspects of a white identity and aspects of a black identity and the position of liminality that this places her in. The idea of racialisation, which refers to the grouping of individuals into racial categories along with all of the associations of that racial category, can be profoundly troubling for individuals as it crafts conduct to suit behavioural expectations in spaces of interaction. The immaterial aspect of this racialisation is interpretation, as people position themselves in racial

terms as they negotiate, affirm, rebuke and arrive at concessions regarding the nature of events that they experience and the ideologies of racism, transformation and redress that shapes every aspect of their lives. Both these immaterial and tangible aspects of society form part of the framework of race trouble. Innately, the racialisation of individuals through practices tends to produce a context of opposition that catalyses tension and antagonism between the races for as long as unequal systems of relations exist within society. In the novel this is evident to note in the relationship between the residents of Umwinsdale and the surrounding black community.

It is through our actions that we not only necessitate the continuing racialisation of society, but also how we manage relations and episodes of contact with each other. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:83) notes that:

Practices – both talk and embodied – are at once individual and collective. They are informed by individual people, but in ways that are informed by shared social conventions. In addition, when many individuals perform actions in this way they bring about collective and patterned ways of doing things that is the very substance of group life.

As is noted in the above quote, the notion of practices includes activities such as the immaterial aspects of talk and discourse, but it extends upon this to include material activities that have tangible effects on behaviour and environments.

These patterned ways of thinking that are influenced by shared social conventions allude to the presence of broader frameworks of ideology that are systemically embedded, whether pervasively or not and exert influence on individual and group mentality and behaviour. In Chapter 5 I apply the concept of ideology to Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*, which focuses on the plight of its main albino protagonist, Chipu. The novel is set during the context of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, however this time of supposed African unity and joy is quickly juxtaposed against the prejudice, xenophobia and harassment that Chipu and her brother George face after entering into South Africa illegally from Zimbabwe.

The term 'ideology' refers to shared aspects or understanding of social life at a broader level than what items of discourse operate at – a type of collective consciousness – that guides thought and behaviour. Purvis & Hunt (1993:476) note that ideology "directs attention towards the external aspects of focusing on the way in which lived experience is connected to notions of interest and position that are in principle distinguishable from lived experience." What this refers to is the

idea that individuals and groups can be influenced to think and act in ways that are potentially outside of their normative ways of being. This alludes to the possibility of individuals being subjugated by ideology to behave in ways that is consistent with that particular ideology, such as the notion of foreigners being unwelcome in South Africa – which is a recurrent theme in the book – and having South African nationals behave in ways that reinforce that ideology, such as threatening foreigners, employing negative stereotypical discourse and so forth. I make use of Judith Butler’s (1993) seminal book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* as an aid in further understanding this phenomenon.<sup>89</sup>

Stereotypes and prejudices have throughout recent history had a profound impact on racial dispersion, attitudes and behaviour. In the case of South Africa, the typical methodology for the subordination of black people was to justify their unequal treatment through assertions of their innate biological inferiority – which takes its origins through stereotypes and generalisations. In comparison to their white counterparts, black people were thought of as being intellectually and emotionally underdeveloped and were often likened to barbaric savages with no qualities of civilisation and maturity. In this manner, the complexes of inferiority and superiority were naturalised. Black people were made to believe that due to their biology, they were suited only to work of a menial, degrading nature and deserved their ill-treatment at the hands of white people to curb their qualities of savagery. I argue that one of the main reasons for the presence of exclusionary ideologies that are aimed at foreigners by South African nationals is as a result of these stereotypes that acted as justification for the systematic disenfranchisement of black people in South Africa. As seen with in the novel, black South Africans attempt to assert their identity in spaces of racial interaction as compensatory for the subordination that characterised the past, in which their identities were systematically denied to them or given to them through the assertion of stereotypes and assumptions.

Furthermore, one of the main tools that is used in the reinforcement of exclusion in the novel, across multiple fronts, is the concept of ‘othering’. Briefly, this refers to the process in which dominant groups define other or subordinate groups in inferior terms. In the novel othering is depicted as a multifaceted phenomenon that occurs within as well as between various nationalities and races (Wilkinson 2016:36). What is of interest is the ability of ‘othering’ in influencing the formation of identity and placing individuals and groups in positions of

opposition with each other. I reference the works of both Robyn Wilkinson (2016) and Richard Ballard (2004) in this regard to gain a greater understanding of the operation within the context of *Zebra Crossing*.

Lastly, I postulate that one of the central themes of the book is the search for the location or place where the self is at home. The concept of home delineates the most intimate location where one feels most comfortable, the most welcomed, the most in-place – the very antithesis of discomfort or exclusion. To this end, I reference Rosemary Marangoly George (1996) and her and her influential book entitled *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial relocations and twentieth-century fiction* where she argues for the notion of home as a contested terrain with conflict that is inherent to it. In the plot of *Zebra Crossing*, this is evident in the intense antagonism that results when South African nationals believe that foreigners are encroaching on South Africa, the location to which they believe is their home, exclusively – which is another of the main themes in the novel that I place focus on.

*Zebra Crossing* and *The Book of Memory* both utilise albino characters, Chipo and Memory, as their central protagonists. Albinism is exemplary of the perspective of race trouble through its ability to disrupt traditional binary conceptualisations of racial identity and highlight the malleable nature of race as context-bound, in-flux and closely linked to issues of belonging, exclusion, potential conflict and the exploration and negotiation of racial ideology.

Through adopting a close reading of the novels by Matlwa, Vandermerwe and Gappah, the project aims to determine if a context of race trouble is produced through the plot developments of the novels. Implicit within the perspective of race trouble is a particular focus on the issue of whiteness and how the characters within the novels engage with it. Focus will be placed on the institutional and positional embedment of whiteness, as this is significant in informing the possibility of race trouble. This project approaches the research on race trouble with a focus on the nuances of racial experience in contexts of interaction between people as depicted in the novels. Every day, normal practices are at the root of race trouble as individuals conduct themselves in racially oriented ways. Practices such as simple acts of communication allow individuals and groups to make meaning of their world, interpret situations and position one's self in relation to others in racially significant ways. The construction, maintenance and undermining of ideology, whether dominant or subordinate, is intimately linked to the use of

language and discourse. Ideology, which also influences the content and nature of language, has tangible effects on all forms of social life, which is a noteworthy point of exploration in this project. There is also a further tendency for the associations of place to be moulded by prevailing groups who appropriate those spaces. This, as a consequence, has significant implications for notions of belonging, exclusion, ownership and identity as contextually grounded. This, among those already mentioned, feature as the most significant approaches to the study.



## Chapter Three: Discourse in the construction of identity

Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*

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### Introduction

*Coconut* by Kopano Matlwa, which has garnered critical attention as the winner of the European Union Literary Award for 2007, is an innovative novel that offers an intimate, relevant exploration of the lived experiences, negotiation of ideology and character development of the main black protagonists that are depicted in the novel. It offers an eloquent examination of the difficult question that many blacks of varying economic and social status found themselves asking post-apartheid – what does it mean to be black in the context of a newly formed South African democracy with newly attained liberties, freedoms and the promise of opportunities and a better life?

The implementation of policies of redress and restitution have had mixed outcomes in terms of manifesting tangible, lasting change in the lives of black South Africans. Seekings and Natrass (2006:308) observe that the deracialisation of economic wealth in the country has occurred predominately within the upper echelons of society, with “accelerating growth of the African elite and ‘middle-classes’”. This has given rise to what Richard Ballard (2015:1) terms as “black diamonds”, which refers to the emergence of affluent black South Africans following the end of apartheid who have been aided in attaining their wealth by the presence of policies of redress, the term “black diamond” alluding to their rarity and value. Although there have been considerable changes to the racial demographics of the middle to upper-class, policies of affirmative action such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) have seemingly failed the most vulnerable and destitute within society, with studies suggesting that the burden of poverty continues to be overwhelmingly placed on the backs of black South Africans, with 63 per cent of black children living in households whose total earnings per month equated to less than R800 per month, compared to 4 per cent of whites who lived in the same conditions. (Seekings *et al.* 2006:308)

While this situation classified South Africa as a country with one of the biggest economic inequalities between the rich and the poor in the world, it also created an internal economic stratification within the black population that continues to be the source of much conflict and

animosity. *Coconut* is unique in the sense that it takes cognisance of both of these economic realities in the form of the main two black female protagonists, Ofilwe Tlou and Fikile Twala, who each come from contrasting economic backgrounds – Ofilwe being the far more affluent of the two. Despite their differing economic backgrounds and the element of entanglement between the two girls that occurs in the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop that the reader has the opportunity to be party to, it is revealed that both characters endure similar issues of identity conflict and influences that they must negotiate in a post-apartheid South African setting. Gugu Hlongwane (2013:18) argues that Ofilwe and Fikile yearn “for a more coherent rather than a fixed sense of identity.” The novel in many respects attempts to piece together a reconciliation of difference between the two lead protagonists through illustrating the common threads of their individual struggles as the nexus between race, class and gender is thoughtfully explored.

Within this chapter I investigate the veracity of the idea that part of the reason for much of the turbulence throughout *Coconut* lies in the fact that whiteness continues to be influential due to the attribute of normality that it possesses, with Phiri (2013:168) noting “that blacks are subject to a covert ethos of whiteness, [they] must thus erase or modify their blackness in order to fit in or ‘exist’.” A telling example of this is the inability of the Tlous to perform a cultural ceremony within the bounds of the Little Valley Country Estate, with Ofilwe relaying that:

*Tshepo was the one who received the letter of warning from the two security guards that explained that the couple in No. 2042 behind us had alerted them that we were sacrificing animals after they spotted a chicken hung up on our washing line. The letter warned that we were liable to be heavily fined because we had breached rules no. 12.3 and 15.1 in the Little Valley Country Estate Code of Conduct Handbook. (Matlwa 2007:73, italics in original)*

Commenting on whiteness as a normative construct, Richard Dyer (1997:2-3) argues that:

Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented *as* whites but as people...there is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that – they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race.

What this ultimately results in is the establishment of a subtle ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ dynamic, similar to that of the colonial period, in which blacks exist at the margin of society attempting to

work their way inward. Within the framework of discourse, this chapter takes inspiration from Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek's (1995) article that views whiteness as a product of strategic rhetoric. Nakayama *et al.* (1995:293) argues that "by viewing whiteness as a rhetorical construction, we avoid searching for any essential nature of whiteness. Instead, we seek an understanding of the ways that this rhetorical construction makes itself visible and invisible, eluding analysis yet exerting influence over everyday life." Taking this direction as a starting point, the aim of this chapter is a simple one: My goal is to look at how discourse affects the lives of the main protagonists of the novel and how they consequently negotiate these influences. At the end of this chapter, I hope to be in a position to make some tentative conclusions regarding the significance or insignificance of whiteness in these spaces as they are shown in the novel and the effect that discourse has on the lived experience of these characters.

I begin by examining the nature and construction of discourse, where I postulate an understanding and definition of discourse that this chapter and project utilises through reference to Durrheim *et al.*, who foregrounds the role of language, diction and the phrasing of communication in constructing discourse. I then include Judith Butler (1993) and Michel Foucault (1972) who view the notion of discourse as socially constructed, but who differ in their perspective on the level of agency that individuals have in engaging with discourse. Discourse however also comes with it the risk of having to account for why a particular discourse was employed in a particular situation or environment, causing race trouble, anxiety and tension when the application of a particular discourse is deemed to be offensive or inappropriate, which I subsequently examine.

I then analyse the concept of whiteness in its three dominant forms within the novel: First, as it pertains to appearance and how Fikile and Ofilwe in particular attempt to subscribe to those prescribes and then second, how the discourse of whiteness affects the use of language and the attitudes of the characters towards this influence. Lastly, I explore the allure of whiteness as it relates particularly to the contrasting social positions of Ofilwe and Fikile. Moreover, I explore the subtle dictates that the book holds for acceptable behaviour of blacks and the ramifications that this potentially has on the ability of the characters to self-actualise and exist in a post-apartheid South Africa. Finally, I conclude with tentative statements regarding the power of discourse within the novel to contribute to race trouble as it applies particularly to black racial

identity and the search for self in a post-apartheid context, racial stratification along economic lines and the influence of the recurrent presence of whiteness.

### **The nature and construction of discourse**

The peaks and valleys, ebbs and flows of power relations, racial positioning, identity and inter-group relations have long been reinforced, contested, negotiated and disputed within the bounds of discourse. The formation of discourse is predicated on the presence and continued use of language which allows individuals and groups to make meaning of their world, interpret situations, engage in social interactions and position one's self in relation to others in racially significant ways where the notion of race becomes significant in guiding the social behaviour between individuals and groups. This racial positioning can manifest itself implicitly and explicitly in the form of verbal expression, regulating individual and group behaviour as well as constructing situations of conflict between different racial groups.

While language is enacted by individuals, Durrheim *et al.* (2011:88) notes that “the activities of masses of individuals can be coordinated and synchronised by their use of language to ascribe shared meaning to the world and to locate themselves in it collectively. Through shared conceptualisations of the world, individuals and groups are able to reinforce or undermine the status quo through language and discourse. Privileged groups, through language, frame the necessity of racial discrepancy and inequality. They justify the current situation by stating how there are no alternatives and how things must consequently be this way. Disenfranchised groups however contest such a necessity and advocate for change and inclusive alternatives. Secondly, it is through language that individuals and groups displace the harsh realities of poverty and struggle away from themselves. They present acceptable images of themselves through language that help to remove situations of racial antipathy and inequality away from their immediate realities, a pressing example of this being the uneasy relationship between Belinda and Ofilwe which will be explored later on in the chapter. The sentiment of societal discrepancy being the responsibility of only some people is an ideology that groups who find themselves affected by inequality, conflict and poverty attempt to undermine.

All of the instances that are described above are examples of social life that are facilitated by language and require a certain amount of shared understanding and tacit agreement in order for

language to function as it does. This is achieved in three ways. First, “language gives us a lexicon, the words we use in talk and writing. These are the basic representations that language provides us of the world, cut up to service the way we live in it.” (Durrheim *et al.* 2011:89) The diction that we use is of importance, as each word we use carries a packed legacy of connotations, implications and interpretations. Second, the language that we use is limited by the use of grammar in order to render expression meaningful. A speaker must therefore conform to the rules of grammar or risk being incomprehensible to a potential listener. Furthermore, this structuring of words in particular ways with the appropriate use of pronouns and verbs imports with it a range of cultural assumptions that are specific to that particular language. It is not uncommon in the language of isiZulu, for example, to reply with “*siyaphila*” when asked “*kunjane?*”. Even though the question “how are you?” is directed at a singular individual, replying with “we are well” is perfectly acceptable, as in the Zulu culture, the communal emphasis of everyday life teaches that an individual moves with his/her ancestors wherever he/she goes, hence the individual replying on behalf of the collective. Last, inherent to the concept of language and the act of speech is dialogue. Whenever there is a speaker, there is always an implied listener, and *vice versa*. This results in speech that is facilitated through language being a social exercise with social implications.

Language and discourse are inextricably intertwined concepts as it is not possible for one to exist without the other. There are multiple definitions of discourse. Michael Foucault (1972:49) defines discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” What this definition highlights is the use of meaning and language in the context of activity as opposed to analysis of words and phrases in isolation. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:94) comments that:

Foucault’s definition of discourse also expresses a constructionist view of the world in which the objects that we believe exist are, in fact, formed in discourse. Reality is constructed or produced by discourses. The only way in which we can get to know ‘objects’ in the world...is by means of the discourses that render them meaningful.

Foucault’s understanding of discourse offers the interesting possibility of ideologies of power and racial identity as being socially constructed through language and therefore malleable in order to converge with specific contextual requirements and social cues. What this potentially alludes to then is the potential for discourse to be challenged, undermined or reinforced through

the same everyday practices that are responsible for constructing discourse in the first place. This would then confer doubt upon the idea of discourses as immutable and pervasive.

Judith Butler (1993) adopted the perspective of discourse as operating on the basis of citation and recitation. Citation means to summon or interpellate; recitation refers to the repetition of something that is memorised or rehearsed. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:96) explains that:

drawing on a discourse can be likened to quoting others who have used it before, putting the discourse to work in the context of our immediate concern. [A discourse] also has proactive force in the present and the future, summoning the speaker and the audience to attend to its meaning, to hear it in specific ways, excluding other ways, and to respond appropriately.

Relating her conceptualisation of discourse to gender, Butler (1993:232) believed that the entire idea of sex assignment, for example at birth, was simply the recitation of societal discursive constructs that are considered to be normative. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:97) substantiates by noting that “the process of ‘girling’ starts at birth with the announcement:

‘It’s a girl!’...this is not an innocent statement or fact, but a summons to a way of being that is recited over and over again throughout life. [The statement]...functions in the same way to bring an infant under an order of discipline, regulation and punishment, but is not recognised as such because it is so routine, so commonplace.

In comparison to Foucault, Butler adopts a far more anti-humanist perspective with regard to the functioning of discourse in the sense that external influences outside the control of individuals are imposed from birth with little to no agency from individuals in resisting these influences. Foucault, conversely, proposes a collaborative paradigm in that while discourse influences the individual, people still have some level of agency in manipulating discursive influences.

This debate is an important one as evaluating the veracity of the various claims has significant ramifications for how discursive constructs, like the notion of whiteness in the context of *Coconut*, are negotiated by the various characters in the novel. Irrespective of the variations in Butler’s and Foucault’s accounts of discourse, the link between discourse and power is an intimate one that has the potential to influence behaviour and identity formation markedly. In this regard, Butler (1997:2) argues that:

We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are.

In the perspective of race trouble, discourse analysis is not used for the purpose of evaluating situations for markers of racism, prejudice or fairness. Instead, the focus lies in how the characters in the novel subjectively account for the various instances of discourse that they encounter and how they assess its nature as well as the methodology that the characters use in applying instances of discourse to the various situations that they find themselves in and the consequent effects thereof. One of the main aims of this chapter therefore is to explore how the characters in *Coconut* negotiate the discursive constructs that they encounter, the effect that this has on their identities, perspectives and behaviour and how this relates to the wider perspective of race trouble.

### **Accountability in the employment of discourse**

It is important to note that every interpellation of discourse brings with it the opportunity for conflict, hostility and shame. As has been alluded to before, the implementation of discourse is not a neutral act; it has the capability of dictating power relations, interactions and opportunities. Durrheim, Greener and Whitehead (2015:87) note that:

Speakers produce (potentially) race-relevant positions in the service of particular actions or arguments...and they do so in ways that anticipate possible hearings of their talk as racist or prejudiced...race attitudes are thus not the product of individual minds in isolation, but are produced in interaction through practices that reveal how potential responses have shaped their formulation.

In this way all participants, either implicitly or explicitly, are accountable for the discourse that they employ to account for, interpret, reinforce or undermine social situations. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:103), notes that “being accountable means that the speaker may need to explain why they used this expression in this context, describing the kind of situation that they thought it was.”

The parameters of accountability, that regulate the expression of discourse, are most evidently observed when one or more social participants objects to or is troubled by the use of a particular discourse. Ofilwe feels offended by the conduct of Belinda which negatively transforms the dynamic of friendship between them. Belinda, who appears to recognise this change, attempts to account for her conduct through the writing of a letter to Ofilwe. (Matlwa 2007:46-7) By doing this, it is evident that she aims to portray herself as a caring and compassionate friend who is concerned for the future of her friendship with Ofilwe – reminiscing on the good memories that they have shared. However even though she attempts to negate any insinuations of her as a patronising, degrading individual, Ofilwe is not convinced by her sentiments and appears to view her as a harbinger and reinforcer of oppressive white values – stating “seeing Belinda has put me in sour spirits and I am in no mood to use the accent today.” (43) Even through Belinda’s writing of the letter, however, she continues to perpetuate the notion of black individuals as objects of ridicule, with particular regard to her description of the household maid, stating “Old Virginia mentioned something about ‘he busy being out’. Ha ha! But you know good Ol’ Virginia never could get anything right.” (47)

What these various events demonstrate in *Coconut* is that far removed from being static and pervasive, discourse that has traditionally been conceived of as hegemonic, such as the values of whiteness, appear to be far more malleable, contested and context-bound than has been previously portrayed by scholarly literature on the novel. Through the depiction of an excessive subscription to Western values as corrupting, consuming and damaging to notions of self, Matlwa has attempted to demonstrate a reprioritisation of native, traditional customs and ideologies as the solution to perceived issues of identity loss and cultural degradation.

### **Whiteness as a discursive construct**

#### The negotiation of appearance:

Commenting on *Coconut*, Gugu Hlongwane (2013:14) concludes that:

One of the most important points of *Coconut* is that the private school system that Matlwa describes in her novel is not necessarily ‘well-functioning’ in the sense that her characters are spiritually dysfunctional and impoverished even as they learn in the lap of luxury. Because these characters are not taught a positive African history, they die in white environments where they are



of the right class but the ‘wrong’ skin colour. Matlwa’s black characters – both young and old – are dazzled by perceptions of a radiant whiteness.

The notion of whiteness is foregrounded extensively throughout the entire duration of the novel and appears evident from its very commencement, with specific regard to the appearance and value of a woman’s hair. Anthony Synnott (1987:381) notes the importance of a woman’s hair in constructing ideals of beauty, stating that it is “powerful first because it is physical and therefore extremely personal, and second because, although personal, it is also public rather than private.” Ofilwe, who is the focaliser of the novel for the first half of the book, describes her classmate, Kate Jones, as “overfed and hoggish. Kate was spoilt and haughty. Kate was rude and foul-mouthed. But with that hair, Kate was glorious. Dazzled by its radiance, class teachers overlooked the red crosses in Kate’s school workbooks...[she] had the most beautiful hair I had ever seen in all my eight years of life.” (Matlwa 2007:1) Ofilwe, who is eight years old at this point of the novel, admires the hair of Kate to the point of child-like delusion. She likens her hair to elements in nature such as “burnt amber. Autumn leaves. The setting sun” (1) and believes that Kate’s hair renders even class teachers as being “dazzled by its radiance.” (1) Jessica Murray (2012:95) adds that despite the fact that Kate falls within what is widely considered to be one of the most powerless and vulnerable groups in society as a girl child, “she is able to exercise power in her relationships with her teachers and classmates. While this power is obviously linked to her whiteness, Matlwa uses her hair to encapsulate her conformity to the white standard of beauty.”

It is however interesting to observe that despite these explicit descriptions of Kate’s hair, Ofilwe, even from this young age, appears to have notions of beauty and value that supersede the actual reality of Kate Jones. While Ofilwe admires Kate’s hair, that is the only aspect of her that she is envious of. She does not attempt to emulate her weight, her “podgy face and swollen ankles” (1), nor does she attempt to recite her mannerisms of being “hoggish...spoilt and haughty...rude and foul-mouthed.” (1) If white values were as hegemonic and categorical as scholars have previously suggested, Ofilwe in this particular instance would look to emulate Kate identically as an exemplar of what it means to be valued and beautiful. Ofilwe does not even attempt to recreate Kate’s hair entirely. Kate’s hair is described as being “curled slightly at the ends” in various intonations of orange. When Ofilwe has her hair done at “Ous Beauty’s” (3), she requests that the hair straightener be left on for an extended period of time so that “every last tiny weenie curl [is] straight.” (4)

While Ofilwe appears to have her own unique preferences with regard to appearance that supersedes what she is exposed to in reality, she describes “Sponono” (Matlwa 2007:1), as a “tiny chocolate girl” as opposed to a black girl. Her choice of diction, with the word “chocolate” (1) being associated with luxury, value and generally possessing a lighter tone than black is a euphemistic term which indicates her inclination towards whiteness and its association with a lighter tone. Her aversion towards using the word ‘black’ to describe the young girl sitting in the church pew is telling of her subtle attitude towards blackness and what she conceives as its negative associations.

What this indicates is that while the discourse of ‘white is beautiful’ still holds influence with regards to appearance, it is not necessarily pervasive and certainly not hegemonic. Ofilwe, and black individuals alike, are not agents who unquestioningly follow items of discourse. Instead, they reflect on, amend, challenge and contour discursive ideologies to fit into their sense of self and specific contexts. Ofilwe has her own conceptualisation of what beauty is, and while it is undeniably influenced by white standards, it is not dependent on them but rather dependent on Ofilwe’s own ideas of beauty and the specific context of Ous Beauty’s hair salon that, with “the black American TV girls on the box of the relaxer cream had hair so straight and so long” (4), who play a role in influencing Ofilwe. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:92) notes that “like all other meanings, our understandings and feelings about people, groups and races are not fixed by their (or our) supposed essential nature, but they are dependent upon contexts of usage.”

Discourse, such as what it means to be beautiful, is continually shifting, malleable and context dependent. This is indicated in the recollection by Ofilwe where she states that “Kate asked me one day, during Music, if I could plate her hair into thin plaits like the braids that adorned my head. She said my braids were pretty and that she wished she could have hair like mine so that she could be as beautiful as I was.” (Matlwa 2007:2) Much like the earlier child-like fantasy and delusion of Ofilwe when thinking of Kate’s hair, Kate displays a similar element of fantasy and admiration where she wishes to have hair like Ofilwe’s. This is a shocking counter-discourse of beauty that leaves Ofilwe “flabbergasted”. (2) The use of the term “flabbergasted” (2), with all of its rich connotative significance, indicates in an emphasised manner the nature in which Kate’s admiration of Ofilwe is completely opposite to Ofilwe’s discursive paradigm of beauty and aesthetic value. To Kate, Ofilwe is beautiful, which undermines any hegemonic discourse

relating to preferable appearances. Beauty is defined differently for Kate and Ofilwe and are dependent upon different contexts of usage and the discourse that accompanies these contexts. It is in these varying contexts of discourse that the concept of race trouble is manifested, as incidents of this nature, although seemingly insignificant when considering the multitude of events that characterise an individual's everyday life, are fundamental in formulating the relations, attitudes and power dynamics between individuals and groups. Adding to this, Jessica Murray (2012:92) states that "it is an oversimplification to argue that these women merely internalize racist and patriarchal understandings of female beauty. Rather, they should be read as exercising a certain amount of agency, albeit within the confines of gendered and racial structures."

Despite this, at a broader level, notions of appearance also feature prominently in the life of Ofilwe, who comes to realise that societal acceptance within the novel is arrived at through subscription to valued prescripts and characteristics. Ofilwe recalls an incident when she was twelve while playing a kissing version of the game spin-the-bottle. During her turn to play, the Axe deodorant container determines that she should kiss Clinton Mitchley. Ofilwe then proceeds to close her eyes and prepare for the kiss, however the boy refuses to kiss Ofilwe, saying that "her lips are too dark". (Matlwa 2007:45) This has a visible effect on Ofilwe, who is "unsure of what to do next" (45) as the words reverberate in her head, "not believing that they were spoken words." (45) Another example of whiteness as preferable is the crush that Ofilwe had on a boy in her class by the name of Junior P. Mokoena. Despite having a hatred for what she terms as his "arrogant" (24) mannerisms, she penned a love letter to him describing her feelings for him, to which he replied: "Tell her I only date white girls." (24) When Ofilwe thinks about her mother and her skin complexion, she wonders how her mother is able to walk within an air of confidence, stating "my Mama is a metallic blue-black in colour. My Mama is a giant. My Mama was not supposed to be, not with that foreign skin anyway, but my Mama is. Daddy sought controversy, marrying a metallic blue-black nothing girl". (52) The effects of these thoughts, experiences and influences appear to have far reaching effects on the disposition and psyche of Ofilwe. When she conceptualises the appearance of her future children, she thinks of them in terms of these influences, stating:

Strangely enough, I think about my future children quite a bit. I imagine lovely round dimpled faces and Colgate smiles running past sticky walls. In my dreams they are painted in shades of pink. I am afraid of what that means. (Matlwa 2007:19)

When Ofilwe tasks herself with sticking cut-outs on her bedroom wall from magazines of who she believes to be “the greatest breathing beings of our time” (92), her brother enters her room and observes a common theme:

The rest that followed was a jumble. A jumble I can barely remember, except for the word ‘white’. White. White. White. There was not a single face of colour on the wall. I had not noticed. Honest. It was only after he pointed it out that I noticed it too. (Matlwa 2007:92)

Fikile Thwala, who is the second main protagonist and who acts as the focaliser in the second half of the book, is far more explicit and unapologetic in manipulating her appearance in order to converge with what she believes to be white values of appearance. She pays particular attention to her physical appearance and places great value on the various items that she believes enhances her aesthetics. She states that “in the box lie my life’s treasures...my magazines...beside them is my contact lens case, holding within the most expensive things I own...my Lemon Light skin lightener cream, my sunscreen, my eyeliner, mascara, eye-shadow, blush, eyelash-straightener and the pieces of caramel-blond hair extension.” (Matlwa 2007:117)

She adds further that “every morning I make sure that I top up any nail-polish chips or cracks that may have developed overnight because I have come to know the great importance of presentation.” (117) Fikile has come to understand, particularly within the context of her workplace, the Silver Spoon coffee shop, that conforming to a tacitly prescribed appearance is paramount in not only retaining her employment, but in also attempting to access some form of social capital and escape from her living conditions that are characterised by hardship. Miss Becky, the owner of the establishment, praises her for her appearance and mannerisms, stating “dahling, you are gorgeous. So well spoken, so bright, just to die for” (119), strongly alluding to the idea that it is these characteristics that got her hired in the first place. When she falters from these prescriptions, however, she is chastised, such as when Miss Becky comments on the appearance of Fikile’s hair, stating “and that hair, dear, do something about it, anything, just don’t come to work looking like that again.” (122)

Language in the construction of problematic identity positions:

The experiences of both Ofilwe and Fikile tie in to one of the main thematic concerns that Matlwa attempts to foreground in *Coconut* – which is the phenomenon of identity loss when exposure to and amalgamation with whiteness occurs. At the beginning of the novel, Ofilwe notes that “[she] was to begin nursery school...and Tshepo grade one, although he should have been in grade two but was held back a year, because he did not speak English as well as his new, elite all-boys’ school would have liked.” (Matlwa 2007:6) Ofilwe is able to discern from a young age the amount of social capital that is granted to a speaker of English, where she states that “it is because I am smart and speak perfect English. That is why people treat me differently. I knew from a young age that Sepedi would not take me far...I spoke the TV language; the one Daddy spoke at work, the one Mama could never get right, the one that spoke of sweet success.” (54)

The use of a particular language and the assumption of culture are concepts that have always been inextricably linked. Through a speaker’s conformity towards a particular syntax, rules of grammar and appropriate diction, the speaker assumes the weight of a civilisation with all of its associated customs and traditions through the adoption of its language. What this ultimately constructs is a discourse of binaries in which the use of English is seen as the gateway to “sweet success” (54), while native languages such as Sepedi are associated with backwardness and savagery – Ofilwe stating that her cousins who speak Sepedi think that “a brick is a toy”. (54) Important research from Stephanie Rudwick (2008) had been indicative of the thickly-laden implications of adopting English as either a main or supporting form of communication for black people. She observes that while there is the risk that excessive or even limited use of English can result in ostracisation from one’s community and culture (110), she also notes that often times “an individual has little prospect of finding a well-paid position in South Africa’s job market without English proficiency.” (107) She states however that this creates problems for black individuals themselves who are uncomfortable with the use of English, producing a sense of internal turmoil. (110)

The importance of language in the formulation of identity is pervasive throughout the novel and extends to the character of Fikile. The introduction of Fikile’s uncle, who remains nameless throughout the duration of the novel except when he is termed as “Silas Nyoni...Black Economic Empowerment partner, and newly appointed Operations Manager of Lentso Communications” (106) when subjugated by his white employer in the process of ‘fronting’ as a Black Economic

Empowerment (BEE) partner, is portrayed as a sexually abusive, pathetic, docile stooge to white interests whose single aspect of differentiation from other low-level employees is his ability to mindlessly recite passages and quotes from the works of Shakespeare. The verbosity and redundancy that characterises the speech of uncle, which is often uttered randomly and in the form of a monologue, with response from a listener only a peripheral concern, is effective in demonstrating the possibility of English, when over-relied upon, in negatively constructing the identity and prospects of an individual.

Uncle however admires the nuances of the language which is indicated by his appreciation of Fikile's over-exaggerated annunciations, Fikile stating that "I would begin to recite the Our Father: 'Our Farther (sic) who heart (sic) in heaven, hello be thire (sic) name,' it always pleased Uncle to hear me roll the r's the way he liked them." (Matlwa 2007:111) When Mr. Dix, the white employer of Uncle, identifies Uncle as demonstrating a good grasp of English due to the literature that he reads and his manner of speaking, Mr. Dix immediately appropriates him to pretend to be a member of upper management in the company, despite his actual occupation being a security guard, so that the company, Lentso Communications, is able to meet the BEE requirements necessary in order to compete for lucrative tender opportunities. In this case, English, thought of as a measure of intelligence and civility that acts as a gateway to opportunity, is simply used as an instrument to further degrade the black speaker while simultaneously uplifting the white benefactor.

Despite this counter-discourse to the contrary, the belief of English as the language of success and value is held dogmatically by Fikile. She states that "I have even started speaking in the English language even when I do not need to. I am no longer concerned with what I sound like as I have come to believe that I sound like any other English-speaking person." (137) Fikile then correlates this increase in the speaking of English with her newly constructed idealistic and boundless outlook on life, stating that "There is this new drive that has taken charge of me: it urges me to take command and create my own destiny. I am certain of where I am going in life and know exactly what it is that I want out of life." (137) The accent in which she speaks English is also of importance for her, indicated in her statement:

It's not something most people give much thought to, let alone wish to change. But for me, my whole life has become about how I speak, about what sounds the words make as they fall on the

listener's ear. People don't realise how much their accent says about who they are, where they were born and most importantly what kind of people they associate with...it is what you sound like that helps people to place you and determines how they'll treat you. Trust me, the accent matters. (Matlwa 2007 :154)

Fikile's admiration of English extends far beyond the actual language itself to the actual phonetical effect with regard to the manner in which words are spoken in order to achieve a specific, desirable accent that alludes to the civility, wealth, education and value of the speaker. This correlates with Fikile's desire to "be white" (135) and to assimilate as much as possible with the white community and the values that they espouse, even going as far to shorten her name to "Fiks" (146) for ease of pronunciation, presumably to cater for white individuals, even though her full name, Fikile, is relatively short and easy to pronounce. Fikile ignores the negative effects that English has had on her uncle, dismissing him with disdain as "an idiot [who] got what idiots got." (127)

Ofilwe, however, resides in a space of interstitiality with regard to acknowledging the value of English while simultaneously harbouring antipathy for its hegemony over her native tongue of Sepedi. On the one hand, Ofilwe acknowledges the value of English and its ability in being instrumental in accessing opportunities for success. (54) Ofilwe however over time becomes increasingly agitated towards English and this is reflected in her conduct towards Belinda, her former best-friend. Ofilwe recalls an incident where Belinda attempts to help her with her English word pronunciations, however Ofilwe reflects negatively towards the memory, stating "I am not used to hating. Hate sits heavy on my heart. It reeks. I can smell it rotting my insides and I taste it on my tongue." (49) It is not conclusively clear what Belinda's intentions were in attempting to correct Ofilwe's English pronunciations, however it is unlikely that it was motivated from a place of malice or an intention to degrade her friend Ofilwe. Reflecting on the incident a number of years later, Ofilwe recognises the memory as symptomatic of the historically recited discourse of black individuals being unable to speak properly due to their inferior intellectual capabilities and consequently needing assistance from an exemplary 'white saviour'.

Items of discourse such as this are historical productions that are kept in existence through their continued identification, allusion and implementation in contexts of social interaction. It is

unlikely that when Belinda attempted to offer Ofilwe guidance on pronunciation that she aimed to invoke firstly, feelings of degradation within Ofilwe and secondly, an entire historical weight of implication that an act such as assisting with pronunciation can invoke. Instances of race trouble are formulated and enacted in exchanges such as these, where the interpellation of discourse in aiding in interpreting social events such as conversations and other interactions vary between the various participants. A portion of the task that discourse sets out to complete in these scenarios is the construction of identity and motive between social participants, in this case, Ofilwe and Belinda. Belinda, through wanting to help Ofilwe avoid being laughed at for her word pronunciations as the reason for her assistance (49), attempts to construct her identity in a benevolent light – as a helper and ‘good friend’, as opposed to a denigrator of self-confidence. Ofilwe, drawing on a contrasting discourse, interprets the incident, both at the time of its occurrence and in the future, as negative – viewing it as “boring” (49) at the time and as more patronising and symptomatic of white hegemony when reflecting on it years later. Through attempting to appear as an ambassador for anti-racism and a benevolent ‘saviour’ of others, whiteness subtly entrenches its hegemony as central to social relations. Alastair Bonnet (1997:182) comments that:

These locations establish Whiteness as an arena not of engagement with anti-racism but of self-generated altruistic interest for ‘others’ as well as for ‘White people’s’ own moral well-being...’White anti-racism’ is continually elevated to a higher ethical terrain, removed from the realm of co-operation and participation to the more traditional (colonial, neo-colonial and anti-racist) role of paternalistic ‘concern’

#### Whiteness as a position of power in the context of inequality:

Fikile Thwala is depicted as an unapologetic subscriber to white values and culture, however this may be influenced by the respective societal positions that Ofilwe and Fikile occupy and the varying power and opportunities that they are able to access. While Ofilwe and her family have grown accustomed to a life of opulence due to her father’s business, I.T. Instantly, and its Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) deals, Fikile and her sexually abusive uncle reside in a one bedroom out-house at the back of another main house in Mphe Batho township. Describing her living conditions, Fikile states that “we do not have a bath or an inside toilet like the Tshabalalas do or like some of the more advanced homes...I have to collect water from the taps outside, boil it and clean myself in a bucket in the kitchen.” (Matlwa 2007:118) Both of these contrasting



situations are however as a result of the legacy of apartheid. Transformative policies such as BEE exist for the purpose of enacting redress while black poverty continues to exist due to the systemic policies of inequality and oppression from the past that continues to linger within the status quo as depicted in the novel. Intra-racial conflict however occurs as while policies such as BEE are welcomed, marginalised blacks like Fikile who continue to live in poverty rarely benefit from government redress due to the fact that like it has been portrayed in the novel, these policies are unequally distributed and are marred by corruption that render them as only being beneficial to the wealthy. This is poignantly noted by Ofilwe when she recalls the nature of her father's business:

When Daddy's company, IT Instantly, won the post office tender in which Daddy had invested numerous golf balls, a thousand glasses of JC, endless swipes on the Diner's Club card and a professionally gift-wrapped ten diamonds and steel limited-edition Mitchell bracelet in, Koko advised that a thanksgiving ceremony would be fitting. (Matlwa 2007:71)

The phenomenon of 'fronting' that is depicted in the novel is also an example of the controversy surrounding these policies. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:51) notes that:

Fronting is the token and superficial inclusion of black men and women in essentially white businesses in order that (sic) the companies are deemed compliant with BBEE regulations, thereby making them eligible to tender for big contracts in the public and private sector. A 2007 study on corruption in the private sector...found that fronting was the second most prevalent form of corruption in the private sector.

This practice of fronting is depicted towards the commencement of part two of the novel, where Fikile's uncle laments over his treatment:

He [the boss] said that they would once again introduce me as Silas Nyoni, their Black Economic Empowerment partner, and newly appointed Operations Manager of Lentso Communications. Today's plan was that Laurie, Mr. Dix's personal assistant, would rush in during the meeting with Borman-Nkosinathi and say that I was urgently needed at the offices. Then I would be hurried out and taken back to my security box. (Matlwa 2007:106)

While policies of this nature have sought to aid in the economic emancipation of the black individual while simultaneously reducing the wealth gap between whites and blacks, what policies of this nature appear to have inadvertently achieved is a situation of classism which has

divided the black population along economic lines, further entrenching conflict, animosity and division, conforming to the perspective of race trouble. Due to this, Fikile is of the opinion that the government has failed her and failed in its mandate for service delivery, bemoaning the “unreliable” (Matlwa 2007:129) trains, “cable thefts” (134) and “scummy townships” (135). It is therefore because of her position of poverty that Fikile so rigorously follows what she believes to be the dictates of whiteness. For Fikile, whiteness is closely associated with wealth, luxury, power, maturity, convenience and civility. Fikile’s actual lived experience in poverty and the details of her background prevent such an association with whiteness, so she lies about the nature of her family life, stating:

I lived in England for a while, Mummy and Daddy still lecture there. I couldn’t stand the weather, absolutely dreadful, so I moved back here the first chance I got. It’s harder here, though, you have to do everything for yourself. You can’t trust anybody, not with all the crime and corruption. But ja, it’s home, what can I say? (Matlwa 2011:146)

This is in stark contrast to the actual details of her background, where she states that:

My mother slit her wrists and let her blood spill all over me, right until I was soaked through to my skin as I slept against the hollow of her stomach. Uncle was the only one who was willing to take me in. Gogo, my granny, had too many of her own white children to take care of and my father had run off long before I had even been implanted into my mother’s womb. (Matlwa 2011:114)

Fikile’s determination in trying to associate herself as closely as possible to the culture of whiteness can be seen as an attempt to escape from her troubled background and attain an element of status and power.

### **Stigma and ideology in the emergence of ‘acceptable’ identity positions:**

The entire novel appears as a chastising response by Matlwa towards blacks who appear to excessively embrace white values at the expense of their native traditionalism. The very first indication of this is the choice of word for the book’s title, *Coconut*. The word ‘coconut’ is a patronising term that Rudwick (2008:102) notes “is used in South Africa in reference to a black person. Its use implies that, although this person has dark skin on the outside, he or she is ‘white’ on the inside, just as a coconut’s shell is dark and its fruit is white. In other words, a ‘coconut’

acts and behaves ‘white’.” The term invokes an essential problem that disciplines the behaviour and potential for upward mobility for blacks from both a black gaze and a white gaze. The former demands peripheral association to traditional custom, suffering and working-class identity as emblematic of ‘authentic’ blackness, while the latter invokes notions of white cronyism, privilege and a denial of inequality – which renders both discourses as problematic in their own ways.

While it appears as though Matlwa’s criticism of this phenomenon serves the purpose of attempting to liberate ‘coconuts’ from their subjugation by white values, the novel inadvertently promotes racial binarism, segregation and the limitation of the agency of the black individual that the book seeks to reinforce. It achieves this through its subtle reverberation of the infamous “Dressed Native” and “Healthy Reserve” discourse, that was conceptualised by the anthropologist Randall Packard (1989:697) and which operates as follows:

The discourse of the ‘healthy reserve’ consists of a set of understandings that paint a picture of rural African life in idealistic terms. It is a life of ease as rural ‘Bantu’ communities live in social harmony and in unity with (Mother) Nature that looks after their needs. The myth of the ‘dressed native’ is the flip side of the ‘healthy reserve’ discourse. This discourse paints a picture of degradation as African people move from this rural environment of ‘blissful ease’ to the more demanding and sophisticated environment of the city. According to this discourse, native Africans are somehow unsuited to this way of life and urbanisation brings with it disease, alcoholism and violence. The reason that Africans are unsuited to city life is that they are primitive and simple folk. They live a pre-modern existence in rural areas and are thus innately or constitutively unsuited to [21<sup>st</sup> century] life.

This ideology tends to manifest itself throughout the novel in the form of the various characters who act as the ‘guardians of tradition’, such as Ayanda, Fikile’s grandmother and Ofilwe’s brother, Tshepo. Within the post-apartheid era and as is depicted in the novel, there are a number of identity positions that are available to black people, but choosing the kind of identity that a black person wants to have and the mannerisms and characteristics associated with that identity carries with it significant implications for social relations, perceptions as well as the possibility for conflict, segregation and prejudice as these identities carry with them the stigma of black stereotypes or white privilege, which can make it difficult for black individuals to settle into a static identity, making disjointed identity complexes, as seen with Ofilwe, a common reality.

Durrheim *et al.* (2011:102) comments that “things get complicated, for example, when similar discourses are used by black Africans to express concern about the younger generation moving away from traditional cultural practices and becoming westernized, ‘acting white’ or ‘becoming coconuts’.” This appears to be a source of acute anxiety for Ofilwe, who is aware of her ignorance of traditional customs, stating that:

As the only female grandchild, I fear that day when my turn comes to run these sacred occasions...What is it that one is supposed to say? Perhaps there was a class I missed, lessons in my youth that I was supposed to attend...I do not know what the mourning women should wear, which way her yellow mattress should face, how long she should dress in black for, pray for, kneel for, cry for. I do not know who to call or who to send...I do not know how I am supposed to know, and whether I will ever know. (Matlwa 2007:8-9)

When Ofilwe tells her father about Tshepo’s opinion of her, she states: “Tshepo says an Auntie Jemima is a sell-out. Daddy, Tshepo says I am a sell-out. He says I embarrass him and that I mustn’t ever come near him when his friends are around.” (Matlwa 2007:60) Tshepo is highly critical of many aspects of Ofilwe’s life, including her choice of friends:

Friends, Ofilwe, know your name. Friends ask where you come from and are curious about what language you and yours speak. Friends get to know your family, all of them, those with and those without. Friends do not scoff at your beliefs, friends appreciate your customs, friends accept you for who you really are. (Matlwa 2007:43)

Commenting on her behavior, he further states:

You will find, Ofilwe, that the people you strive so hard to be like will one day reject you because as much as you may pretend, you are not one of their own. Then you will turn back, but there too you will find no acceptance, for those you once rejected will no longer recognise the thing that you have become. So far, too far to return. So much, too much you have changed. Stuck between two worlds, shunned by both. (Matlwa 2007:93)

Fikile’s grandmother, further into the novel, scolds her for her enjoyment of reading fashion magazines and keeping to herself:

I am fed up with you sitting here all day reading those fashion magazines. I have a good mind to take those magazines away from you. I thought that they would be a fine way for you to practice

your reading but they have taught you nothing but to be a snob. Go outside and play. (Matlwa 2007:131)

Ayanda, Fikile's colleague at the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop, expresses contempt for her workplace demeanor:

The effort that you put into remembering even their middle names, their ridiculous little preferences, their favourite seats and those childish stories they tell about their lives and their dramas and their hardships. It's real cute [but] do you know that if you were to walk past any one of them in the street on any other day of the week in some other place they wouldn't even know who you were? These people are not your friends, Fikile. (Matlwa 2007:143)

Both Ayanda and Tshepo can be described as operating on different sides of the same coin as they share a number of the same characteristics and motivations, with particular regard to their choice of workplaces. Despite coming from a background of affluence, Tshepo attempts to closely associate himself with the lived experiences of the lower and middle economic brackets. Commenting on Tshepo's desire to be a waiter at a fast-food establishment called Instant Fried Chicken, Ofilwe states:

I laughed because I did not think he was serious. As much as Tshepo liked to push the whole 'down with the people thing', he is by nature the type whose mere existence depends on being intellectually stimulated, so I was pretty certain that even if he was to go as far as showing up for his first day at work, he wouldn't last longer than a week. (Matlwa 2007:25)

Ayanda appears to also come from a wealthy family, with Fikile stating that she is unsure of why he has sought a job as a waiter because "he lived in some loft his parents had bought for him in Morningside" (152) and that "Ayanda had tons of white friends, good friends, friends he cared about. Ayanda had gone to a white school, lived in white neighbourhoods all his life. He had the life that everybody dreamed of." (153) Despite their efforts, their attempts at associating themselves with those of a lower societal position appears to be insincere and sterile. First, they are able to neatly compartmentalise their two experiences of working with the working class in order to appear more grounded and then go home afterwards and step into the lap of luxury – oscillating between the two experiences in a compartmentalised way as if they can exist jointly without appearing as farcical. The incompatibility of the two experiences manifests itself in

Tshepo being unable to relate to his colleagues at Instant Friend Chicken, where he reflects in his diary:

I am afraid of them. I know I am different. I reek of KTV, IEB, MTV and ICC, although I have tried to mask it behind All Stars sneakers and a free Youth League election T-shirt. I am certain that they will catch me out as soon as I open my mouth. (Matlwa 2007:26)

Second, the determination to relate to working-class people appears to quickly unravel for both Tshepo and Ayanda when they encounter struggle and strife in their working environments and resort to referencing their upper-class background to differentiate themselves from their colleagues, as in the case of Tshepo when a customer at Instant Friend Chicken does not return his greeting:

I am enraged. I want to call them to order. Tell them that they have no right treating people the way that they do. I want them to hear my voice. I want them to listen to the manner in which I speak. I want to slap their stuffed faces with my private school articulation and hurl their empty heads into a dizzy spin with the diction I use. I will quote our democratic Constitution. I will remind them that it is now, and not then. I will demand respect. (Matlwa 2007:29)

Due to being used to a life of luxury, Tshepo appears to be out of touch with the reality of employment that is sometimes a thankless occupation. His colleagues subsequently highlight his naivety, pointing out that “there is much [that he] must learn.” (29)

Ayanda has a similar incident at the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop when a customer insults him, ultimately hurling expletives at her. (150) Characters such as Ayanda and Tshepo, as well as the novel itself to a large extent, appear to serve the purpose of advocating for a particular definition of what it means to be black, the nature of white values and the effects of racial interaction that ultimately converges towards a very narrow conceptualisation of identity and individual agency and is itself an example of race trouble, as those individuals in the novel such as Ofilwe and Fikile who don't always subscribe to these definitions are left to bare the weight of judgement and ostracisation. What is ironic however is that despite appointing themselves as the stalwarts of 'black authenticity', close interpretive analysis of the events of the novel reveal both Tshepo and Ayanda to be lacking substance of character as upon first encountering strife, they appear to unravel – revealing that they suffer from the same identity complexes that they judge Ofilwe and

Fikile for having. Fikile's grandmother, who is also critical of whiteness, is hesitant to offer an earnest account of its positive qualities, which is reflected in Fikile's recollections:

She didn't have much to say about them [the Kinsleys] because they weren't as cruel and cold-blooded as the others. My grandmother hated speaking about the good white people, so she would often only say a word or two about the Kinsley family and their home. (Matlwa 2007:124)

It however also appears that the endemic fear of whiteness as a hegemonic, pervasive construct that necessitated the presence of these 'guardians of black tradition' is to a certain extent misplaced as on a number of levels, whiteness and the agents and values that represent it are ridiculed and undermined. A reader of the novel who reads the antics of Miss Becky, the owner of the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop, does not view her as an object of admiration who conducts herself in a graceful manner. Instead, the reader is primed through the construction of her behaviour to dislike her and the values that she represents. Furthermore, she is portrayed as naïve and ignorant when she assumes that all black individuals live together, stating "and you go tell that to your people when you get home tonight. Striking is no way to solve any problems." (149) Towards the conclusion of the novel, when a white individual approaches Fikile with amorous intentions, he is portrayed as a caricature of stupidity in not even being able to pronounce two words of IsiZulu correctly – stating "kumuhle kakhulu" (183) instead of "umuhle" (183). The white characters in the novel exist mostly within the periphery and are portrayed often as mindless and lacking depth of character – hardly attributes that encourage admiration.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter has attempted to answer the central question of what it means to be black in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. For blacks within South Africa, this appears as a difficult and complicated question to answer because of the multiplicity of identity positions that can be assumed. Unlike during apartheid, with the rise of democracy the liberated black South African has access to much more lucrative opportunities and far greater resources that make the possibility for self-actualisation and upward mobility a much more realistic prospect. Much of this has been facilitated through the introduction of policies of affirmative action, such as Black Economic Empowerment. This has created race trouble on two fronts: First, whites feel disadvantaged by these policies of redress that they feel systemically exclude them and

consequently place animosity towards blacks who they feel do not deserve their economic gains. In this regard, Ofilwe recalls incident while waiting for her father to pick her up after school:

As I am getting up, Stuart Simons walks from the high-school sports fields towards the parking lot with a clique of senior boys who I know are only allowing Stuart to hang with them because he is wealthy. Although I never liked Stuart very much, I wave bye to him so that he can see me climbing into the most captivating car on the school grounds. As I open the boot to put my bag in, Stuart walks over and says something like “Nice wheels, Ofilwe, who did your father hijack this one from?” (Matlwa 2007:16)

Second, these policies of redress have been implemented unequally within the black community that has created an economic stratification between the rich and the poor that has been the source of much tension.

While Ofilwe is depicted as a product of South Africa’s “black diamond” (Ballard 2015:1) phenomenon, on the opposite end of the spectrum is Fikile, who resides in a one-bedroom outhouse with her abusive uncle in the township of Mphe Batho. Portrayed as a disenfranchised individual, Fikile attempts to use the power that is associated with the prescripts of whiteness in order to attain some level of social capital and status, through the manner in which she speaks, the importance that she places on her appearance and the manner in which she behaves both outside and inside her place of work, The Silver Spoon Coffee Shop. Within the novel, whiteness is purported to be closely associated with comfort, civility and power for Ofilwe and Fikile, who both enjoy the comforts it provides. For Ofilwe, it’s the joy of living in an opulent gated community, attending a private school and embracing the materiality of luxury goods. For Fikile, the prescribes of whiteness mean the possibility of upward mobility in life and the construction of a stratification between herself and other black people that she believes that she is better than.

Irregardless of their varying economic positions, Ofilwe and Fikile are depicted as undergoing the similar issue of attempting to negotiate a coherent identity in the context of conflicting discourses. This has been looked at through the lens of discourse, which has been defined earlier, in being imperative in influencing identity, attitudes and behaviour.

Ofilwe’s character development in this regard is portrayed as far more profound and dynamic in comparison to Fikile. While Ofilwe in many respects embraces white influence, it is not unthinkingly and without regret. On multiple occasions she laments her perceived alienation



from her traditional culture and the influence that whiteness has on her behaviour, perceptions and aspirations. With varying success, she attempts to distance herself from what she believes is condescending behaviour from her friend Belinda and minimises her use of English, with the goal of learning more of her traditional language of Sepedi.

One of the main reasons for her character shifts throughout the novel who act as the ‘guardians of tradition’ and employ the discourse of only one authentic version of ‘blackness’. For Ofilwe, this is a major source of anxiety that results in much of her identity conflict as she is shunned by her brother as a sell-out while attempting to negotiate modes of conduct that are deemed as ‘too white’. Ultimately, it appears as though prescriptions of an ‘authentic black identity’ limits the agency and potential for upward mobility for Ofilwe instead of promoting liberation, which appears to be the aim of the book for the characters that are depicted.

Fikile, on the other hand, embraces constructs of whiteness as instrumental in achieving what she terms as “Project Infinity”, which describes her ideal lifestyle of comfort and luxury. While her disposition is portrayed as class obsessed, she is shown also to be driven and motivated in pursuit of her goals. Despite her harsh criticisms of others, through the reference towards the middle of the novel of her humble beginnings, the reader is primed in some respects to feel sympathetic towards her plight.

What the perspective of race trouble reveals in Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* is that while discourse is a powerful instrument in affecting and influencing change, the characters in the novel demonstrate an element of maneuverability in their capacity to mould discourse, such as the primacy of whiteness and black identity, to suit their own desires. Moreover, the novel reveals that the plurality of the post-apartheid setting and the multiplicity of influences and identity positions that are associated with it need to be embraced in order for true liberation to occur.

## Chapter Four: Practices and Place

Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*

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### **Introduction:**

*The Book of Memory* by Petina Gappah is an enthralling tale that is written from the first-person perspective of the novel's main protagonist, Memory, who is an albino woman who recollects the events of the plot of the novel while inside Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Harare, Zimbabwe. She has been convicted of the murder of her white, informally 'adoptive' father Lloyd Hendricks and as part of her appeal process, she has been asked by her lawyer, Vernah Sithole, to write down the events that led up to the death of Lloyd. The novel presents a kaleidoscopic depiction of the ability of albinism to disrupt traditional binary conceptualisations of racial identity and highlight the malleable nature of race as context-bound, in-flux and closely linked to issues of belonging, exclusion, potential conflict and the exploration and negotiation of racial ideology.

I argue that in many respects the plight of Memory throughout the novel can be encapsulated by her desire, as a disenfranchised individual, to attain power. At various points in the novel this takes a multitude of forms – in attempting to find belonging in a variety of environments, in embracing the mysticism associated with albinism, in subscribing to the dictates of whiteness, in acting prejudiced towards marginalised others. What I aim to achieve therefore in this chapter is to examine the effects of the various environments that Memory traverses throughout the novel on her character and to use the perspective of race trouble to reveal the problematic dynamics that this produces with regard to the relationships between the characters in the book and the connection that this has to Zimbabwe's colonial past. Central to this exploration is the notion of locations that develop subjective meanings and associations for different people. This is accounted for through the idea of place identity. Environmental psychologists Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983:60) define place identity to refer to a "pot-pourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas and related feelings about specific physical settings as well as types of settings." Durrheim *et al.* further adds that "the meaning of places have been racialised and these meanings have then been the basis for developing a sense of who belongs (inclusion)

or not (exclusion)...townships, for example, are black places, the suburbs are white, and in each town or city you will recognise Indian and coloured areas.”

The novel also offers a poignant portrayal of not only the strained status of whites within Zimbabwe and their interactions with members of other races, but also the attitudes of prejudice and intolerance that circulate within the racial groups of the previously disadvantaged. As an albino, Memory finds herself located in a position of interstitiality with regard to her racial classification that appears to be wholly bound and influenced by her immediate contextual and environmental variables. This chapter takes inspiration from the thought-provoking article by Richard Ballard (2005) entitled *Bunkers for the Psyche: How Gated Communities Have Allowed the Privatisation of Apartheid in Democratic South Africa* as a central tool for analysing the racialised segregation in the novel and the attempt by the white community in the novel to align their preferred identity as Europeans with their spatial surroundings. Closely related to this is the idea of ‘home’, which is regarded as the ultimate form of environmental familiarity.

Commenting on this, Ballard (2005:4) argues that:

As much as we try to shape our worlds to fit in with our identities, our environments also shape us, challenge us and constrain us. We attempt to find comfort zones within which it is possible for us to ‘be ourselves’. These are places that do not challenge our self-conceptions. Home in its ideal form is the best example. It is a place where we feel safe and can let our guards down. Some people say that their homes are an extension of themselves. Home is a manifestation of our values, visually and in the things done and words spoken in it. The walls of our home are our ultimate barrier against the ravages of the outside world. If our home feels unsafe it is very difficult to feel existentially secure. Or to reverse the equation, existential insecurity can be most powerfully conveyed through the perception of threats to the home.

The character development of Memory throughout the duration of the novel is reminiscent of that of a pendulum as she attempts to negotiate the duality of achieving a coherent internal identity in the context of continually shifting environmental variables and influences. This project broadly, but with particular applicability to this chapter, utilises Gerhard Mare’s (2001) conceptualisation of “race thinking” to supplement the project’s and the chapter’s understanding of race – which extends far beyond simply the colour of a person’s skin, as evident by Memory. Mare (2001:77) states that:

Race thinking shares processes of identity formation with all social identities. Race thinking refers not only to the manner in which we make sense of social relations, actions and events, but also to the way in which we perceive our own group membership and those of others, the way in which we share identities with some and are distinguished from others – the making of boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

This clarification is an important one to make when thinking about race as it effectively underlines the idea of race as a social location that involves group membership. It is for this reason that this project has chosen to include the element of albinism in its scope, as it provides for the opportunity to investigate its unique functioning and position of liminality within these contested spaces of race.

First, I offer a historical contextualisation to underline the status quo in Zimbabwe as it is presented in the novel to account for the element of race trouble as well as the strained and unequal system of race relations that continues to be pervasive after the abolition of colonialism. I then introduce the concept of place-identity, where I explore the process by which the various environments in the book acquire both positive and negative connotations and the effects that this has on the various characters in the novel. I systematically then navigate through the variety of environments that Memory is exposed to and the influence that this has on her sense of self, with particular focus on her racial identity and her ability to identify with the plight of both whites and blacks. Lastly, I conclude by reflecting on how the idea of race trouble is located in the problematic history and present of Zimbabwe’s socio-political terrain as it’s depicted in the novel and how this has infused into the variety of environments that Memory explores – influencing her sense of self profoundly.

### **Contextualisation: The historical significance of places in the construction of identity and race relations**

The various environments within the novel and the distinctions that are characteristic of them are largely as a result of the ideology of racial segregation that Zimbabwe was founded on. Zimbabwe, in a similar fashion to South Africa, has been negatively influenced by settler colonialism, land expropriation and the systematic marginalisation of the indigenous people. This has resulted in both countries being plagued by issues of belonging, restitution and relational discomfort between the various races, which I categorise broadly under the terms

‘black’ and ‘white’. Contemporary Zimbabwe, as is depicted within the novel, is a racially textured terrain that is the sum of decades of intra- and inter-racial conflict, negotiation and tense co-habitation. This is a result of the various narratives regarding the state of politics, the economy, racial interaction and restitutive dispensation, with particular regard to the issue of land, are fought for within and between races in Zimbabwe. While similar sentiments are also accurate in the case of South Africa, issues of land and equity have not been at the forefront of the national consciousness to the extent that was seen in Zimbabwe. It is only in recent years, in South Africa, that various political parties have made explicit calls for the previously disadvantaged to receive land that has been expropriated without compensation to its previous owners.

Many of the issues regarding land equity and race relations that continue to be of prominence in present-day Zimbabwe have their origin in the country’s colonial past and the dispossession of some of the original inhabitants of the land. A key figure in the upheaval and displacement of the inhabitants of the land was Cecil John Rhodes, who was not only interested in expropriating the basic resources of the area, but in also employing his acute imperial ideology, which underpinned most of his actions. (South African History Online [SAHO], 2011) He was of the belief that the Englishman was innately located in a position of primacy in comparison to all other races and people and that the rule of Britain would be of great benefit to all. This sentiment would come to inform much of the expropriation, manipulation and disenfranchisement of the indigenous people that would characterise his presence in the area of present-day Zimbabwe. Even at this early stage this ideology of a binary between those who are inferior was effective in creating notions of group membership and prejudice that unfolds in *The Book of Memory*. Commenting on how historical societal relations are of influence even in modern times, Herbert Blumer (1958:5) argues that:

An analysis of how the sense of group position is formed should start with a clear recognition that it is an historical product. It is set originally by conditions of initial contact. Prestige, power, possession of skill, numbers, original self- conceptions, aims, designs and opportunities are a few of the factors that may fashion the original sense of group position. Subsequent experience in the relation of the two racial groups, especially in the area of claims, opportunities and advantages, may mould the sense of group position in many diverse ways. Further, the sense of group position may be intensified or weakened, brought to sharp focus or dulled. It may be deeply entrenched

and tenaciously resist change for long periods of time. Or it may never take root. It may undergo quick growth and vigorous expansion, or it may dwindle away through slow-moving erosion.

The colonial conquest of individuals like Cecil John Rhodes was effective in establishing group relationships of opposition along the lines of inferiority/superiority, belonging/exclusion. Once early settlers became familiar with the nature of the land and its rich potential for economic gain, the area became viewed as a favourable settler colony for Europeans, resulting in surges of settler migration into the area. Premised on the notion that the black population was uncivilised and that it was therefore necessary to limit the contact between the black and white races, unequal sections of land were therefore reserved for the two races – with 49 060 000 acres for the white population and 21 600 000 acres for the black population. (South African History Online [SAHO], 2011) This restriction of land, which limited subsistence farming as well as the ability to farm for profit, forced much of the black population into positions of wage labour where they were exposed to tough working conditions for meagre pay. This inequality with regard to land allocation – with whites occupying favourable, plush farmland while blacks were forced towards the periphery of civilisation, is shown through the stark contrasts between the areas of the township of Mufakose, where Memory grew up and begins her journey, to the area of Lloyd Hendricks' residence which is affectionately known as Summer Madness in the serenity of Umwinsdale. (38) The feeling of exploitation that is held by black people in having their land appropriated during colonial times is a significant issue that is depicted in *The Book of Memory* and as accounting for a large portion of the distrust and conflict between blacks and whites.

Despite land restitution operating within a 'willing-buyer willing-seller' framework since the 1980s, the white minority, which only comprised of 0.6% of the population, continued to hold 70% of the country's most fertile agricultural ground. To assist with the enterprise of land redistribution and to facilitate compensation for landowners, the British government set up a land redistribution grant of approximately 44 million British pounds. The grant policy however expired in 1996 with Britain unwilling to commit further funds to the issue due to irregularities in land allocation, with large plots of land being given to ZANU-PF loyalists and little change being found at a grassroots level. (Human Rights Watch [HRW]: 2002) The land seizures in Zimbabwe and the manner in which they were carried out created a situation of racial unease for both blacks and whites in Zimbabwe, as white farmers felt robbed of their land and amenities,

while large numbers of landless blacks felt no impact of the land redistribution program that was seen to be marred in corruption. Relating on an instance of this, Memory notes that:

I don't want you to think that I am in any way defending the chaos of the way the farms were parceled out, or the greed with which the top people took farms for themselves. From what Lloyd told me, Alexandra and Ian's farm had gone to the second wife of an army general, who had also taken a farm in addition to the one that went to his first wife and two children. (Gappah 2015:212)

By 1999, eleven million hectares of the richest land was still in the hands of about 4,500 commercial farmers, the great majority of them white. (HRW: 2002) As will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, the ultimate manifestation of this conflict and the inability of the government to properly enact policies of redress is the raiding of farms that occurs towards the conclusion of the novel. (Gappah 2015:211-2) These farm invasions resulted in a compounded sense of displacement for white individuals that began with the dawn of Zimbabwe's independence. White people lost most of their privileges and found themselves in competition with their black counterparts for jobs and a share of Zimbabwe's post-independence dispensation. Many white people became disillusioned with the new black-run structures of government and immigrated out of the country. In a similar vein to South Africa after apartheid, whites in Zimbabwe struggled to find their place in the new democratic political framework. In the book however Memory questions the validity of white anger in the context of land appropriation through referencing its historical origin:

The invasions were the talk of Umwinsidale. My feelings were ambivalent. I had lived long enough among them to understand and feel pity for their losses, but I found it infuriating that they spoke as though there was no context to this, as though this is something that just happened, with no history to it. They spoke as if the Pioneer Column had never invaded a land that was not theirs, as if land had not been stolen, as if this had not been a crisis long in the making. (Gappah 2015:212)

Of particular interest with regard to the above two quotes is the liminal position of conflict that Memory resides in between the various identities that she relates to, where she embraces the 'white' aspect of her identity and consequently feels a level of sympathy for whites with regard to their loss of land but when relating more to her 'black' origins and influences, feels scorn towards whites and their ignorance of historical oppression and the need for the redistribution of

basic resources. The influence of colonialism was effective in placing whites in a position of primacy with regard to access to resources and a status of prestige that was accorded to them. Following the liberation of Zimbabwe from colonial rule however, as is noted in the above quote by Herbert Blumer (1958:5), these racial dynamics appear as subject to change following shifts in political and social power towards the black majority. Within this context, it is white people who feel alienated and who live in a state of fear – anxious to show that they are not detractors to the liberation movement. Memory recalls an instance where she states that “when I first came back, Alexandra had encouraged me to buy a flag to hang in the car. It was the only way to get past the roadblocks, she explained...like many whites under siege, she thought flying the flag from her car was a badge of patriotism, a visible sign that she was not a ‘detractor’.” (Gappah 2015:218) Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in this context, Alexandra appears to relate to Memory as someone who occupies the same identity position as her and who consequently believes that the presence of the new government is likely to adversely affect Memory as it will her – hence her advice for her to also hang a flag in her car. Memory however does not view herself as existing in an alien position from the political developments in Zimbabwe in the same manner that Alexandra does. As noted previously, in many ways she empathises with the plight of black people who rely on the restitution promised by the government and in some ways likely relates to their struggle due to her humble beginnings in the township of Mufakose. Despite their exclusion of her, she continues to feel an earnest connection to them and does not appear to harbour enduring animosity, despite reminiscing on her time in the township with a degree of lament. In the case of Alexandra however, this is a superficial show of support for Zimbabwe’s push towards redress, as it is revealed later in the novel that she still harbours racial prejudices, such as for example her automatic assumption that Memory was responsible for the death of Lloyd and that what she stood to gain from his will was a motivating factor. (Gappah 2015:163) Had she found a white person with the corpse of Lloyd in the same circumstances, it is unlikely that she would have rushed to the same conclusions without at least initial inquiry as to what happened – a courtesy that she did not afford Memory.



## **Place-identity:**

### Exploring the association of identity, sentimentality and stigma to place

The legacy of exclusion, corruption and oppression continues to be impactful within the novel's depictions of Zimbabwe and the polarities of economic, political and social extremes that it houses. Commenting on how little her fellow prisoner, Mavis Munongwa, knows about the political upheaval in Zimbabwe due to her extended stay in prison, Memory states:

She has no knowledge at all of Zimbabwe, no idea of what life has been like in the last thirty years, no concept of the immense contradictions that make up this country – national unity achieved through the massacres in the south, discrimination against white people...the multiplicity of laws that guarantee women equality and a culture that ensures that they remain subservient. (Gappah 2015:78)

Within this context economic discrepancies and social divides are most explicitly observed within the environments and landscapes that individuals and groups inhabit and the belief systems and traditions that are associated with these areas. Environments do not endemically possess stereotypes, associations and traits but however acquire them over time. This is achieved through patterns of encounter, engagement and interaction in which spaces gain racial connotations and stereotypes.

In the case of Zimbabwe, separate living arrangements for whites and blacks was necessitated by economic disparagement in which blacks were resigned to living in townships and villages and whites to suburbs and farms. Due to the Land Tenure Act, prime land was reserved for the exclusive use of white people, which made it possible for them to occupy preferential residential zones. Blacks occupied the lower economic rungs of society with rife levels of unemployment being a common phenomenon. Those who were able to gain employment were often underpaid and mistreated, resulting in their continued stay in townships, villages and informal dwellings.

An extension of this is the tendency for powerless individuals to protect the little that they have through imposing notions of ownership and consequent belonging on spaces that dictates parameters of inclusion and exclusion for certain categories of people. While to a certain extent this reflects the colonial stereotype of black individuals as intolerant and uncivilised that they have subtly adopted due to the nature of their living environment, it also originates from the systematic disenfranchisement of black people of land and other resources that results in issues

of who belongs and who does not at the forefront of township consciousness. Nevertheless, despite the formalised abolishment of colonialism and legislation regarding segregation, people continue to congregate together in racial groups which results in these spaces gaining racial connotations.

Besides this, Durrheim *et al.* (2011:121) notes that in the case of South Africa, but with particular applicability to Zimbabwe:

Around the country, segregated black townships acquired representations of being degraded, violent and dangerous places. All the colonial dangers associated with meeting an ‘evil-minded, barefooted black man on a dark night’ were now concentrated in townships and the symbolism infused into these spaces. [This was] in contrast with the (white) city, which was developed, peaceful and an orderly place governed by the rule of law.

#### Mufakose township

Memory describes Mufakose township with “the houses that look exactly the same, redbrick houses with a square inch of space between them. Families lived together all packed one on top of the other, like sardines in a tin: mother, father, another mother, sometimes; aunts, uncles and cousins.” (Gappah 2015:37) Commenting on one of the more subtle distinctions between the racialised environments of whites and blacks, Memory states that:

You will discover as you walk around the city that it was planned to keep the direct heat of the sun away from the faces of white people. In the mornings, they left the northern suburbs to go to work and the sun was behind them, and in the evenings, when they went back home, the sun was behind them still. But in the townships, the sun is always in the faces of the people. And there are no tree-lined avenues, no cool grass beneath the feet, only the hard heat of the dusty streets. (Gappah 2015:38)

In many respects the colonial mentality of black individuals as depraved, unworthy of comfort, stoic, tough and ‘beasts of burden’ is reflected in the design and location of areas of living. Describing the inferior design of residences, Memory notes that “our house, all our houses, had rickety doors and thin, thin windows that shook as the doors were opened and closed”. Black individuals were classed as unsuitable to reside or even occupy cities, suburbs and plush areas of farmland unless it was to be subordinated in exploitative labour practices, after which they were expected to swiftly vacate the premises to return to their own assigned areas on the outskirts of

the developed central business district. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:121) however notes that “by a disturbing slippage, the representations of people and places reinforce each other...place representations bind people to places as the place and the people who occupy it reflect meanings off each other.” Over time, the identities and behaviour of individuals and groups are influenced by the characteristics of their environments, where black identity in the context of Mufakose township is represented as adopting the stereotypes of violence, depravity and criminality that defines the area. Memory states that “in Mufakose, the night was torn with sounds of couplings, snoring, howling dogs, the running feet of thieves chancing it in the darkness”. (Gappah 2015:38)

Moreover, depictions of the township within the novel are also imbued with the exotic and the supernatural. The pervasiveness of these are outlined in the recollections of Memory when she was young – one instance of this being when she believed Nhau, the neighbourhood bully, that if she planted her sweets into the ground outside his house, they would grow into a sweet tree. (2) Despite this being a ploy for Nhau to acquire the sweets it is an innocent enough recollection. There is also the belief that Memory and the rural community have in the existence of the “*Njuzu*” (60), which Memory describes as a violent and malice water creature, claiming that “they become hurricanes and storms. They transform into snakes and crocodiles. *Njuzu* capture them down, down beneath the waters.” (60)

An archetypal embodiment of the colonial stereotypes of witchcraft and dark magic as being associated with black individuals is the character of Memory’s mother, Moira. Conforming to the colonial expectation of Africa and the context of the township as only being able to produce darkness, nonsensicality and malice, towards the conclusion of the novel it is revealed that Memory’s mother is deeply superstitious and a believer in the divine and supernatural. This is likely coupled with a certain degree of mental illness, as Memory recalls an instance in which her mother believed that it was Memory’s sister’s birthday, Joyi, when it was in fact not:

We were too afraid to tell her that it was no one’s birthday, or that it was not Christmas. Instead we went along with her excitement...then the music stopped with a harsh scratch as she snatched the needle from the radiogram...‘Stop looking at me with those eyes,’ she said. ‘What are you doing in here anyway, what kind of children are you, always indoors...but we were too slow for

my mother. She took up the record from the radiogram and threw it at me...the cake followed.  
(Gappah 2015:95)

Memory's mother, it is revealed, is also responsible for the death of her son, Gift, as well as her infant daughter, Moreblessings, due to the belief that her dead first born son was telling her to commit the murders. (251) Belief in the supernatural is however not only limited to the township of Mufakose, but appears to extend to the entire country. Memory states that "as you travel around the country, you will find that a lot of people believe in the power of witchcraft and dark magic. Jimmy is full of stories from her village in Chipinge about wives who put spells on their husbands". (81) This culture extends even to government officials, as Memory recalls the sentiments of one following the reburial of dead military soldiers, stating that "a government minister had suggested a ritual ceremony to propitiate the spirits of the dead, lest they return as vengeful *Ngozi* spirits." (169)

Despite this, the humbleness from which the township operates allows it to be viewed with a sense of authenticity that is grounded in the realities of real life. Memory notes that:

In the daytime, the township pulsed to the symphonic movement of the everyday. From the *speya*, I heard the children of Mharapara Street play their favourite games...from the *speya*, I heard the women who walked up Mopani Road from Mufakose to Kambuzuma crying out the vegetables that she sold...I heard the beggars, the blind men and women led by their children, pleading from one end of Mharapara to the other...we were poor without knowing it. There was nothing enabling or romantic or life-affirming about our poverty. It just was...we accepted the simple order of our lives...we were intimate with the ways of our neighbours and they with ours. (Gappah 2015:40)

When reflecting on the difference between the nature of her life in the township in comparison to the more comfortable lifestyle of Umwinsidale, she states that "poverty holds no terrors for me, because I have known it and conquered it. I want to tell her [Jimmy], but I am not sure that she would understand it, that even the big mansions hold their secret miseries. I would like to tell her that they hold more of them because there is more room for them." (Gappah 2015:11) It is perhaps because of her humble upbringing that when Memory is exposed to the area of Umwinsidale, she is able to take a step back and assess the nature of the environment from a more balanced perspective, cognisant of the discrepancies that it houses.

Mufakose township: Arrangements of space and systems of relations through the process of categorisation

While the legacy of colonialism continues to be impactful in influencing this system of relations, the perspective of race trouble also argues for a model that is grounded in the everyday practices of people, such as the ostracisation of those who they believe to be different. In the township of Mufakose on Mharaphara Street, Memory states that “there was a brutal honesty in how the children regarded anyone different...[being termed] as a *murungudunhu*, I am a black woman who is imbued not with the whiteness of *murungu*, of privilege, but of *dunhu*, of ridicule and fakery, a ghastly whiteness.” (Gappah 2015:10) Although associated more with the black race than with the privilege that accompanies whiteness, due to the inability of the community in reconciling a fixed black identity with her fair aesthetic appearance, Memory is immediately framed as an outsider to the community through terms such as “*murungudunhu*” and “*musope*” (10). Commenting on this, Dixon and Durrheim (2000:32) argue that place identity is:

Something that people create together through talk: a social construction that allows them to make sense of their connectivity to place and to guide their actions and projects accordingly...it is through language that everyday experiences of self-in-place form and mutate; moreover, it is through language that places themselves are imaginatively constituted in ways that carry implications for ‘who we are’ (or ‘who we claim to be’).

In this way individuals within the township attempt to make meaning of their world and exercise power through positioning themselves and others in systems of relations according to a metric of similarities and differences. Accounting for this phenomenon through the establishment of group membership, Herbert Blumer (1958:4) argues that:

In race prejudice there is a self-assured feeling on the part of the dominant racial group of being naturally superior or better. This is commonly shown in a disparagement of the qualities of the subordinate group...the second feeling, that the subordinate race is an alien and fundamentally different stock, is likewise always present...it is this feeling that reflects, justifies, and promotes the social exclusion of the subordinate racial group.

It is this establishment of even and uneven relationships that the perspective of race trouble is most evidently observed. Practices however also extend to the physical manipulation of spaces in order to reflect and reinforce the ideologies of dominant groups. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:124-5) states that:

The arrangement of spaces begins to provide necessities, constraints and motives for human action as they shape, channel and focus practices that give 'race relations' a tangible and concrete form...places are not dead backdrops to human action but are, in part, produced by the regulated forms of human activity that they inspire or require.

An example of this within *The Book of Memory* is foregrounded towards the very commencement of the novel through reference to Memory's living quarters while in Mufakose, which was known as the *speya*. Describing it, Memory states that:

In the township, the parents' bedroom was just the bedroom, and the second bedroom, for there were only ever two bedrooms, was always the *speya*. This indicated rooms so plentiful that one was spare, but...it also suggested that our rooms were not our own, and we were mere interlopers, temporary guests who could be evicted at any time. (Gappah 2015:38)

From a structural standpoint, this compounds Memory's existence at the periphery of township life, reinforcing the notion of her presence as something spare, extra, as opposed to essential. Categorised as a racial other from an early age, within the opening pages of the novel Memory recalls her exclusion from childhood games, stating "I remember playing that game in Mufakose, or, should I say, watching the children on Mharapara Street playing that game while I imagined that I was a part of it..." (22) She is also explicit in her detailing of much of the activity in the township from her vantage point in the *speya*. She states that "I heard the children of Mharapara Street play their favourite games. I knew all the rules to all the games...I heard the woman who walked up Mopani Road from Mufakose to Kambuzuma crying out the vegetables that she sold...I heard the beggars, the blind men and women led by their children..." (39)

While her exclusion from the activity in the township is due partly to her skin condition and the necessity that she avoids exposure to the sun, it is also a further indication of her ostracisation by the community. It is through the idea of Memory as an idiosyncratic outsider in the township community that the violence, inequality and oppression that she experiences is justified. If asked, these perpetrators of oppression, despite flaws of their own, would not believe their actions to be morally apprehensible as they believe themselves to simply be acting within normative behavioural constructs that is subtly dictated by their immediate environment and the metric of who belongs and who does not. Even those who would traditionally be excluded from everyday life due to oddities in appearance or disabilities attempt to grapple for positioning and power in

order to achieve acceptance. One of the ways that this is achieved is by placing focus on individuals such as Memory, in which there is general consent towards her status as an outsider. In doing so, they gain social capital as being above the object of their ridicule while simultaneously deflecting attention away from their own shortcomings. This is indicated through Memory's recollection that:

even the people who looked odd, like Sekuru Jones, who limped on his left leg...spat whenever he saw me. MaiTafadzwa, who could only afford to feed her family on Lacto sour milk and *matemba*, muttered something under her breath and spat. The Phiri family...generally mocked because they were Malawian and the father had a sing-song voice and joined the *zvinyau* dancers...looked at me with eyes of pity. (Gappah 2015:52, italics in original)

This phenomenon of attempting to deflect attention away from one's self and onto another through the identification of their flaws as worse than one's own in order to gain social capital is a methodology that is so pervasive within the book that it is one that even Memory attempts to employ through her mention of Lameck, a fellow albino in the township. She describes him as an individual "who had a squashed face and red, blotchy skin that broke over his arms and face." (52) She goes on to further state that "it was terrible that people should look at us and conclude that we were the same...I gave him no affirmation at all. His attempts to get me to enter some sort of melanin-free club failed." (53) While those with shortcomings in the community attempt to place themselves above Memory through displays of pity and scorn towards her, Memory attempts to regain social capital and status through her display of scorn and judgement towards Lameck, who she places herself above.

Notions of identity appear then to be bound up in their immediate contexts of usage but are actively contested and negotiated in order to determine hierarchies of status and belonging. This also alludes to the idea of race as a measure of social positionality and group membership which allows Memory to differentiate herself from Lameck despite both falling under the category of 'albino'. Through descriptions of his appearance, she views him as an inferior other while simultaneously categorising herself as superior. Omi and Winant (2008:406) note that "thus we should think of race as an element of social structure rather than an irregularity within it; we should see race as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion." These comments by Omi and Winant (2008) allow then for an element of self-representation with regard to race –

alluding to how an individual categorises themselves – as seen in this instance with Memory and Lameck. Tension however arises when an individual’s self-classification is incongruent with that of wider society. While Memory might classify herself as superior to Lameck, the society that she occupies views them in exactly the same manner as judged by its treatment of them – with Memory noting that “it was terrible that people should look at us and conclude that we were the same”. (Gappah 2015:53)

One of the only reasons though that Memory has been able to obtain a preferential appearance in comparison to Lameck is that in many respects, she occupies a position of privilege. She has access to umbrellas and items to cover her skin, moisturising lotions and opportunities to visit the hospital when her skin breaks out in itching blotches due to sun exposure. Lameck, who appears to occupy a lower economic position, is forced to stand in the sun all day selling “tomatoes and maputi at the market” (52) in order to make a living. Memory, in contrast, has never needed to toil labouriously in the sun as her parents have always provided everything that she needs. It is interesting to note that the dynamics between Lameck and Memory act almost as a microcosm for the nexus between race and class that problematises relations throughout the entire book and influences identity constructions.

#### Highlands Police Station and Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison

Within Highlands Police Station and Chikurubi Maximum Prison, her racial associations and identity vary numerous times in accordance with her immediate context and the participants with which she interacts. After being arrested for the murder of Lloyd and explaining her relationship to him as she understood it at the time, stating “I lived with Lloyd Hendricks because my parents sold me to him as a child” (Gappah 2015:4), the police officers react in disbelief, stating ““just tell us the truth. You were his girlfriend and he was your boyfriend. He was your sugar daddy. Just tell us the truth, that you killed him for the money.”” (3) Despite having no reason to doubt her version of events, the police characterise the relationship dynamic between Lloyd and Memory as that of ‘sugar daddy’ and ‘girlfriend’, employing the discourse of Memory as a typically wanton black woman who’s only motive for interaction with a white man is for financial gain. This ideology disallows the possibility of their relationship being based on a father-daughter dynamic and instead depicts the only motivation for interaction between a white man and a black woman, as Memory is characterised in this context, as being for financial gain and sexual gratification.



When she is moved to Chikurubi, she is initially viewed with suspicion and fear. Within the initial context of the prison, she is not associated with either binarism of whiteness or blackness but is instead almost constructed within the framework of a new race – which is that of albino. As a member, she is automatically associated with all of the stigma, superstition and mysticism that accompanies albinism. Memory notes that “when I first arrived [at the prison], I found the usual fear-laced fascination and superstition around my condition.” (26) She recollects an instance of an inmate by the name of Marvellous equating the mere act of Memory’s stare as being responsible for killing her son. (27) Memory recalls another incident on the prison farm in which she picked up a chameleon and allowed it to move over her hands and arms, watching it change colour to adapt to the new colour hue of her prison uniform and skin. Shocked at Memory’s handling of a chameleon, Beulah, one of the prisoners, asks “are you some kind of a witch that you play with such things?” (28) In response, Memory notes that “I had forgotten that...chameleons are portents of evil, associated with witchcraft and black magic. The news spread throughout the prison and made me safe from bullying, at least from the other prisoners. The fear did not extend to the guards.” (28) What this episode also reveals is the construction of a counter-discourse by Memory of autonomy and ingenuity that allowed her to benefit from the stigma surrounding her condition that has traditionally been associated with oppression, subservience and violence. Here, she regains some power in relation to her prison inmates.

Despite the initial difficulties and challenges that she faces in Chikurubi, she eventually manages to attain a semblance of comradeship with her fellow prisoners, joined together by their mutual hardships and dislike of the prison system. When Memory introduces each of the main prisoners towards the beginning of the novel, she goes through great pains to relate each to the reader in great detail, conveying their full names, nicknames, origins, offenses and personality dispositions. This indicates a level of intimacy and affection between her and her fellow prisoners and the relationship that they share. Even though the prisoners live in close quarters, so a level of intimacy is unavoidable, it is entirely possible to live near individuals and know nothing about them should one choose to – living an isolated existence. In this prison, that is not the case. The relationship dynamic appears to be characterised by a community of women, who offer each other support and guidance when needed. This is indicated numerous times throughout the novel, from the mock trial that the lady prisoners performed in order to help Beulah during her court appearance and avoid a lengthy prison sentence (72-3), to the solidarity shown between

Memory, Jimmy and Verity in support of Sinfree, a new prisoner in Chikurubi who was being victimised by the guards. (89-90) When Mavis Munongwa passed away, she is referred to as a “sister” (246), with the rest of the female prisoners honouring her life, despite her transgressions, with song and lament at her passing.

It is because of the close bond that is shared between Memory and the other prisoners that she introduces the reader to that towards the conclusion of the novel, when the majority of prisoners are released due to a political pardon that came with the introduction of a new government, some return to visit her. Memory notes that “Verity, Jimmy and Beulah came to see me yesterday. As part of their amnesty conditions, they are not supposed to visit the prison. But there they were, in the canteen, with things for me: food, drink, toiletries, soap, a new toothbrush, a towel and sunscreen lotion.” (Gappah 2015:264) Despite risking being in contravention of their amnesty conditions, the three prisoners visit Memory as a show of support. While in the prison, Memory has even managed to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with some of the guards. She has agreed to assist the daughter of Loveness, Yeukai, with her academics and in exchange, she is granted certain liberties, such as being able to frequent the residence of Loveness and watch television, eat and drink. She eventually also extends these services to the rest of the children of the guards. (261)

In many respects, Memory is able to attain a certain level of comfort and belonging that she was not able to attain in any of the other environments that she finds herself in throughout the novel. In each of the environments, to greater and lesser extents, she is an outsider, an other. She faces the burden of exclusion severely in the township of Mufakose and this is significant in negatively influencing her self-worth and sense of identity. Her subversion of traditional categories here does not work in her favour, and she is isolated as an agent of witchcraft and mysticism. Within Umwinsidale, the constructs of whiteness are more embracing of her difference, despite the allusion from individuals like Alexandra that no matter how much she embraces the mannerisms of whiteness, she will always be different. A similar situation presents itself during her overseas travels, in that despite adopting a mostly white identity, she still exists on the periphery. She is too black to be considered white and too white to be considered black, being forced in this context to exist within a position of liminality. Within the prison environment, however, she is surrounded by individuals who have been outcast by society, in a similar manner to herself.

Despite initial fascination with her condition of albinism, it could be argued that the relationships that Memory forms within the prison are some of the most authentic within the novel, as Memory's fellow prisoner's embrace her for who she is, with all her flaws and idiosyncrasies. The comfort that Memory finds in the prison is evident to observe, as she ponders on it favorably, enjoying her new liberties: "The prison is open to me now; I go where I please, when I please. There is no lock-up. I eat at Loveness's house, and spend most of my time there...I [also] spend most of my time in a small room that used to be the library, and which I have persuaded Loveness to let me rebuild as one." (261) Furthermore, in line with the idea of place-identity and belonging, Memory has come to be sentimental regarding the routines of the area, being hesitant to embrace any change, with Memory stating that "if I am to be honest, I do not want to think of changes here." (257)

At times in Chikurubi, however, Memory comes to be associated with the privilege of whiteness. This is facilitated through the admiration of materialism of Jimmy, one of her fellow prison inmates who "prefers to be the last to get the paper because she likes to pore over the classifieds without worrying about the next person in line. She laps up the mansions that cost billions and trillions of dollars..." (67) Jimmy then comes to admire Memory when she learns of her inhabitation in the residence of Lloyd in the affluent Umwinsidale area. Memory states that "to Jimmy...all that she sees as essential in me is that I lived in a huge mansion in one of the northern suburbs." (68) She goes on to further state that Jimmy "keeps asking for more and more detail about the house. I have added more and more rooms, and a sauna and a Jacuzzi in addition to the swimming pool and tennis court that need no introduction." (70) With Jimmy replying to this new information that "Memo really lived the life" (70), Jimmy reinforces the notion of power, privilege and whiteness as being inextricably linked. Memory recognises Jimmy's admiration of white materiality and attempts to exaggerate her previous living conditions in order to gain the most social capital, respect and status from the situation.

Whiteness as associated with privilege and power is however depicted numerous times throughout the book. In the context of the township, whiteness is admired to the extent that engaging in conversation with a white person is regarded as an occasion of spectacle, as Memory recalls when she first saw Lloyd in Mufakose: "I was struck by the wonder of a white person talking to my parents so familiarly. I had never talked to a white person before...it filled me with

wonder that my father could be talking with this man; at eye level they were the same height.” (132) Before her death, Memory’s infant sibling Moreblessings is depicted as being infatuated with the neighbour’s child’s white toy doll:

My father called out to Mobhi to come, but she cried that she wanted to stay next door...MaiPrincess’s daughter Promise had a new doll with curly yellow hair and blue, long-lashed eyes that opened and closed while it said ‘Mama’. That holiday, Mobhi had spent as much time as she could with Promise, watching her play with her doll, never allowed to touch it”.  
(Gappah 2015:121)

Moreover, one of the most recurring examples of whiteness is the portrayal of the English language as the conduit of civility and status. One of the earliest instances of this occurs during the mock trial of the inmate Beulah when she asks whether or not to speak in English at her trial. Verity, considered to be the most knowledgeable of court procedure due to her various misdemeanors, replies, stating “‘Yes, use English...the magistrates will be impressed because they do not expect someone who goes around thumping people in the street to speak in English.’” (73) Jimmy, another prison inmate, advises Beulah not to speak in English as “‘everyone will think...that you are just too high-class and they will want to fix you.’” (73) This instance reveals that whether English is associated with civility or pretension, in either case, the speaking of English appears to be inextricably linked with status and power. The intricacies of the language are however depicted as not being suited to everyone, as Memory observes how the prison guard Patience “‘prefers to speak to us in English. She is training to be a court interpreter. ‘Irregardless of the absence of water,’ she says, ‘you should make sure the hoarse pipes are connected.’ ‘You must make sure that your plates and bowels [sic] are clean.’ ‘You have the wrongful [sic] number!’ she screamed into her phone the other day. ‘I said this is the wrongful [sic] number!’” (29)

Local languages are shown to carry a negative stigma of difficulty, backwardness and an allusion to malice. When Memory discovers that Melinda Carter, the journalist from America who is researching her case, is attempting to learn Shona, she states that “‘whatever you do, you should not allow yourself to be discouraged by the many people – white people, I mean – who you are certain to meet who will tell you how difficult the local languages are, how they twist the tongue and confuse the mind.’” (49) From this, Memory makes a generalisation of white people as being

prejudiced towards local languages and alludes to a subtly uneasy relationship with whites, despite her intimate relations with them. Furthermore, in depicting the attitudes of whites and the nature of local relationships in this way, she achieves some success in displaying the value of local languages while simultaneously attempting to undermine the perceived primacy of English. She also views English with some condescension when she states “I wondered often why Lloyd had taken me in. You see how insidious his influence is, how I am using his language.” (144)

#### Umwinsidale and ‘Summer Madness’

While Memory is on that occasion critical of the influence of whiteness on the development of her character, in many respects she embraces the distinctions from rural life that it provides. While for the majority of the book the environments of the township and the prison are described as an aberration, the area of Umwinsidale, where Memory goes to stay with Lloyd, is depicted as synonymous with nature, peace and civility:

In Umwinsidale, with Lloyd, on the other side of Harare, I was as far from Mufakose as it was possible to be. Umwinsidale was still tranquility. There were no sounds that did not belong to nature. Lloyd’s house, Summer Madness, sat on its own small hill, and when I looked out into the night, I saw nothing but the darkness of the valley, and the far-away lights of the neighbours shimmering like fireflies in a distant forest. (Gappah 2015:38)

Initially however, when Memory comes to reside with Lloyd she is extremely anxious and uncomfortable and is met with suspicion and passive-aggression, as indicated by Alexandra’s reaction to Memory mistakenly dropping and shattering a doll, with Alexandra stating: “If you are to make a success of this, you must teach her to respect other people’s property. And you really ought to teach her better manners, too.” (158) Here, Alexandra assumes, despite Lloyd’s protests to the contrary, that Memory broke the doll deliberately and consequently lacks manners and respect for property. These assumptions are likely motivated not from the action of breaking the doll itself, but from the position of Memory as a racial other to that of Alexandra. Part of Alexandra’s racial prejudice towards Memory and motivation to exclude her from her immediate surroundings likely stems from the entire purpose of Lloyd’s Summer Madness, which is to create an escape and utopian environment away from the harsh realities of Zimbabwean life, an environment which Alexandra believes that the presence of Memory will threaten. Commenting on this, Ballard (2005:14) states that:

The process of othering...which was the basis for traditional strategies for creating comfort zones, maps into space attempting to remove or regulate people who threaten the Western, modern, first world identity. In a situation where such traditional strategies...are no longer in place, private boundary maintenance becomes a vital tool. Barriers regulating access to neighbourhoods are physical statements regarding the kinds of people who belong and the kinds that do not. They are an attempt to restore a certain sense of 'our' identity through boundary maintenance, prompted by the disturbing presence of others...

To substantiate the unrealistic nature of Umwinsidale, noting the racial demographics of a dinner party, Memory comments that "Zenzo...was the only other guest there who was not white. The only other black people there were the staff: the maids in colourful uniforms, the men in white shirts and black trousers, carrying glasses and food." (Gappah 2015:185-6) In many ways then the response of Alexandra towards Memory simply reflects the stereotypes of racialised others that she has been conditioned into believing through the exclusive structure of her immediate environment, pointing to the impact that environmental variables have on character dispositions. It is likely because of this that despite no explicit evidence of racism or racial prejudice in her utterances, Alexandra also appears to view individuals who are not white only in terms of subservience, and not as equals, as indicated by her observations later in the novel: "I never recovered my relationship with Alexandra. I want to believe that she might have been kinder to me if she had known how. She only knew how to command black people or give them charity. And I was a black child who was only black on the inside." (161) Dixon and Durrheim (2000:29) argue that:

In this conception, human actors are cast as imaginative users of their environments, agents who are able to appropriate physical contexts in order to create, here, a space of attachment and rootedness, a space of being. The personalization of dwellings is an oft-cited example. By this practice, 'home' places are organized and represented in ways that help to maintain self-coherence and self-esteem, to realize self-regulation principles.

Later in the novel however it appears as though Alexandra does indeed harbour inherent racial prejudices towards Memory, as even though she has no definite evidence to support her accusations, she is convinced that Memory is responsible for the death of Lloyd and utilises reasons such as the fact that Memory stood to gain materially, such as acquiring the house, from the will of Lloyd should he pass away. Memory recalls the instance by stating:

She told the judge that I had killed Lloyd for the Hendricks money and for Summer Madness and everything in it. She knew about the will because Lloyd had told her that he would be leaving everything to me. She had not liked it, of course, and had tried in vain to plead with him, and she saw me only as one who sought to take the things the family had fought for and make them my own. (Gappah 2015:163)

Irrespective of her challenging start in Umwinsidale, the environment of Summer Madness, which she uses as a nickname to describe Lloyd's residence, appears to embrace her racial identity to a far greater extent than that of Mufakose. Memory describes the differences between the two environments:

In Mufakose, I moved between my rigidly defined worlds of home and school, my mother's churches, healers and hospitals. In my tree house at Summer Madness...I spent long days reading Lloyd and Alexandra's old books...when it was too wet or cold to go outside, I stayed in the library, a dark cool room at the back of the house...in the library, and up in the tree house, I found the happiest and most peaceful moments of my life. (Gappah 2015:164)

In comparison to Mufakose, Memory finds a certain degree of familiarity, comfort and belonging in Umwinsidale that was never possible in the township environment. The contextual possibilities and opportunities that Summer Madness brings begins to reflect in her changing disposition and interests which is visible as she develops an appreciation for Western constructs, such as the architecture of Lloyd's house:

I did not know until Summer Madness became my home that it was possible to fall in love with a house. It did not happen at once. What was meant to be a simple farmhouse became a little temple to grace and beauty; all Doric pillars and columns. Along its length runs a veranda. I loved to sit there during a raging storm, as one with the elements but protected from them. (Gappah 2015:167)

As the novel develops, Memory is surprised to reflect upon how much of an influence Western ideals have had on her. One of the occasions that she realises this is when her love interest, Zenzo, mimics her voice: "He laughed at my accent; until he mimicked me back to myself, I had not realised how my voice had taken on the voices of those around me. I had not realised how much of the Convent was in me, how much Liz, of Lloyd and Sandy. I wanted to stamp out my voice." (190) Despite the comforts that she enjoys, Memory has an uneasy relationship with the

environmental influences that she finds herself surrounded by and exists often in a space of interstitiality between embracing the traditional culture that shuns her and adopting Western ideals that largely accepts her. On several occasions she however laments the status quo in the Zimbabwe that is depicted in the novel, in this instance, the nature of education:

In this independent, hundred-per-cent-empowered and fully and totally indigenous blacker-than-black country, a superior education is one that the whites would value, and as whites do not value local languages, the best-educated among us have sacrificed our languages at the altar of what the whites deem supreme. So it was in colonial times, and so it remains, more than thirty years later. (Gappah 2015:50)

### Overseas

The influence of colonial associations of whiteness with that of power, status and prestige continues to be evident throughout the novel and is impactful with regard to how racialised individuals relate to each other. Zenzo appears to be cognisant of the power that is associated with whiteness and attempts to associate himself with it as closely as possible through having sexual relations with white characters in the novel: First, with the German economist Sigrid, then with Memory, who by this stage has adopted many of the mannerisms of whiteness, and then finally with Lloyd. For Zenzo, variations in gender do not appear as a boundary in the attainment of white power. Despite the questionable nature of his actions, his strategy in using the power of whiteness is effective in attaining upward social mobility as it results in his journey overseas – with Memory noting that he “left on the arm of his German girlfriend, on a ticket bought with her Deutschmarks, and that, having gone to Germany, he got himself a nice new passport before he traded her in for someone richer.” (Gappah 2015:179)

Memory would encounter Zenzo during her travels overseas following her fallout with Lloyd. Much like Memory who has the ability to adapt to her surroundings, the Zenzo that Memory meets on her travels is the product of his environment. Memory comments that:

Zenzo had lost his dreadlocks. He was still very good-looking – better looking, in fact, than he had ever been. Money and success became him. I had already learned from the *Observer* interview that he had reinvented his past when he renamed himself...this was certainly a new Zenzo, a more expensive one. (Gappah 2015:179-180)



Aware of contextual cues and societal culture, Zenzo is able to reinvent himself in order to be most congruent with the requirements of the environment and crowd that he finds himself in. This is perhaps one of his biggest strengths, and he seems prepared to strip down the very essence of his identity and history in order to better match his surroundings and attain opportunities that were perhaps not previously forthcoming. The overseas environment appears to be the location in which Zenzo is best at 'home', self-actualising more here than in any of his previous settings.

For Memory, while her overseas travels were necessary in order to escape the trauma of her discovery of Lloyd and Zenzo, she appears less comfortable overseas than she was with Lloyd in Summer Madness. She meets another love-interest, Simon, however the dynamic of their relationship is a strange one. He appears to like her only for her exotic appearance, viewing her more as an item of fascination and mystic as opposed to an actual human being. Memory comments on this, stating:

I had developed by then the affectation of braiding my hair into long plaits that matched the colour of my skin to produce a somewhat otherworldly effect. Simon, in the first giddy moments when we could not stop touching each other, said I looked like something that lived in the water, like the Ondine. (Gappah 2015:193)

This incident is telling as it is illustrative of the position of liminality that Memory occupies as an albino – the allure of her for Simon is the position that she occupies as an enigma, something mysterious that he is unable to categorise, hence his infatuation with her. While this is positive in the sense that it allows for a partner such as Simon to be attracted to her due to her idiosyncrasy and allows her to move between various environments due to her subversion of traditional categories, her flexibility makes finding a sense of belonging in one environment challenging. This is indicated in her unwillingness to pursue further studies overseas, opting to return home to Zimbabwe instead:

A few months before my studies ended, one of the fellows at my college had recommended that I continue on to doctoral work. He also recommended that I spent a year at an East Coast university in the United States...I collected the forms; I put everything together. Then I did nothing...I was tired, too tired to do anything; all of it seemed too difficult; everything seemed to difficult...I decided that it was finally time to go home. (Gappah 2015:205)

While Memory has the ability to adapt to her surroundings, she is certainly not as skilled or committed to it as Zenzo, and she consequently finds it difficult being away from Summer Madness, the location in which she first found a sense of comfort and belonging. More than this, however, the white people that are shown as residing overseas, such as the parents of Simon, are depicted as ignorant and obnoxious. When Simon's mother, Domenica, inquires about a term that she has heard, Matemba, believing them to be a group of people who engage in a forgiveness ceremony, when she is corrected by Memory that Matemba are actually small fish, she casually states that "well, it must be some other Africans, then", (194) operating on the assumption that all African cultures and identities are simply interchangeable. Furthermore, Simon's parents appear to be under the impression that all Africans look a certain way, which Memory comments on upon first meeting them: "I could see as soon as I met them that Simon had only told his parents where I was from, but not what I looked like." (193) This difference in appearance likely takes Simon's parents by surprise, which results in them taking liberties with her, such as the expression of ignorant comments, that perhaps would not be as forthcoming had Memory complied with their expectation regarding the appearance of an African. To a large extent however Memory appears to be disillusioned towards this behaviour and these attitudes, placing her in an uncomfortable position, unable to relate to this culture and this place. This likely acts also as a motivating factor for her desire to return home.

## **Conclusion**

While it appears as though Memory's most probable path to self-actualisation lies within the environment of Umwinsidale and Lloyd, she remains painfully aware of the racial discrepancies, conflict and political instability that characterises her country, despite it being removed from her immediate lived experience. She notes:

But at Summer Madness, I had long wet weekends in the library or sunny days in the tree house...the wars and troubles were, at the closest distance, only reports on the news bulletins, and at the furthest, distant murmurs, far off rumours that did not penetrate the ordered tranquility of my new life. (Gappah 2015:170)

The conflicts that Memory refers to here are waged against the backdrop of colonialism and the levels of government corruption that are in part a result of it. The equitable allocation of land,

being a central issue in these conflicts as it is portrayed in the novel, is fought for viciously not only between whites and blacks, but within the black population itself as government corruption is shown to undermine any policies of redress:

I don't want you to think that I am in any way defending the chaos of the way the farms were parceled out, or the greed with which the top people took farms for themselves. From what Lloyd told me, Alexandra and Ian's farm had gone to the second wife of an army general, who had taken a farm in addition to the one that went to his first wife and two children. (Gappah 2015:212)

Whites who are viewed as being in possession of land and other privileges that was unfairly acquired during colonialism however continue to be a focus of what blacks view as necessary retributive justice that takes the form of land seizures:

She [Alexandra] told me about the stand-off at the farm...Lloyd had called 'a connection of his', one of the ministers he had been with in the camps at Chimoio, who had said, if they packed their clothes and things, he would make sure that they were not harmed...she told me about the people I did not know...like Keith and Suzy Granger, who had left with nothing at all, just what they had on; not even proper shoes...the Grahams had [also] fled the farms, shots ringing in their wake; their dogs were killed as they tried to defend them. (Gappah 2015:211)

The main focus of this chapter, to return to the aims expressed in the introduction, was to examine the effects of the various environments that Memory finds herself in and how these varying contexts contribute to her character development. Through the perspective of race trouble, I hoped to gain a greater understanding of the problematic relations that this potentially produces with the remnants of colonial influence as a lingering backdrop. What appears evident from some of the analysis undertaken in this chapter is that due to the imperial aspirations of the first colonisers, such as Cecil John Rhodes, and the establishment of binaries such as between the civilised and uncivilised, a metric of difference was established that resulted in the construction of identities that operates along the axis of group membership. This resulted in not only racial distinctions, between various people, but also economic distinctions, between the rich and the poor. This is evident in not only the strained relationship that whites have with blacks in Zimbabwe, but also the vast economic inequalities between blacks. Part of the reason for this is because of the presidential reign of Robert Mugabe and his reckless economic policies that plundered his own country into destitution, but part of the reason is also because of the failure of

policies of redress, such as land redistribution, to be equally divided, with vast amounts of corruption marring the process. Tension and race trouble were therefore evident on at least two different axes.

This chapter also argues that much of the problematic plot trajectories that occur in the novel can be characterised by the attainment of power, which disenfranchised individuals across race and class appear obsessed with attaining. Memory, as the focaliser of the novel, is important as the perspective of race trouble reveals itself most potently through her status as an albino and position of liminality in society. This chapter has used the mechanism of place and the idea of place identity to better understand the attributes that become attached to places and contexts and how these unique identities of place create troublesome behaviour and identity constructions.

Each environment that Memory traverses throughout the novel profoundly impacts her ideas of self-worth, identity and perspective. Within the township of Mufakose, she endures the worst of ostracisation, humiliation and abuse and is constructed as an outsider in not only the behaviour of those around her, but also in the physical construction of place, as she is described as sleeping in the *speya* – the spare bedroom. Colonial constructions of the township, as a place of darkness, malice and incivility, in some respects, as Durrheim *et al.* notes (2011:121), the ideological construction of place and the behaviour of people sometimes reinforce each other. The degradation of the township can be closely linked then in influencing the degraded behaviour of its residents in isolating those deemed to be different.

In stark contrast and through the influence of colonial representations, the area of Mufakose, where Lloyd's Summer Madness is located, is described in naturalistic terms as being one with the environment, as opposed to the township, which has the connotation of being an aberration and an eye-sore. While Memory is initially uncomfortable in this environment and made to feel out of place by Alexandra, the constructs of whiteness appear to be far more welcoming of her and this context provides her with the best opportunity at attaining self-actualisation. This environment is not without its perils, however, as Memory often laments the hegemonic effect that white constructs, such as the speaking of English and the adoption of an accent, has on her identity. While Memory exists within this context as a liberated individual, its utopian setting also belies its falseness, as just outside its borders, the country is in chaos. Despite the attempt of

the white community to create a 'bubble' and comfort zone, the area is also ultimately affected by the political chaos of Zimbabwe which takes the form of farm raids.

Reflecting on the farm raids, Memory's crisis of identity is exposed. While she is sympathetic towards the white community and their sense of loss, she empathises with the plight of black people who have been systemically disadvantaged. What this ultimately reveals for the perspective of race trouble is that places are not just idle backdrops for human activity but act as profound tools for shaping behaviour and the structure of wider society through the connotations and attributes that they inherit.

## Chapter Five: Ideology, Subjugation and Othering

Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*

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### Introduction

Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* is a profound tale that is an explicit portrayal of the far-reaching implications of othering as understood in its broadest sense but with particular emphasis on race, gender and sexual orientation. Othering within the novel is depicted as a multifaceted phenomenon that occurs pervasively within as well as between various nationalities and races. Underscored by discursive constructions of identity, belonging and exclusion, Robyn Wilkinson (2016:36) defines othering as:

...processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate.

Drawing attention to the historical context of othering, Richard Ballard (2004:52) states that:

Othering [was] a key conceptual process in which inferior qualities were projected onto, and seen as, the property of racialised others. Such others were seen as lazy, licentious, criminal, dirty, and so on. The effect of such classifications was to produce a positive self-image for Europe/the West/'white' people as hard-working, moral, clean: broadly, as civilised...the dominant strategy for managing this social hierarchy was ensuring that others were far away.

Part of the reason for the establishment of large spatial distance and segregation during colonial times was to ensure the maintenance of colonial stereotypes of the black individual as 'malice' and 'uncivilised'. Boundaries between urban areas and the townships on the periphery of the cities ensured that contact between the races was kept to a minimum, with research by Gibson and Claassen (2010:269) indicating that "interracial contact has a positive effect on racial attitudes, but that more intimate contact has more direct and powerful consequences". I suggest that the strict maintenance of stereotypes, prejudices and segregation in instances such as these is to ensure a denial of the recognition of our common humanity and similarities, with Hook

(2005:10, italics in original) commenting that “we witness a situation in which the confrontation with radical difference *threatens to give way to the possibility of identification*, to the perception of similarity or a common humanity.” This is eloquently realised in the novel through the interaction and relationship between Jean-Paul and Chipo, who is an albino as well as the novel’s primary focaliser. Despite the stark differences between them, as will be elaborated on further in this chapter, Chipo’s encounter with Jean-Paul is one of the only instances in the novel in which she is treated as an individual that is worthy of respect and recognition.

What is significant in Wilkinson’s (2016:36) definition of othering is the emphasis that is placed on the ability of discursive processes, such as othering, in influencing the formation of identity. The term identity, which is employed in an inclusive sense to refer to an individual’s perception of themselves and their racial identity, is therefore malleable and subject to change in accordance with external definitions of identity that are imposed by other groups who occupy a hegemonic position, as is indicated in Chipo as a subservient subject when in the presence of her brother George, Peter and David and as a liberated woman when in the company of Jean-Paul. This is particularly applicable to racial identity, which extends beyond simply the colour of an individual’s skin and appears to be more a matter of group consensus as opposed to being determined by any conclusive aesthetic characteristic. While this assertion appears to have some validity in the context of the previous two novels – *The Book of Memory* and *Coconut* – the extent to which it is true for *Zebra Crossing* will be explored. Alluding to the complication that albinism brings to this, however, Omi and Winant (2008:409, italics in original) state that:

We utilise race to provide clues about *who* a person is. This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently categorize – someone who is, for example, racially ‘mixed’ or of an ethnic/racial group we are not familiar with. Such an encounter becomes a source for discomfort and momentarily a crisis of racial meaning.

This crisis of racial meaning can be profoundly troubling for individuals and groups in the society that is depicted in *Zebra Crossing* that appears to be heavily reliant on the categorisation of people into ‘neat’, traditional classes. As is indicated later in the chapter with regard to the placing of specific nationalities in specific jobs due to their stereotypical strengths and weaknesses, race becomes a powerful tool in which people use to comprehend and organise their world. This is particularly true in the contexts of South Africa and Zimbabwe, where the notion

of race continues to be of significance due to the troubled histories of racial conflict of both countries. The presence of Chipo in this equation is a source of anxiety and confusion for many people, as her status of liminality prevents easy, traditional compartmentalisation. The tension that this produces manifests itself in rebukes, aggression and scorn that is directed towards Chipo that is evident throughout the novel. Interestingly, in an attempt to understand and place a person for whom groups and individuals have little to no knowledge of, the employment of stereotypes is used in an attempt to categorise and better understand the person that is unknown, even if it is a false sense of knowledge. Commenting on the functioning of stereotypes, Derek Hook (2005:9) notes that “as a mode of discourse the stereotype functions to exaggerate difference of the other, whilst nevertheless attempting to produce them as a stable, fully knowable object.” Hook is effective here in highlighting the apparent nonsensicality of the stereotype, in that while it tries to highlight the other as distant and unknowable, it simultaneously assumes intimate knowledge of its characteristics. Despite its apparent contradictions, however, it is a powerful tool in influencing identity.

Through constant repetition, these cumulative attitudes of stereotype, anger and ostracisation become normalised and closely associated with her identity. Chipo, who feels the burden of the hostility that is directed at her from various facets of society, including as close to her as her immediate family, begins to become defined by these attitudes – consequently influencing her behaviour, self-esteem and self-perception. This will be looked at further in the chapter. This process in which the routines of everyday life influence people into acting in certain ways is what is referred to as ‘subjugation’, or the production of the ‘subject’.

Through the mechanism of othering, in this chapter we are interested in examining this idea of the subjugated individual as an ideological production and the implications that this has on race relations as they are depicted in the novel. While in previous chapters we have looked at the perspective of race trouble as a tool in investigating discursive and embodied practices, with environmental variables as a backdrop in influencing identity politics, opportunities, relations and episodes of conflict. Here we attempt to extend upon these constructs through the idea of individuals or groups who are interpellated or ‘hailed’ as a subject by ideology to behave in certain ways. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:139) notes that “ideology operates by producing individuals or collectives as subjects – the ability to feel, think and to be an agent depends on the existence



of ideology, which subjugates in the moment of its producing the subject.” This chapter hopes to achieve a greater understanding of the functioning of the subject in potentially producing problematic behaviour, intergroup relations and identity constructions.

What Durrheim *et al.* alludes to is the idea that one’s sense of self with inclinations, perceptions and personality attributes is necessitated by an ideological context, otherwise known as the home, that acts as the backdrop against which behaviour is enacted. Home, which alludes to the ownership of place, provides individuals and groups with the satisfaction of comfort, security and pride. In order to maintain the intimacy with place that these qualities require, the personalisation of space is often necessary in order to assert identity. This personalisation is a subjective and exclusive process that is inherently divisive in nature – creating divisions between those who fit into these newly personalised spaces and those who do not. In *Zebra Crossing*, this is a highly political and social act and is evident in a number of ways – from the ostracised position that Chipso and her family occupy in residing in the building of President’s Heights to the manner of treatment that they receive while in the country – being constructed as outsiders at every available opportunity. In close proximity to this process is the notion of self-identity, in which insider/outsider constructions are internalised.

One of the ideas that has been looked at in the previous two chapters was the possibility of racial interiority and its associated constituents of selfhood, perception, subjective states and behaviour being influenced by regulated and normative external settings that take the form of environments and contexts that are inhabited by individuals and groups. I take lead from Richard Ballard (2005:14) in exploring the idea that othering is used as a traditional strategy for creating ‘comfort zones.’ Ballard (14) notes that “barriers”, be them ideological or physical, “are...statements regarding the kinds of people who belong and the kinds that do not. They are an attempt to restore a certain sense of ‘our’ identity through boundary maintenance, prompted by the disturbing presence of others”.

Intimately linked to the notion of ‘comfort zones’ is the idea of the home that is postulated by Rosemary Marangoly George (1996) in her seminal text *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial relocations and twentieth-century fiction*. In *Zebra Crossing*, one of the central issues that confronts the main protagonists is attempting to negotiate the dimensions of home. George (1996:2) offers the suggestion that:

The basic organizing principle around which the notion of the 'home' is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive. Home...along with gender/sexuality, race, and class, acts as an ideological determinant of the subject.

From this definition two points also form part of the focus of this chapter: First, the framework of home and its attainment is an inherently contested terrain with the potential for producing profound conflict between those who attempt to find belonging within its boundaries. In this regard, I look at the primary mechanism of othering in producing instances of exclusion and the framing of home as a place of inherent competition between those who are trying to claim their place. Second, to investigate the notion of an intimate link between the terrain of home and the production of the subject.

### **Introduction to subjugation and the role of language in the construction of the other**

In her book, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, Judith Butler (1993) conceives of the notion of situational subjugation through adopting an anti-humanist perspective that denies the individual any sense of agency and that views a disjunct between the self and ideology as nonsensical. The production of a subject can be compared to being hailed or interpellated. Providing an example, Durrheim *et al.* (2011:139) notes:

You are hailed, for example, when you recognise that the shouts on the street, 'Hey you, there!' apply to you. The hailing calls you into being so that you recognise yourself as belonging to a particular identity. This recognition will differ if it is your name being called by a stranger or friend, or perhaps if it is a police officer or beggar that is hailing you. Each of these hailings will place a different regime of expectations upon you, frame your actions and subjugate you accordingly.

In line with this, Butler attempts to advance a theory of performativity – which refers to the performance of behaviour that lacks a pre-existing subject. The subject is constructed entirely in the act and does not precede it. Butler (1990:25) states that "...there is no 'being' behind doing, acting, becoming; the doer is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything." Commenting on this, Durrheim *et al.* (2011:142) states that:

The upshot of this perspective is that the starting point of analysis of subjectivity is human activity, of which the desiring subject is an outcome. This is what Butler means when she says that there is no doer behind the performance. All we have are people engaged in discursive and embodied activities of various kinds that have become routine, unthinkingly compulsory, but which produce subjects as they are accomplished.

The formation of identity in this regard is strongly influenced by this process of subjugation, which is indicated towards the very commencement of the book through the use of diction and the association of terms with certain categories of people, with the significance of language in the construction of identity and its influence on behaviour being highlighted also in *Coconut* and *The Book of Memory*. This is shown towards the beginning of *Zebra Crossing* where Chipo, an albino and the novel's main focaliser, describes the terms which are used to refer to her:

Peeled potato. That is what many in Zimbabwe call me. Also 'monkey' and 'sope'...in Malawi, they call us 'biri'. They whisper that we are linked to witchcraft. In Tanzania, we are 'animal' or 'ghost' or 'white medicine'...in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they call us 'ndundu' – living dead...in Lesotho, we are 'leshane', meaning half-persons, whereas to South Africans, depending on whether they are Xhosa or coloured, we are 'inkawu', meaning ape, 'wit kaffir', 'spierwit' or 'wit Boer'. (Vandermerwe 2013:10)

The use of each of these terms constructs Chipo's identity in different ways depending on the context in which they are used. Within some contexts, she is constructed as sub-human and referred to in animalistic terms – being called 'ape', 'monkey' and 'half-person'. In other contexts, the identity of Chipo is linked to the divine through the belief that she possesses supernatural powers and that her body parts have healing properties. In certain contexts, such as South Africa, the terming of Chipo as a 'wit boer' alludes to an association with privilege due to her fair skin tone. However, the term also has a derogatory element to it as in both the countries of South Africa and Zimbabwe, the term has intimate associations with colonialism, apartheid and the oppression that was associated with those eras. The term alludes to Chipo being an outsider and trespasser, much in the same way that white farmers were constructed following the emergence of democracy in Zimbabwe, with similar sentiments being expressed more recently in the case of South Africa.

## **Subjugation as performative: Exploring the role of practices and environment in the emergence of the subject**

Extending beyond this however, in multiple contexts throughout the novel, Chipo is constructed as an idiosyncratic, inferior other and this in turn influences the behaviour of people towards Chipo as well as Chipo's perception of certain incidents. She notes an occasion where while walking with her brother George, they attempt to hail a minibus taxi. The taxi however speeds past and leaves Chipo wondering "too full for us? Or maybe it is me that they do not want to stop for. Two men pass. Too close. I can feel them staring. I look at the ground." (12) She is fearful, suspicious and distrustful of people's motives, as indicated by her reaction to the two male passerbys. The stigma and stereotypes that surround Chipo have a significant impact on her perception of behaviour and events. When a second minibus taxi is hailed by her brother George, Chipo believes that the eyes of the passengers "narrow" (14) as she enters the vehicle. As a result of this, Chipo chooses an isolated seat next to the window, in order to distance herself from any potential conflict. She believes that every situation has the potential for her to be prejudiced and excluded, and as a result of this, her ostracisation from society and her immediate surroundings appear to be sometimes self-imposed, as indicated in the above mentioned instance. Chipo assumes that she will be mistreated by others and attempts to pre-emptively avoid it through isolating herself, in times constructing herself as a marginalised subject even without the necessary actions to facilitate that construction. Her assumptions regarding her mistreatment are however depicted as a very rational and justified anxiety due to the names that are given to her and the superstitions surrounding her condition. George (1996:2) comments here that:

The politics of location come into play in the attempt to weave together a subject-status that is sustained by the experience of the place one knows as Home or by resistance to places that are patently 'not home.' 'Location'...suggests the variable nature of both 'the home' and 'the self', for both are negotiated stances whose shapes are entirely ruled by the site from which they are defined.

The notion of 'home' is a difficult concept for Chipo to attain in both South Africa and Zimbabwe where she carries her status as a marginalised subject everywhere she goes. Within almost every environment that she encounters, from the broader contexts of Zimbabwe and

South Africa to the more immediate settings of Cape Town, Presidents Heights, Home Affairs and her family environment of George, Peter and David, she is denied the intimacy of belonging and familiarity. There are only two environments within the novel in which Chipo feels a sense of belonging – within her mother’s house, affectionately known as “Old Trafford”, and within the flat of Jean-Paul, where she is employed as his assistant. Despite the initial welcome that she is received with in both environments, the sense of comfort that she enjoys is fleeting, placing her again in positions of displacement. Chipo reflects on the context of her mother’s household positively, recalling the level of protection and comfort that she felt in that space. One of the primary reasons for this sense of belonging was the role that her mother, Grace, played in maintaining the area of her home as a location in which Chipo is accepted entirely – taking great effort to remove any person who is prejudiced towards Chipo. When Stanley Mupfudza, the man who Chipo’s mother was briefly in a relationship with, expressed that Chipo and her condition was an obstacle in the progress of their relationship, she immediately banished him from her home. (Vandermerwe 2013:21-2) When patrons at the tavern that Chipo’s mother used to operate from her house showed disdain towards Chipo handling their money, they too were banned from the premises. (33) This sense of inclusion would however not be long lasting, as Chipo recalls when:

In 2003 the government [of Zimbabwe] declared informal drinking taverns like Mama’s illegal. Operation ‘Remove Moral Filth’, they called it...all informal drinking taverns must be demolished. Street markets too...Some say [they] had seen Mama at the rallies supporting the MDC. That is why she and Old Trafford in particular were targeted. (Vandermerwe 2013:12)

It is interesting to note that even within their birth country of Zimbabwe, Chipo and her family are considered to exist as undesirable members of society, with regard to both their political affiliations and style of living, which results in the demolition of their house by the government. For Chipo and her family, this results in a profound sense of sadness and displacement, to the extent that Chipo correlates this event with the ailing health and consequent death of her mother. (13)

The burden of exclusion weighs heavily on Chipo which results in her being overly grateful for small mercies. She indicates gratitude to David and Peter that, despite her condition, they also allow her to stay with them at President’s Heights. (28) Her unnecessary gratefulness at not

being prejudiced due to her condition makes her vulnerable to exploitation within the familial setting of the book. At President's Heights, Chipo occupies a position of subservience, one that she appears to acknowledge and accept, stating that "it is my job to listen. When I am not scrubbing or sweeping. But most of all it is my job to obey. If I do not obey, how can he [George] protect me?" (9) However, instead of being protected by her brother George, Chipo is exploited, ridiculed and ostracised in the worst possible manner. Despite being portrayed in a more positive light throughout the novel, even David takes advantage of Chipo's housekeeping responsibilities, tasking her with washing and ironing his clothes, cleaning his dishes and picking up after him. Chipo appears to be aware of the expectations and responsibilities that she is expected to complete as a woman – and often takes pride in the tasks allotted to her. She notes the fact that back in Zimbabwe, despite the fact that red dust is a prevalent nuisance and opponent to cleanliness, the home that she tends to "is never filthy – I make sure of that". When she first arrives at President's Heights, her first inclination is to scrub away the filth from the apartment. (29) When serving food to the men in the apartment, she is cognisant of the tacit responsibility to behave in a 'ladylike' manner, stating:

I blush as I serve myself a few spoonfuls [of mealie porridge]. I do not want to appear greedy. To be greedy is not ladylike. That is what Mama always told me...after we have eaten, I pack the dishes into the sink in the corner of the room. Then I roll up my sleeves to begin to wash. A lady knows when to do the men's dishes. (Vandermerwe 2013:29)

The ideology of traditional gender roles and expectations appears to be an enduring habit of practices that was learnt from her mother, which places her in a position of subservience within this intimate familial setting. Despite this, Chipo faithfully embraces her role as caregiver to the men and caretaker of the flat at President's Heights. Irregardless of her efforts, her brother George uses her role within the household to further humiliate her. When David compliments her on her academic prowess and A-grade average, George interjects: "Grade A? Chipo? Ha ha. A good joke...yes, A-grade for scrub, cook and clean. Speaking of which, why is dinner not ready yet, hey? Can't you even manage that, Tortoise?" (39)

While David is portrayed as one of the most redeemable characters in the novel, with particular regard to his actions towards the conclusion of the book in which he attempts to save Chipo from her situation of dire abuse and exploitation (Vandermerwe 2013:151), his paternalism towards

Chipo, in which he is grateful for her completing his domestic chores despite the fact that there is no reason that he cannot complete them himself, reinforces the identity of Chipo as a subservient other. She notes that:

Everyday I do my work happily if I receive one of David's compliments. He is the only one who seems to notice what others take for granted. 'No one washes shirts like you, Chipo. The sweat stains are completely removed. And when I have swept or scrubbed the carpet, he always takes his shoes off before walking about so as not to give me extra work. (Vandermerwe 2013:42)

Unfortunately, even with the occasional positive affirmation that she receives from David, her identity in this environment as an inferior other has negative implications on her self-worth. When Chipo describes what a beautiful woman would look like, she describes an individual who is nothing like herself: "She would look respectable. Would she be fashionable? I look in the mirror and stare hard. Examine. Imagine. She would not be a tin of condensed milk like me. She would have beautiful dark skin. She would definitely have long hair too." (Vandermerwe 2013:74) In this way Chipo appears to have internalised the stigma and criticism surrounding her condition, now adopting offensive terminology to describe herself in the same manner that others would use to describe her, such as referring to herself as a "tin of condensed milk". (74) This is a process that Durrheim *et al.* (2011:33) refers to as self-stigmatisation, in which people describe themselves through a variation of negative attributes. Chipo, who is already cognisant of the uniqueness of her appearance, pines over what she considers to be normatively beautiful. Despite the fact that a lighter complexion, such as hers, is often thought of as desirable, due to its closer association with whiteness, she places no value on her skin colour and gushes over the thought of "beautiful dark skin". (74) It is interesting to note the contrast between Chipo's sentiment and the thoughts of Ofilwe in *Coconut*, who believes that the dark skin of her mother is undesirable and carries with it the negative stigma of poverty and malice. This instance of Chipo internalising the influences of her environment places her in a position of self-imposed subjugation, in which she takes the ideology of what she believes to be beautiful and systematically excludes herself from the category. This takes place despite the presence of no third party to influence her perceptions of herself.

## **Routines of conduct, ideology and gendered self-identity in the production of the subject**

At the heart of the idea of subjugation like the incident mentioned above are the consistent practices that come to define people and situations. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:114) comments that “once embodied and habitual, the routines of performance persisted, becoming forces for social conservation. Social routines contain subjects.” What Durrheim *et al.* alludes to here is that an analysis of practices is paramount in determining the nature of identity – as it is the sense of normality that is produced from social routines that comes to define the subject, and not the subject that defines the routines. Judith Butler arrives at a similar understanding in placing the emphasis on practices with regard to gender. Butler (1990:33) states that:

Gender is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gendered ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social world of gender.

The routines of conduct that Chipo engages in – cooking, cleaning, an attitude of subservience and humility – all contribute to the construction of her as a subject that is characterised by domestic exploitation. Chipo then meets the tailor from next door, Jean-Paul, who she asks for help in mending a pair of David’s trousers. The goodness of Jean-Paul is immediately foregrounded in their first encounter, as Chipo describes Jean-Paul as being “surrounded by a shimmering watery halo” (44), the brightness of which blinds Chipo. For one of the first times in the novel, Chipo is treated as an individual who is worthy of respect and kindness. When Jean-Paul is made aware of the fact that Chipo is only in possession of three dresses, he gifts her with a parcel of skirts:

In the bathroom I kick off my skirt, whose elastic waistband had long ago grown slack. I cannot remember when I last got new clothes. Not since Mama was alive, that is for sure. Very carefully, I pull open the tissue paper. Two skirts. Brand new! One red and one green with a yellow pattern. I put on the red one and look down. It fits perfectly. (Vandermerwe 2013:57)

Jean-Paul is also the only individual to remember Chipo’s birthday. Despite being uncomfortable in the noise of a busy taxi and the chaos of the city streets, Jean-Paul takes Chipo to Fabric City



to get fabrics for her birthday gift – a “winter wardrobe” (89). When they arrive, Chipo is overcome by the variety of colours:

I look. Pinks, blues, yellows, greens. Some are sari fabrics that the Indians like. Gold with black trim. Black with gold butterflies. Others have African patterns. I look at Jean-Paul. He is too kind to hurry me, but I am sure he is growing impatient to get back to his room...which one should I choose? I feel overwhelmed by so much choice. It isn't often in my life that I am asked, 'What would you like, Chipo?' 'Which would you prefer?' (Vandermerwe 2013:90)

Chipo has become so accustomed to being downtrodden by the everyday habits that characterise her life that when she is treated with dignity and affection, it is a surprise to her. She is engulfed by the subjugation that accompanies her place of residence at President's Heights. There, she is seen, by George and Peter particularly, as simply an instrument to making their lives more convenient. In the contexts of Jean-Paul's room and her mother's house, she enjoys the respect and affection that she is deserving of. The main distinction between the contexts in which she is oppressed and the contexts in which she is liberated is the social routines and practices that characterise the respective locations, which in turn influences the nature of her identity profoundly. The location to which Chipo feels at home is also negotiated along these various environments, where she is particularly cognisant of the areas that felt like home, reminiscing fondly on the time spent with Jean-Paul and her mother inside Old Trafford. In this manner, the concepts of subjugation, identity, home and the routines and practices that characterise these respective locations share an inextricable link.

In the space of Jean-Paul, however, the routines of subservience and mistreatment are absent. It is a fresh, new space in which Chipo is free to establish new routines of conduct and behaviour that render her as a liberated subject. It is also important to note here the inextricable link between context and the individual – in that it is contextual cues that informs the nature of individual identity and that as these cues vary, so does individual identity. This is evident in the contrast of the treatment that Chipo receives while in the presence of George and Peter and how she is treated while working for Jean-Paul. In the confines of Jean-Paul's room, Chipo finds herself, perhaps for the first time in the novel, in a location of belonging and inclusion. George (1996:2) states that “locations are positions from which distance and difference are formulated and homes are made snug.” Jean-Paul embraces Chipo as a welcome member of his space where

she is able to obtain a level of agency through the money that she earns and takes a step in the direction of self-actualisation, an example of this being the fact that Chipo has developed the tendency of taking care of her appearance. She states that “working for Jean-Paul has made me more conscious of what I wear, too. Every day I make sure my blouse is clean and pressed.” (Vandermerwe 2013:74) For the first time in the novel, she is recognised as a woman with certain needs and desires as opposed to an object that is instrumental to the completion of household chores.

### **Othering: Examining exclusionary behaviour and its role in identity construction**

Despite attempting to avoid situations in which she is prejudiced and discriminated against, her ostracisation and ill-treatment from others is enduring. From birth, she is condemned as the product of infidelity by her father who ultimately deserts the family due to her “foreign pink form.” (21) This acts as a significant loss early on in the life of Chipo as she not only loses a central parental figure, but is profoundly rejected by an individual who is tasked with nurturing her, accepting her and acting as the foundation upon which she can grow. Instead, he catalyses the framework of insecurity and exclusion that will come to follow Chipo throughout her life. Moreover, this rejection carries with it a particularly painful stigma that it was the result of Chipo’s mother having an affair with a white man, hence Chipo’s “foreign pink form”. While the accusation of an affair is cause for conflict in any family, this instance is particularly taboo as such an interaction with a white individual calls up ideas of being a traitor and a stooge to white interests – a particularly harmful title to have due to Zimbabwe’s colonial legacy. Even though Chipo was birthed in what was supposed to be a context that constitutes belonging, she is immediately made to feel out of place. What confounds the situation is that it is not the father who banishes the baby Chipo from the house due to her unexpected appearance. It is he who leaves the home – an indication that he believes that the entire familial situation must be dismissed as there is no possibility of redemption once such a situation has occurred – indicating its severity. Chipo notes further that “our close family made it clear, time and time again, that we were an embarrassment. What, an albino for a child *and* a husband who abandoned the family...they shook their heads at gatherings and muttered under their breaths when we saw them in the street or at the market.” (62)

The second love interest of Chipo's mother, Stanley Mupfudza, refuses to leave his wife in order to pursue a relationship with her due to the presence of Chipo in the family. This is a noteworthy instance within the novel as it indicates and foregrounds the complication that gender and its politics introduces within this family setting. Despite the vigor and agency that characterises Chipo's mother – indicated by her choice to dress in bright colours (22) and the fact that she runs her tavern with authority – she is reduced to a subservient, helpless position when engaging in relations with men. Her relationship with Stanley is not exclusive – he has a wife, and it is on these grounds that the terms of their relationship are negotiated. Chipo's mother is reduced to an 'other' in the relationship between Stanley and his wife and is expected to contend with being a member of a love triangle, indicating the extent to which women are devalued under this ideology which promotes 'traditional' gender roles. Moreover, when Stanley is banished from the house, it is not explicitly because of this, but because of his rejection of Chipo. This is a vivid portrayal of the normalisation of these gender roles, that it is almost expected that men will engage in extra-marital relations

When Stanley's wife, Mai Mupfudza, sees Chipo, Chipo notes that "she spat at her feet and turned her back on me. It was local superstition – spit and you will protect your unborn child from catching the sope's curse." (22) One of the main ideologies that is depicted here as dominating the context of the township is superstition. Despite having no grounding in fact or being able to produce any tangible change, believers in superstition, such as Mai Mupfudza, subscribe strongly to its constructs. This ideology is significant in the construction of Chipo as an outsider and as an oddity. Superstition is also instrumental in her appropriation by the main antagonist of the book, Dr. Ongani, with George and Peter as willing beneficiaries. Due to her albinism, Chipo is associated with the stigma of being in possession of magic powers which Dr. Ongani, George and Peter take advantage of in a FIFA World Cup betting scheme. While with Dr. Ongani, she endures difficult conditions. She sits behind a curtain for lengthy periods of time, is barely allowed to use the toilet before she must rush back to the consultation room and is eventually confined to this consultation room where she must permanently reside "for her own safety" (143). Despite Chipo likely perceiving her racial identity as that of a black woman, it is clear from these incidents that from the perspective of her sibling, her cousins and the larger community, she is excluded from that racial category and is viewed as an idiosyncratic other.

However, although she is an object of ridicule due to her marginalised status, Chipo projects the same intolerance and prejudice that has been directed at her at David upon discovering his homosexual orientation. The role of diction in this regard is evident in the construction of David in an exclusionary discourse. She states that “my head is spinning. David...an ngochani...moffie, buttock beak, homo, homosexual, pede, gay, festering finger...isn't that what the government used to call their sort back in '98?” (110-11). Chipo is highly critical of the relationship between David and his love-interest Jeremiah. Surprisingly, although she is oppressed by traditional gender roles, she resorts to her understanding of a normative husband and wife dynamic and uses that as a tool to critique David's relationship, stating: “Once or twice I think I catch them looking at each other, secretly, smiling, the way a man and wife should.” (111) Through referencing a husband and wife, Chipo attempts to propose the idea that because David and Jeremiah are not husband and wife – they are an oddity – they should not be looking at each other in such a way. Through this, in much the same way that Chipo has her rights denied to her by many of the characters in the novel, she too proposes the ideology that marginalised individuals, such as Jeremiah and David, cannot enjoy the same rights and freedoms as everyone else.

Moreover, she subtly wishes that harm befalls Jeremiah and David, stating: “What would you two do if everyone knew you were *that sort*? And you, Choirboy? If the others knew? Peter and George would beat you until you couldn't walk. No more chess for you two. No more anything at all, I think.” (111) Here, for once Chipo finds herself on the side of the normative majority and in this instance, not as a marginalised other. Her prejudice towards homosexuality is congruent with the belief system that characterises her immediate surroundings and in concurring with these beliefs, she attains a sense of power and acceptance, which for an individual like herself, who is generally on the receiving end of intolerance, is enticing. The level of acceptance that she experiences is however fleeting, as the stigma that is attached to her condition will still render her as an outsider. More than this though, the passage reveals the power of ideology and othering, in that everyone is susceptible to engaging in exclusionary practices due to the power that one attains in discrediting and marginalising others.

Prejudice and othering within the immigrant community however extends far wider than Chipo and David to explicit antipathy, stereotyping and intolerance between nationalities. Upon

arriving in President's Heights and finding out that the flat that Peter and David reside in is shared with a Congolese tailor, George immediately asks "and our suitcases with the Congolese fellow? Is it safe to leave it?" (Vandermerwe 2013:29) George's allusion to the criminality of the Congolese is then followed by him questioning why he does not live with people of the same nationality. (30) When George steps in vomit on the stairs of President's Heights, he immediately blames the "bloody drunk Congolese bastards" (39), despite having no proof to supplement his accusation. The prejudice, intolerance and tendency of George to preference segregation is evident. The normalisation of segregation in the immigrant community also extends to the various occupations that the various nationalities are stereotyped as doing. To confirm this, Peter states "this Mountain Dew tuck shop...it is owned by the Somalis...you won't secure a position with them. They only employ family or Xhosa-speaking locals." (30) He goes on to further note that "DRC people do all the security for these shops. They are also most of the parking marshals around here. You will find it is like that in Cape Town. Certain nationalities, certain jobs." (31) When George then inquires as to what Zimbabweans do for employment, David replies: "Mostly waiters and chefs. Sometimes cleaners. Sometimes shop assistants." (32)

What is of significance here is the tendency of associating certain nationalities with certain occupations. The practice of creating these stereotypes sets up specific employment outlooks and opportunities that dictates the behaviour and perception of individuals. What this means, for example, is that if you are an immigrant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and are living in Cape Town, the ideology of the Congolese occupying the positions of security guard and parking marshal subjugates them to act in certain ways that are congruent with that line of work, such as perhaps spending more time in the gym, walking with a heightened sense of bravado and so forth. More than this, however, is the economic and social position that this subjugation reduces them to – to living in a certain kind of accommodation in a certain area, dressing a certain way, eating certain kinds of food etc.

While discriminating and categorizing amongst themselves, the entire immigrant community is also discriminated against and prejudiced by South Africans that takes the form of xenophobia. Essential to this process of discrimination is the establishment of insider and outsider groups that

are characterised by a relationship of dominance and inferiority respectively. Blumer (1958:4) notes that:

Essential to race prejudice is a fear or apprehension that the subordinate racial group is threatening, or will threaten, the position of the dominant group. Thus, acts or suspected acts that are interpreted as an attack on the natural superiority of the dominant group, or an intrusion into their sphere of group exclusiveness, or encroachment on their area of proprietary claim are crucial in arousing and fashioning race prejudice.

Chipo recalls an incident “in December when David came back, furious because a Xhosa-speaking saleslady had refused to speak English to him when he asked for help at a department store” (Vandermerwe 2013:80) and another incident where “there were unfriendly comments from the Xhosa locals. ‘Hey, makwerekwere! Go back to your own country!’ ‘Hey, we know you are only here to take our jobs and money.’” (80) Chipo further notes that “complete strangers have started approaching [George, Peter and David]. They say, ‘We are giving you until after the World Cup final. After that, you better go home.’ Peter’s girlfriend, Aneni, says that a Xhosa woman, a woman at the hotel where she cleans, said to her, ‘Sorry for you. When the World Cup is finished, you will burn.’” (84) For South Africans, the immigration of foreigners into their country is seen as a threat to South Africa as a zone of comfort that carries with it the possibility of undermining the sanctity of their home. The idea of the home is an intimate space in which those who are deemed to be trespassers are met with the force of exclusion and prejudice. Supplementing this idea, George (1996:1) notes here that “the word ‘home’ immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection.”

### **The ‘home country’: Inclusion, exclusion and the politics of belonging on a national scale**

These incidents occur against the backdrop of the FIFA World Cup, which has been promoted as an inclusive African event that can aid in promoting humanity and unity. With this biting irony being highlighted, discourse that depicts foreigners as thieves of jobs, opportunities and local women is important in the construction of immigrants as outsiders but is important in furthermore highlighting the fear that South Africans experience towards the presence of foreigners and the potential that it is believed that they have in ‘stealing’ opportunities and

resources. In this regard, Kristen Day (2006:569) comments that “fear is a key mechanism for justifying and maintaining race privilege and exclusion.” Here, Chipo recalls “the smoke of May 2008...it is a stain that cannot be washed out. That smoke spread like blood over the houses of those foreigners burned out of the townships by their African brothers and sisters who bared their teeth and raised their pangas, chanting ‘Go home or die here!’” (Vandermerwe 2013:80) This behaviour that characterises the context of South Africa for foreigners produces a sharp binary between one’s home country, where one feels the comfort of belonging and familiarity, and a foreign land, where one is made blatantly cognisant of their displacement. Within the notion of the ‘home-country’, the politics of home occur on a grander scale as the primary focus of the ‘home’ is on a more private, intimate space from which the individual moves into the larger domains of life. Furthermore, George (1996:11) adds that “home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography.” In contrast to this, the home-country operates within the realities of geography and fixed borders, which makes the distinction between foreign and national clear. Moreover, George (1996:11) states that “the term ‘home-country’ suggests the particular intersection of private and public and of individual and communal that is manifest in imagining a space as home...[it] is also not quite the object of nationalism as it is usually understood.” Furthermore, George (1996:2) notes that:

The term ‘home-country’ in itself expresses a complex yoking of ideological apparatuses considered necessary for the existence of subjects: the notion of belonging, of having a home, and a place of one’s own. And yet, in the very reference to a ‘home-country’ lies the indication that the speaker is away from home. This distance from the very location that one strives to define, is, I believe intrinsic to the definition that is reached.

As opposed to the more private location of one’s conceptualisation of ‘home’, the broader nature of the ‘home-country’ necessitates that the construction of ideologies of belonging, national consciousness, identity and exclusion are a collaborative effort between a plurality of varying demographics. Due to its collaborative nature, conflict is inherent to the process of establishing a home-country’s dominant narrative and ideas – resulting in a phenomenon in which some people are at home within their home-countries and some are not. In the unfortunate case of Chipo, however, the attainment of a place to call her home is complicated by her status as a double outsider: First, in her home-country of Zimbabwe with her status as an albino and then second in South Africa with her status as a foreigner. For Chipo, while she was born in Zimbabwe, her

condition of albinism renders her as an other and denies her the opportunity to identify with Zimbabwe as a 'home-country'. The element of superstition that governs the attitudes of the population automatically places her on the periphery of society but also in a position of danger – she is fearful as she walks the streets as she is cognisant of the belief that her body parts possess magical powers. (Vandermerwe 2013:12) The comfort of belonging to a home-country is consequently denied to her. In South Africa, the stigma surrounding her condition persists, however her status as an other is compounded by the fact that she is a foreigner.

The tangible effects that discourse of this nature has on the behaviour and attitudes of immigrants in general is also evident to note. George compares the Home Affairs papers that he is required to possess to the passbook that blacks had to carry during the period of apartheid – which was also responsible for dictating movements and facilitating issues of belonging and exclusion. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:118) notes that individuals “are constructed as foreigners by ‘a dual discursive process which involves: 1) the construction of a normative place classification; and 2) the exposure of an action, event or human presence that transgresses this system of classification.” While this is complicated by the backdrop of the FIFA World Cup, which is presented as a spectacle of African unity, prejudice within many of South Africa’s primary institutions also undermines this endeavour. David recollects one such instance in a hospital:

The nurses. They asked Jeremiah’s cousin for his name and family name so that they could fill in their forms. When he told him the nurse replied, “But that is not a Xhosa name. You cannot be from here.” Immediately she left. And each time Jeremiah went to find her, she and her colleagues pretended to be too busy to help. (Vandermerwe 2013:82)

Chipso also comments on the manner in which foreigners are viewed by officials at Home Affairs, stating that “refugee sounds like flea. That is how, we are warned, many at Home Affairs view us. Like fleas that need to have their heads squeezed off.” (36) This is illustrative of the intolerance with which foreigners are viewed but also the manner in which they are depicted – as subhuman, as pests and parasites that do not belong and that need to be removed. Moreover, The Department of Home Affairs in South Africa is the official channel through which individuals become recognised as citizens of the country. The denial of foreigners as citizens of the country or even as worthy of being viewed as human beings is particularly significant in their construction as unwanted subjects due to Home Affairs as an official arm of the South African



government. Moreover, the words ‘Home Affairs’, alluding to its business in dealing with affairs of the home and home-country, poignantly depict the country as a restricted location for foreigners – the very antithesis of a comfort zone and area of belonging.

### **Whiteness and the attainment of power and status in the context of marginalisation**

It is interesting to note however that despite the wide prevalence of othering between South Africans and foreigners and between foreigners themselves, the notion of whiteness continues to be a construct that is associated with power and a culture to aspire to. This is indicated explicitly when Chipo is mistaken for a white woman. She recalls that:

The Pan African Market is a collection of different shops...as I make my way through the rooms, with their walls painted bright red, blue and yellow, out of the shadows step handsome black men, with smiles like slices of sweet melon when they think they can smell foreign currency. Most ignore me when they can see that I am not a real white. (Vandermerwe 2013:75)

The association of whiteness with power appears to be pervasive and in line with historical constructions of it as the measure of civility and status – which appears as an attractive point of aspiration for those who are marginalised – such as the migrant. This takes place despite the suspicion and distrust with which whites are viewed due to their involvement in colonialism, which is alluded to at the commencement of the book: “‘It was the imperialist murungu,’ our headmaster explains, ‘he came long ago, dividing the continent like the carcass of an ox, and kept the lion’s share for himself...but never forget: once your parents and grandparents were slaves to greedy foreigners.’” (Vandermerwe 2013:7)

Although there is an absence of notable white characters within the novel, whiteness as an institutional construct appears to be evident within the novel. In a similar manner to *Coconut*, whiteness as a potential container of influence is foregrounded at the beginning of *Zebra Crossing*. While whiteness is explicitly realised in *Coconut* through the presence of its numerous white characters, whiteness appears to operate more subtly within *Zebra Crossing*. The above quote regarding the role of colonialism and the enactment of borders and social divisions between races is insinuated in the novel as a catalyst and also being continually responsible for the xenophobia and the tendency for racial categorisation that is witnessed during the context of

the FIFA World Cup. The ability of whiteness to set up relations of opposition between people that is impactful is significant with regard to issues of subjugation, home and belonging.

Moreover, despite the novel depicting a multiplicity of individuals from different countries, hardly a word of their native language is spoken throughout the course of the novel. In the case of Chipo and George, despite growing up and living most of their lives in Zimbabwe – having only recently immigrated to South Africa, they do not speak a word of Shona throughout the book, only English. For most readers, this is not even a noticeable point until it is highlighted, but it is significant in outlining the normative nature of English, to the point of invisibility, that exists within the broader framework of whiteness. This is likely because of the fact that even though they are able to speak their native language, using it in this context would result in a further sense of isolation from the South African nationals that they are trying to assimilate with. More than this, though, the speaking of their native language would only serve the function of highlighting their difference and status as foreigners, which is highly undesirable and potentially dangerous for them in this context of intolerance and xenophobia. The power and status that the use of English provides them is essential in attempting to establish a platform of commonality with South African citizens, but it also allows them to associate themselves with the global phenomenon that English has become. This links to discussions had previously in *Coconut* and *The Book of Memory* regarding the nature of whiteness as an invisible troupe of domination as well as the relationship between the use of a language, the assumption of its culture and the attainment of power.

### **Conclusion:**

One of the main thematic concerns of *Zebra Crossing* are the interlinking circles of prejudice, discrimination and othering that characterises the dynamics within society, as families discriminate within each other and between each other, which further extends to the conflict within the immigrant community and the immigrant community that is finally discriminated against by South African citizens. These situations are responsible for the emergence of conflict and anxiety as people attempt to grapple for position, belonging and power. What this chapter has attempted to explore is the process by which the characters in *Zebra Crossing* perceive and behave in a subjugated state. This chapter has sought to reconcile some of the aspects of race

trouble that have been analysed in previous chapters, such as the effects of discourse, contextual influences in identity formation and the influences of ideology in an attempt to account for the individual as a subject that is rooted in the routines of embodied practices that ultimately produces structured ways of living that become normative over time. Individuals engage in these ways of living unthinkingly as they sometimes unconsciously and sometimes consciously reproduce stereotypes, assumptions, prejudices and inequality.

One of the primary mechanisms that provides a link between the subjugation of the individual and the perspective of race trouble is the concept of ‘othering’ – in which individuals and groups describe each other in inferior and exclusionary terms for the purpose of attaining primacy. The chapter has examined the notion of states of subjugation as being inextricably linked to the contexts in which they are produced and has sought to test the idea of whether or not subjugative states are pervasive across contexts.

The chapter has utilised the important work of Rosemary Marangoly George (1996) and her conceptualisation of ‘the home’ in its attempt at understanding the motivations of the various characters in the novel – to which I can conclude that one of the main themes throughout the novel is “the search for the location in which the self is ‘at home’”. (George 1996:3) George conceives of the home as a place of belonging but also as a place of inherent conflict in which exclusions and inclusions occur.

Through analysis of the character of Chipso, who is presented as an ‘other’ for most of the novel, with brief respites during her time with Jean-Paul, there is some evidence to suggest that subjugative states persist to some degree across a multiplicity of contexts and appear to be able to effect a fundamental aspect of an individual’s character that they carry across contexts. This appears to be in contrast to Butler’s conceptualisation of the subject, in which she believes that the subject is produced in practices and does not precede it. (Butler 1990:25) What this suggests with regard to the perspective of race trouble is that individuals and groups appear to act from an anti-humanist perspective in that as opposed to individuals acting in ways that exclude and oppress unwarrantedly and maliciously, the source of their behaviour appears to arise from environmental, political, economic and social factors that are external to them.

## Chapter Six – Conclusion

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### **The perspective of race trouble: Understanding race relations in the post-apartheid and post-colonial setting**

This project locates itself within the post-colonial and post-apartheid contexts of Zimbabwe and South Africa respectively as they are depicted in the novels by Kopano Matlwa, Petina Gappah and Meg Vandermerwe entitled *Coconut*, *The Book of Memory* and *Zebra Crossing*. Following the abolishment of apartheid and colonialism respectively, focus for researchers turned towards attempting to understand the potential change in racial dynamics and interactions that the post-apartheid and post-colonial era would necessitate. Indeed, as has been observable within the novels, some changes have occurred, and it has been the primary motivation of this project to attempt to frame and understand the nature of these changes. Throughout this project, we have observed a number of profound changes to race relations, attitudes and behaviour that have been depicted in the novels and that have been facilitated and influenced by the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, which appear to be impactful long after their formalised end.

In the context of this legacy, individuals are acutely aware of their racial identity and how they are positioned in society with regard to their status, power and the opportunities that are available to them. As these individuals interact and compete with each other for limited resources, some groups feel disadvantaged, some feel marginalised, others feel privileged and included. The central question which has guided the content of this project was as follows: To investigate how the conditions of race relations that were set up in the colonial past continue to influence the colonial present as it is depicted in the novels? One of the main tools that this project has used in attempting to understand this phenomenon has been the perspective of race trouble, which has been formulated by Kevin Durrheim (2011), with the assistance of researchers Lyndsay Brown and Xoliswa Mtose in the book *Race Trouble: Race, Identity and Inequality in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Durrheim *et al.* (2011:27) defines race trouble as “a social psychological condition that emerges when the history of racism infiltrates the present to unsettle social order and create situations that are individually and collectively troubling.”

Part of this involves a sense of unease that was created as the racial hierarchies of these systems of oppression were outlawed, and different races were expected to interact within a position of equality, despite lingering elements from the past, such as environmental stigmas and pervasive discourse. What role the identities and influences of whiteness and blackness would assume in this context became a point of interest for researchers and a noteworthy point of investigation for this project.

More than this, however, are the complications that arise within the context of these legacies that cut across simply characterising the problem of the post-apartheid and post-colonial context as simply a problematic interaction between blacks and whites. It further involves the issues that become attached to certain identity positions with the rise of liberalism and the opportunities for self-advancement. It produces questions of what it means to be white or black and the stigma attached to moving too far away in behaviour from what is considered to be acceptable for white or black individuals. It raises complications of language, discourse and environment, as individuals and groups engage in practices, such as the use of English to communicate, which produces anxiety for people who are cognisant of the historical weight of using the language, but who are simultaneously enticed by the power and status that it continues to wield. Issues of discourse become significant in this sense as it frames the interpretation of these actions as appropriate or not in achieving a desired identity or subject position. In line with this, it also involves how individuals are constructed in these contexts, either consciously or not, and the implications of this.

Moreover, it references the ideologies that spaces and environments have historically been associated with, which is influenced by their respective locations and the demographics that populate these areas, and the influence that these environments have on the lives of people. Closely associated with environments in this regard is the idea of belonging, exclusion and place-identity, in which individuals attempt to place ownership on specific locations and the implications that this has on those who are deemed as belonging and those who are not.

This legacy furthermore hails and affects those who have been categorised as ‘other’, such as the immigrant, such as the albino, which the novels *Zebra Crossing* and *The Book of Memory* craft masterfully in showing the unique position that these individuals operate from in subverting

traditional categories of classification and the unique effects that this has on their individual character journeys.

To look at some of these issues in more detail, it is noted that despite an emphasis on attempting to achieve restitution and redress, constructs of whiteness appear to be resilient in their unwillingness to relinquish their association with power and status. In Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* and Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*, this issue is explored profoundly. An observable phenomenon within both of the novels is the tendency for the pursuit of upward social mobility by the characters to be inextricably linked with constructs of whiteness.

The power of whiteness in this regard lies in its ability to pose as a normative construct with the connotation that all other identity positions are an aberration. The origin of this lies with the advent of colonialism and apartheid in which individuals were classified into racial groups for the purpose of distinguishing perceived inferiority from superiority – with the concept of whiteness being created to confer hegemony and power to those who possess the classification. In this regard, Sally Matthews (2015:117) notes that:

The category “white”, and other racial categories, are arbitrary and continually shifting, but also that the category “white” describes a particular social and political *position* in a divided and oppressive society, rather than a cultural or ethnic identity or a biological or natural category. Whites are those who occupied (and for the most part still do occupy) a dominant position in the very unequal and divided societies and the broader global order created by European expansion and conquest.

By tapping into the hegemony and normalcy that continues to be associated with power and strength, the main protagonists in *Coconut* and *The Book of Memory* are able to uplift their social positions. In *Coconut*, whiteness is normalised to the extent that white people are unaware of their position of privilege and the implications of their presence and behaviour. Ofilwe reflects on page 48 how her friendship with Belinda came to an end, acknowledging that while Belinda had good intentions and was not entirely to blame for Ofilwe's discomfort, friendship with Belinda was an exhausting exercise – reflecting on the excuses that she would have to make to account for her family's mannerisms.

Here, white values and culture are constructed as normative while the mannerisms and tendencies of Ofilwe's family are depicted as idiosyncratic in comparison. She is kept at a

position of subordination in having to excuse her family's non-compliance with these norms. The peril with the adoption of whiteness however is that it appears as an all-encompassing construct that renders both Ofilwe Tlou and Memory with profound identity conflicts that produce anxiety within both of them. Memory and Ofilwe however negotiate these anxieties differently. Ofilwe is cognisant of the perceived ostracisation from her culture, family and preferred identity that whiteness brings and she systematically tries to undermine its influence.

For Memory, however, the belonging that the constructs of whiteness provides is largely embraced and is conversely embracing of her. It allows her to escape the trauma that she endured in the township of Mufakose but even in the context of Umwinsidale, she is hesitant to fully amalgamate into its heavily influenced, white colonial culture. Noting the racial demographics of a dinner party, Memory comments that "Zenzo...was the only other guest there who was not white. The only other black people there were the staff: the maids in colourful uniforms, the men in white shirts and black trousers, carrying glasses and food." (Gappah 2015:185-6)

In a similar fashion to Chipso in *Zebra Crossing* when she uncovers that David is a homosexual, Memory chastises Lloyd for his sexual orientation, stating that "I judged him with all the prudish and priggish self-righteousness of a Catholic schoolgirl with narrow, dogma-driven certainties." (196) It is however interesting to note that within the novel, even the hegemony of whiteness cannot liberate Lloyd from the marginalisation that homosexuality faces in Zimbabwe.

While Lloyd Hendricks is depicted as one of the most redeemable white characters in *The Book of Memory*, the normative nature of whiteness makes him often unaware of his position within the 'bubble' of Umwinsidale that belies the true, politically and socially chaotic nature of his surroundings. Despite being shown to be empathetic and kind, he remains a benefactor of the privilege that he surrounds himself in, choosing to live a segregated existence in Umwinsidale.

The mechanism of discourse that is used to analyse the events in *Coconut* and the idea of place identity that is used in *The Book of Memory* can be observed as reinforcing each other, as it is through discursive constructs that the organisation of places occurs, and it is through the structure of place that discourse is formed. This has been explored thoroughly in both Chapter 2 and 3. Through analysis of the novel *Zebra Crossing* by Meg Vandermerwe (2013), Chapter 4 extends upon the ideas of place identity and discourse through the emergence of the subject, which is produced through the combination of discourse and place. Facilitating the production of

the subject is the presence of ideology which influences behaviour and attitudes that results in certain practices becoming habitual and taking the form of social routines. As Durrheim *et al.* (2011:114) argues, these routines of conduct are the container in which subjects are positioned.

Through the important work of Ballard (2005) and Rosemary Marangoly George (1996), this project characterises much of the plight of *Zebra Crossing* as the search for the place in which the self is at home. The idea that groups establish “comfort zones” (Ballard 2005:14) in order to place a sense of ownership over spaces accounts for the activity of “othering” (Wilkinson 2016:36) that is depicted as pervasive throughout the novel as individuals and groups are excluded from certain areas in order to reinforce the familiarity and comfort of the space. George (1996:9) notes that “homes are manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels. They are places that are recognised as such by those within and those without...home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place.”

Along all three of the axes of geography, psychology and materiality, Chipo and the rest of the immigrant community are denied access to South Africa as a place of home. At the commencement of the novel, the reference to geographical borders, which Chipo describes as “a place where barbed wire and high fences block your way. It is where you are not wanted, but where you must nonetheless go.” (Vandermerwe 2013:8) This separation between South Africa and Zimbabwe which distinguishes those who are welcome from those who are not is crossed illegally by Chipo and her brother George, who hide in a truck. (19) Once in South Africa, the immigrant community is depicted as living separately from South African nationals in a building complex known as President’s Heights – described as a dilapidated building. Within South Africa, George, Chipo, Peter and David struggle to make a living – sharing a borrowed mattress to sleep on (30) as well as barely being able to afford the rent for the flat. (54) They are also denied basic amenities when they are recognised as foreigners by the locals, such as access to the hospital and service at Home Affairs. Moreover, psychologically, they are constructed as thieves of resources by the locals and are explicitly constructed in exclusionary terms, such as “*makwerekwere*” (80), which is a disparaging term for a foreigner.

The effects of place, the notion of the home and zones of comfort, the discourse of whiteness, the activity of othering and the construction of the subject through social routines are most evidently



realised through Chipso and Memory and their status as albinos in their respective novels. Both characters have offered the valuable opportunity to examine the process of racialisation and identity development from a fresh perspective due to their subversion of traditional categories of classification. The perspective of race trouble reveals, from these two characters, how the legacy of apartheid and colonialism continue to be significant from the character developments that were evident throughout the novels.

What the perspective of race trouble reveals through analysis of the three novels, at the broadest level, is that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid is indeed embedded within the respective societies in the novels. The remnants of this legacy have had a direct influence on many of the inequalities and prejudices that are visible within the novels due to these systems of oppression necessitating distinctions between the civil/uncivil, superior/inferior that were the groundwork for each to function effectively. This tendency to group the inferior from the superior and those who belong from those who do not are explicitly evident.

With the fall of both of these systems of oppression came the liberty for black individuals to self-actualise with regard to identity constructions and behaviour, however the stigma attached to venturing too far away from 'acceptable' racial conduct remains. Ideas of acceptable 'white' conduct and 'black' conduct are still evident in these contexts.

Despite the engagement that the characters have with whiteness in the novel with the consequent exposure of some of its hegemonic traits, it remains an elusive and deeply complicated concept to map out and understand. It has a resilient tenacity of remaining relevant in the lives of the most disenfranchised as a manner of attaining some level of perceived status and power. The adoption of white values and culture remains in vogue for many, likely due to the continued place of locations such as America and Europe at the centre of society and modern life.

Positively, items of discourse in the novels, such as the primacy of whiteness, have been shown to be malleable and can be used in service of achieving one's goals and desires, such as agency and upward social mobility.

The perspective of race trouble has sought to provide a better understanding of how the notions of discourse, practices and ideology such as place identity and subjugation articulate with each other and how these interrelated constructs fashion social life. Due to the emphasis of this project on the everyday practices that characterise daily life, the suggestion for enacting social change

with regard to problematic social relations as depicted in the novels is a reevaluation of the very practices that constitute items of problematic discourse, place stigmas and subject positions. It is through the practices that can be employed on a daily basis, such as acceptance and tolerance and the dismantling of antagonistic subject positions in exchange for ones that promote unity and a recognition of our common humanity that positive changes can be brought about.

This study is limited due to the nature of its scope in focusing on three novels and the conclusions reached in this study can therefore only be limited to the context of the selected novels. Issues relating to the precarious position that individuals find themselves in as they attempt to navigate a post-apartheid and post-colonial terrain is prominent in the status quo so a study with a broader scope has the potential for enriching and illuminating conclusions to be reached.

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