



**Class and Racial Inequality Experienced by Women of Colour in Post-apartheid South Africa, Explored through Selected South African Literary Texts (1987-2011)**

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## DECLARATION


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## Abstract

South Africa is commonly referred to as the ‘Rainbow Nation’. This country is known as a melting pot of ethnicities. However, the legacy of apartheid is eternally woven into the fabric of the nation’s existence. This has shaped the identities of those born before and into the era of democracy. Women of colour have difficulties adapting to a post-apartheid, male-dominated version of South Africa. This study investigates the class and racial differences women experience in contemporary South Africa as represented in two post-apartheid feminist texts, along with an analysis of a text set and written during apartheid. My research focuses on *Coconut* (2007) by Kopano Matlwa, *Onion Tears* (2011) by Shubnum Khan, and *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) by Zoë Wicomb. Using Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality as the foundational theoretical framework, this research project argues that women should embrace every aspect of their heritage and identity to deal with the pressures of a variable socio-economic atmosphere. Matlwa and Khan’s novels are debut texts for these female writers and present characters who search for identity, yearn for belonging and struggle to assimilate while addressing women’s societal roles and the impact of an ever-changing socio-political environment. Wicomb’s interrelated short story anthology also deals with issues of identity, acceptance and the difficulties Coloured women experienced during South Africa’s darkest days. Each theme resonates with non-white women currently, just as in the past. *Onion Tears* focuses on three generations of Muslim women living in suburban Johannesburg. Khadeejah Ballim is a first-generation Indian woman who wonders if her place truly is in South Africa. At the same time, her daughter Summaya is caught between her South African and Indian identities. Summaya’s young daughter, Aneesa, often has difficulty connecting with her peers and understanding her community. Similarly, *Coconut* documents the lives of two young Black women living in Johannesburg. On the one hand, Ofilwe Tlou is born into a wealthy family, receives her education from private schools and is given every advantage. On the other hand, Fikile Twala, who hails from a township, strives to escape poverty by working hard to change her circumstances and reinvent herself. The novel indicates that class differences create social segregation, which is apparent in this society. Wicomb’s protagonist, Frieda Shenton, encounters class and racial issues from a gendered perspective throughout her life in South Africa, which influences her relocation to London during adulthood.

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## Introduction

Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different. According to this understanding, our liberatory objective should be to empty such categories of any social significance.

– Crenshaw (1991, 1242)

The above extract from Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality is the foundation for this dissertation. Crenshaw understood how class, racial and gender differences are used as a tool to divide society. When applied to a South African context, intersectionality highlights how race, class and gender were and are factors for segregation, which could be crucial for integration in the post-apartheid era. Evidently, “colonialism and apartheid worked with taxonomies of difference, such as race, gender, and class as occurring separately” (Govinden 2008, 51). However, Crenshaw’s research indicates that these categories are not mutually exclusive. For instance, “[a] critical view of history moves one out of narrow binary interpretations, exposing the interdependence and intermeshing of race, gender, and class” (51). This dissertation uses literary representations to study women of colour in South Africa. The focal texts for this analysis are Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* (2007), Zoë Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) and Shubnum Khan’s *Onion Tears* (2011).

Crenshaw recognises that “because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (1991, 1244). Similarly, Devarakshanam Govinden determines that “writings by [South African] Indian women” have not received critical attention compared to South African Indian male writers since they “have very likely been seen as a minority within a minority” (2008, 5). This illustrates some of the gender divisions that have prompted my research. Matlwa, Wicomb and Khan capture the above notions concerning their respective communities in their writing through their female characters of colour. My research seeks to promote intercommunity discourse on race and class among women of colour.

This chapter presents the key concepts and theoretical framework for analysing the chosen novels and engaging with the emergent issues. I aim to understand the connection between literary works and social realities to determine how the authors' experiences have influenced their writing. The six protagonists I focus on are Ofilwe Tlou, and Fikile Twala from *Coconut*, Frieda Shenton from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* along with Khadeejah Bibi, Summaya, and Aneesa Ballim from *Onion Tears*. Each character's life depicts the intersectional relationship among class, race, and gender from a unique angle. The characters have lived through different phases of South Africa's history as part of three communities facing discrimination. Their stories expose the importance of decolonial thinking, a phrase that Walter Dignolo (2007) coined as rejecting colonist views while embracing hybrid identities among people of colour. Furthermore, each author has chosen central characters from different generations. This allows for a longitudinal study of the texts with narratives transcending time and space. To effectively understand the experiences of each woman and their resulting views and traits, I provide a background to the periods that have affected people of colour in South Africa. Delving into the subject of inequality related to class, race, and gender within each community of colour in South Africa would require the larger scope of a doctoral thesis. Thus, my research solely focuses on women and briefly touches on lesser issues that are relevant and related to these inequalities with the aim of highlighting the research gaps.

This dissertation holistically draws attention to women who have been casualties of unjust systems and social constructs during South Africa's decades of transition, using the women in my selected texts. To fully understand the extent of inequality, I focus on women as victims of violence and consider responses to gender relations from the selected communities in each text. Examples of violence in the chosen texts highlight power dynamics in romantic relationships, families and among people of colour. These trends across different groups that remained separate for decades suggest that common mindsets, often based on patriarchal views, exist. Furthermore, I discuss bouts of violence between and within race groups. In addition, this dissertation investigates how Western ideologies regarding class, race and gender have subjected women of colour to discrimination. As a result, these women have internalised negative perceptions of themselves and their communities over time. My study concludes by illustrating the intersectional relationship between African, Coloured, and Indian South African women according to the issues presented in the selected texts.

## **Background and Summary of the Selected Texts**

Early post-apartheid literature identifies a recurrent issue in South African society: the class divisions that stem from economic disparities. Poverty is common and is yet to be addressed on a mass scale in countries across the global south. Besides contending with these ongoing concerns, women are subject to gender inequalities and societal expectations. Feminist literature, written during apartheid and following democracy, provides insight into the challenges that non-white women experience. This project, engaging with three South African literary texts written by women of colour, seeks to understand the lingering effects of the colonial and apartheid periods in South Africa. More specifically, my research focuses on the experiences of non-white women of different class categories to determine how racial and financial inequalities pervade society. My reading of *Coconut* (2007) by Kopano Matlwa, *Onion Tears* (2011) by Shubnum Khan, and *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) by Zoë Wicomb, in conjunction with select theoretical frameworks, allows this dissertation to evaluate themes which are pertinent to South African feminist studies.

*Onion Tears* is Shubnum Khan's first novel, which began as her Master of Creative Writing dissertation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her writing has appeared in several local and international publications. She is a graphic artist, cartoonist, and literary illustrator. In 2021, Khan gained further success following the release of a biographical novel. *Onion Tears* was shortlisted for the Penguin Prize for African Writing and the University of Johannesburg Debut Fiction Prize. Khan has also accumulated a number of awards globally. *Onion Tears* enlightens readers about the inner workings of the South African Indian community, with Khan's three female protagonists as narrative voices. Through their experiences, Khan is able to spin a tale with which Indian women can identify. By creating central characters from different age categories, Khan encapsulates the shared and individual lived experiences of Indian women in a democratic South Africa. As members of the working class, the characters encounter issues that are archetypal to their economic bracket, such as crime, inability to afford better housing, the disconnect between living costs and income, and the pressures of educational or career aspirations.



Khadeejah Bibi Ballim, the matriarch of her family who has outlived her husband, resides alone in suburban Johannesburg. She is an elderly Indian woman who, in her youth, left India with her family at the whim of her entrepreneurial father. In South Africa, she was married and raised two children during the apartheid era. She met with challenges due to her husband's unsuccessful ventures, causing Khadeejah's household to edge toward financial turmoil. However, she manages to prevent this eventuality with the profits from her homemade pickle business. She withstands the worst of her husband's recklessness and faces his contempt for her success in light of his failures. Khadeejah's daughter, Summaya, is a shell of her former self years after her divorce. Summaya works hard to provide for her adolescent daughter, Aneesa. They are forced to live in an unsafe area as Summaya's salary is insufficient to afford a better neighbourhood. The novel illustrates the challenges that widows and single mothers endure. Aneesa is fortunate to have grown up in a democratic South Africa; however, she is exposed to remnants and consequences of the troubled time by the words/ actions of her family as well as a specific instance of crime which causes her trauma. Each character exudes vulnerability as they attempt to understand their surroundings and where they belong in society.

Dr Kopano Matlwa is a Public Health Physician and author of three successful novels thus far. She has amassed a host of prestigious literary awards and leadership accolades. Matlwa completed her Master's in Global Health Science and PhD in Population Health at the University of Oxford. Each of her novels addresses emergent issues in post-apartheid South Africa. As her inaugural text, *Coconut* launched Matlwa's entry into the literary sphere. The novel is divided into two parts, each narrated by one of the protagonists. Part one is from Ofilwe Tlou's perspective and documents her life as the teenage daughter of a newly established, Black economic empowerment benefitting, upper-class family. Despite their wealth, Ofilwe is discontented as she perceives that her family can never truly belong to the affluent white community they aim to join. In her home, she feels isolated; she endures rejection from white and non-white peers at her school. Within society, she observes that her family is shunned for their dark complexion as much as their prosperity. As a woman, Ofilwe is aware of the expectations laid upon her shoulders, and as part of a formerly marginalised group, she understands that her position is precarious.

The second part of *Coconut* revolves around Fikile Twala, a server at an upscale restaurant. The clientele is predominantly well-off white individuals who provide a welcome escape from Fikile's impoverished background. She lives vicariously through the people she encounters at work. Her obsession with elevating her social standing blinds her to the reality that she is a mere attendant to the callous persons with whom she interacts. Fikile discards her education for low-income employment and her reality for a fabricated life. She, too, is on the fringe of society as she strives to prove herself worthy of acknowledgement. The narrative displays the flaws of superficial ideals.

Zoë Wicomb is a renowned writer and academic who was one of the first female Coloured authors to gain popularity during apartheid. Her debut interconnected short story anthology, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, helped Wicomb gain popularity and highlighted the plight of the Coloured community during the apartheid period. The central character in each narrative is Frieda Shenton. Each tale provides a glimpse of Frieda's life, beginning during her early years in Namaqualand, her university life spent in Cape Town, and her relocation to London during adulthood. Despite her success as a novelist, Frieda is dissatisfied and chooses to visit her home to reconcile her fragmented identity. Her life signifies the lengths that women must go to in order to succeed in a male-dominated environment. Frieda inadvertently isolates herself to accomplish her goals. Her parents' fixation on class and racial superiority drive Frieda to yearn for an escape, as reflected in Frieda's writing.

Although Wicomb's work is written during and set in apartheid South Africa, Frieda contends with many concerns that are still significant in today's context. These issues are tactfully emphasised through humour and satire to attach seriousness to commonly overlooked feminist issues such as beauty standards, sexual violence and educational limitations. Frieda's interactions with the other characters and her observations inform readers about the hardships that non-white individuals faced and how racial segregation influenced behaviour and perspectives. Furthermore, Wicomb shows the hierarchies within communities based on ancestry. Frieda's paternal lineage originates from European descent, distinguishing the Shentons from their peers, which represents a colonial view, elaborated on further in this section. This mindset was detrimental following the demise of apartheid as the country strived for racial equality. Wicomb stresses the need for new approaches to these subjects by

contrasting parallel notions of class and race. Moreover, she indicates that the problems which require attention are ignored as the focus shifts to trivial matters. Through Frieda's narrative and other characters, Wicomb challenges South Africans to abandon segregated mentalities.

### **Theoretical framework and Key Concepts**

My selected texts tackle situations unique to South African women; thus, my research requires a localised approach to understand each author's perspective. In the global south, Western feminism has been contested for generalising women's issues. Feminist studies in South Africa calls for a layered method of contending with contemporary concerns of class, racial and gender inequality. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality is the primary framework used in this dissertation to determine how class, gender and race overlap concerning past and present problems mentioned in the novels. The secondary concepts which are discussed in this project and defined below are coloniality, decoloniality, race and Rainbowism.

#### **Intersectionality**

In 1989, advocate and academic Kimberlé Crenshaw presented intersectionality in her seminal paper entitled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" to focus on the issues of marginalised African American women. Her revolutionary work highlights the interrelation between sexism and racism. Crenshaw, in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," theorises that "the concept of intersectionality [...] denote[s] the ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black [American] women's employment experiences" and "in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color" (Crenshaw 1991, 1244). This concept is applicable in a South African context to indicate how class and race differences affect African, Coloured, and Indian women. Furthermore, it suggests that global media prompts a colourist and binary standard of beauty, which characters in each novel emphasise by implying that European attributes signify perfection and create unattainable benchmarks for women to aspire to. This suggests that community beauty standards signal larger issues of colonial influences among people of colour, which is seen in each novel and explored below. Therefore, this study investigates the experiences of non-white women in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa using Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality to analyse Shubnum

Khan's *Onion Tears* (2011), Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007), and Zoë Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) from a localised perspective.

The editorial introduction for the collection of essays using intersectionality as a framework, entitled "Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory" (2013), tracks the circulation of this theory across disciplines, decades, and locations, which indicates the significance of Crenshaw's contribution to African feminist studies and beyond. The collective writers Devon W. Carbado, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, and Barbara Tomlinson describe intersectionality as a "method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool" which is "[r]ooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory" (303). Carbado et al. assert that "intersectional analysis can identify and emphasize commonalities and create solidarity between political [or marginal] groups" (2013, 305); my study endorses the authors' claim. Thus, "intersectionality" is a vehicle "to forge alliances between formerly adverse groups" (306), such as South African women of colour. Research employing intersectionality "identif[ies] categorical differences [which] can enhance the potential to build coalitions between movements by acknowledging differences while promoting commonalities" (306). Furthermore, "this can lead to mutual acknowledgement of how structures of oppression are related and, therefore, how struggles are linked" (306), which is what my project intends. Additionally, "an intersectional lens can reveal, on a given issue and between separate identity groups, perspectives of both privilege and victimhood, and thereby create a connection around shared experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and privilege" (306). I concur with the findings of Carbado et al. (2013), as the analysis of my selected texts regarding class, gender and racial inequality reveals the intersectional relationship between the issues which each central character deals with similarly in each selected text. In addition, decoloniality, defined and explained below, forms a basis for transformation and healing. Explanations of each approach are necessary at this stage of the study.

### **Coloniality and Decoloniality**

For this dissertation, the working definition of coloniality is a mindset rooted in and beliefs stemming from colonial principles, elaborated on below. Malesela Montle and Mphoto Mogoboya (2020), in "Deconstructing Colonial Influence on Black South African Youth in the Post-apartheid Era: An Exploration of Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*," examine the lingering

effects of European rule and the apartheid regime. The article suggests mitigation strategies the government could implement to support African youth. Multiracial education is shown as a catalyst for positive change while conforming to European standards is perceived to cause division and discrimination. The authors recommend “reconstruction programmes aimed at healing and reconciling the nation” to curb the disunity (174). This study analyses the other texts I have selected for my project and can assist in understanding the experiences of Coloured and Indian youth. I concur that solutions should be at a national scale first, but local approaches are vital to enable widespread transformation. My analysis delves into the socio-economic challenges that affect women in modern South Africa. Theorists often look at society without focusing on women and the class struggles that non-white women experience. Thus, my research aims to evaluate the stated literary texts and highlight the issues mentioned.

Decoloniality is a philosophy theorised by Walter D. Mignolo (2007) and stems from a movement across formerly colonised regions proposing divergence from Eurocentrism. Mignolo signals that “[d]e-coloniality was clearly formulated, in the [1960s and 1970s], by radical Arabo-Islamic thinkers (Sayyid Qutb, Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Khomeini); by a philosophy of liberation in Latin America and by Indigenous intellectuals and activist in Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada” (2007, 457). In a local context, the term can be understood as a counter to the traces of colonial thinking which persist in current South Africa. Decoloniality is associated with “liberation” of the mind which many regions are still in desperate need of since universality binds the global south to conformity in the name of development (458). The colonisation period paved the way for apartheid propaganda and oppression. Thus, the remaining influences of colonialism facilitated the advent of the apartheid government and reinforced racial discrimination. According to Peter Moopi and Rodwell Makombe, “decoloniality is a theoretical paradigm [which] seeks to identify and critique [the] legacies of colonialism that continue to influence the lived experiences of those who were formerly colonised” (2020, 1). Coloniality manifests as psychological subjugation, which causes people of colour to favour European ideals and results in ambivalent identities.

Mignolo identifies three types of coloniality with “coloniality of power” (2007, 451), being described by South African researchers Moopi and Makombe as a weapon of “exploitation, domination and superiority” (2020, 1). This power is wielded by the wealthy against the poor.

Unequal power relations have become the norm in South Africa, usually referring to gender inequality and extending to wealth distribution. In relation, forms of capitalism and corruption are stewards of coloniality as lower and middle-class communities are economically marginalised. The second category, termed “coloniality of knowledge”, refers to the discrediting of knowledge systems originating outside of the West. In contrast, “coloniality of being” is understood as non-white individuals comparing themselves to Europeans (2). Understanding the forms of coloniality and the need for decoloniality is pertinent to this dissertation as the central characters in each selected novel struggle to move away from colonial influence in their families or communities. Matlwa’s *Coconut* depicts two Black girls who, despite all their efforts, remain outsiders among those from whom they seek acceptance. Similarly, Khan’s *Onion Tears* presents Khadeejah, who continues to believe that white skin spells superiority, while her granddaughter, Aneesa, struggles to relate to her peers, regardless of race. Aneesa’s mother battles with her opposing identities as a South African Indian woman. These women fail to understand that through democracy, they can accept their diversity. Wicomb delves into the experiences of coloured women through the life of her protagonist, Frieda Shenton, who navigates a constantly socio-politically changing South Africa.

## **Race**

Race is a disputed term in South Africa. *The Population Registration Act of 1950* categorised South Africans into four significant groups still in use: White, African, Coloured, and Indian. *The Freedom Charter* (1955) states “that South Africa belongs to all who live in it”, with the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) adding “united in our diversity” (1). However, race classifications continue to cause division among citizens. For instance, movements such as the People Against Race Classification South Africa, abbreviated as PARCSA, created a petition against racial classifications in the employment sector. On 24 February 2022, the Employment and Labour Minister, Thembelani Thulas Nxesi, responded to PARCSA’s concerns and acknowledged that “all South African citizens are African by virtue of being born and bred in the African continent”. The minister’s statement echoes the sentiments of advocates for democracy following the demise of apartheid and liberation for South Africans of colour. This is vital for restoration efforts to transform South African society and appease all citizens.

## **Rainbowism**

For the purposes of this project, Rainbowism refers to the notion of the South African nation moving from a segregated society to a united body as a nation of many colours or races. In a biblical context, the rainbow symbolises hope after periods of turmoil. *The Bible* mentions a covenant between God and Noah with the “rainbow”, signifying that there will “never again” be the destruction of “all life” (Genesis 9, *New International Version*). For South Africans, the rainbow represents harmony and unity in diversity after the anguish of apartheid and colonialism. Thus, the rainbow nation is a symbol of hope and unity. Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, in “Race, Place and Indian Identities in South Africa”, recount Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s statement discussing the concept of “rainbowism,” “in which the four ‘nations’ in South Africa could maintain their boundaries but also come together to forge a nation” (2018, 71). This term foreshadowed national transformation, which allowed all South Africans, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and class, “to come together as equals in celebration of unity through diversity in a nonracial state” (71). However, Vahed and Desai warn that “the danger” of such diverse groups existing in a developing country “is that in a context of competition for limited resources, racial and ethnic identities can strengthen and become valorized”, which results in racial tensions and xenophobia (71). Thus, almost thirty years after freedom reigned over South Africa, “tensions persist around the need for social cohesion and social and economic redress” (76). Similarly, Govinden determines that “[i]n the quest for national unity amidst cultural, ethnic, gender, and other forms of difference, we should not set up hierarchies of difference” (2008, 34). My study aims to show that cliques created during apartheid cause division among women who should be allies in the struggle against inequality and racial and class-based discrimination. Each framework mentioned in this section is linked to the legacies of apartheid rule.

## **Literature Review**

This project stems from the notion of an intersectional relationship among race, class and gender when measuring inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, each novel is written by a woman of colour and deals with the stated themes. Since there are traces of the effects of the colonial and apartheid periods in each narrative, an understanding of decoloniality is also significant. The perspective of female authors who wrote the three selected texts and belong to the communities they write about ties each aspect together. It is suitable to mention some

critical areas covered in this literature review section, such as African feminism and Indian literature, dualism, race, class and gender.

### **African Feminism and South African Indian Literature**

To introduce a feminist perspective to this study, I use research by Ronit Frenkel (2008) entitled “Feminism and Contemporary Culture in South Africa”, which discusses the need to re-envision ideas of feminism for post-apartheid South Africa. Frenkel also asserts that the creation of universal narratives through the media leads to “homogenisation [which] attests to the relentless insertion of [the] local market into a global cultural economy that furthers the gap between rich and poor and has a particular resonance in South Africa due to apartheid history” (8). This dissertation expands on Frenkel’s study by applying her findings to local texts written by women of colour to highlight the feminist trends among these diverse groups. “Reconsidering South African Indian Fiction Postapartheid,” another study by Frenkel (2011), is specifically applicable to Shubnum Khan’s *Onion Tears* (2011) and looks at the importance of Indian Fiction to understand the contribution that the Indian community has made in South African society. Frenkel’s study is helpful since *Onion Tears* has thus far received little scholarly engagement.

Frenkel states that South Africa is a space created by racial tension due to apartheid, which lingers among the population. Frenkel’s study explores how South African Indian fiction encourages “new ways of thinking about [local] culture” (2). She suggests that texts by South African Indian writers are significant “interventions” into dialogues about “race and identity formations” that reimagine current perceptions of South Africa after apartheid (2). Frenkel also asserts that “[p]hysicality does not always correspond to our centres of identification” (2). Racial classifications require flexibility, especially in institutional settings, since emphasising the importance of race is a gateway to corrupt methods of evading the quota system, which is also mentioned in the research by Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai. Since literary analyses of *Onion Tears* are limited, Vahed and Desai’s chapter 4, “Race, Place and Indian Identities in Contemporary South Africa”, in *Who Is an African?: Race, Identity, and Destiny in Post-apartheid South Africa* (2018) can be applied to Khan’s novel and the other selected texts.



Vahed and Desai argue that Indian South Africans are caught between two conflicting identities. These authors highlight the similarities between India and South Africa, such as the “rising” “poverty and inequality” along with “corruption scandals” (65). They further imply that class dynamics in South Africa, which “confine poorer Indians [and other impoverished citizens] to their “place” is comparable to the “caste” system in India” (70). The authors elaborate on the concept of the “rainbow nation,” which is a crucial component of my discussion of each text (71). Consequently, the chapter explores the differing needs of each class, such as employment and education. Vahed and Desai imply that the racial quota system enforced within economic and tertiary institutions blurs the lines of racial identity as those financially able to cheat the system use money to advance their positions. This places many working-class women at a disadvantage. Vahed and Desai note that “[t]he shedding of jobs since the early 1990s has created a host of socio-economic problems with women often bearing the brunt of the burden” (74). These findings apply to the selected novels as the protagonists and their communities deal with these issues. Prior to the above study, Vahed authored the chapter “Indian Muslims in South Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, 1860-2013” (2016). His research is significant as *Onion Tears* focuses on Muslim Indian South Africans.

However, Vahed also provides a comprehensive history of the Indian community in South Africa. In the chapter, class distinctions between “contract indentured workers” and “free migrants” are highlighted (86). These “free migrants” formed part of the “trading class” who pursued entrepreneurial exploits and distanced themselves from “working class Muslims” (86). This social order impacted on marriage conventions until access to educational opportunities reasserted the structure. The chapter also examines how a shared “Indianness” resulted from several subgroups being forced together despite language barriers (91). Vahed indicates that the Indian (Muslim) community has been active in South Africa's political and economic sectors for decades. These contributions emphasised their commitment to citizenship and love for the country. Despite differences in religion and class, Indian people were able to unite against a common bureaucratic enemy by creating many organisations to uplift their community. Vahed also discusses how education and modernity have re-evaluated traditional concepts and given women a platform to speak for themselves. This is important to note regarding Khan's novel, as Khadeejah represents the traditionalist views while Summaya challenges her mother's bleak outlook regarding race and gender roles.

Thus, Vahed's research has proven invaluable for analysing Indian writing and this minority. It is interesting to note the changes that have occurred over the 163 years since Indian people arrived in South Africa. Another pertinent study for analysing Indian writing is Devarakshanam Govinden's *Sister Outsiders: The Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women* (2008). Govinden begins by locating Indian writing in the context of apartheid literary restrictions. She highlights how writing by women of colour was excluded. Against this backdrop, she identifies why Indian female writers have not received the same critical attention as their male counterparts. Govinden establishes that female Indian writers are caught between their South African and Indian identities. This is exacerbated since the validity of their work as South African literature is questioned. However, their writing captures the South African experience. Govinden also provides a historical perspective on Indian women during the colonial period. This background is vital for my study. The need for Indian female voices is necessary since "Indian women's resistance to both colonial and indigenous male domination is suppressed in the male literary tradition" (Govinden 2008, 349). Thus, my analysis of *Onion Tears* compliments Govinden's research.

### **Dualism**

In their introduction to *Who is an African?: Race, Identity, and Destiny in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Roderick R. Hewitt and Chammah J. Kaunda suggest that South Africans "have no other choice but to deal with the social cohesion challenge that race and identity politics pose" to foster unity (2018, xix). Hewitt and Kaunda's research further indicates that the problems of "inequality and poverty" signal that the lingering "structural identity issues" are a product of South Africa's "colonial and Apartheid past" (xix). Furthermore, the authors note that "negative connotations" are attributed to Africa and its citizens owing to "white superiority" being portrayed as the only acceptable stance (xx). The study mentions "schizophrenic behaviour" exhibited by people of colour (xx). This dissertation asserts that dualism is created since split identity emerges as a person's origins and aspirations are in constant conflict while influenced by global perceptions of Africa. By analysing these findings and the chosen texts, my research demonstrates how South African women of colour are affected by apartheid legacies.

Similarly, Teboho Bojabotseha, in his article “Dualism and the Social Formation of South Africa” (2011), considers the challenges within the national economic sphere. His work also alludes to the dual aspects of society. Like the work of Hewitt and Kaunda (2018) and Vahed and Desai (2018), Bojabotseha recognises the ambivalence that characterises the attitudes of non-white South Africans. Bojabotseha concludes that many critics consider South Africa a country with a dual economy, the first consisting of affluent white citizens. In contrast, the second comprises impoverished black masses; however, this is inaccurate of contemporary South Africa. He suggests that the first economy’s successes are dependent on the labour provided by the second. Thus, these descriptions of existing economies highlight the intersectional relationship between capitalism and the marginalised poor. I diverge from Bojabotseha by focusing on how women are affected by these capital-driven exploits. Additionally, he concludes that “[t]he maintenance of underdevelopment is, therefore, an inherent condition of the process of the capitalist accumulation path in South Africa” (2011, 7). Likewise, as Frenkel (2008) foregrounds, globalisation often increases poverty levels experienced in developing countries such as South Africa. These topics are appropriate for discussing inequality among women reflected in the selected texts.

Similarly, Nadia Sanger, in “Apology By Way of Sex: Race and Gender in Zoë Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*”, explores the dualisms which, she believes, contribute to the “oppression, marginalisation and violence” that are perpetuated through racism and sexism (2019, 86). Sanger’s research suggests that *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) opposes the rigidity of binary thinking, especially regarding race and gender, in favour of alternative understandings. Like Moopi and Makombe (2020), Sanger asserts that decolonisation is essential for change. The article states that colonial ideas influence current views about distinctions in society. The apartheid and colonial periods established the foundations for the class differences among South Africans. Sanger notes that Wicomb’s work urges citizens to confront the country’s complex past and the current climate while abandoning dualisms that trap society into “oppressive categorisations” (2019, 92). My study highlights that the focus should shift from differences to understanding and embracing the interrelatedness between women of colour. Sanger’s findings propose that during apartheid, racial issues held more significant importance than gender inequality, while currently, the topics are inversely proportional.

Sanger recognises the intersectionality between race and gender, whereas my research introduces class issues to the discussion. Continuing on the topic of Zoë Wicomb's writing, in 2018, Aretha Phiri interviewed the author for an article entitled "Black, White and Everything in-between: Unravelling the Times with Zoë Wicomb", which they co-authored. This article reveals Wicomb's views on several topics that her novels explore. The discussion indicates that her works, such as *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, are as relevant now as when she wrote them, reinforcing my selection of this text. Wicomb categorically dismisses racial stereotyping, which encourages racism and sexism. She highlights the intersections among race, class, and gender. Furthermore, she advocates for decolonisation in education. Although Wicomb and Phiri discuss the importance of African voices expressed through writing and the value of female writers, they do not mention South African Indian female writers, which my research contributes to this discussion.

Since the Coloured community is known for their dual identities, Vernon February's ([1981], 1991) analysis of the Coloured stereotype in South African literature is vital for analysing Wicomb's text and exploring the significance of South African racial classifications. February's work provides a background to the legislation that contributed to the ambiguity surrounding race in South Africa. His work is essential as he indicates how apartheid legislation affected Coloured Identity and how the representation of Coloured people in literature has changed as the government has classified and reclassified this group. The *Immorality Act, No. 5 of 1927*, *The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, No. 55 of 1949*, *The Group Areas Act of 1950*, *The Population Registration Act of 1950* and *The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953* are the principal statutes discussed in my study regarding the selected communities. February also gives various definitions of a 'Coloured' person according to the changing legislature during the apartheid rule. He discusses the concept of Coloured people pretending to be white, a recurring theme in Wicomb's writing, and how this further proves their ambivalent positions. Understanding the various laws that prohibited interracial relationships is significant for each selected text in this dissertation, as the protagonists are affected by stereotypes that were perpetuated by apartheid indoctrination. This continues to impact racial and gender relations after almost three decades of democracy, signalling an apartheid legacy in the post-apartheid. For this reason, although *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* was written

and set before 1994, the text is relevant to my current study. Duality is also a shared characteristic among the women of colour on which each novel focuses. February's assessment highlights the intersectionality between class, race, and gender.

### **Race, Class, and Gender**

Aretha Phiri (2013), in her article "Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* and the Dialectics of Race in South Africa: Interrogating Images of Whiteness and Blackness in Black Literature and Culture", explores Matlwa's humorous portrayal of race relations and identity conflicts among young African women post-apartheid. She suggests that the title, *Coconut*, denoting food, relates to globalisation and "consumerism," which is "indicative of racial and class disparities" (166). The quest for upward mobility causes individuals to erase the aspects of their background that fail to match their growing economic success standards. Phiri compares *Coconut* to Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, emphasising the similarities between the struggles of each protagonist. Nonhlanhla Dlamini (2019) investigates class and gender in her article "Class and Masculinities Un/making in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*". She focuses on how African people function in predominantly "white spaces" (13904). In contrast, her article foregrounds the male characters in Matlwa's narrative, while my analysis focuses on the feminine interactions. Using the ideas drawn from Dlamini's article, I determine that venerating masculinity entrenches gender inequality. Dlamini points out that people of colour are pressured to progress and improve their class position to surpass or be on par with their successful white counterparts. This develops a competitive cycle that encourages racial and gender inequality.

### **Research Methodology**

This research falls into the category of a qualitative analysis of literary representation across three categories of non-white female characters in the jargon of the apartheid state, although these women would be defined as women of colour. This dissertation applies a close reading of the selected texts. It also engages with the reflections and ideas from scholarly studies, such as journal articles and books dedicated to this project's central topics, as defined above. This dissertation utilises intersectionality to explore the connections between the selected texts and women's struggles, such as patriarchy, identity issues, racial prejudices, and the widening gap

between the rich and poor. It draws attention to intersectionality in the context of South African society. The study also discusses decoloniality in relation to the selected texts. It highlights the attitude of the central characters toward the idea that wealth, status and following a Western trajectory promises a more comfortable life even in a contemporary context. Significantly, novels written by South African Indian women lack critical engagement since Indian women who write about and expose the crevices in Indian culture are seen as traitors. Traditional African and Coloured communalism tend to value within the confines of patriarchal expectations. Thus, this dissertation aims to fill these gaps and build on existing studies exploring similar issues. A literary and character analysis of *Coconut*, *Onion Tears*, and *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* is a good approach to accomplish the aims of this project.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

This dissertation seeks to understand the cause and result of inequality among South African women by analysing *Coconut* (2007) by Kopano Matlwa, *Onion Tears* (2011) by Shubnum Khan, and *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* by Zoë Wicomb (1987). As my texts show, the issues pertaining to women of colour have hardly changed over the twenty years between the texts. I am struck by how the representation of women within the Indian community has barely changed within the period. Given the nature of apartheid, I look at women in terms of racial groupings and traditional norms of feminine behaviour within African, Coloured and Indian communities to determine common experiences.

#### *Key questions:*

Although the selected novels address different population groups in South Africa, the following questions are relevant to all cases. These issues are explored through their representation in the works of the selected authors studied in this dissertation. The questions identify what this project seeks to uncover. How do issues of class affect non-white women in post-apartheid South Africa? What challenges affected women during apartheid and continue to have an effect currently? How do race and European influence impact women's experience in contemporary South Africa? To what extent are Indian, African, and Coloured women engaged in similar struggles? Is there an intersectional relationship between class, race, and gender among women of colour?

## Structure of Chapters

This dissertation consists of three key sections, each expanding on one of the primary texts, namely, *Coconut*, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and *Onion Tears*. These chapters explore the intersectional relationship between class, race, and gender from the perspective of women within the Black, Coloured, and Indian communities of South Africa. The dissertation also identifies the colonial influences that persist despite the reign of democracy, which reveals the importance of decoloniality studies. The introductory chapter provides the aim of this dissertation, defines the key terms, and provides a literature review that foregrounds the prominent critics with whom I will engage.

Chapter One analyses Kopano Matlwa's novel *Coconut*. The chapter explores the narratives of protagonists Ofilwe and Fikile as they deal with issues of class, gender, and race in contemporary Johannesburg. First, I examine the relationship between racial identity and social class among the Black upper middle class. Then, I determine how the influences of Eurocentrism have mentally enslaved people of colour. My analysis of *Coconut* deals with class issues through the lives of the polar opposite protagonists. Comparing and contrasting the experience of an affluent, educated, young Black woman with that of a working-class African woman in the same age category allows the discussion to focus on class through the eyes of two teenage girls in contemporary South Africa. Fikile's narrative also deals with power distribution and violence in the form of sexual abuse. Furthermore, racial inequality is expressed within school and employment settings as the characters navigate their adolescence in an unwelcoming environment. Using the research of theorists and the framework of decoloniality applied to the texts, I highlight the possible solutions to the inequality crisis.

Chapter Two investigates Zoë Wicomb's short story anthology, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Wicomb's writing aids this dissertation in analysing the apartheid era during which the Coloured community struggled to find their social niche. The life of the central character, Frieda, depicts the ongoing class challenges and racial prejudices of apartheid. This text is comparable to the other two selected works as it exhibits class, racial and gender issues in similar ways and follows a protagonist who exemplifies that each community has its own set of tensions. I begin the chapter by discussing the ambiguity surrounding the Coloured race in

South Africa and highlighting the relevance of Wicomb's work to this study. Next, I analyse Wicomb's portrayal of hierarchy in the Coloured community. The chapter then examines topics specific to women, such as objectification based on appearance. Finally, I look at gender issues such as sexual violence and stereotypes that restrict women. This chapter also looks at the story of Sandra Laing, born to white parents, whose race was classified and reclassified due to her physical features not adhering to the accepted exterior of a white person.

Chapter Three focuses on Shubnum Khan's *Onion Tears*. My evaluation of the novel provides a complementary approach to the themes by examining the experiences of three Indian females at distinct stages in their lives. I explore how Khan confronts the stereotypes within Indian culture and highlights the stigmas attached to divorce and female-headed households. These concerns affect the class position and social status of the central characters. The chapter begins by discussing the significance of Indian Literature. Thereafter, I focus on colourism as racial prejudice within the Indian population. Khan illustrates how this discrimination occurs through each protagonist's narrative. Next, I move on to class-based issues such as marriage conditions and how these factors contribute to overlooked gender-based violence. *Onion Tears* exposes the patriarchal ideologies that have shackled Indian women to abusive spouses decades after women's liberation has been achieved. Finally, the chapter determines how community stereotypes impact identity in the post-apartheid. The dissertation's Conclusion provides a comparative analysis of the texts and a summary of my argument. This section also indicates how race and class inequalities have affected and continue to impact South African society.



## **Chapter 1: “Reconciling Dual Identities”: Class and Racial Inequality Affecting Young, Black Women in Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* (2007)**

“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 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, 69)

### **Introduction**

The title of this chapter, “Reconciling Dual Identities”, encompasses the pursuit of both protagonists in Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* (2007) as they are exposed to class and racial disparities from opposite ends of the spectrum. The above extract, which concludes part one of the text, summarises the premise of *Coconut*. This epigraph further alludes to the duality resulting from the oscillating nature of post-apartheid society. In modern South Africa, women of colour battle to escape their prescribed roles and challenge stereotypes associated with their communities. The pressures emerging from social class structures and the emphasis placed on racial categories blur the identities of South African women of colour.

The 2021 protest action, which erupted into widespread looting of businesses and property damage, signalled the toll that the pandemic, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), referred to as Coronavirus or COVID-19, had taken on South African citizens. However, the uproar began as a response to the arrest and prosecution of former South African president Jacob Zuma, and the robbing of establishments morphed into opportunistic crimes of resentment. The poor masses could finally acquire many goods for which they aspired. This episode highlighted a significant fault in the nation’s economy –the increasing unemployment rate has been drastically affected by the coronavirus pandemic since March 2020, and the period also sparked tensions between communities as the disgruntled poor targeted middle-class retailers and suburban areas. I aim to demonstrate how this tragic period, etched into recent South African history, is relevant to the analysis of Matlwa’s *Coconut* and the dissonance resembling that which prevailed in colonial and apartheid South Africa.

In this chapter, I argue that class divisions and resulting inequality create social segregation, leading to bitterness among the disadvantaged toward those perceived as prosperous. This is illustrated by the two central characters in *Coconut*, Ofilwe and Fikile. Furthermore, I indicate that subversions of regulations, such as Black Economic Empowerment and the racial quota system, based on racial distinctions in economic and institutional sectors lead to corrupt means of circumventing the stringent conditions as explored in part two of Matlwa's novel. My discussion investigates how the text evaluates the class and racial constructs of contemporary South African cities, which relates to the looting incidents that destroyed major areas within KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in July 2021. Using this practical example and an instance of identity fraud at a public university as case studies, I emphasise the significance of Matlwa's writing in understanding how the new generation of Black women copes in a volatile country.

### **Investigating the Themes from a Privileged Perspective in Part One of *Coconut***

Ofilwe Tlou is a young woman growing up in a South Africa, where people of colour seem able to achieve anything they desire. Her family escapes the township when her father obtains a business tender through bribery. However, her life of luxury is vastly different from the promise of perfection that comes with wealth. Marzia Milazzo establishes that the "[upper] middle-class status" that the Tlou family secures does not shield Ofilwe from "experiencing alienation" in every area of her life (2016, 135). The Tlous are trapped in a liminal space where they are neither accepted nor openly rejected by the blue-blooded community, which they desperately try to integrate into, as illustrated by their experience at the Silver Spoon Café. They are placed in a corner where they observe but cannot participate in the sophisticated environment. Ofilwe blames her family for "not [trying] to assimilate [itself] into the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop family tree"; however, even the server Fikile treats the Tlous as if they are not welcome (Matlwa 2007, 27). Owing to insecurity, Ofilwe criticises Fikile without attempting to understand her background, demonstrating, as a result of social stratification, how easily and frequently individuals judge others. Fikile is guilty of having the same mindset towards Ofilwe. In this manner, the 'other' continues a pattern of 'othering' to cope with marginalisation. Matlwa uses her protagonists to display how people of colour are condemned by their people as much as other groups.

Although Ofilwe's family improves its class position, it fails to alter how its members are seen and portrayed in cosmopolitan Johannesburg. Thus, the Tlous cannot enjoy the fruits of success. Ofilwe laments her uneasiness in the form of a prayer, expressing that she:

Hate[s] it, Lord. [she] hate[s] it with every atom of [her] heart. [she is] angry, Lord. [she is] searing within. [she is] furious. [she does] not understand. Why, Lord? Look at [her family], Lord, sitting in [a] corner. A corner. A hole. [her father] believes he enjoys [the] food. Poor Mama, she still struggles with this fork and knife thing. [Her] [p]oor [family is a] poor, poor, poor pathetic [family]. It is pitiful. What are [they] doing [there]? Why did [they go]? [They] do not belong. (27)

The above indicates how her impressionable mind is being bombarded by a realisation of the emotional poverty that strikes her family. She does not get the support that she needs from a fractured family. Despite her comfort within a prosperous family, joy is lacking in Ofilwe's home life. This extract accurately depicts Ofilwe's pain as she transitions from a child to a young woman, and her eyes are opened to the harsh realities of persisting colonial influences. Through a narrative that shifts between memory and reality, Matlwa recreates the idea of a *Bildungsroman* (a story following a protagonist's stages of growth or a coming into consciousness) as her protagonists relive their forgotten experiences while navigating their current circumstances as adolescents. Ofilwe's development is traced as she considers her past from a fresh perspective and pieces the root of her problems together. She refers to her family as "poor", which depicts self-pity and resignation in a hopeless situation, reinforcing the idea that material wealth cannot ensure one is accepted in a prejudiced society (27). Although the Tlous have entered a formerly forbidden realm, they are forced into the outskirts literally and metaphorically, which is a rejection they cannot escape. Ofilwe also implies that her parents must pretend to enjoy their "[t]raditional English" food and Western utensils to blend into the foreign setting (20). Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass, authors of *Policy, Politics and Poverty in South Africa*, argue that "Ofilwe [and her family] are immersed" in a "suburban upper-middle-class" lifestyle which begins blotting out their ethnic background as they follow Eurocentric conformity (2015, 121). As the pressure to belong increases, Ofilwe becomes mentally overwhelmed.

The choices that Ofilwe and her parents make suggest that conventional European behaviour is associated with wealth. This reflects Mignolo's coloniality of being as Ofilwe's family considers itself, according to Eurocentrism, to emulate 'acceptable behaviour'. The Tlou family "embrace westernisation" while distancing itself from "African 'tradition'", which displays the

effects of psychological colonisation (121). The gradual transformation of her family places Ofilwe in a difficult position when she realises that she has lost sight of her Pedi roots. Her discovery motivates her to make drastic changes. Aghogho Akpome's chapter "Ethnicity in post-2000 African writing" in the *Routledge Handbook of African Literature* discusses Ofilwe's journey of self-exploration. Akpome surmises that Ofilwe goes through a "psycho-social metamorphosis dramatized through her personal reflections on racial inequities" in post-apartheid South Africa (2019, 113). This transformation charts the beginning of her laborious trek into adulthood. During the "process", she terminates her friendship with "her best friend Belinda, who is white and commits herself to learning Pedi culture and speaking the language" (113-114). However, I perceive that Ofilwe does these things which she assumes are expected of her because she cannot understand how to exist within a divided populace. She loses sight of herself as she chooses between her traditionalist origins and modern lifestyle. Ofilwe's introspection is partially influenced by her brother Tshepo pointing out the significance of magazine clippings stuck to her bedroom wall and her realisation that:

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 saw it too. I mean, why on earth would I do something like that intentionally? What did it matter anyway? It was purely a coincidence; there were no black faces I liked in the magazines I cut [them] out from. 'None at all?' I looked around once more and then at Tshepo. In his eyes I saw what was only to hit me many years from then. I think it was on that day that Tshepo saw me for what I was. I wish I had then too; maybe things would have worked out differently. (Matlwa 2007, 69)

By revealing that her choice of images was unintentional, Ofilwe implies that her inclination toward European values is ingrained into her subconscious. Ofilwe only feels the weight of the incident years later when she reaches maturity, which fills her with dread. Her dilemma exemplifies how global media associates success and beauty with whiteness, implying that only Europeans or white South Africans symbolise luxury. This misrepresentation deceives people of colour, causing these individuals to imitate and favour Western culture. This aligns with ideas highlighted by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1987) and Carbado et al. (2013) since there is an overlap of class and racial oppression, which pushes women to subscribe to ideologies from the West to gain wealth, success, and respect. Furthermore, the "[r]acial division" between people of colour and the white minority in post-apartheid South Africa seems to worsen as the converging plots of *Coconut* progress (Montle and Mogoboya 2020, 173). For instance, Ofilwe is "segregated" by her peers at school, which "causes her to experience spiritual, emotional and

psychological trauma”, which intensifies her ambivalent personality (173). This negatively affects her personal development and how she reacts to her surroundings.

Women of colour are particularly affected by the colourist mass media outputs that promote fair skin and typical European hair texture. *Coconut* references painful beauty practices that Black South African women and young girls perform, such as chemically straightening their hair using relaxers. Ofilwe recalls “such pain” as the hairdresser attended her, “a girl with the coarsest of hair” (Matlwa 2007, 3). As she narrates the traumatic experience, Ofilwe reveals that at the age of ten, she would “shut her eyes tight, refusing to let out the tears that wrestled within” (4). The “Black Queen hair-straightener cream” caused a “painful exothermic chemical reaction” that burned Ofilwe’s scalp, which indicates the agony that befell her during this incident (4). Ofilwe, like many, endures this to feel “beautiful again” (4). Toks Oyedemi refers to these processes as acts of “violence” that result in “identity erasure” (2016, 537). Thus, women are influenced to change or remove parts of themselves that do not conform to standards that reflect coloniality.

Furthermore, “the result of a history of structural violence through hair creates physical and cultural violence of erasing natural hair based on internalized narrative of the ugliness of African hair, and aspirations for a ‘finer’ looking European-textured straight hair” (539). Global media perpetuate this and subtly encourages archaic ideas about what are considered attractive features concerning women. These instances of violence echo the coloniality of power and being, as defined by Moopi and Makombe (2020), explored previously in my study. Chammah Kaunda and Roderick Hewitt analyse how the media use the “power” of “advertising” to label “white as beautiful and black as ugly”, which results in large sums being spent on the “importing” of foreign beauty products annually (2018, xx). Similarly, Oyedemi expresses that “the culture of hair straightening, relaxing and using human hair weave extensions also functions within global capitalism” (2016, 539), which benefits manufacturers that generally operate from the global North.

Wealth is a tool used to speed up the process of Eurocentric conformity, as exemplified by Ofilwe’s mother, whose “money is her own to be used on herself and nothing else because she is beautiful and it costs money to remain so”, according to her daughter (Matlwa 2007, 79). Ofilwe recalls her mother’s fear of “losing complexion” from exposure to the sun (51). Mrs Tlou is also described as having “metallic blue-black” skin, which Ofilwe thinks should not be,

but is beautiful (52). Mr Tlou's choice to marry an unconventionally attractive woman from a low-class family was deemed controversial. The notion of conventional beauty initiates an identity crisis among people of colour. Thus, the pressure to fit the mould of European beauty standards causes women to alter their physical appearance and teaches girls to loathe their natural attributes. Similarly, although the Black upper middle class, as illustrated by Ofilwe's family, "elevate [themselves] to the level of the European through Western education and culture, [they are] unable to escape from [their] race" (Tafira 2016, 189). This group is trapped by past perceptions, which cause them to work harder for societal approval. Ofilwe admits that she does "not know where [she] is going" as the direction of her life begins to become blurred (Matlwa 2007, 49). This illustrates her emotional loss of self and mental disorientation as she becomes aware of the faults in her new community.

A private school education, specifically the ability to communicate fluently in English, is celebrated among Ofilwe's disadvantaged relatives. She views herself as her family's liberator, comparable to the 'white saviour complex' that identifies wealthy white philanthropists as the only hope for non-white individuals in developing countries. These rescuers often implement unsuitable solutions for the issues they aim to resolve and fail to establish or contemplate the community's needs. Allison Mackey explains that the concept of a white saviour "depicts Africans as helpless, voiceless" and requiring rescue derived from "the West" (2019, 61). Global media organisations circulate this false narrative, creating or enhancing derogatory, biased, and exaggerated images of African citizens. The media further influences the ideologies of the wealthy; for instance, Ofilwe berates her cousins for using a "brick" as a "toy" (Matlwa 2007, 44), which can be understood as a metaphorical representation of Mignolo's coloniality of knowledge. Ofilwe fails to recognise the benefits of straying from materialism. This suggests that while physically she has the means to engage in leisure travels, Ofilwe's mind remains within her reality while her cousins escape the confines of their environment through their imagination. Ofilwe views her relations from an outsider's perspective, just as ill-informed outsiders view Africa as primitive. Thus, Matlwa's book is pertinent as it challenges the stereotypical views of South Africans. Ofilwe's insensitivity is exacerbated by elderly members who "know [that she is] special" and give her preferential treatment (44). Ofilwe "tell[s] [her] cousins" not to "despair" because when she completes her academic pursuits, she plans to return "and teach them English" so that "they will be special" like she is (44). Her condescending attitude is a token of her privileged position.

As he matures, Tshepho develops a rebellious attitude toward his parents and sister due to their adoption of European culture. His behaviour causes his parents to devote more time and attention to reprimanding him, which further contributes to Ofilwe's isolation, signalling that women frequently have little support through their struggles. Nonhlanhla Dlamini asserts that Ofilwe's father uses financial "success" to exhibit "several avenues for masculinity creation available to his son's dominated masculinity, mental agility/academic prowess and economic success" (2019, 13904). Mr Tlou associates material wealth with masculinity and respect, which causes him to dictate Tshepho's career path. This family conflict adversely affects Ofilwe as she wades through the tension in her home. Mr Tlou believes that a career in the Arts and Culture sector is improper for his child because the income is not high enough to maintain the lifestyle for someone of his social stature. When recollecting her father's argument with Tshepho, Ofilwe reveals that Mr Tlou "has" and "sees his lady friends", a fact which is undisputed in their household (Matlwa 2007, 60). Her father's clandestine behaviour highlights another fault in Ofilwe's superficially perfect family, which is the unequal relationship between her parents. Owing to her husband's distractions, Ofilwe's mother "becomes a central parent" for her children; however, she favours Tshepho, who identifies more with her (Dlamini 2019, 13902). In all areas of her life, Ofilwe is less regarded than others, which mirrors the marginality experienced by non-white citizens. Dlamini recognises that Tshepo "rebels against" Mr Tlou because of his appropriation of "negative remnants of (post)colonial masculinities such as violence and various levels of absenteeism in the home" (13902). Matlwa's portrayal of the dysfunctional Tlou family alludes to fractures in post-apartheid South Africa. Ofilwe becomes a voice of scrutiny as she recognises faults in her home and country.

The freedoms that come with wealth are a gateway to reckless actions and create a sense of entitlement, denying individuals the skills necessary to cope in an unjust environment. Ofilwe experiences this as she struggles with condescending attitudes from her friends, classmates and teachers throughout adolescence. The "Tuscan" "architectural style" (Matlwa 2007, 57) of Ofilwe's home is a testament to her family's obsession with patterns of Eurocentrism. The estate agent describes the house as "incomparable" (57), yet it is located within a gated community which demands conformity. This insistence on uniformity among the living spaces extends to the behaviour of residents, and those who contravene the rules are met with hefty fines. In an attempt to conduct a traditional ceremony, the Tlous violated several Little Valley Country Estate regulations, which resulted in a penalty and widened the rift between this family. The complaints of their neighbours invite disciplinary action. Matlwa indicates that

difference is met with hostility and fear in Western society through this scene. This fosters fear and resentment among the ‘other’ as they are denied the freedom many generations fought to obtain. In consequence, the post-apartheid nation fails to fulfil constitutional mandates. As Dlamini similarly states, “the colonised ‘other’ is deemed inferior, made aware of it, and told that s/he needs to conform to the coloniser’s culture to be deemed human” (2019, 13900-13901). Matlwa’s text highlights how women become further victims of emasculated men. This is also prominent in Wicomb and Khan’s novels.

At the beginning of her narrative, Ofilwe appears to think that physical displays of wealth solely measure success. For instance, when her father is set to pick her up from school, she proudly announces to her peers that her “Daddy [is] picking [her] up in his new Mercedes-Benz” (Matlwa 2007, 17). When her father arrives late, she tries to get the attention of the remaining older male students. To her dismay, someone named Stuart Simons remarks, “[n]ice wheels, Ofilwe, who did your father hijack this one from?” (17). Stuart’s comment demonstrates the veiled racial stereotypes that continue circulating. In the same passage, Ofilwe exposes a hierarchical structure within her school, indicating that ideas of class division begin during youth. Ofilwe knows that the “clique of seniors [...] only allow Stuart to hang with them because he is wealthy” (17). Affluence is portrayed as the key to admiration, and although Ofilwe criticises Stuart for his inauthentic friendships, she too wants recognition for her father’s riches. Therefore, Matlwa implies that children must be taught to implement equality within social circles or risk the reproduction of countless generations of prejudiced citizens. This eventuality hinders nation-building attempts and stagnate budding coherence.

### **Analysing Class, Race, and Gender Issues from a Disadvantaged View in Part 2 of**

#### ***Coconut***

“Promise to keep a secret?”

“What kind of secret?”

“A bad secret.”

“Dark?”

“Black.”

– Matlwa (2007, 71)

Part two of *Coconut* begins with the above pejorative connotations of “black”, often associated with skin complexion and racial classifications (71). Embedded in this euphemism for identity politics lies the novel’s central theme, race relations. The colour black contains negative



nuances that prefigure the injustices that Black South Africans endured before democracy. Fikile Twala narrates this section of the text. She introduces her unfit guardian, ‘Uncle’, who is unnamed but given a fictitious identity as Silas Nyoni by his corrupt employers. Fikile commends the scheme concocted to benefit from the Black Economic Empowerment initiative, which ironically intends to remove racial inequality in business. Silas Nyoni is depicted as the “Black Economic Empowerment partner and newly appointed Operations Manager of Lentso Communications” (76). However, ‘Uncle’ dwells in a township and works as a security guard at Lentso Communications. This subplot introduces the theme of appearance versus reality; for instance, Fikile’s fixation on physical beauty distracts from the turmoil in her life. Her Uncle’s involvement in his employer’s deceitful practices teaches Fikile that success is easily obtained through duplicity. In comparison, the following controversial headline and content for an article in the weekly newspaper, the *Sunday Tribune*, in June 2016 explores the subjectivity of race in institutional settings, “FOR SALE; A place in med school; UKZN probes syndicate enrolling Indian students as Coloured”. The exposé stated that:

[i]n 2015 and 2016, Indian South Africans needed to score a minimum of 90.83 percent overall in matric to study medicine at UKZN. For the same period, Coloured pupils needed a score of 65 percent. It is believed the syndicate allowed Indian South Africans to pass themselves off as Coloureds and gain entry to the medical school. It is further alleged that this was done for a sum of money. The guidelines for the selection of first year students states that the university should take 69 percent African students, 19 percent Indian, nine percent Coloured, two percent white and one percent other. (*Sunday Tribune* 2016)

This case is unsurprising in post-apartheid South Africa, as venality occurs at a national level. This scandal highlighted the peculiarity associated with South African race categorisations, especially regarding the modern Coloured community. It is challenging to classify Coloured people since the term now refers to individuals of mixed descent, a common occurrence in a multiracial country. This example is comparable to Fikile’s Uncle being coaxed into portraying an executive for a white company since both situations breach race-based policy. However, in Uncle’s case, the benefits are one-sided as his involvement allows the enterprise to benefit from BEE while he is remunerated with useless trinkets. Thus, Matlwa addresses the deficiencies of the post-apartheid government and indicates the relevance of her work in investigating the need to promote accountability. The above extract suggests that the racial quota system, which intended to reduce the inequality created by the apartheid system, became a medium for other disparity through corruption. Similarly, award-winning South African author Dr Sindiwe

Magona comments on policy failure in her novel *When the Village Sleeps* (2021) as one of her characters mentions that “[t]he formerly dispossessed continue to blame history, while the present is but a mirror thereof” (70). This suggests that the anger of people experiencing poverty is often misdirected.

Evidence from Matlwa’s text suggests that Fikile’s uncle’s salary is insufficient for the pair to live comfortably; therefore, she leaves school to become a server at the Silver Spoon Café. The first impression that she makes on her employer, Miss Becky, is an example of what Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati define as “intra-intersectional discrimination” in their article “The Intersectional Fifth Black Woman” (2013, 310). During the beginning of her employment, Miss Becky instructs Fikile to “[m]ake a plan” to get a pair of black “jeans” because it is “not [something expensive like] a pair of Jimmy Choo shoes” and tells her to “do something about her hair” but not to “come to work looking like that again” (Matlwa 2007, 87). This insensitive employer fails to understand that Fikile’s deprived financial circumstances sparked her need for employment. The incident forces Fikile to steal a pair of jeans to satisfy her boss’s requirements. Carbado and Gulati (2013) create a fictional case study to illustrate the prejudices against Black American women in professional environments; I offer that the hypothetical example can be applied to the South African employment trends satirised in *Coconut*. The ‘fifth’ Black woman, Tyisha, was one of five Black women interviewed for an associate position at a law firm. Four of the “Black women [are] hired, but Tyisha [is] not” (Carbado et al. 2013, 310). She is rejected because of her “demeanour, name, accent, hair, political identity [and] social identity” (310).

Similarly, Miss Becky hires Fikile because she is “gorgeous”, “well spoken”, and “bright”, but warns that her appearance and mannerisms must cater to the social class that she serves (Matlwa 2007, 87). This suggests that physical attributes can be a more significant asset for women than qualifications. Carbado and Gulati indicate that a Eurocentric image is favoured when assessing women of colour. Regarding Miss Becky’s comment about Fikile’s hair, “issues of beauty, acceptability, race, and their cultural implications continue to shape cultures and narratives about African hair” (Oyedemi 2016, 539). As indicated by Fikile’s narrative, controlling how a woman styles her hair is a form of psychological domination that reinforces the subordination of the ‘other’. Miss Becky uses the above methods to demean her employees, ensuring they do not undermine her authority.

Fikile devotes her entire being to recreating her image. *The Bible* declare that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21 and Luke 12:34, *New International Version*). Fikile’s “life treasures” (Matlwa 2007, 84) anchor her to Western patterns of behaviour, which appear to be her only source of joy in a lacklustre life. As a woman without support, Fikile overcomes her limitations to obtain a host of prized possessions that aid her pursuit of whiteness, such as:

the most expensive things [she] owns, [which are] worth many months spent scrubbing grease and sweeping storerooms after hours. The dainty little emerald-green coloured lenses that float gracefully in the sapphire blue contact-lens solution are a reminder of how far [she has] come, from the naive orphan child living in a one-bedroom house with her incompetent Uncle in another family’s backyard in yet another decrepit township to the charming young waitress with pretty green eyes and soft, blowin-the-wind, caramel-blond hair (pinned in perfectly to make it look real), working at the classiest coffee shop this side of the equator. [Her] Lemon Light skin-lightener cream, [her] sunscreen, [her] eyeliner, mascara, eye-shadow, blush, eyelash-straightener and the pieces of caramel-blond hair extension which were bought for [her] as a child to braid [her] hair with but never used because Uncle misplaced the money he was supposed to pay the braiding lady with, are all little testimonies to the progress [she has] made despite the odds. They are hard evidence of how much closer [she is to begin her new life]. (Matlwa 2007, 84-85)

Fikile emphasises that each item is earned through hard work and indicates that she is proud of what she has gradually achieved. She yearns to be a version of herself that is respected and shielded from the unfairness of contemporary society. Since she allows herself to be swayed by the allure of European beauty practices, Fikile becomes “psychologically violated”, which causes her to view this “dominant” perception as absolute (Oyedemi 2016, 542). Like Ofilwe, Fikile looks for inspiration from fashion magazines. They are both unaware that the images they constantly consume are marketing strategies that entice readers to purchase products, potentially allowing them to resemble the model. These advertising techniques mislead women and often imply that the working class and people of colour are unworthy of recognition. Oyedemi identifies that “the culture of pressing, straightening and relaxing one’s hair is not only physical violence on the self but also a cultural violence passed on from generation to generation” (539). Therefore, Matlwa chooses to draw attention to this process by illustrating the horrors of chemical straightening through the eyes of a child. This custom reinforces the cyclic nature of colonial values in post-apartheid South Africa.

Wealth and whiteness are often romanticised in the global South. Matlwa emphasises this through Ofilwe's statement that she could not find "black faces [she] liked in the magazine" and Fikile's failure to find merit within Black South African society (Matlwa 2007, 69). Fikile refuses to accept that her non-white identity is irreversible, which fuels her quest to alter her appearance. She "struggles to accept her black identity" and detests her people due to the continuing "legacies of apartheid" in current South Africa, which have "adversely affected her, namely, poverty, the definition[s] of beauty and sexual violence" (Montle & Mogoboya 2020, 172). Women are forced to equip themselves against these colonial reminders. This signals the importance of intervention efforts to rewrite the narrative that has been forming since the dawn of democracy. Similar to the research of Montle and Mogoboya, Kaunda and Hewitt identify that these legacies "have left deep psychological wounds on race", which were not resolved following the abolishing of apartheid and endure in the current political climate (2018, xix). This has impacted how individuals view their race in relation to other South Africans. Oyedemi similarly argues that following the apartheid era, "social structures of class, hierarchy, gender, race and so forth operate with violence that births a legacy of cultural and symbolic violence" (2016, 538). These researchers highlight the intersectional relationship between the issues discussed in this dissertation.

Despite her minor role in the café, Fikile believes she carries a more significant role than her co-workers since she interacts directly with the customers. Margaret Lenta argues that Fikile is "enchanted by the magazine version" of the affluent lifestyle, and although she is "exploited" at the Silver Spoon Café, she writes it off as the "cost of whiteness" (2009, 65). Thus, Miss Becky exhibits the coloniality of power over Fikile while Fikile illustrates coloniality of being. Since Fikile is young and desperate for employment, she fails to identify the abuse and exploitation she receives at work, especially because she is close to the community that she admires. Her encounter with Miss Becky's daughter, Caroline, is evidence of Lenta's argument. When Caroline unfairly reprimands Fikile in the presence of the kitchen staff, she resolves that her employer's daughter "has no appreciation for the hierarchy of" the establishment because she "disrespect[s] [Fikile] in front of the kitchen staff" whom Fikile believes is beneath her (Matlwa 2007, 104). However, Fikile is adamant that her employer would never mistreat her and commands her co-workers to follow Caroline's instructions. Accordingly, Fikile's colleagues pity her due to her deluded attitude. This is similar to Ofilwe's approach toward her disadvantaged cousins. Both protagonists believe they are elevated owing to their positions in the context of the surrounding upper-class communities, leaving their peers

disillusioned by their arrogance. Ofilwe perceptively describes the class dynamic of South Africa, observing that:

even amongst the poor there are those who are poor and even amongst the lower class there are those who are lower class. Perhaps it is consoling for us that there is always some who are worse off: they are a group who are dumped with the heap of scorn that has been offloaded onto our own heads. (42)

Although financial success is the favoured determinant of class position in society, as in the past, physical appearance/ race and family ties still subtly dictate social standing in many communities across democratic South Africa. Ofilwe implies that those suffering are reassured that many are in more dire circumstances. The 2021 looting events suggested a national restructuring is necessary as the destruction targeted the working class and outlets that cater to those who could afford amenities that poverty-stricken communities cannot. The period led to food and fuel shortages that spread fear across South Africa, causing panic buying and aggravating food scarcity.

Fikile dislikes the Tlous because she believes they are masquerading as upper-class citizens. Her opinions are entrenched in Western culture, so she cannot understand the post-apartheid privileges she witnesses through Ofilwe's family. The Nazi dictator responsible for the holocaust, Adolf Hitler, believed in a perfect 'Aryan race', consisting of individuals with blond hair, blue eyes, and white skin, ironically a group to which he could never belong since he did not meet the idealistic requirements, denoting a self-hatred that Fikile and Ofilwe also illustrate. Similarly, Fikile idolises 'whiteness', aspires to be accepted into wealthy white society and wants the Tlous to be rejected. As a result, she uses caramel blond hair extensions to change her hair colour, green contact lenses to alter her eyes and skin-lightening cream, but she only fools herself. Her choice of green contact lenses alludes to the metaphorical 'green-eyed monster', a personification of jealousy. Fikile is jealous of the Tlou family for achieving what she desires; therefore, she resents Ofilwe. Fikile's "obsession" with Europeanism is a "metaphor for cultural dislocation" and a pursuit of a successful life that is beyond her grasp in a "society which reeks with coloniality" (Moopi and Makombe 2020, 10). She is not welcomed into the upper-class community despite her sacrifices and efforts. During childhood, she is abandoned by her mother, who commits suicide, and her grandmother, a domestic worker for white families. Fikile's uncle molests her while she is too young to understand, further influencing her rejection of 'blackness'. Furthermore, the negative portrayal of Africa in global

narratives affects the “psycho-social health” of citizens and leads to “self-hate or shame” (Kaunda and Hewitt 2018, xx). Fikile takes this further as she allows stereotypes of her lower-class community to influence how she views her identity and interacts with her peers.

Due to the sexual abuse, Black “men disgust [her]. [She believes that] all of them are a bunch of criminals. [To Fikile, they are a] bunch of uneducated criminals. [She notices that] [t]hey look at [her] like they want to rape [her] and [she] know[s] they would do it if there weren’t so many people around” (Matlwa 2007, 93). Fikile's observations of Black men are shaped by the men who objectify her as she passes them in public. Her generalised “description of black men” implies that she has distanced herself “from her people” (Moopi and Makombe 2020, 10). She despises her community; thus, she is distancing herself from her reality. Even though she is a victim of sexual violence, Fikile remains in the care of her uncle because she does not have other viable options. This representation alludes to the countless cases where South African women stay in abusive situations because they cannot financially provide for themselves. Inevitably, Miss Becky, whom Fikile respects and admires, also disappoints Fikile by unfairly reprimanding her for correcting a rude customer who refused to follow the restaurant rules. Fikile is subjected to rejection from white and non-white individuals, indicating how fickle society can be toward women of colour. The portrayal of Fikile suggests that inequality places women in lowly positions without job security. In addition, Fikile’s male co-worker, Ayanda, is favoured, and Miss Becky often overlooks his transgressions. Fikile’s tale reflects the relationship between class, race, and gender issues.

Fikile unintentionally attracts the attention of Paul, an older white customer. He orders alcohol and pays large sums, encouraging Fikile to “keep the change” (Matlwa 2007, 170). Upon their first meeting, without waiting for her consent, Paul grabs Fikile’s “arms”, pulls her “toward him”, and kisses her “before [she has] a chance to figure out what [is] going on” (170). Although this is a sexual violation, Fikile does not rebuke his advances. A week after their first meeting, they flirt like “old friends” (170). Comparing Fikile’s attitude toward black men at the train station with Paul’s conduct illustrates the extent of her prejudice toward non-white men and her preference for whiteness. When Miss Becky dismisses her, Fikile resolves that she will refuse to return as an employee; instead, she plans to tell her boss that she is “leaving with Paul” (180). Thus, Fikile naively views Paul as her ‘white saviour’. She relies on Paul’s wealth and position in the upper-class society she strives to infiltrate. By depending on this man to rescue her, Fikile leans into the damsel in distress motif, whereby she surrenders her

agency in want of masculine intervention. Throughout her narrative, Fikile believes that her position at the Silver Spoon café is secure; Miss Becky proves that employees are expendable, destabilising Fikile's plan for her future. Fikile realises that her class, race, and gender leave her at a disadvantage when she is disciplined for gently discouraging a wealthy white male customer from smoking in a non-smoking area.

### **The Need for Decoloniality Among People of Colour**

Access to a higher class creates opportunities for Ofilwe to enact change and alter negative perceptions about people of colour. At the same time, Fikile is able to demonstrate the resilience of underprivileged individuals. Hashi Kenneth Tafira's chapter, "The Black Middle Class and Black Struggles" in *Black Nationalist Thought in South Africa: The Persistence of an Idea of Liberation* (2016), discusses the potential of the Black middle class in contemporary South Africa. The unequal treatment of the different classes in South Africa is an issue which originated during the colonial period. The following extract, translated from the introductory issue of John Tengo Jabavu's *Imvo Zabantsundu*, the first South African newspaper to be written in isiXhosa in November 1884, highlights the beginning of the class divisions among African citizens created by the colonial government stating that:

For over a half a century missionaries have been labouring assiduously among natives of this country, and the government has invested, and is still investing enormous sums of money with the professed object of civilising them. The result—which will ever be mentioned in these columns with gratitude—is, that a large class has been formed among the Natives which has learnt to loathe the institutions of barbarism, and to press for the better institutions of civilised life. Hitherto this newly formed class has been tossing from pillar to post, despised by its former friends of the heathen state, and misunderstood by the representatives of civilisation in this country. This uncertain drifting hither and thither of 'school kaffirs', as they are called, has given rise to some hateful comparisons as to whether 'red kaffirs' are better than 'school kaffirs.' The fact is, the so-called 'school kaffirs', or as they are sometimes called, 'educated natives', have had stirred up within them a desire for better things, and in their perhaps clumsy efforts to attain them, they have been misunderstood by their white friends. This is due to the fact that there is no touch between the great mass of reclaimed natives and those who are on the shores of civilisation. (Tafira 2016, 185)

The above excerpt justifies Ofilwe's narrative and represents the resulting coconut experience. Jabavu's article suggests that the class struggle placed the Black middle class in a difficult position between those less fortunate and the White elite. According to Tafira, Jabavu opposed the "formation of the Congress in 1912" in favour of the "Cape non-racial system", which

worked with “sympathetic whites” to create “pressure” for the “established parliamentary” structure (2016, 185). Jabavu stood for unity over further societal divisions. His views align with Oyedemi’s concept of “postracialism”, which commonly describes “a society where race does not exist” (2016, 543). Rainbowism sought to achieve this by blending cultures to form a cohesive body. Although educated and influential, Jabavu rejected the status of superiority that separate classes instituted, a split that mirrored the objectives of apartheid. Furthermore, rifts were created within communities and distracted citizens from the oppression and discrimination of the colonial authorities. These issues have evolved into the inequalities that South Africans currently experience, which Matlwa critiques. Thus, examining the connections between the past and present is vital. Although *Coconut* is divided into two parts, Matlwa uses stream-of-consciousness narratives, revealing the incoherent mental state of both central characters. The frequent shifts in their thoughts indicate they are preoccupied with the intersection between their racial identity and class. They recall moments of discrimination that had previously been repressed.

According to Tafira, African intellectuals experience “cultural shame”, causing them to associate Indigenous customs and beliefs with “tribalism”, “barbarism”, and “primitive” lifestyles (2016, 186) due to derogatory depictions of Africa. *Coconut* addresses cultural shame when Ofilwe’s maternal grandmother, Koko, insists that their family conduct a “thanksgiving ceremony” to celebrate Mr Tlou’s financial success (Matlwa 2007, 54). When preparations go awry, and the Tlous are reprimanded for contravening Little Valley Country Estate regulations, Gemina blames Koko. Gemina expresses her frustration with her mother, stating that Koko “insist[s]” on “witchcraft”, “reminding [them] of [their] backward ways” (56). This incident illustrates the unease and embarrassment about traditional beliefs once the Tlous established themselves in modern society. Tafira determines that cultural shame during the colonial period stemmed from “exposure to Western civilisation” and “formal education” (2016, 186). Currently, several South African people of colour are similarly influenced by aspects of globalisation and the attractive elements of Eurocentrism that rob Africans of their uniqueness. Before the concluding introspective paragraph of part one, Matlwa draws attention to the negative aspects of Western education, stating that:

[i]n every classroom children are dying. It is a parasitic disease, seizing the mind for its own usage. Using the mind for its own survival. So that it might grow, divide, multiply and infect others. Burnt sienna washing out. DNA coding for white greed,



blond vanity, and blue-eyed malevolence. IsiZulu forgotten. Tshivenda a distant memory. (Matlwa 2007, 69)

*Coconut* indicates how coloniality is reinforced through the influence of the global media and education systems that eliminate the virtues of the global South. The reference to “white”, “blond”, and “blue-eyed” is comparable to Adolf Hitler’s criteria for the ‘Aryan race’ (69). The novel relates “greed”, “vanity”, and “malevolence” because the colonial and apartheid governments birthed wicked, materialistic rules that focused on the outward appearance of citizens to determine their worth, just as Hitler executed individuals based on their race (69). Ofilwe and Fikile are inadvertently victims of Western media indoctrination. As exhibited in *Coconut* through both women, “the media operate on the symbolic and the cultural, the images of beautiful European textured hair portrayed in movies, television shows, glossy magazines and so forth thus become a cultural hegemonic ideology of beautiful hair” (Oyedemi 2016, 542). I concur with Oyedemi’s findings, and further argue that the media encourages falsities among women. Matlwa’s protagonists are subject to feelings of “inferiority”, which they assume are “overcome” through immersion into “European mannerisms and [by] adopting a superiority complex toward their own” (Tafira 2016, 186). Thus, they relinquish their psychological freedom. Fikile recalls an incident in which she told her teacher that she would grow up to be white. Peter Moopi and Rodwell Makombe explain that Fikile’s belief that whiteness is superior “highlights the systemic perpetuation of colonial matrices of power in the global power structure” (2007, 10).

Tafira’s research suggests that a sense of ambiguity surrounds the educated Black middle class attitudes toward their African heritage compared to European standards, resulting in them looking towards the West for direction. Likewise, “[i]n search of an identity, [the ‘coconut’] would cleanse themself[f] of the stigma associated with African-ness” (Tafira 2016, 187). I agree with Tafira since Ofilwe and Fikile are guilty of adopting this tendency. Matlwa uses her characters to raise awareness about the casualties of the transformation engulfing the global South, which eliminates cultural traits. Hence, people of colour are enslaved again. Along the same lines, Ronit Frenkel proposes that the concept of “ambiguous positionings” in society is the core of “African Feminist Scholarship” (2008, 6). This ambiguity stems from instances where women have served as allies, such as during the apartheid struggle, but are treated as inferior in the post-apartheid era. Frenkel notes that including diverse cultures in African Feminism is necessary but has proved challenging in South Africa due to the number of

communities. She believes that refraining from exposing injustices against women is detrimental to national progress.

Tafira states that “[i]f the elite study [South Africa’s] past and understand [the significance of] their customs and institutions, they would discover [reasons to be] proud and [realise that the rejection of] traditional African culture [is] due to a state of [unintentional, self-inflicted] mental slavery” (2016, 187). The conclusion of *Coconut* shows how Ofilwe and Fikile have come to terms with what Tafira describes. Both women reach a sense of awareness during their narratives after reflecting on the past. By switching between the past and present, Matlwa encourages South Africans to confront the ghosts of our history. Tafira’s research reveals how many educated African upper middle class citizens sought to differentiate themselves from the uneducated or underprivileged masses, which led to the adoption of these insulting labels, such as ‘Coconut’. Some members of this group redefined the term as a badge of honour to celebrate their elevated position. These individuals are often discriminated against by White and non-white people alike since:

[l]oyalty to race and unquestioning allegiance have been historically constructed as primary; those who detoured from the prescribed path were labelled “sell-outs,” “traitors” or “Uncle Toms,” and those who deviated from forms of racial identity and cultural expression were called “Oreos” or “Incognegroes.” (Tafira 2016, 193)

These budding ‘coconuts’ (similar to play-whites, referring to those who try to assimilate into white society) are ostracised based on their financial circumstances, academic abilities, and lacking knowledge of traditional culture. This stigma further affects women due to their interest in Eurocentric beauty practices. However, many Black South African intellectuals have benefitted from Western education and used their opportunities to uplift communities and represent the voices of those left behind. They use English, formerly the language associated with the coloniser, to authentically tell stories that would otherwise go untold, as Matlwa, Wicomb, and Khan have done. This can lead to the rise of consciousness movements, which result in decoloniality. However, those who chase “power” and “accumulation” often leave people experiencing poverty to fend for themselves (Tafira 2016, 192). Decoloniality is slowed because the upper middle class and many in power have clung to negative aspects of Eurocentric culture and ideals as they are awarded higher societal standing. I agree with Fanon’s assertion that “decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon” (1967, 27). South Africa’s history indicates that challenges arise when marginal groups seek to oppose the

dominant ideology. Tafira also points out how the elite “use national resources in schemes that don’t benefit the people, but themselves”, which is “seen in the dire social conditions [that citizens] live under” (Tafira 2016, 192).

In the novel, those emulating the behaviour of the White/ European upper middle class often behave as if there is no longer any discrimination because they have risen above it. Many of the characters in *Coconut* depict this naïve view. After gaining “entrance” into a previously restricted world, they ignore the suffering of others (192). The Black elite created an exclusive society, denying access to those beneath them in a manner similar to how the white elite had prevented them from being recognised as equals and reaping the benefits of success during the colonial and apartheid periods. This creates a cycle of oppression and promotes societal divisions. Friction between classes detracts from inequality, which is increasing. Several youth, especially, have unintentionally adopted Eurocentric attitudes and perceptions. People of colour and those recognising that inequality is a major post-apartheid issue should “have vested interests in racial and economic equality regardless of their cultural identification, class, gender or age” (194).

The tensions and violent retaliation during the 2021 looting incidents resemble the 1949 Cato Manor riots, which saw Black South Africans redirecting their pent-up frustration towards Indian communities in Durban. Tafira highlights how “collective black identity is worsened and complicated by intergroup conflicts and cultural and class differentiation” (2016, 194). The economic fissures among South Africans and the rising unemployment rate stoked the fire among the disgruntled poor. Many women join the informal sector and are often the sole breadwinners in their families. The working class struggle to compete with the wealthy, who continue pursuing capital-driven economic exploits, inevitably increasing tensions. As people of colour are divided by race and class, the Black middle class becomes “culturally estranged, thus posing questions of [African] authenticity” (Tafira 2016, 194). However, the sacrifices made to change their social standing do not guarantee acceptance by those already established in mainstream society. Fikile’s opinion of the Tlous reflects how this upper middle class Black family is viewed despite achieving success by European standards. Fikile declares that she does not understand:

why [the family frequent the Silver Spoon Café]. Every Sunday they [go], nobody knows who they are, they do not fit in, everybody can see it, everybody knows it,

[she is] sure they know it too, but they [go] anyway. Such forced individuals. New money is what they are and that is why [Fikile] hate[s] them. That is why [she] avoids them. (Matlwa 2007, 119)

Ofilwe's most significant insecurity is captured by Fikile's soliloquy above. The Silver Spoon café alludes to upper-class society since being born with a silver spoon in one's mouth refers to those from a privileged background. Miss Becky has created an elitist environment. In Fikile's eyes, it is evident that the Tlous force themselves to part-take in Western upper middle class cultural practices. Although they gain what Fikile sets out to achieve, she cannot celebrate their fortune because they do not resemble her idea of wealth. Tshepho implies on several occasions that his sister cannot be a slave to two masters; thus, she must choose between the comforts of her bourgeois life and her African heritage. By questioning the loyalty of a select group to a specific community, South Africans recreate the segregation of apartheid and the prejudice of colonial rule. Thus, theorists such as Oyedemi contemplate "the racist policies of apartheid" (2016, 538). For instance, "the texture of [a person's] hair" decided the "class social hierarchy in society, and where an individual's existence, well-being and economic survival was linked to racial structure determined by the color of one's skin and the texture of hair" (538). Although these discriminatory procedures are no longer instituted, population groups are still controlled by appearance. Thus, issues such as those experienced in 1949 and 2021 are doomed to resurface until the nation eradicates inequality and elitism. For this to occur, the previously marginal groups must confront the pain of South Africa's history and make peace with the events that have impacted several generations of non-white citizens.

A decolonial approach rejects capitalism and corruption while promoting the advancement of people who were previously discriminated against. This paradigm also advocates for innovation among people of colour so that they rely less on ideas from the West. Africans have proved that this is possible when citizens work together to repair the faults of a formerly broken nation. Intellectuals can spark discourse, which might lead to new efforts toward unification. Matlwa suggests that South Africans have become stewards of globalisation. Along these lines, Tafira affirms that "middle-class Africans" are willing "soldiers of imperialism" (2016, 194). He identifies modern African people as no longer a "homogeneous cohort" (193). South Africa's history indicates this has been evident since the inception of class divisions. Oyedemi presents his argument concerning inequality as follows:

the social structures of class and hierarchy that have historically been instituted based on racial differences resulted in exclusion and unequal distribution of power and life chances. To maintain this exclusion certain groups in society create [a] standard of acceptability that other groups strive to achieve in order to gain access to resources of achieving well-being. The social categorization of race has often been the standard in much of South African and American history, and for those not belonging to the dominant European class of whiteness, passing to achieve closeness to it guarantees acceptability and access to resources of achieving well-being. (2016, 541)

The above extract describes current South Africa as much as the nation that existed during the colonial and apartheid periods. The irony for individuals like Ofilwe and Fikile, as *Coconut* demonstrates, is that they are “misfit[s] in the borrowed European cultural atmosphere because Europeans would never accept them as equals no matter how much” (189) they transform themselves into pseudo-Europeans. *Coconut* portrays women as vessels for revolution but highlights the various influences that inhibit Black women’s agency. Ofilwe and Fikile are at a transitional phase in their lives where they become privy to the realities of their surroundings, which are constantly in flux. My findings indicate an intersectional relationship among race, gender and class whereby Black South African women are discriminated against according to their racial classification and economic standing. Ofilwe’s narrative indicates that she is still excluded and misunderstood despite her family’s financial success and educational achievements. Fikile is guilty of discriminating against Ofilwe and her family yet fails to recognise that she is a victim of oppression. The racism Fikile endures at work is exacerbated by her impoverished circumstances as she has to work harder to maintain the image of a “charming young waitress” (Matlwa 2007, 84).

Just as Fikile’s uncle inspires her rejection of blackness, Ofilwe’s parents encourage her to embrace whiteness early in life at the expense of her individuality. Malesela Montle and Mphoto Mogoboya state that “the loss of (South) African cultural identity could be noted in the changes that occur every day as a result of modernity”, as portrayed in *Coconut* (2020, 173). As a result of colonisation, South Africans are under the impression that progress translates to the emulation of Western society in the novel. Fikile and Ofilwe are unperturbed by the disproportionate “distribution of wealth” in South Africa; however, both women yearn to find a “space within for herself” (Moopi and Makombe 2020, 10). Thus, their insensitivity signals the disconnect between advancement and equality. Ofilwe and Fikile both grapple with acceptance of their appearances and backgrounds due to “alienation” from upper-class society, which propagates “an ingrained self-hatred” (Raditlhalo 2010, 26). This stems from “a situation

where young South Africans suffer from a debilitating sickness of whiteache, in which they do not wish to ‘pass for white’ but to ‘be white’” (11). These sentiments echo Fikile’s childhood dream of becoming ‘white’ since she believes this comes with financial stability and a better life. The reference to passing for white is a central theme in the next chapter dealing with Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, indicating that identity crises surrounding race are a cross-community phenomenon. The economy is structured so that individuals must become selfish to reach and maintain high living standards. People experiencing poverty are trampled underfoot in a rush for success. The mismanagement of funds by municipal officials across South Africa worsens this plight.

My analysis of Ofilwe and Fikile’s narratives identifies similar issues endured by these young women. One glaring similarity is the psychological castration of Black males through coloniality, leading to female subordination and sexual violence. As mentioned previously, Ofilwe innocently informed readers about her father’s extramarital affairs, which are condoned. He risks the destruction of his family for pleasures that are associated with privileged circumstances. Thus, *Coconut* indicates that men treated as inferior, such as Mr Tlou, seek illicit means of proving their masculinity and worthiness. The women in their lives are the unfortunate victims of these practices. Gemina and Ofilwe ignore Mr Tlou’s activities to maintain familial peace, thus preserving the image of a perfect upper-class family. Matlwa suggests they ignore the problem because Mr Tlou finances their affluent lifestyles. These women believe that without his money, they would be “nothing” (Matlwa 2007, 13).

Mary K. Holland and Heather Hewett (2021) in *#MeToo and Literary Studies: Reading, Writing, and Teaching about Sexual Violence* determine that:

Fiction and nonfiction narratives written by authors across the globe remind us that sexual violence, while ubiquitous, is also tied to histories of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and structural inequities, a reality often overlooked by #MeToo. Nafeesa Nichols acknowledges this reality by examining how intimate spaces become sites of sexual violence and of resistance and agency, for women in post-apartheid South Africa in Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut*. (9-10)

Nichols recognises that Fikile is sexually assaulted by her uncle owing to him bottling up his frustration about the direction his life has taken. He is emotionally exploited by his superiors, which causes him to abuse his niece. She is mentally scarred and develops bitterness toward Black people. Thus, coloniality ignites a chain reaction culminating in intolerance. Matlwa’s

*Coconut* shows there is still hope for the modern Black South African to embrace decolonial attitudes. She criticises those who reject the West completely as she recognises that there are also benefits emanating from European influence. Her work suggests that an evolving nation must reflect on the past and appreciate progress. However, she warns against the loss of South African identity. Uniqueness comes with being a citizen of a democratic South Africa, which should unite whites and non-whites in celebrating a rich multicultural heritage. Oyedemi suggests that “the process of shaking off over 300 years of colonial subjugation and apartheid has led to the renaissance of Blackness, and being African is unashamedly celebrated” (2016, 540). This mirrors the Negritude movement, which occurred in France and French colonies during the twentieth century as a counter to the racism and oppression of Black people. It highlighted the importance of Black academics and artists. *Coconut* combines academic thought and art to create a platform that addresses the ostensibly unnoticed issues people of colour face. The road to peace is paved with sacrifice and forgiveness. Thus, inequality should be dealt with through local and national approaches. Aretha Phiri indicates that the emergence of capitalism and ‘coconutism’ cannot solely be attributed to Eurocentrism and vestiges of colonialism since these individuals are “evolving images and imaginings of whiteness and blackness in [a] South Africa [with communities that are] interdependent, shifting, and dialectical” (2013, 170-171). I agree that these post-apartheid phenomena are a sign of the distance South Africans have come and a reason to continue shattering the barriers the global North has indirectly put in place.

### **Conclusion**

*Coconut* exposes the societal divisions in post-apartheid South Africa. Ofilwe and Fikile provide alternative views of the inequalities that people of colour contend with. South Africa is depicted as an indistinct space that has become a breeding ground for intolerance. Thus, the protagonists develop ambivalent personalities and struggle to integrate. Intersectionality is a valuable theory that shows the relationship between racial, class and gender issues. At the novel’s end, Ofilwe and Fikile are at a crossroads, symbolic of hope. Matlwa’s novel ignites discourse about the socio-economic disparities that have ravaged the nation since apartheid. Furthermore, the recent outbursts of looting, racial tensions and gender-based violence display the country’s skewed distribution of wealth and persistent discrimination. These issues have worsened since 2007, when *Coconut* was published. The novel’s message is still relevant in addressing the problems in the current society. Both protagonists experience growth comparable to that of a *Bildungsroman* narrative as they reflect on the experiences that shape

their past. These phases reflect the stages that South Africa has experienced on the journey toward a unified ‘rainbow nation’ and thus its reflection of rainbowism.

## **Chapter 2: “Colour Consciousness”: Class and Racial Inequality among Coloured Communities during the Apartheid Era Highlighted in Zoë Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987)**

During Apartheid, “Coloured” came to be defined by what you were not. According to the *Population Registration Act of 1950*:

A white person is one who in appearance is, or who is generally accepted as, a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance is obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a Coloured person. A native is a person who is in fact or is generally accepted as a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa. A Coloured person is a person who is not a white person or a native.

– Vahed & Desai (2018, 73)

### **Introduction**

Colour consciousness is an appropriate title for this chapter as the colour consciousness theory proposes that an individual’s complexion directly impacts how he or she is viewed and treated in society. The above passage suggests that the Coloured race served as an equivocal category for those who could not be incorporated into the initial binary racial classifications of the apartheid. This excerpt from apartheid legislation emphasises the primary aim of the policy, which was to conquer a nation through internal divisions. During this period, beyond dividing the population, race categorisations split families. The shocking case of Sandra Laing, who was racially classified and reclassified, exposed the flawed system. Laing’s race was as much a paradox as the theory of Schrödinger’s cat, the feline considered potentially simultaneously dead and alive. Laing was genetically white, but her appearance was that of a non-white person. Her Afrikaner parents were keen supporters of the apartheid regime. Due to her dark complexion and “afro hair”, she was regarded as a “black girl”, and “under the strict segregationist laws of [a]partheid, the fact that she had two white parents” could destabilise a structure founded on racial oppression (Younge 2012, 105). Thus, “Sandra was removed from her whites-only school and reclassified as coloured” (105). Her parents strongly disputed the reclassification, “apparent in her father’s explanation” in an article for the *Rand Daily Mail*, stating that:



Sandra has been brought up as a white. She is darker than we are, but in every way, she has always been a white person. If her appearance is due to some ‘coloured blood’ in either of us, then it must be very far back among our forebears, and neither of us is aware of it. If this is, in fact, so, does it make our family any different from so many others in South Africa? (in Younge 2012, 106)

After much departmental screening, media coverage and pleading, the apartheid government reclassified Sandra as white. However, in a South Africa, where racial divisions were treated as sacred, she did not find acceptance in white society. Eventually, she joined a “black” community and had herself reclassified as “coloured” (106). Sandra’s story highlights the ambivalence that characterises the South African Coloured population and is relevant when analysing Wicomb’s anthology. The phrase, “every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand”, applies to South African society during colonial, apartheid, and democratic periods (Luke 11:17; Matthew 12:25; Mark 3:24-25, *New International Version*).

As discussed in Chapter One regarding the racial tensions in 1949 and 2021, divisions based on race and class have repeatedly ruptured South African society. These communal conflicts have inhibited progress and compounded the damage caused by colonialism and apartheid. The Coloured community is among the victims of a flawed social system. Although the tyrannical rule induced racial discrimination, class disparities were also prevalent. Zoë Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) follows the life of Frieda Shenton, a Coloured girl growing up during the apartheid era. Frieda’s parents emphasise the importance of class throughout her life. They believe the Afrikaans-speaking White and Coloured citizens lack “the refined quality of the more ‘civilized’ British” (Wright 2000, 9). In this way, they adopt a colonial mentality (coloniality of being) that affects Frieda’s identity development. Frieda learns what it means to be a Coloured woman in South Africa through her narrative. Wicomb’s writing “bears out the process of racial formation and gendering through institutionalised patriarchal structures” (Laue 2017, 19), depicting intersections between race, gender, and class.

This chapter explores the racial divergence within apartheid South Africa, specifically focusing on the Coloured population. Many preconceived notions highlighted in Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* still resonate in post-apartheid society. Frieda provides a glimpse of the transitions experienced by Coloured citizens. Her narrative is also significant to our

understanding of South African society, which is separated according to “class aspirations and economic disadvantages that carry forward a history of vulnerability” (Wright 2000, 7). This dissertation uses Wicomb’s text to analyse the intersection between class, race, and gender within the Coloured population during apartheid. Sandra Laing’s story is suitable for analysing the text as it emphasises the detrimental aspects of racial discrimination.

### **Wicomb**

Kharys Laue (2017), regarding Wicomb’s “When the Train Comes”, comments on the author’s critique of gender relations by suggesting that:

Wicomb’s writing investigates, in the day-to-day lives of “coloured” women, the docile female body as it is shaped to perform normative femininity through practices of obedience, adherence to white standards of beauty, and the execution of domestic and maternal roles. Under the objectifying male gaze, the female characters in [Wicomb’s] short stories are perceived as inferior versions of the human and are perpetually at risk of further dehumanisation through gender failure. (30)

The following analysis exemplifies the relevance of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*. Wicomb’s female characters refute clichés of Colouredness. Her writing is a narrative of racial identity and deals with gender issues and social structures that negatively impact women. Laue further argues that non-white South African women “were – and often still are – subjected to” various forms of oppression (19), highlighting the relevance of Wicomb’s work even after thirty-five years. Laura Fuchs-Eisner asserts that “during the struggle against apartheid and the building of a new nation, questions of race were so prevalent that difference and inequalities concerning gender and class tended to be” overlooked (2014, 5). Thus, literature exploring these topics is vital for comparative analysis. Fuchs-Eisner notes that Wicomb rejects a simplistic approach to South African feminist issues. Kara Lee Donnelly determines that Wicomb’s writing “is strongly associated with [...] a post-modernism inflected by Black Consciousness and feminism” (2014, 64). I concur with Fuchs-Eisner and Donnelly as Wicomb’s use of intersectional methods for Freida’s narrative reflects the appropriateness of this anthology for my study. As Devarakshanam Govinden points out, “Wicomb’s views on the construction of ‘coloured’ identity draws attention to”:

a shameful excess, an exorbitance of identity currently expressed in the construction of “coloured” nationhood that has surfaced since the [1994] elections. What the problem of identity indicates [...] is a position that undermines the new

narrative of national unity: the newly democratized South Africa remains dependent on the old economic, social, and also epistemological structures of apartheid. Wicomb criticizes the complicit construction of cultural practices, when the ethnic homelands of apartheid, as with District Six, [have been] accepted without question. She bemoans a refusal to engage with the collections of Colouredness, or interacting identities in a larger framework of South African citizenship. (Cited in Govinden 2008, 45)

Govinden notes that Wicomb is “aware of the complex cultural cross-overs and borrowings in South Africa”, which is evident in “*You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*” (45). Thus, using this text in a study about women of colour illustrates how issues have expanded and continue to impact South African women and is critical to understanding the intersectional relationship between class, race and gender.

### **Play-whites and *real* Coloureds**

To provide an analysis of the Coloured community, it is necessary to understand the initial subdivisions created by the apartheid government. For instance, the *Population Registration Act of 1950* lists seven groups belonging to the umbrella term, Coloured. These are as follows: “Cape Coloured, Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, ‘other’ Asiatic, and ‘other’ Coloured” (February 1991 [1981], 4). It is also implied that Coloured cannot be a ‘pure’ category as the population consists of individuals with hybrid parentage. This union violated apartheid legislation, as interracial relations were prohibited. V. A. February’s seminal analysis of the Coloured stereotype in South African literature provides a broad framework to support the argument of this study. He asserts that the “various definitions [of Coloured] gave rise to such practices as ‘trying for white’, ‘playing white’ and ‘passing for white’” (1991 [1981], 5). February explains, “since colour plays such a significant role in South Africa, some ‘coloureds’ often try to cross the colour line and pass themselves off as whites. They are referred to as ‘play-whites’ or people who are ‘trying for white’” (230). Some communities often criticised these individuals for rejecting their true identity.

*You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) comprises ten interrelated short stories narrated by Frieda Shenton. The first story, “Bowl Like Hole”, introduces Frieda and her parents. At an early age, Frieda observes the pecking order instituted by the apartheid authorities through the interactions between her parents and Mr Weedon, referred to by Mrs Shenton as a “true Englishman” and “a gentleman” (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 12). The idea of gentility stems from

European class systems based on wealth and pedigree. Frieda's narration reveals that her parents attempt to mimic Mr Weedon's speech patterns and behaviour. For instance, the story's title, "Bowl Like Hole", refers to a scene when Frieda's family learn the correct pronunciation of the word 'bowl', which the Shentons had previously assumed rhymed with 'howl'. Mr Shenton's conversations with Mr Weedon allow him to improve his spoken English. In this tale, the English language is a currency used to claim prestige among the Afrikaans-speaking residents of Little Namaqualand. Although the Shentons are not significantly wealthy, they are highly regarded due to their European ancestry and legendary command of English. Frieda's "parents are ashamed of their 'coloured' identities and emphasise their British heritage" (Sanger 2019, 87) while warning Frieda against behaviour characteristic of the lower Coloured classes such as Griquas and Hottentots.

Mr Weedon's choosing to "conduct his business from the magnificence of his car" (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 11) serves as a metaphor for the privilege of wealth, starkly contrasting the surrounding Namaqualand Coloured community. This introductory tale serves as a preface for Frieda's account. She reveals that to English speakers such as Mr Weedon, Afrikaans is an "impossible, barbaric" language (12). According to Frieda, the Afrikaans-speaking white community referred to as "Boers" are "uncouth", unlike the Englishmen (12). The Boers occupy the lowest class among the white population. This notion indicates that prejudice affected the ruling race, and divisions were based on ancestry. Frieda's father expresses his distaste toward the Afrikaner clan by suggesting that the "Boers could learn a few things from" Mr Weedon (13). Wicomb uses irony to contrast Mr Shenton and Mr Weedon as Frieda narrates the exchange of pleasantries between the men, stating that:

Mamma's asthma [was] mentioned [and Mr Weedon] explained how his wife suffered with hers [since] Cape Town [was] so damp in winter[,] she was forced to spend a hideous season in the Bahamas. Father tutted sympathetically. He would hate to spend several days away from home, let alone months. 'Yes,' said Mr Weedon, braiding his lapel with delicate fingers. How frail we all are [in] an uncertain world [where] even health cannot be bought [and] we must all march past as Death the Leveller makes his claim, and he looked up at a floating cloud in support of his theory of transience. (13)

The above extract displays the class differences within apartheid society. Mr Weedon expresses that his wife is "forced" to travel to a tropical paradise to escape winter (13). This is ironic as middle- and lower-class individuals like Mrs Shenton are forced to contend with health

complications as a result of seasonal conditions. However, Frieda's father is genuinely sympathetic as he is grateful for his home and the little he has accumulated. By acknowledging that "even health cannot be bought", Mr Weedon contemplates his mortality and unintentionally implies that in death, all are equal.

Mrs Shenton observes Mr Weedon's chauffeur and determines that he is either a "coloured, from Cape Town", a "play-white", or a "real coloured" (14). Her statement suggests that within the Coloured community, various classifications and hierarchies exist. The concept of 'play-white' is critical to understanding the racial dilemma that Coloured individuals experienced during the apartheid. This term, referring to a Coloured citizen who can pass as a white person and uses this to benefit, contrasts Sandra Laing, who was ostracised for racial ambivalence. Mrs Shenton scrutinises the authenticity of the driver by wondering if he is a "real coloured", implying that some individuals are not accepted as truly Coloured by their community (14). This is an example of the bias that Frieda's parents have against their people. The notion of the play-white also foreshadows Frieda's future in Cape Town.

Wicomb uses the metaphor of Mrs Shenton occupying "opposing worlds" to explore the ambiguity of the Coloured experience (14). Within this Coloured community, women such as Mrs Shenton resemble the white population enough that she cannot be classified as black but is a combination of non-white forebears; thus, she cannot be considered white. Frieda's narration repeats that her mother occupies "her two worlds so fully", suggesting that she can embrace her dual identity created by the apartheid government (14). Her repeated focus on her mother's rear indicates that Frieda is struck by Mrs Shenton's bushman buttocks. This alludes to the sexual images of non-white women. For instance, Sara Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman, was exploited by Europeans as a public attraction for her unusual appearance. Thus, curiosity devalued the human form into an animal or sexualised object for public consumption. The Khoikhoi are considered the ancestors of the original Coloured community.

The significance of skin colour is highlighted when Mrs Shenton contemplates whether "Mr Weedon[,] being a civilised man[,] might not mind a brown person driving his car" (14). By referring to the man as "a brown person", Wicomb illustrates that skin colour was a key factor when considering an individual for employment. Mrs Shenton, being of a lower class, does not understand that driving a wealthy person's car is an ordinary, low-wage job. She warns Frieda "not to speak Afrikaans to the children" in their community because she believes that they

should “understand English” (14). Mrs Shenton declares that both she and Mr Shenton “managed and [they] all have to put up with things they don’t understand” (14). This alludes to the masses forced to live under the uncertainty of segregationist rule. According to Frieda, to keep busy, her mother uses their “milk separator” to “frighten” the components of “calf’s milk” into “separation”. This is an allegorical device reflecting the apartheid machine that enforced societal separation. This metaphor also signifies the differentiation between the white and play-white groups, which are intertwined. In an interview with Aretha Phiri, Wicomb expresses her views about the concept of play whites by indicating that:

[i]f Apartheid claimed to promote racial purity and to protect whiteness, then the 1950 Population Registration Act and the Amendment Act of 1962 by which coloured people were given the opportunity to be reclassified as white, certainly undermined that claim. It was, of course, not really paradoxical: it made demographic and economic sense to try and boost the white population with those who could pass for white - and so to ensure European domination in a country where they are outnumbered. (Phiri and Wicomb 2018, 120)

This also suggests that “play-whites” were a strategic tool to create internal resentment toward those who chose to be reclassified (120). Wicomb’s reflection on system faults before democratic rule reinforces her criticisms in the anthology. For instance, Mr Weedon’s prideful acts are unfamiliar to Mr Shenton, who “marvel[s] at the modesty of this man who preferred to sit alone in the back seat of his own car” (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 15). Wicomb uses Mr Shenton’s naivety to emphasise how the white man separates himself from his non-white employee and the coloured man who assists him. Young Frieda is perceptive as she studies the interactions between her father and Mr Weedon. She understands that her father is tasked with helping Mr Weedon due to his communication skills, which is a “wonderful spectacle” (16). She realises this since her “Father was the only person for miles who knew enough English [and] could interpret”, which is essential since “Mr Weedon had a deep fear of appearing foolish” in front of the inferior class (16). This also indicates that beyond the physical barriers, communities were separated by language barriers, which are still evident in the post-apartheid era.

Mr Weedon offers cartons of cigarettes to the miners to reward them for their arduous work and gain their loyalty. These men “wait in semaphoric obedience” for the addictive product that helps this employer earn the favour of his workers (10). Mr Shenton politely declines the cigarettes because he does not smoke, which surprises Mr Weedon, who assumes that all would

gratefully accept his gift. Following the rejection of his supposed generosity, Mr Weedon wonders if “the wind [is] changing direction”, symbolising a shift in the atmosphere (18). Mr Shenton appears more civilised than he is given credit for, which suggests that Mr Weedon misjudges him based on the behaviour of the miners. Mrs Shenton criticises Frieda by comparing her to “a tame Griqua”, highlighting the prevailing class divisions among Coloured communities as Griquas are a caste less regarded than other sects. Since Frieda’s mother intends to insult her, it is evident that Mrs Shenton’s opinions are entrenched in social division. This introductory story highlights the complicated “relationship” that Coloured people have with “the English Language” and suggests that a peculiarity and “privilege” are associated with English people (Donnelly 2014, 70). Wicomb uses this story to foreground the impact of language on class divisions within Coloured communities during the apartheid.

The title story, “You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town”, presents a tentative Frieda. She sets out to terminate her unplanned pregnancy and end her relationship with Michael, her forbidden lover. Michael is white; therefore, the relationship and pregnancy are illegal according to the *Immorality Act, No. 5 of 1927*, “which forbade sex across the colour line” (in February 1991 (1981), 223). Beyond the legal implications, Frieda considers her family’s opinions, which disapproves of interracial relations. Her Aunt Trudie’s daughter, Marge, is referred to as a “disgrace” because “she should know better than to [fraternise] with white men” (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 74). However, Frieda believes that if the men were wealthy and of high social standing, her family would approve regardless of race. Aunt Trudie’s sentiments confirm the notion as she cannot understand how her daughter is “such a pretty girl” but “she can’t even find a nice rich man” (74). Her emphasis on the financial advantages of Marge’s suitor indicates that class negates racial prejudice, unlike in *Coconut*. Furthermore, Trudie implies that a woman’s beauty is a tool to attract male attention. She asserts that “there’s no place in the house for a girl who’s been used by white trash” (74). This prejudice mirrors the attitudes that the ruling class had toward people of colour. In comparison, Frieda thinks of Michael as a “steady young man” whom her father would admire for his “successful academic career” (74). However, she has not informed her family of their relationship. Unlike Trudie’s focus on material wealth, Frieda implies that educational pursuits would impress her father as it creates the potential for financial stability. Frieda also suggests that women must rely on men to secure their futures.

While travelling by bus, Freida overhears a conversation between two women who are domestic workers. Tiena, one of the women, complains about the selfishness of her employer, which emphasises materialism as a motif related to class. Tiena declares that for the wealthy, “the more you have, the more you have to [be alert,] count and check because you know you won’t notice or remember” if an item is unaccounted for (78). This implies that the tight-fisted are robbed of peace while attempting to hoard their possessions. Tiena also reveals that her employers underestimate her intelligence by assuming she cannot read. This is an example of how Coloured people were misjudged. Subsequently, Tiena shows that, despite her beauty, her employer’s daughter, Miss Lucy, “has to be smart to keep her man” (78). Lucy’s partner is credited as a “gentleman” by Tiena; therefore, Lucy has to ensure that he is gratified (78). This perception devalues Lucy as she is expected to fulfil her partner’s sexual desires to maintain his attention and affection. In this way, as Tiena asserts, Lucy loses her purity and innocence to preserve her relationship. However, Tiena cynically believes that no other man would “have what another man has pushed to the side of his plate”, which reinforces the urgency of Lucy’s efforts (78). Contrary to Lucy’s predicament, Frieda rejects a future with Michael. She refuses to flee with him to England, where they would be allowed to marry and raise their multiracial child. Thus, Frieda shuns traditional gender roles.

When Freida and Michael are outside the abortion clinic, he clutches her hand as she exits his car. She wonders whether “he thinks that [she] will run off into the mountain [and] revert to savagery” (85). Her thought reflects the colonial view that non-white people were uncivilised. In the clinic, Freida uses a pseudonym and is asked if she is Coloured. She finds the question “absurd” as she looks at her “brown flesh” until she realises that the woman asking is “blinded” by Frieda’s “educated voice [and] accent” (86). Freida assures the woman that she is not Coloured. Immediately, Freida internally expresses guilt for denying her identity through an intertextual reference as she “wait[s] for all the cockerels in Cape Town to crow simultaneously” (86). Thus, Frieda alludes to the apostle Peter, who denied knowing Jesus before the rooster crowed, which occurred despite Peter insisting that he would never reject Jesus. In “Bowl Like Hole”, Mrs Shenton clarified her opinions on play-whites, intending to deter Freida from becoming a traitor to her people. However, Freida’s parents repeatedly encouraged her to embrace her European background while ignoring her Griqua heritage. These stories foreground how Coloured women experience identity crises.



Like Freida's parents, the woman conducting Freida's abortion demonstrates her prejudice against Coloured women by perpetuating stereotypes about this group. She declares that:

one must check nowadays [because] these coloured girls, you know, are very forward, terrible types. What do they think of [her], as if [she] would do every Tom, Dick and Harry. Not [her] you know, this is mos a respectable business and [she tries] to help decent women, educated women, you know. No you can trust [her]. No coloured girl's ever been on [her] sofa. (86)

The insistence on determining the client's race indicates that many coloured women become play-whites. This also reflects the significance of the *Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953*, which enforced the segregation of races for services and public spaces. The woman ironically labels coloured girls as "forward" but condones those for whom she provides the illegal service. She refers to her practice as "respectable", yet her actions are unlawful. Furthermore, she assumes that coloured women are indecent and uneducated. Freida's accent and educational achievements challenge the woman's racist assumptions. Ironically, Freida undermines her claim that she never assists Coloured women. By referring to Coloured women as "girls", the woman infantilises them.

The coloured helper at the clinic exhibits a greater awareness as she "stares at [Freida] with undisguised admiration" for convincing the racist woman that she is not Coloured, and she "winks" at Freida for giving her employer a comeuppance (86). The woman disrespects her assistant by revealing her prejudice against Coloured people in front of her coloured employee by asking Freida if she is coloured. Thus, Freida is an ambassador for the Coloured community. During the procedure, Freida associates the servant's "brown hands" with gentleness, while the medical practitioner's "white hands" are linked to pain (87). This inverts the connotations of colour, as white is usually associated with purity. Wicomb establishes that "the impossibility of bearing the mixed-race child indicates the intrusion of apartheid's logic of racial "purity" into individual lives" (Whittington 2013, 342). This tale signifies Freida's loss of innocence and increasing awareness as she enters adulthood.

### **The Significance of Appearance and Intellect**

The second tale in Wicomb's anthology is titled "Jan Klinkies". The narration consists of Freida's observations and experiences during a visit with her father to their eccentric relative, Jan Klinkies. Jan is described as a psychologically unstable recluse who has remained

unproductive for numerous years. While assessing his character, Frieda exposes stereotypes women face by considering her family's opinion of his wife, Truida. Frieda states that:

in spite of her fair skin, [Truida] came from a dark-complexioned family and there was something nylonish about her hair. Not that anyone knew of the primus stove in the back room, the metal comb, and the sweet smell of brilliantine welded to the shafts of [her] hair. The fashion of the French knot that Truida so foolishly adopted confirmed suspicions. There was no doubt that the little hairs on the nape of her neck were rolled up tightly like fronds, unfurled by the cautious hot comb. Truida had in other words made a good marriage and Jan had regrettably married beneath him. (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 24)

This observation reveals the harsh standards used to judge women of colour. Furthermore, it indicates that skin colour contributes to a woman's social standing, even among members of her race group. Frieda's remarks also suggest that the texture of a Coloured woman's hair is a principal factor when considering her status; therefore, women use several practices to achieve an acceptable appearance. Although it is implied that Truida is intelligent while Jan is peculiar, his family believes she is unworthy. Her husband's attitude toward her eventually drives her to leave him, which triggers a scandal within their community. While Truida set goals for their future, Jan had reservations about her plans. Through this failed relationship, Wicomb explores the pressures on Coloured women in their families and communities. Kharys Laue reflects on the idea that men could further their positions through "education", while for women, "marriage" was the only means to advance, placing undue importance on physical appearance (2017, 24).

While reminiscing about Truida, Frieda describes how the *Group Areas Act of 1950* affected Coloured communities. Apart from the disparaging sentiments about Truida, she was "remembered [for] her valour during the business of the loss of land" when non-white populations were forcibly removed from their homes (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 23). During revolts against apartheid, women defied sexist assumptions by displaying strength and resolve. Frieda notes Truida's knowledge and prudent nature are praiseworthy "for she was thorough in whatever she did" (23). Thus, the contrasting views suggest that women like Truida were shallowly criticised for their outward appearance and familial background despite the grudging acknowledgement of her possessing admirable qualities. Truida's experience emphasises the overlap of class and gender issues.

“When the Train Comes” is the title of the third story in Wicomb’s novel, which exposes Frieda’s internal identity crisis that stems from her perceived unattractive adolescent appearance. The first line of her narrative indicates that Frieda is “not the kind of girl whom boys look at” (31). This notion implies that the male gaze is used to determine the worth of women. Understandably, Frieda wishes to be desired by boys. The presence of Mr Shenton at the train station to see her off complicates her response. The Coloured boys hanging around aimlessly affirm the negative stereotypes about the community. Frieda consoles herself by suggesting that she “should be pleased [because] boys can use their eyes shamelessly to undress a girl” (31). However, Frieda’s insecurity resurfaces when observing the boys’ banter with the coloured girls who appear at the station. Wicomb illustrates that even at the juvenile stage, females can be regarded as sexual objects.

Frieda bases her opinion on universally accepted ideals, leading her to believe that boys do not find her attractive because she is “fat” (32). This causes her to loathe herself. She repeats that she is prone to “cry[ing] about being fat”, which emphasises her anguish (32-33). Frieda’s obsessive focus on her perceived flaws points to her “internalised hatred” of her gender and “race” (Handlarski 2007, 53). This ironically links this story to the preceding tale as Frieda’s attitude toward Truida is characterised by self-hatred, which could be the source of Jan Klinkies’ eccentric behaviour. Frieda is a member of a race surrounded by ambiguity, yet she is met with rejection due to her appearance. Mr Shenton contributes to his daughter’s increasing weight by encouraging her to eat large meals. He declares that they are “not paupers with nothing to eat. [His wife] was thin and sickly [because] she didn’t eat enough” (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 34). He is establishing that his family should not be viewed as underprivileged. Likewise, he does not want Frieda to have “cheekbones that jut out like a Hottentot’s” since this is a marker of a lower class (34). Mr Shenton believes Frieda’s increasing weight signifies his ability to provide for his family.

Nadia Sanger asserts that “Frieda is socialized by her parents, within the context of a racist South Africa, into believing that she is never good enough, and must strive towards mimicry, elevating the aspects of her identity which has its roots in European ancestry” (2019, 88). I argue that Frieda believes she is inferior due to her negative self-image based on her perception of beauty. At the same time, her parents teach her that certain groups of Coloured people are beneath them for her to uphold the family legacy. This forms Frieda’s “internalised racism”, which stems from her father’s judgement of other subclasses of Coloured people (Handlarski

2007, 53). She highlights the generational rift between her and Mr Shenton, declaring that her “Pa knows nothing of young people”; therefore, he cannot understand her afflictions (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 32). Mr Shenton is proud of his daughter’s intelligence, which indicates his aspirations; however, he becomes obsessed with Frieda achieving his dreams, allowing him to live vicariously through her, so he is blind to the adverse effects of the pressure on her. Frieda “believed that [she] was envied” except for her “appearance”, which can be attributed to her family’s haughtiness (35). This perception further exemplifies her prejudiced attitude toward other Coloured people.

Wicomb subtly presents the theme of sexual assault through Mr Shenton warning Frieda not to “play with boys now that [she is] a young lady, [menstruating], [as] it’s dangerous” (33). This correlates with the alarming rate of gender-based violence, which affects women of all races, ages and social standing, thus indicating a shared struggle. To protect his daughter from the perverse male gaze and to maintain “a habit of obedience”, Mr Shenton encourages Frieda to consume “second helpings of mealie porridge” every day (34). He exerts “patriarchal control” over his daughter to shield her from over-sexualisation (Handlarski 2007, 53). Denise Handlarski states that “Wicomb aligns racial and sexual politics” through her critiques of racial and feminist issues; thus, the text is “significant” even during the post-apartheid era (2007, 53). Similarly, Wicomb maintains that “feminism is not separate from issues of gender, race [and] economics [as it is] fundamentally relational” (Phiri and Wicomb 2018, 124). Thus, Wicomb uses her novels to comment on the intersection between these constructs that continue to affect South African society. Likewise, Laue asserts that Wicomb “explores the intersectional impact of race and gender on the socio-political lives” of South African women of colour (2017, 19).

At the train station, Frieda and her father wait “under the black and white arms of the station sign” (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 33). This image symbolises the racialised nature of South African society during apartheid and the borderline status associated with the mixed heritage of the Coloured population. Mr Shenton straddles the black-white divide by standing beneath the sign to indicate that he belongs to both communities. Through Frieda’s life, Wicomb suggests that education was the best chance for people of colour to escape racial inequality. Mr Shenton encourages Frieda to complete her secondary studies in Cape Town since there was “no high school” for their people in Little Namaqualand, and he does not want her “to be a servant” (34). Despite her dithering about leaving home, Frieda acknowledges that Coloured women during the apartheid had few options, which allowed them to attain a comfortable life. She admits that

“there is so much to be grateful for [and someday, she] will drive a white car” (34). Her optimism is fuelled by the possibility that she can escape the circumstances the government forced upon her family. This determination is a trait of those who tackled racial oppression by manipulating the fractures in a flawed system. Wicomb demonstrates this in the text through a newspaper extract which reads:

It was a short report on how a coloured deacon had won his case against the Anglican Church so that the prestigious St Mary’s School was now open to non-whites. The article ended sourly, calling it an empty and subversive gesture, and warning the deacon’s daughters that it would be no bed of roses. (41)

Although fictitious, the excerpt accurately represents how apartheid laws were contested and amended due to inconsistencies. This quotation is also a critique of churches that supported the intolerant regime despite these imperialistic views contradicting biblical teachings. For instance, Galatians 3:28 declares, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*The Bible, New International Version*). The bitterness of segregation supporters is evident as the journalist indirectly warns “the deacon’s daughters” and others that they shall be met with difficulty (41). The fundamental hypocrisy of apartheid ideology was underpinned by the justification of the inhumane system by the pseudo-religious support given by the Dutch Reformed Church in particular, but also by other denominations, as revealed in Marguerite Poland’s *A Sin of Omission* (2019).

Frieda represents her community as she embarks on her journey to St Mary’s School. Mr Shenton is referred to as “a clever chap” who “keeps up with the Boers” for his decision to send Frieda to a former white-only institution (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 37). His choice is an act of defiance which could potentially spark change for future generations. Frieda is inundated with encouragement to “show them, [the upper class], what [they, the lowly Coloured people] can do” (37). Her success contrasts the stereotypes about coloured people highlighted in the text. As Frieda timidly looks at her hands, she notices the “irrepressible cuticle, the stubby splayed fingernails that will never taper [which] is all [she has] to show, betraying generations of servants” (37). She understands that she must break the cycle of servitude. Together with considerable costs incurred to finance Frieda’s opportunity, Mr Shenton “insist[s] on [purchasing] new imitation leather bags, claiming that people judge by appearance” (37). This notion is the tale’s premise since Frieda ponders how she is discriminated against based on her appearance, as people of colour are.

Frieda again reflects on the effects of the *Group Areas Act* on her family and community. After living in the vastness of the veld, Mr Shenton scorns relocating to a township. He describes how the government expects his people to live “in rows in the village, [...] all boxed in with no room to stretch the legs” (39). Over time, people of colour were robbed of freedom through the ever-increasing discriminatory legislation. The government tried to police their movements, residence, romantic relations, education, careers, and other aspects of life. Thus, Mr Shenton believed that accumulating money was the only solution. He tells Frieda that “[b]rains are for making money and when [she goes] home with [her] senior certificate [she] won’t [go] back to a pack of Hotnos crouching in straight lines on the edge of the village” (40). He wants his daughter to escape the circumstances that many have accepted. Conversely, young Frieda does “not understand what he was fussing about” since, in the new settlement, they had been provided with electricity and running water from a communal tap (40). Her innocence prevents her from realising that the forced removal was an act of domination.

Despite the inequality, Mr Shenton refuses to be deterred, and his optimism impacts the community and his family. He aims to secure “the best education” for “his only daughter” since intelligence is seen as a form of retaliation (41). His monetary sacrifices indicate that his daughter’s future is his priority. He believes that “[i]gnorance, laziness and tobacco have been the downfall of [their] people” (42). Thus, he distances himself from stereotypical behaviour. Mr Shenton tells Frieda that “it is [their] duty to God to better [themselves], to use [their] brains and [their] talents” (42). Therefore, he motivates her to succeed. Frieda remembers a childhood friend named Jos who had been “bold and clever”, a child able to “master [*the First Sunnyside Reader*] within a week”, someone who “knew everything that grown-ups thought should be kept from [children]” (38). This child had the potential to thrive through her education. However, she is forced to leave school “when she turn[s] nine and her family move[s] to the village where her father [finds] a job at the garage”. This illustrates the limited opportunities during apartheid, and while Frieda’s father uplifts her, Jos’ education must be sacrificed.

In the next story, “A Clearing in the Bush”, the point of view shifts as a woman named Tamieta begins the narration. She is employed to “run the canteen at the new coloured university” in Cape Town, where Frieda is a student (56). Although Tamieta is an employee at the institution, she remarks that she has never been to the library, which illustrates the divide between her and the Coloured youth who are scholars at the campus. She also notes that the apartheid

government allocated “four buildings” “specifically for coloured people” (49). Tamieta declares that her ward, Beatrice, will attend the university someday, reinforcing the theme of hope for future generations. This symbolises the buoyancy of the Coloured community and the critical role of education in emancipation on the continent. This also underlines the supportive element that a belief in an extended family completes, despite the often negative aspects highlighted in the text. Tamieta’s younger co-worker, Charlie, often undermines her. He views her as an uneducated “plaasjapie” who cannot understand the “handfuls of English words” that he inserts into their conversations (49). Tamieta believes Charlie patronises her because he thinks “it’s so special to come from District Six” (49). This indicates how location and language are used as class determinants. Ironically, Charlie assumes superiority over Tamieta, who is his supervisor, which reinforces the dreadful impact that patriarchal notions have and the devastating internalisation of the divide-and-rule ethos in African countries.

Contrary to the descriptions of Englishmen in the first story, Tamieta refers to her former employers as “the terrible English family” who “paid well but never talked to her” or each other unless a family member had died (55). This illustrates the importance of the right to dignity in society. Tamieta’s remark suggests that English people distance themselves from their workers and maintain separation from their kin. Furthermore, Afrikaners are often, justifiably, blamed for instituting apartheid, but the English did not always oppose the right-wing nationalist policies. Admittedly, members of the liberal party were predominantly English. Additionally, relative to Wicomb’s tales, Tamieta’s account of the English is comparable to that of Coloured communities that were forced into shared spaces and developed a kinship. Tamieta’s next job at the UCT canteen allowed her to “hold her head up high and do a respectable job of cooking for people whose brains needed nourishing” (55). She implies that working for an English family was not considered respectable, which indicates that employment also affects social status.

Tamieta’s portrayal of Charlie suggests that there is also a generational rift between them, as she mentions that he is arrogant and has “no respect for his elders” (56). When Frieda approaches the kitchen while Charlie insults “country folk”, Tamieta expects that the educated Ms. Shenton will defend her (56). Tamieta considers that because Frieda is:

from the country [she should interject]. Tamieta knows of her father who drives a motor car in the next village, for who in Little Namaqualand does not know of

Shenton? The girl speaks English but that need not prevent her from saying something educated and putting Charlie in his place. (56)

Tamieta's musings reflect the anticipations of the uneducated masses who view the educated youth as their hope for change. Furthermore, Coloured scholars such as Frieda are seen as the voices of their communities. The extract implies that Frieda is expected to use education to break language barriers and shatter stereotypes associated with her people. However, to Tamieta's disappointment, Frieda does not rescue her from Charlie's insults. This causes Tamieta to resent the unwitting Frieda. In this manner, frictions arise between the less fortunate and the privileged, who focus on their own needs. Tamieta believes that "Charlie with his smooth hair and nose like a tent will find every opportunity to humiliate her" (56). The reference to his hair and nose alludes to the theme of acceptable physical traits.

Frieda, at university, is as conscious of her appearance as she had been during her adolescence. She is pleased with the "customary wolf whistle" from "the boys" who play card games at the back of the cafeteria, which she enters (59). She considers their acknowledgement of her beauty a "tribute" (59). Frieda's self-appreciation has significantly improved in her young adulthood, possibly due to the attention of fellow male students. She terms the hierarchy associated with whistles as a "scale of appreciation, from the festive tantara for the beauties to the single whiplash of a whistle for the barely passable" (59). This degrading action conditions women to fixate on their appearances. The feigned interest from males also intensifies the insecurity associated with rejection. Male attention is an "objectifying force that influences and creates the docile female body" by the "inscription and internalization of feminine norms" (Laue 2017, 20).

Frieda becomes aware of these accepted gender-dependent practices during her adolescence, allowing these to influence her behaviour and thinking. For instance, she dejectedly admits that despite "her narrowing waistline [she is] one of those who does not merit a second look" (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 60). Following harsh self-inflicted criticism of her appearance, Frieda introduces her friend Moira to the narrative. Her name is significant as the Afrikaans 'mooi' means pretty in English. Frieda expresses that "Moira is indisputably beautiful [with] smooth skin[,] a delicately sculpted form [and] sleek brown hair" (60). Since male students admire Moira more, Frieda compares herself to her friend. This negatively affects her sense of worth. These adolescent insecurities feature in Matlwa's *Coconut* and are perceived as normal. Frieda



distinguishes Moira as motivated by adoration; thus, she hesitates to enter the cafeteria when male students do not acknowledge her. Likewise, Freida's self-worth is dependent on male approval. This is connected to her adolescent experience at the train station, where she questioned her physical appeal.

In the tale, Frieda also narrates her experiences at university. While working on an assignment, she considers that "close up [her lecturer,] Retief's skin is not white at all, [but] rather a liverish-yellow with fine red veins" (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 50). Her description of the educator highlights the ambivalence associated with colour consciousness. When Freida's friend James asks about her assignment, he pretends that Retief noticed her absence during a lecture that she missed. She wonders whether James understands "that Retief has no idea who any of [them] are" (62). This observation highlights Frieda's astuteness and suggests that during the apartheid, Coloured students were disregarded by white lecturers. James uncharacteristically proceeds to the back of the room to join a crowd of male students, which confounds the women. He later reveals that they are staging a boycott that requires participation from every student, yet women are excluded from the discussion. Through this exclusion, educated men discriminated against women, which reflects patriarchal attitudes.

Tamieta, unaware that students are boycotting the ceremony, attends the memorial for the assassinated Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd, who was a pivotal contributor to the establishment of apartheid. By using the actual event of Verwoerd's assassination and reflecting the students' emotions, Wicomb expresses the pain of the marginalised population. When Tamieta notices the Theology students, her "chest swells with relief, which she interprets as pride in her people" (67). Her delight stems from the unity she associates with her community contrasted with rejection from upper-class white society. However, she shows contempt for those who avoid the event, such as Charlie. She resents him for abandoning her to "sit alone among white people" (69). Owing to the usual societal divisions, Tamieta is uncomfortable with the integration. It is contradictory that Verwoerd is mourned during a ceremony encouraging non-white attendees since he was partially responsible for implementing segregation. Tamieta possibly felt it prudent to attend, given her position. However, the 'black boycott' challenges her to reconsider her presence, leading to her swift departure. Tamieta innocently refers to the observance as a "time designated by strangers to mourn a man with a large head" (69). Her reflection of Verwoerd connotes a narcissistic man, which led to his demise.

The final tale, “A Trip to the Gifberge”, illustrates how Frieda reaches her crossroads like Matlwa’s protagonists. Frieda visits her mother, which reveals that Mrs Shenton’s death had been a fabrication for Frieda’s literary compositions. The opening line, “you’ve always loved your father better”, and Frieda’s choice to kill her mother in her writing and omit her presence from early stories in the narrative indicates that her relationship with her mother is still strained (171). Wicomb uses their conflict to depict the generational gaps which broaden as communities are impacted by Western influence and modernity. Frieda chooses to focus her attention on the “chair” that her mother “sits in” (171). By sitting in a chair that is cutting into her, Mrs Shenton asserts her rebellious nature, which Frieda has inherited. Frieda compares this chair to a throne, although it is atypical of the seating afforded by royalty. Frieda then considers her mother’s regal appearance. She remembers Mrs Shenton lamenting that “if [her] eyes were wider [she] would” look like “a princess” (173). Thereafter, she criticises young Frieda for her lack of beauty and wonders how she will attract a husband. This emphasis on marriageability pressures women to seek male approval. Mrs Shenton’s harsh assessments of her daughter are ironic since Mr Shenton’s father disapproved of her, “a Griqua meid”, marrying his son (173), comparable to Gemina and Truida being unsuitable for their husbands. This form of domination ensures that these women internalise inferiority.

Mrs Shenton is pretentious, although she had been considered an unsuitable match for Mr Shenton. Aunt Cissie confirms that the family “were so worried” when Mr Shenton “wrote [a letter asking them] for permission to marry” a “Griqua girl” (175). However, their apprehensions were subdued upon discovering that she was “quite shy”, which, according to the Shentons, signifies that she was “a real lady” (175). She was praised for her fluency in English and favourable appearance. Thereafter, Cissie warns Frieda to “look after [herself or she] won’t get a man if” she does not maintain her appearance (175). Laue explores psychological destructiveness, indicating that:

the “coloured” or black woman unable to conform to white norms of beauty must continually struggle against the signification of her body (through a Western aesthetic) as ugly and therefore less than human. “Non-white” women, for these reasons, feel most acutely the intersectional burden of race and gender. (2017, 24)

Subsequent to the above, women who cannot attract or keep a spouse are treated as social pariahs. This is explored in *Onion Tears* (2011) through Summaya’s narrative. While reminiscing about Frieda’s childhood, Mrs Shenton realises that in London, Frieda can attend

“concerts and theatres”, leading her to wonder what Freida does with her “bush” of “hair” (185-186). Frieda assures her mother that “sensible people pay to turn their sleek hair into a bushy tangle” like hers (186). This shows that women are convinced to alter their natural attributes according to variable criteria.

### **Gender Relations, Norms and Stereotypes**

Frieda’s “Home Sweet Home” tale expands on her desire to distance herself from the oppressive structures in her family and country under apartheid rule. Freida’s uncle Gerrie symbolises patriarchal thinking as he cynically criticises his niece’s decisions and debases her opinions. He remarks that they “sent her to college, [her] very own college that [the] government [has] given her, just so she can go away and leave [her people] to stew in ignorance” (94). Gerrie’s statement demonstrates that he takes credit for Mr Shenton’s sacrifices and contributes to the pressure Freida longs to escape by emigrating. Donnelly observes that Freida’s “desire to escape the horrors of apartheid” drives her to abandon her “Afrikaans-speaking Coloured community” in favour of “English language [and] literature” (2014, 63). Furthermore, in choosing to relocate to where English originated, England, she inadvertently aligns herself with her European ancestors. Gerrie admits that “in the veld among the Griquas is no place for an educated person, but [they] all thought [she] would like Cape Town” (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 94). Thus, he attempts to coerce Freida to forgo her plans without considering her reasons for leaving.

Frieda’s aunt Cissie sarcastically comments that Freida has always been peculiar, which she believes is confirmed by Freida relocating to England instead of Canada, where many South Africans go. Cissie retorts that Frieda is “as stubborn as a mule, always pulling the other way” (95). Thus, Freida’s choice to stray from the norm is derided. Her family’s objections are contradictory, as her parents encouraged her to reject her Coloured heritage and pay homage to her European lineage through her behaviour, education, and appearance. They view “emigration as freedom bought at the cost of great distance from one’s relations and community” (Whittington 2013, 327). Wicomb demonstrates that this is a great sacrifice accompanied by guilt and jealousy. Unlike the women in her family who believe she needs to fulfil a domestic role, Frieda’s male relatives view her as a pioneer for their people. Therefore, although the novel was set when women were subordinate to men, Wicomb has a contemporary view of a woman’s role in her community and society. The example of Freida’s aunts also suggests that men do not solely subjugate women since cultural norms dictate how women are

expected to behave. Freida's initial choice to leave South Africa underscores her rejection of narrow-minded ideals concerning class, race, and gender.

Cissie warns Frieda to "behave [herself] at all times like a lady" and "remember that she is an educated girl" lest she should fall prey to men aboard the ship transporting her to England (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 95). This relates to female vulnerability, which Wicomb delicately evaluates through Freida's experiences. For instance, Frieda recalls an incident the previous night when a drunk Coloured man was placed in her train compartment by a white guard. Although the compartment was strictly for women, the guard had chosen to leave the drunk man there, warning him not to misbehave as a woman was inside. Frieda indicates that the "fear of both men left her frozen in her bunk" (96). In this manner, the guard, whose duty was to protect the passengers, endangered Freida. She "could hear the blood pound angrily through her veins" as she "manoeuvred [her] left elbow in readiness to defend herself" against the drunk man (97). Fortunately, she is not harassed, but the event leaves her with internalised trauma. However, she knows she cannot share the tale with her judgemental family. Freida also recollects an image from her youth of a naked "strange dead woman" floating in the river, an implied victim of sexual violence (99). Wicomb uses nuances of victimhood to display the polarisation among men and women of colour.

In "Behind the Bougainvillea", Freida is a victim of sexual assault. During her visit to her childhood home, Mr Shenton convinces his daughter to seek medical assistance from their local doctor. She is reluctant but obliges her father. After waiting several hours in the surgery yard, she feels faint and decides to leave. Henry Hendrikse, Freida's former classmate, uses the opportunity to exploit her weak physical state. When Freida recognises Henry from afar, she is transported back to her adolescence as she remembers their fleeting love affair. They had exchanged multiple letters filled with declarations of affection. Henry initiated the correspondence, and despite their age, he wanted to:

press his lips against [hers], which were soft as velvet. [Freida] was surprised at his ability to think of love in such concrete terms. [she wondered if he could] imagine his hands travelling over [her] folds of fat, [her] squishy breasts. Instead, he said [her] breasts were two fawns, twins of a gazelle that fed among the lilies. (123)

Henry's words are reminiscent of courtly love conventions. He expresses his sexual desires and, in turn, objectifies Freida. His flattering words guarantee that Freida would allow his

advances. She is aware that her father would disapprove of their infatuation because she “was too young to think of boys”, and Mr Shenton had repeatedly declared that “Henry Hendrikse” “was almost pure kaffir” (123). This is a crucial instance of the Shenton class- and race-based prejudice. Mr Shenton believes that because they “had an ancestor, an Englishman whose memory must be kept sacred, must not be defiled by associating with those beneath [them because they are] respectable coloureds (123). Although Freida does not share her father’s biased views, she later equivalently rejects Henry. Young Henry is forthright in displaying his affection for Freida. She recalls their unpleasant first kiss, which he had enjoyed.

After almost collapsing at the doctor’s surgery, Henry offers to take Freida for a walk to help her regain her strength. She is led to a servant’s room in a white residential area. In the room, Henry endeavours to revive their unsuccessful relationship. He crudely remarks that her “breasts are as good as they were fifteen years” prior (129). As in his youth, Henry abandons pretence by openly lusting after Freida. She is evidently “appalled by his presumption”, which he interprets as shyness (129). Although Freida is uncomfortable, she allows his sexual advances. Her description of the encounter indicates that it is as repulsive as their kiss. She demonstrates her detachment by expressing her pleasure that “the transaction” was rapid (130). Her reaction is a contrast to her encounter on the train. Although the scene had initially appeared to be sexual violence, after Freida’s realisation, the act is an expression of guilt for racial discrimination.

Nadia Sanger (2019) considers Frieda’s submission to Henry’s desires to be an “apology” (85). However, this is only due to gender-dependant “unequal power” relations (85). After violating her in an unfamiliar space, Henry asks Frieda about her childhood friend, Olga. In remembering this person, Freida recollects her public rejection of Henry. When Olga asks if he is the author of the love letters, Freida asserts that she would not write to a “native” (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 131). Henry is proud despite his low ranking within the Coloured community, which motivates his domineering behaviour that Freida cannot resist during youth and adulthood. Thus, he sexually exploits Frieda to exact revenge on those higher in the pecking order. Since she is known to be of English ancestry, Henry conquers her. In doing so, his act reversed and rejected colonialism. Therefore, colonisation and apartheid have influenced his attitude and actions.

“A Fair Exchange” shares similarities with “Jan Klinkies” since it is a tale about an unsuccessful marriage. The elderly Johannes September gives Frieda an account of his wife’s

decision several years earlier. Johannes, known as Skitterboud, shares his perspective objectively. Magriet September, referred to as 'Meid' (a colloquial term for a female servant), struggled to satisfy the domestic role expected of her as a Coloured woman during the apartheid. After purchasing enamel plates for her children, she knew that "Skitterboud would be angry" about her unnecessary expenditure (Wicomb 2008 (1987), 138). She reflects that "she tried to be a good wife but there were so many people a woman had to please that she no longer knew what to do", a dilemma that Freida experiences (138). Even before she had married Skitterboud, Magriet knew that her duty was to work for the wife of Skitterboud's employer.

The farmer, Baas Karel, confirmed that "the place for his shepherd's new woman was in Ounooi Annie's kitchen", although Magriet "had hoped that Skitterboud's smile and sweet talk would keep her out of that farmhouse" (139). Thus, Magriet's path was decided for her, illustrating her limited options. She could not clean to Ounooi Annie's satisfaction, leading to her dismissal. Skitterboud took Ounooi Annie's advice and married Magriet shortly after. Ounooi Annie convinced him that Magriet would be "better, more willing to learn" if she became his legal wife (140). Once again, Magriet was subject to the will of others. When her daughter is born, Magriet vows to protect her from a life of subservience. As a result, she attempts to break the generational cycle of servitude among Coloured women. Skitterboud admits that "she was a smart one that Meid, nothing could stop her" (146). Subsequently, she leaves Skitterboud for his nephew Giel in hopes of a better life for herself and her children. Skitterboud concludes by confirming that he eventually had to live in peace with her choice.

"Ash on My Sleeve" reintroduces Moira to the narrative as Freida decides to visit her after twelve years of estrangement. The women reflect on the changes they have witnessed and undergone since their university years. Desmond, Moira's husband, praises Freida's improved appearance while suggesting that Moira has lost her appeal. He determines that "a good figure" during a woman's "youth is no guarantee against childbearing" (156). Desmond tactlessly comments on the "veins and sagging breasts" and how "some women get horribly fat [or] grow thin and haggard", and then he "looks sympathetically at Moira" (156). Freida is appalled by his remarks. She wonders why Moira does not react to his disrespect. Moira is a contrast to her husband as she chooses her words carefully before speaking. This dissimilarity suggests their relationship is strained as they struggle to find common ground. Desmond is an archetypal narcissist and represents a patriarchal mentality. His views indicate that he values women according to their perceived attractiveness. Wicomb implies that this practice reduces women

to mere objects. Moira, who epitomised the beauty hierarchy during her youth, is unhappily married to someone she chose based on superficial criteria according to societal norms.

Frieda highlights the double standard in her community whereby women are judged for consuming alcohol while the negative impacts of alcohol on men are overlooked. While Desmond drinks his whiskey, he offers her coke, which:

[she] declines but [she] long[s] to violate the alcohol taboo for women. [Mr Shenton said that] a girl who drinks is nothing other than a prostitute. Nice men believe that there's no such thing as just a little tot because girls get drunk instantly. Then they hitch up their skirts like the servant girls on their days off, caps scrunched into shopping bags, waving their Vaaljapie bottles defiantly. A nice girl's reputation could shatter with a single mouthful of liquor. (159)

Mr Shenton's condemnatory views reveal that women are expected to behave according to a standard while men are not held accountable for their actions that do not meet that standard. He compares women who drink to servants, suggesting that the habit reduces women's class positions. However, Freida's desire to indulge in this practice indicates that she does not share her father's outlook and hopes that her community will rethink their sexism. Wicomb uses Frieda to comment on gender discrimination.

Freida's conversation with Moira emphasises the identity crises experienced by Coloured women, according to Wicomb. When Freida asks Moira about her residence, she responds:

[they are] so new, don't [they] belong in estates? Coloureds haven't been around for that long, perhaps that's why [they] stray [...] in [their] teens [they] wanted to be white, now [they] want to be full-blooded Africans. [They have] never wanted to be [themselves], and that's why [they] stray ... across the continent, across the oceans, thus, it suits [Moira] very well to live where everything looks the same. (164)

The above illustrates that during the apartheid, Coloured women were caught between Black and White communities as Sandra Laing was. Women still struggle with this divided consciousness. Moira differentiates herself from her community by understanding the internal dualism afflicting Coloured women throughout their lives. Having become an adult, she realises that aspirations can be reversed; thus, she discovers the uselessness of conforming to the expectations of a discriminatory society. This is similar to Matlwa's concluding sentiments in *Coconut* (2007). Predictably, Moira's thoughts fail to account for a South African identity

that accommodates the various aspects of a rainbow nation. However, in a democratic era, South African nationality should encourage inclusivity.

### **Conclusion**

The *Bildungsroman* nature of Frieda's narrative tracks changes in the coloured community. Wicomb uses an imperfect protagonist to highlight the flaws of a hierarchical society that encourages women's discriminatory treatment. Since Frieda's narrative begins in her youth, Wicomb uses young Frieda's objective gaze to explore distinctions based on race by comparing the noble Shentons to the Englishman, Mr Weedon. Mr and Mrs Shenton's adulation of the English and bias toward subgroups of the coloured community reveal the colonial mindset characteristic of play-whites. Frieda's childhood experiences impact how she views herself and others in adulthood. The titular short story, "You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town", presents Frieda's interracial relationship and complex identity as someone able to pass for white. This alludes to the significance of duality and racial harmony.

Wicomb links and overlaps her themes at each stage of Frieda's life. Education and beauty are contrasting topics but similarly affect women's appeal and advancement opportunities. In her adolescence, Frieda longs to fit shallow beauty standards while her father stresses the importance of education. Her experience at the train station encompasses each element of my discussion, highlighting the intersection of class, race, and gender. Frieda's time at university further shows that women are valued more for appearance than achievement. Years later, by reconciling with her estranged mother, Frieda understands her position in a changing country. Having emigrated from South Africa, Frieda admits feeling alienated in a foreign land as much as her racially polarised birthplace. Her interaction and history with Henry Hendrikse suggest that she adopted her parents' biased views of race as she aged. Frieda's life is a window into the coloured experience during apartheid, but Wicomb's work remains relevant.



### **Chapter 3: “A Tale of Two Selves”: Race and Class Distinctions as Contributing Factors Affecting Female Identity in Shubnum Khan’s *Onion Tears* (2011)**

Apartheid and the anti-apartheid movement created one set of determinants against which the Indian community developed a sense of self. The transition period (1990-1994) offered more guidelines for communal behaviour. Finally, postcoloniality, with what some Indians consider its thwarted promise, is forging yet another aspect of Indian identity.

– Rastogi (2008, 108)

#### **Introduction**

The colonial and apartheid periods have altered the trajectory of South African history by introducing formerly foreign communities into South African society and recreating the nation by grouping people of colour. Likewise, Devarakshanam Govinden acknowledges that “[t]he introduction of Indian indentured labour was to change the racial composition of Natal and introduce a new pattern of racial diversity in South Africa” (2008, 81). Consistent with Pallavi Rastogi’s view regarding Khan’s protagonists, *Onion Tears* (2011) indicates how Khadeejah develops her “sense of self”, explores Summaya’s “transition” as democracy looms and Aneesa’s grasp of her “Indian identity” during South Africa’s entry into the era of “postcoloniality” (Rastogi 2008, 108). This chapter’s title, “A Tale of Two Selves”, alludes to the multifaceted identities that many members of the Indian population deal with. Along with this identity crisis, Indian women are subject to prejudice within their communities. These women must adhere to an outdated paradigm drawn from the Indian caste system and apartheid indoctrination.

The caste system, according to Suraj Yengde, is a “hereditary, birth-based, rigid endogenous form of institution” (2022, 350), comparable to several objectives of apartheid. In the Indian culture, caste refers to a class structure based on descent and wealth. When the Indian indentured labourers were brought to South Africa, the hierarchy migrated with them. Although South African Indians have embraced modernity and equality, traces of caste bias endure, especially among older generations of women. Colourism is another factor related to the caste-

based discrimination of women. Montle defines Colourism as “discrimination against persons with dark skin tones, usually among people of the same racial identity” (2023, 13). According to this prejudice, a woman with a lighter complexion is more valued than a darker-skinned woman. Colourism was reinforced by racism during colonialism and apartheid. The central aim of this dissertation is to highlight the intersectional relationship among class, race, and gender. Govinden indicates the relevance of this topic, suggesting that:

the tendency is to absorb alterity and elide difference into universalism, with complexities within and between [sic] categories of race, ethnicity, class and gender being ignored and the reality of people’s lives, even in the post-apartheid era, is distorted. But differences within difference are constantly being signalled. (2008, 33)

This chapter discusses how the caste system, apartheid, and colonialism influence class, race, and gender discrimination in the South African Indian community. I use Shubnum Khan’s *Onion Tears* (2011) to understand the ways that Indian women are stereotyped and forced to accept ideals that promote inequality. Khan’s protagonists, Khadeejah, her daughter Summaya, and granddaughter Aneesa, each contend with different forms of discrimination that shape their identities. Khan explores the stigma surrounding female-headed households, divorce and victimhood while highlighting the difficulties experienced by women in male-centric economic environments. Furthermore, she critiques the importance placed on marriageability, which objectifies women. Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai highlight that in post-apartheid, “as much as Indians have hung on to an identity, they have also “played” with identity under conditions that sought to imprison them in it” (2018, 79). Khan’s novel encompasses the ideas of each theorist mentioned. *Onion Tears* compares the attitudes of different generations toward gender roles and the ambivalence of home. Furthermore, the narrative indicates how women often adopt and impose misogynistic views in Indian communities.

### **South African Indian Literature**

Before I begin the central argument of this chapter, I provide a background of South African Indian Literature since this genre of writing lacks sufficient research engagement. Rastogi indicates that:

The term [Afrindian] suggests both an Africanization of Indian selfhood and an Indianization of South Africa. The former is achieved by an affiliation with the indigenous population and an attachment to the African land, while the latter is demonstrated through tracing the changes wrought in South Africa by the Indian presence. Changing oneself as well as being an agent of change in order to claim a South African national identity is the central dialectic underpinning Indian fiction in South Africa. (2008, 2)

Rastogi argues that “Afrindian Fictions unsettles that paradigm of racial interaction and focuses instead on how different non-white constituencies interact with each other in non-Western geographies” (2). Post-apartheid South African Indian writing highlights the intersection of the author’s nationality and heritage. Thus, these writers display the difficulties associated with their duality through their characters. Ronit Frenkel (2011) reasserts Rastogi’s views regarding the significance of Indian literature, mainly since this genre is insufficiently researched, as already noted. Frenkel suggests that “these literary works are therefore critical interventions into discourses of race and identity formations that redefine contemporary understandings of postcolonial South Africa” (2). These theorists recognise that ‘Afrindian’ fiction contains elements that track a transformation of the Indian population. The value of writing by Indian women lies in the volume of untold stories that are given a platform. In 2012, Fatima Asmal, a “Durban-based journalist” who founded the “Institute of Learning and Motivation – South Africa”, when discussing the organisation’s “conference for Muslim women”, said:

voices of Muslim women in this country need to be heard. For years, men have been speaking on our behalf, particularly on mainstream media platforms, leading to an incorrect perception that Muslim women cannot voice their opinions or make a contribution to society.’ She pointed out that there were hundreds of Muslim women in South Africa who have made a valuable contribution to society within their respective fields and they needed to be heard. Speakers at the inaugural conference included author Shubnum Khan. (cited in Vahed 2016, 99)

In *‘Sister Outsiders’: The Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women*, Devarakshanam Govinden offers that “Indian women’s writings in South Africa have suffered marginalisation not only because of gender discrimination but also because they have been seen as part of a minority culture” (2008, 3). Consequently, Govinden expresses that narratives by local Indian female writers are not recognised as representative of the South African experience. To debunk this perception, as mentioned

previously, my research highlights the similarities between African, Coloured, and Indian women while also exploring the situations that are unique to each community. Govinden reflects on how changing identities have influenced Indian writing:

in South Africa, identity politics is overlaid with the historical background of colonialism and apartheid, which persists in different forms. It is also defined by resistance to apartheid, with such resistance being complicated by different ideological positions. Thinking through the debates and views on identity is useful in appreciating the varying, contradictory and shifting subject positions/identities of Indian women writers. (32)

Khan employs her characters to push the boundaries of identity and use memory as a tool to display how acts of defiance helped women revolt against the apartheid system. Regarding *Onion Tears*, it is crucial to note that “[t]he identities of Indian Muslims have been shifting since they first arrived in South Africa in 1860” (Vahed 2016, 102). Overall, “the dominant identity in relation to outsiders was ‘Indian’ as race played a central role in defining existence” (102). This blanket term allowed Indian people of different backgrounds to identify with one another easily.

### **‘Afrindian’: A Historical Perspective**

To accurately study the Indian community, one must journey into the past and unravel the overlapping histories that recreated a population who identify more with their South African counterparts of other races than citizens of India. Govinden states that:

the history of colonialism shows how European identity was seen as the norm and difference from this norm was imposed by homogenising oppressed and marginalised groups. This difference was produced and indeed managed through the elaborate discourse of Orientalism, with essentialist understandings of identity and of difference. It was based on notions of pure race and ethnic groups, derived from the ‘race science’ of European thought in the nineteenth century. (2008, 35)

Indian writing is essential as it opposes Oriental literature written from Western perspectives, depicting a false narrative of Indian culture and people. Although *Onion Tears* is about the

South African Indian experience, Khan captures the essence of a community that has combined and adapted its traditions for this diverse nation. Khan's characters are symbols of the identities that Indian women have played with as their communities have adapted to various forms of control, first imposed by the government and their spouses, then by the conservative views of their people. Now, capitalism and globalisation threaten to oppress modern Indian women further. Focusing on Muslim Indian women, *Onion Tears* shows similarities between other sections of the Indian population and this group that integrated despite the historical turmoil between Muslims and Hindus. As alluded to in the previous chapter, the *Group Areas Act* forced people of the same race to reside in constrained townships, regardless of ethnic distinctions. Thus, "Muslims of Indian origin [were] mostly confined to KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng due to the fact that they were prevented by law from settling in other parts of the country until the demise of apartheid in 1994" (Vahed 2016, 82).

However, Govinden indicates that this enforced sharing of space began "in the early indentured years when Indians of different languages and castes were forced to live together, inevitably resulting in the emergence of a pan-Indian culture, alongside internal difference" (2008, 35). Similarly, Vahed indicates that "[t]he emergent white state treated Indians legislatively as a homogenous racial entity, forcing a 'made-in-Natal' consciousness" (2016, 87). Vahed determines that "[t]his was emphasized by Imam Bawazeer, a Muslim priest and close associate of Gandhi, when he was departing for India in 1915":

We are all Indians in the eyes of the Europeans in this country. We have never drawn distinctions between Mahomedans and Hindus in public matters. Mahomedans, like the Hindus, look upon India as our Motherland, and so is it a matter of fact, and when it is a matter of serving India, we must set aside any differences and be united. (87)

Although Indian people travelled across the ocean to a continent brimming with new ideas and forms of oppression, the ideologies of India arrived with them. Govinden aptly points out that "for women the entrenched traditional patriarchal society did not seem to slacken under the new dispensation" (Govinden 2008, 73). Women were regarded as financial burdens and married off for their families to benefit from dowries. Furthermore, "educational opportunities for Indian women were scarce [and] the conservative attitudes of Indian families regarding the education of girls exacerbated the situation" (75). Khan uses Khadeejah's narrative to highlight this.

Like many of Indian origin, “the majority of Indian Muslims arrived in Natal in the period between 1860 and 1914 as contract indentured workers or free migrants” (Vahed 2016, 83). The distinction between the groups signalled class divisions within this community. For instance, Vahed reveals that “the class distinction among Indians was also evident to the authorities” (84). This was determined from “a confidential report to the Durban Town Council (DTC) in 1885, police inspector Richard Alexander noted that ‘Arabs [referring to Muslim traders] will only associate with Indians so far as trade compels them to’ [despite being categorised as a homogeneous Indian community]” (84). This provided context for marriage conventions based on class. Vahed provides the example of “Gujarati Muslims [who] were largely endogamous and rarely married Muslims from an indentured background whom they disparagingly referred to as ‘Calcuttias’, as Calcutta (Kolkata) was one of the ports from which the latter departed for Natal” (84). Khan highlights this prejudice through a conversation between Khadeejah and her sisters about their children’s spouses.

Owing to class hierarchies, “politically and socially, Muslim traders mingled with their Hindu counterparts rather than working class Muslims” (86). Despite the government grouping Indian people into one category, “Muslims were not homogenous” (86). For some, “[e]conomic interests and political outlook determined their status in Natal [and] as a result of their ambition, [t]raders aroused the hostility of white settlers” (86). Once “Natal achieved self-government in 1893, laws were passed to restrict Indian access to trading licences, deny them the vote, and prohibit immigration” (86). However, the trading class became an established group in the Muslim and broader Indian community. This was evident as “[t]he trading classes formed the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in August 1894 under Mohandas K. Gandhi” (86). Access to educational and economic opportunities disrupted the pecking order as a new generation of Indian (Muslim) citizens “challenged the hegemony of traders” (91). This propagated non-white upward mobility. To begin this chapter discussion, my research acknowledges that “[w]hile Indian Muslims had ‘hybrid’ identities in relation to language, class, ethnicity and religion, race was the most important identity in the political realm” (87).

### **Race and Colourism**

As previous chapters have indicated, the concept of race is surrounded by ambiguity in contemporary South Africa due to historical factors. Ashwin Desai uses a speech by Fatima

Meer, an “anti-apartheid activist and academic Sociologist” (2018, 11), to illustrate that Indian South Africans have tethered their identities to their country of birth. Meer expressed, “South African Indians have had to struggle hard to claim our South Africanness [and] are not a diaspora of India in South Africa because we claimed South Africa for our own, in order to entrench that claim, we had to struggle hard and long alongside our South African brothers and sisters” (11). Despite efforts to integrate into a blended society, the Indian population has struggled to gain acceptance from fellow citizens. This is partly due to the levels of discrimination enforced during apartheid and the persistent emphasis on divisions of race. Vahed (2016) illustrates that the Indian population chose to remain in South Africa despite being offered an opportunity to return to India. He states that:

The government was intent on repatriating Indians. A round table conference between the South African, Indian and Imperial governments in 1927 introduced a system of voluntary repatriation and an Indian Agent General was appointed to oversee the upliftment of Indians who remained in South Africa. The policy failed because few Indians were willing to repatriate while the South African government did nothing to ‘uplift’ local Indians. It was left to Indians to take care of the poor amongst them. (87)

Frenkel asserts that “instead of focusing on ideas of embodiment and difference, South African Indian fiction pivots on the conception of race as a social category shaped by its historical routes” (2011, 1). In accordance, *Onion Tears* expresses how different generations of Indian women view and are affected by racial classifications. To justify how Muslim Indian characters apply to broader contexts of Indian women, Vahed’s chapter in *Indentured Muslims in the Diaspora* (2016) is helpful. He observes that “[g]iven the racialization of South African society, it was [and still is] difficult to separate being Muslim from being Indian” (87).

Khadeejah’s views illustrate the metamorphosis of ideas related to race through national periods of change and a self-awareness triggered by maturing, indicated below:

Age, it seemed, brought out the colour of people’s skin. Like bananas. That ripen from the usual dull greens into deep yellows, reds or browns. They were made to notice it all, the children of old Africa.

Brown. White. Black.  
Fair. Dark. Medium.  
Coolies. Kaffirs.  
Words were just words, right?  
(Even sneer-painted words?). (Khan 2011, 238)

Words used to wound and control communities are now a reminder of the darkness associated with power. The history of apartheid is a barrier to the hope of a colour-blind South Africa. Those who remember that their skin had determined their class position internalise feelings of inferiority and seek to prove their worth. The “children of old Africa [...] were made to notice” (238) the differences between each community. Thus, Khadeejah believed “that she was indeed far below the white race” (238). This impacts how she interacts with other races and views herself. Khadeejah recalls being considered incompetent during the apartheid because she was Indian. White customers at her father’s shop would speak slowly, assuming she had difficulty understanding English. In her youth, she also observed the striking difference between the Afrikaans-speaking Boere people and the English-speaking white community. Afrikaners were associated with roughness, while Englishmen embodied sophistication. This concept is explored in Wicomb’s anthology, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Racial disparities were most apparent when interacting with white citizens due to the rising inequality. Govinden recognises that “while identity formations are haunted by past histories of oppression”, illustrated by Khadeejah’s narrative, “there is an attempt to move beyond their legitimising and deterministic influences” (2008, 33), which Summaya’s life depicts.

Khadeejah’s youth was spent in Bronkhorstspuit, a location allocated to Indians under the *Group Areas Act*. This environment limited her positive interactions with individuals of other races as a community of people similar in beliefs, culture, and economic status surrounded her. These circumstances caused her to view society as a medley of binary opposition. It was evident that “[r]esidential clustering served to consolidate racial and religious identities” (Vahed 2016, 91). Khadeejah’s position is apparent in the following instance:

Her father always told them that no one was better than the other person. He said that Islam said every person was equal. She wanted to believe him but it was hard



to do when all the evidence around [her] proved otherwise. Signs that read ‘Whites only’ (white people who called her coelie). Why, even her father had a separate entrance for black people. He said it was because the [white people] wouldn’t come into his shop if he didn’t.

But all this led Khadeejah to believe that white people were better than her. (Khan 2011, 238)

The extract explores how Khadeejah developed her understanding of race and racial politics. According to Frenkel, “the multiple placements and displacements of Indianness highlight the legacies of colonialism, apartheid, and globalization where non-normative migration narratives become new versions of national, gendered, and racial belonging” (2011, 3). Khadeejah’s transition from child to woman in an everchanging country reflects Frenkel’s view. After spending most of her youth under the white ruling class, Khadeejah held on to an ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ mentality, with Indians struggling to find belonging. For these reasons, she has a “preference for white” (Khan 2011, 36). She establishes that there are “virtues” associated with “the colour white” since it “signifie[s] cleanliness [and fairness] ensure[s] good looking children” (36). This opinion highlights her distaste toward, and the connotations of, the colour brown. Indians are colloquially referred to as brown people. Thus, Khadeejah displays her self-loathing caused by the colourism related to caste and apartheid. Therefore, she unintentionally resents her ethnicity because her people were discriminated against and denied access to basic needs. For instance, Khadeejah remembers that her sister died in a hospital after waiting hours to be treated for pneumonia, leaving young Khadeejah wondering how “skin matter[ed] when you [were] sick” (51). The inhumane treatment of non-white communities led to preventable fatalities.

Owing to the discrimination she experienced in the past, Khadeejah “couldn’t accept anyone who was different from her” (94). In this way, she holds on to the backward principles of a system that subjugated her people. When Summaya, her daughter, was rumoured to be in a relationship with a white boy at university, Khadeejah prayed that the claims were false. Khadeejah resolved that the idea of “white” attracted to “brown” (94) was unnatural, as apartheid decreed. Decades later, her granddaughter Aneesa asks Khadeejah “why [Indians] can’t marry whites or blacks”, to which Khadeejah states that they “just can’t” (263). Both Khadeejah and Aneesa are perplexed by this restriction. Before democracy, the emphasis on physical differences led to the perception that race groups could not socialise and should not

intermarry. Many traditionalist families retain this view, which intensifies the animosity between communities. Govinden expresses that the Postapartheid era signalled a bid toward “multiculturalism, especially an uncritical, reductionist kind, which seems to invoke a ‘peaceful’, but still separate, co-existence of the various ethnic or racial groups” (2008, 33). Khadeejah displays this peaceful separation through her aversion to interracial relationships.

Summaya “knew” that her relationship with “Mark Green” would not last because “he was white and her mother wouldn’t understand” (Khan 2011, 21). These interracial relations, which could initiate a unified rainbow nation, become taboo as elders reinforce beliefs that mirror *The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, No. 55 of 1949* and the *Immorality Act, No. 5 of 1927*, that forbade relations between white and non-white citizens. Summaya understood that her choice would result in her family being “ostracised by a community that would never accept it” (21), which influenced her mother’s bias. This view indicates that “there has indeed been a tendency to internalise apartheid’s racial categories and ethnocentric beliefs and myths” (Govinden 2008, 37). As a result, marital conventions in Summaya’s community continued to subscribe to segregationist thinking. Thus, Indian women were forced to abide by communal consensus, even regarding personal matters. Ironically, “the other Indian girls secretly admired and openly condemned [Summaya’s] relationship. They said it was against her religion and her race” (Khan 2011, 21). These women realise that Summaya was not restricted by former patterns of thinking, which allowed her to enjoy the freedom that anti-apartheid movements fought for. However, they resented that she was brave enough to revolt against a subconscious form of patriarchy that oppressed women.

Summaya’s relationship with Mark subverted the apartheid and gender power dynamics as she opposed the restrictions of her community and decided when to terminate their romance. She admits that she “didn’t care too much for Mark” and “she didn’t feel any sincere love for him” (22). Although Mark “cried when she broke up with him”, Summaya calmly “told him he should have seen it coming” (22). This attitude indicates that Summaya was in control while Mark willingly submitted to her whims. Based on her behaviour during their time together, Mark believed she was “emotionless, but said he loved her anyway” (22). Summaya’s deviance from what was expected of women of her class and race illustrates how restrictions provoked defiance among citizens. Thus, resistance was born from measures intended to maintain order.

Summaya's interracial relations are similar to Fikile's interactions with Paul in Matlwa's novel and Frieda's relationship with Michael in Wicomb's text. By unintentionally exerting control over a man viewed as her superior in a segregationist society, Summaya accomplishes what Henry Hendriks did by sleeping with Frieda. These characters prove that change is possible, although power is unequally distributed and unfairly determined.

Since she feels like an imposter in a foreign land, Khadeejah clings to her Indian identity and seeks kinship from the homeland of her parents, India. To prevent herself from being 'whitewashed' by contemporary South African culture, Khadeejah uses media to express her Indianness. As a result, "she loved her Indian channels filled with Indian soap operas and comedies. She felt it kept her close to her beloved India. And that she was fulfilling her father's wish for [his family] to remain close to their heritage" (141). As a result, Khadeejah attempts to subdue her South African identity. Unlike her mother, Summaya believes that Indian media represents "a culture obsessed with beauty and fairness" (146). This promotes colourism that discriminates against women based on appearance, and social standing. Summaya rejects the narrative created by this media. Hence, "she hated that Indian television perpetuated fairness as beauty. [This was a] mild [form of] apartheid. A mindset of colonialism that they had never let go of" (147). This indicates that hegemony has led India and South Africa astray, a power that depicts differences from Western norms as flaws. The following extract shows how media influences perceptions of beauty:

[Summaya] had once watched an advert where a boy was rejected by his girlfriend because he was dark-skinned. The boy then discovers the advertiser's fairness cream and after using it, finds a bevy of women chasing after him, including his old girlfriend. The advert ends with a smooth voice singing "Fair fair is sexy sexy." Summaya had forbidden Aneesa from watching the channel with her mother. Khadeejah complained that it wasn't such a big deal. Summaya had told her it was wrong, completely wrong to make people think dark-skinned Indians were unappealing. (147)

The advertisement illustrates that men and women are affected by unattainable standards. As explored in *Coconut* (2007), colourism controls advertising trends. Summaya recognises that the portrayal is "demeaning to women" (Khan 2011, 147). She aims to shield her daughter from this false narrative. By rejecting the objectionable customs of her people, Summaya shows that

she has the potential to break backward generational cycles. Desai (2018) uses the testimonies of Indian South Africans who visited India to understand the relationship between this group and their ancestral land. In his research, Desai quotes Preggs Govender (2007, 3), who “experienced racial prejudice of another kind in India, because as a South Indian, she is dark-skinned. She was shocked when told by one of the [Indian] ‘sisters’ at the spiritual retreat, ‘South Indians are black, like Africans’” (2018, 3). This illustrates how the Indian community has discriminated against dark-skinned Indians.

During young adulthood, Summaya travelled to India and failed to find a connection to her culture and the Indian population. In her ancestral land, “she found the lack of races strange [and] missed the contrasting coloured skins” of South Africans (Khan 2011, 243). Since Summaya develops her identity in an interracial population, she discovers that her duality leads to displacement in India. The experience shows that she has embraced the idea of a rainbow nation. Summaya “felt bad for not feeling some sort of kinship with [India’s citizens], with [their] land, with [their] culture. Her culture” (245). However, the journey teaches her that contrasting worlds can exist in harmony. Like Summaya, Preggs Govender’s account (2007, 3) indicated that before her trip to India, she “had never experienced any sense of yearning to visit” because she “identified [herself] as a South African [and] did not see India as [her] motherland” (Desai 2018, 3). In 1994, former president Thabo Mbeki recited the “well-known ‘I am an African’ speech”, in which Mbeki “incorporates the place of Indian experience in the context of a wider Asian identity” (Govinden 2008, 85). In his “vision of the new nation, there is spontaneous celebration of the contributions of the different and distinct racial or ethnic groups historically to the emerging nation, and of the crossing over and interconnectedness that links each group inextricably with the other” (85). Mbeki’s words echoed the idea of a Rainbow Nation coming together to rebuild and reclassify itself as South African first before recognising racial and other divisions. However, this idealised society is yet to be. Thus, although different races fought together against the apartheid machine, ideologies of separation were ingrained.

In a global context, the Indian community of South Africa retain its nationality as a prefix to its racial identity. Frenkel observes that “physicality does not always correspond to our centers of identification” (2011, 4). Thus, although Summaya resembles a citizen of India, she does not identify with this community. Govinden points out that “the search for ‘roots’ can also be

an essentialising process, perpetuating false dualisms, and exhibiting an exoticised, commodified notion of some suppressed identity waiting to be excavated. Such a search (for ‘roots’) may make one actually believe that a supposedly ‘authentic’ Indian identity is attainable” (2008, 48). Khadeejah is guilty of adopting this notion during her trip to India, where she idealises her experiences and surroundings while overlooking the faults that Summaya is expressly aware of. For Khadeejah, identifying as South African is a betrayal of her father’s wishes and ancestral homeland. She holds the same bias as Mrs Shenton since they both believe that some cannot meet the standards of an authentic Indian or Coloured.

The metaphor of modern and traditional spaces coexisting in India helps Summaya realise that she can accept herself as an Indian and a South African. She also identifies with India when she comes to terms with poverty and marginalisation, which resonates with South Africa. After that, she has an affirmative cathartic experience. Before her trip, she “maintained that the world was a big race of coloured people, all God’s creation” (Khan 2011, 246). Her idealism emphasises the innocence which is necessary for a colour-blind society. When she contemplates this, considering her new experience, she learns that “differences were important” (246). This revelation alters her worldview and allows her to celebrate diversity. Frenkel recognises that “self-identification as a South African highlights the multiple placements of identity that are able to express a simultaneous schism and overlap between origin and nationality, nation and location, Indian and African, local and global” (2011, 5). This supports the concept of dual identities associated with people of colour.

As a minority, the Indian population has been under scrutiny for decades. Many aligned with anti-Indian movements question whether this group belongs in South Africa or should return to the land of their forefathers, especially during periods of racial tension. Steve Biko’s idea of blackness refers to a political stance above skin colour, suggesting that:

[t]hose who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in South African society and identify themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations. This definition illustrates to us a number of things: 1. Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of a mental attitude. 2. Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on the road to emancipation, you have committed yourself

to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being. (Cited in Govinden 2008, 40)

The above suggests that as a product of their suffering and efforts during apartheid, the Indian populous have earned their right to be 'Afrindian' citizens. Furthermore, South Africans reclaim their power by accepting the term that the segregationist government initially allocated to people of colour.

Through the influence of Summaya, Khadeejah and her limited experience, Aneesa develops an understanding of race politics. She also perceives that people reject their natural attributes, which subdue their racial identity. Aneesa failed to comprehend "why people who had curly hair kept straightening it" (Khan 2011, 27). This observation links to Matlwa and Wicomb's criticisms of beauty and highlights the significance of hair, which has been emphasised as a determinant of race in each novel. Aneesa believes that her grandmother "wants [her] to marry a scary man" who "looks like a ghost" because Khadeejah insists that Aneesa's future husband's complexion should be "white-white like a wall" (102). Thus, in addition to her prejudice against interracial relationships, Khadeejah devalues darker-skinned Indian men as appropriate partners for marriage.

However, to Khadeejah's dismay, Summaya declares that Aneesa is free to marry whomever she chooses, regardless of race or skin colour. This defiant attitude sets Summaya apart from her community. Aneesa is caught between the contrasting views of her closest female role models during the period she frequently refers to as her "stuck-in-the-middle-age" (Khan 2011). This term also applies to her neutrality toward the opinions of her mother and grandmother. Aneesa is blind to the differences that force racial separation. Khadeejah is a symbol of the past as she struggles to reconcile her antiquated views with a changed South Africa. Summaya represents the present with constantly changing opinions, having learned from the past and hoping for a better future. Aneesa denotes the future as she gradually develops her outlook. Along these lines, each generation is a totem for periods that affect the identity of Indian South Africans, specifically the apartheid, transitional stage, and post-apartheid.

## **Class, Marriageability and Violence**

Khadeejah defied marriage conventions in her community by superseding her husband as their family's breadwinner through her successful pickle-making business and working in a clothing factory. Despite the strong influence of patriarchal mindsets during the apartheid, she was forced to assist her husband, Haroon, with his responsibility to ensure that their family was adequately provided for. Since she had to fulfil duties as a wife and mother while working nine hours, Khadeejah "resented her husband for being the promise of a better life and failing" (6). In the Indian community, women were told marriage could guarantee a comfortable life, but the contrary was true among lower classes. Thus, Khadeejah had to work hard to improve her circumstances as she could not solely rely on her husband. From an early age, Khadeejah was taught that her cooking aptitude would ensure she found a good husband. She quickly grew to enjoy the gender roles imposed upon her.

Khadeejah wanted Aneesa to marry a doctor. She asserted that this high-income career would elevate her granddaughter's class. This view implies that a woman must choose her husband based on his profession to gain financial stability and upward mobility. Khadeejah had strong opinions about husbands and had "learnt a lot about bad husbands from her own marriage" (69). Thus, she helps her neighbour, a victim of domestic violence. Through this portion of Khadeejah's life, Khan comments on abuse in marriage. Khadeejah highlights the limited choices that women had during the apartheid, and she understood that:

even if these men are very stupid[,] we [women] are still stuck with them [...] because what can we do? [...] we never went to school[:] at least [Khadeejah] didn't finish. [She] didn't study after that. [Khadeejah's father] got her married[.] [Women] never learnt how to do much besides cook, so we are stuck with [men].  
(70)

Many first-generation Indian women contended with violent spouses and difficult living conditions because daughters were considered a burden in Indian households. Marriage was the solution to the economic turmoil blamed on girls who could not contribute financially. Men were encouraged to pursue education, while women were advised to maintain beauty and refine domestic skills. This contributed to gender inequality and the wealth gap when women were welcomed into the formal employment sector as men had a head start. Khadeejah asserts that

although men have more educational opportunities, women “are also clever” (71). Unfortunately, during her young adulthood, men believed that “wives [were only] there [...] to make babies and [cook]” (72). These gender stereotypes were reinforced by the Indian community, with women devalued and men placed on pedestals. Women were also stuck in abusive environments because marital separation was taboo among their people. Khadeejah knew that her neighbour could not “get divorced [because] her parents” would not allow it, especially since she had “a child” (72). Additionally, their husbands “with big brains give [them] their money” (72). Thus, Indian women were oppressed based on race and gender.

For these reasons, Khadeejah endures verbal abuse from her husband and overlooks his cruel treatment of their daughter while he favours their son. Furthermore, great importance is placed on “[t]he ideal of ‘the [nuclear] family’ (reflecting both Victorian and Indian values)” (Govinden 2008, 77). Accordingly, “Indian women were as much the preservers of their ‘race’ through the values of motherhood, tradition and stability”, causing the community to stigmatise single-parent households (77). The stigma surrounding divorce forces women into submission and strips violent men of accountability. Khadeejah expresses that wives “must make the sacrifices [...] always the women must make it otherwise no one will end up making the sacrifice and [they] will end up killing each other” (Khan 2011, 72). Even though her statement is figurative, the extent of physical violence can escalate to a life-threatening situation. She suggests that her young neighbour “learn to make money” and leave her husband (72). Regardless of their disadvantages, there is hope in acquiring valuable skills. Years later, Khadeejah meets “the girl (who was now a woman)” and is informed that she has left her husband and managed a successful business (73). By referring to her as a “girl” (73), Khan illustrates how young the individual was when her husband abused her. This is similar to Matlwa’s character, Fikile, who endured sexual abuse as a child. Khadeejah’s advice and supervision liberated her neighbour from a lifetime of gender inequality and influenced her independence.

Khadeejah contemplates how caste has affected the modern Indian community. She mentions that her in-laws “were willing to overlook the fact that” the man proposing to Haroon’s sister, Fareeda, “was of the *Hyderabadi* caste” (114). Fareeda’s parents were solely concerned about getting her married so she could leave their home. Khadeejah’s friend Sagren, who sold her



vegetables, believed that if he were in India, “he would have probably been a *dhobi* enjoying the sun on his back as he scrubbed great piles of cloth on a flat stone” (221). This low-income washerman profession was connected to his family’s caste. Sagren also reflects that “had he been given the opportunity in the old South Africa, he would have made an excellent lawyer” (222). His thoughts indicate how employment in India was linked to class and ancestry, while similarly, in apartheid South Africa, race had influenced the careers of non-whites.

Desai (2018) explores the financial rise of the Indian minority during apartheid. He asserts that “Indians” achieved monetary gain through “family-owned businesses, the emergence of a professional class as a result of increased educational opportunities, and the working class benefited from the entry of women into formal employment, mainly in the clothing and textile industries” (Desai 2018, 5-6). This liberated women who were previously restricted to domestic spheres. Khadeejah’s employment in the clothing industry and entrepreneurial efforts allowed Summaya to attend university. According to Desai, “the *Group Areas Act* resulted in Indians being placed in working class townships” (6), which separated the population based on race and class, like the former caste divisions of India. Desai notes that this “resulted in a distinct economic gap between Indians and Africans” (6). This persists during democracy because of the rift created during the colonial and apartheid periods.

Khadeejah’s final chapters deal with women as victims of crime and abuse. These sections also indicate how the economic gap has influenced criminal activity, which is linked to Chapter One of this dissertation, which uses the periods of looting and racial tensions as case studies. Thieves break into Khadeejah’s house and violently awaken her and Aneesa. Khan describes “one [as] scrawny with a tattered cap” while “the man with the gun was muscular; he wore Converse takkies and a vest” (2011, 319). His “appearance was calculated to look cool and experienced” (319). Khadeejah “mistook” the intruder’s “look” “for poverty”; he observed the prejudice in her “eyes and shoulders”, and “this mistake irritated him” (319). This man is judged by his exterior appearance, and his intelligence is underestimated. The situation illustrates how an individual’s class position is judged by appearance. The following extract expresses the resentment that spawns from inequality:

A lifetime of stealing from homes had trained them into experts. They could lift a hundred rand note from a man's wallet while he slept and in the morning he wouldn't even know someone was in his room. They conversed with each other in liquid gestures and rapid eye movements. It was as much a part of their growing up as playing soccer on the dusty township streets. They had no fathers. Their mothers were too busy cleaning other people's houses, so they formed gangs to keep themselves entertained. At first, they stole in small quantities from their own people but as they grew older they discovered the outside world where people drove BMWs and Audis, where people slept on soft beds with wallets of crumpled cash in their pants. They had wide roads that were paved with tar. Not with dust, foot prints and bent Coke cans. A bitterness grew in their hearts that they needed to sweeten. They bought small guns and dirty knives and ran up to windows of cars with people who trembled inside. They screamed and punched people until their knuckles were covered in a glistening red. They grabbed women by their hair and pulled open their dresses and pushed and pushed until the sobs and muffled cries didn't matter anymore. They gorged themselves on the soothing sweetness of fear until it seemed their bellies would burst. (319-320)

The resentment of lower classes is a product of inequality and state failure, resulting in violent retaliation. Furthermore, as Desai indicates, "there have been periodic outbursts of anti-Indian sentiments, [experienced in 1949, 1985 and 2021] which cause Indian South Africans to question their place in the South African body politic" (2018, 7). Vahed and Ashwin Desai determine that the 1949 case was caused by "competition for limited resources between Indians and Africans in a racialised city, which the policies of the [apartheid] state deepened as it suited its agenda of racialised politics" (2017, 5). This relates to John Jabavu's assessment of the frictions within communities after the colonial government established class divisions. Ronit Frenkel refers to contemporary South Africa as a "negotiated space in which former victims and oppressors continue to live together" (2011, 3). This environment is bound to become volatile as tensions between communities linger. Likewise, Vahed confirms that "[g]rowing tension between Indians and Africans during the 1940s, as they competed over trade, housing, and jobs, culminated in three days of tragic race riots in January 1949 that left 142 people dead, 1,087 injured, and thousands of Indians homeless" (2016, 91). Furthermore, "[t]ension with Africans on the one hand, and whites on the other helped to foster a strong sense of Indianness, a racial identity that superseded religious identity, and which was strengthened during the apartheid" (91).

Khan's comparison between the "dusty township" and the luxury of an upper class "outside world" exhibits the extent of disparity, and the concluding lines suggest that through rage,

women become victims of sexual assault (Khan 2011, 320). Similar to the position of the Black middle class, according to Jabavu, Vahed and Desai recognise the Indian population as a “middleman minority [...] placed between dominant and subordinate groups” (2017, 3). Vahed and Desai’s research, compared with Jabavu’s thoughts, indicates that hostility directed at the middle class detracts from the institutional shortcomings that prolong inequality. This inequality sparks the need for social and economic elevation, emphasised by Summaya, who:

in primary school, kept secret the fact that her mother sold *achar* and worked in a clothing factory for a living. She spun a tale about her father working as a chef on a ship that cruised around Mauritius. She said her mother didn’t have to work because they earned so much money.

“Well, why don’t you leave for a white school like Nazira Paruk, if you have so much money?” Raeesa Karim, the grade five bully, had once demanded.

“Because my mummy said it teaches me humility to be with people poorer than me.” Summaya had quickly replied. (Khan 2011, 20-21)

The passage above indicates that even in her youth, Summaya understood the value placed on class and wealth in her community. She fabricates her background like Fikile, who uses a façade to impress her customers. These young women know they are judged by their assets as much as by their appearance. Well-earning families are admired and respected. These individuals are set apart from ordinary citizens and shielded from the hardships of their peers. As she ages, the reasons for Summaya’s financial desires transform. Instead of seeking the approval of her peers, she yearns for the comfort of a secure environment.

Summaya’s narrative begins with her financial concerns. She reflects on “money problems”, which made “looking after a daughter” complicated for a single parent (16). The bank denied Summaya’s application for a loan, which she needs to relocate as her salary is low. She “preferred a better neighbourhood for Aneesa to grow up in” because “the [current] area was dangerous”, rife with “drug dealers” and other criminal activity (18). Summaya knew that although she was safe in her home, “around them there was a wide, cold and cruel place”, especially for women (18). Thus, she desperately tries to change her circumstances.

Summaya recalls that at the age of “twenty three”, she had felt that as “an Indian girl”, she was under immense pressure (127). She believed this was “the stage that indicates whether she’s either going to make it in life or not” (127). She was taught that for “a young Indian girl it meant whether she would get married and be happy for the rest of her life, or not get married and be unhappy” (127). This shallow notion caused Khadeejah to fear for her daughter, leading Summaya to resent Indian customs. Summaya rejected potential suitors in revolt against the patriarchal selection process associated with arranged marriage. Years after her divorce from Aneesa’s father, Summaya endures criticism for remaining unmarried. During a dinner with her employer and his affluent clients, their wives patronise Summaya and express that they prefer the financial security that their husbands provide. These women state that they are happy to sacrifice independence for wealth. After her husband left her, Summaya received faux pity from the women in her family and community. They secretly blamed her for the unsuccessful marriage and speculated that she had driven her husband to retreat because she had adopted modern habits.

In university, Summaya had distanced herself from men who “were so shallow” and “easily drawn to pretty things like bright cars and stupid girls” (185). She critiques the chauvinistic notion, which reduces women to objects defined by attractiveness. This corresponds with Freida’s university experience, where boys ranked girls by appearance. Summaya’s brother, Naeem, inherited his father’s view of women. He disapproved of his sister’s choices. Summaya understood that “life to him was about paying bills, going to work, going to mosque, saving for the future, building a house and bringing up children the Right Way” (199). This was the path of the upper middle class. Summaya never challenged Naeem because she feared that her lifestyle differed from society’s expectations. Naeem was eventually wealthy enough to emigrate to Australia. He claimed this was to protect his family from crime in South Africa but left his sister and mother to fend for themselves.

Summaya accepted that “Haroon was not a perfect father”; “he was a weak man [who] liked proving his authority by ordering his wife and daughter around” (81). Women were casualties in these relationships that contradicted the claims that marriage improved a woman’s life. To soothe his wounded ego due to unsuccessful business ventures, Haroon mistreated Summaya and Khadeejah. During childhood, Summaya forgave that he “sometimes smacked” her mother

because she “loved” her father “even if he didn’t love her” (82). She was too innocent to understand the magnitude of her father’s abuse. Despite her affections, he was “rude and demanding”, “always [making] it perfectly clear that he preferred his son over his daughter” (82). This affected how Summaya viewed herself in relation to Naeem. She recalled that her father “was the type of man who believed that daughters were merely there for marrying off” (86). This attitude influenced women to believe they were insignificant outside of domestic duty.

Aneesa’s knowledge of marriage is limited, but she recognises that elders in her community frequently assess women’s marriageability. Upon her first meeting with Hoosen, Aneesa’s friend, Khadeejah, comically asks him if he wants to marry Aneesa, which puzzles the child. The children later reflect that “adults only worry about who [their children] will marry” (102). Hoosen and Aneesa recognise how class and race are linked to marriage ideals within the Indian community. When discussing reservations about interracial relations, Aneesa informs her mother and grandmother that “Hoosen said he’ll marry a black girl. He doesn’t care. He said he’ll even marry a Chinese girl, as long as she knows how to cook” (264). This indicates that younger generations of South African Indians are unaffected by the apartheid colour ban that influenced their predecessors’ beliefs during the post-apartheid era. Children like Hoosen accept and celebrate differences, unlike their elders, who have reinforced the dividing ideals of discrimination. Aneesa and Hoosen indicate that the youth can reverse the impact of generational hegemony and misinformation arising from intolerance.

### **Gender and Stereotypes**

Racial stereotypes stem from characteristics that a large part of a race group shares. However, these ideas are often exaggerated and used to slander individuals. Although Khadeejah reinforces community stereotypes, she does not conform to specific standards. Due to financial pressure and Haroon’s abuse, “she took to smoking, although it was done secretly in the bathroom” (6). She thought that “if people knew [about her habit,] they might think she wasn’t fit to run her household” (6). This prejudice can be likened to Wicomb’s Mr Shenton, who criticises women who consume alcohol. Women are judged for these actions, while men are not discouraged from indulging in these addictive substances, which demonstrates gender bias.

At the beginning of her marriage, Khadeejah faced scrutiny for not having a child immediately. She recounts, “it became quite the family scandal when Khadeejah Bibi Ballim hadn’t fallen pregnant after two years” (179). Furthermore, “Haroon [and] his family blamed her” (179). To them, “it seemed somehow these things are always the female’s fault” (179). Thus, young Khadeejah was ostracised for a situation beyond her control. However, “they never went for tests [...] because Haroon didn’t want to know” whether he was infertile (180). Haroon did not want to risk his masculinity being called into question, so he used his wife as a scapegoat. Their families condemn Khadeejah without considering that Haroon could be responsible. The examples mentioned indicate that Khadeejah was forced to meet the requirements of biased individuals. As an elder in her family and community, she reciprocates the treatment she experienced as a young woman. For instance, “she judged all women on the length of their fingernails; if they were long enough to puncture an apple then the woman was not worthy of her respect” (2). Khadeejah developed strong opinions and created her own standards. It pleased her that Aneesa “was fair and had pretty brown eyes” but she believed her granddaughter was “destined to be on the chubby side” (12). Khadeejah considers the effect of appearance on Aneesa’s marriage prospects while she is still too young for her grandmother’s probing.

Khadeejah’s identity is rooted in the roles she adopts during her lifetime. She “had always been a hardworking woman. She had been used to hard work from the time she realised her eight siblings could not rely on their mother alone” (4). Khadeejah was responsible for taking care of her family from a young age, as expected from women of lower classes. As a matriarch, she contemplates that she and her sisters “had lived difficult lives [...] they knew poverty [and] hardship” (90). These experiences have shaped Khadeejah’s outlook on life as a first-generation South African Indian woman. In “Citizen Other: Islamic Indianness and the Implosion of Racial Harmony in Postapartheid South Africa” (2008), Pallavi Rastogi explores the position of Indian-Muslim citizens in post-apartheid South Africa using fiction by Ahmed Essop. Rastogi indicates that Essop’s *The King of Hearts* (1997) “reflects the fraught relationship between Indians, particularly Muslim Indians and other races in the post-apartheid era” (107). This is also true for *Onion Tears*, focusing on Khadeejah’s narrative. Like Desai and Vahed (2017), Rastogi recognises that the Indian population “inhabit[s] an in-between

state” and is “assailed for being alien and foreign” even as the political power dynamic shifts (2008: 108). Along these lines, Indian women are treated as second-class citizens due to their race and gender.

Summaya remembers that she “had not been considered a good looking girl at school [because] she had caramel skin and sharp features that were too pronounced for her face” (Khan 2011, 20). Like Freida in her youth, Summaya is aware that her appearance generated opinions from her community, “people said,” that “with her parents’ [skin] colour she [should] have been fair” (20). Within the Indian community, Summaya is a victim of colourism. Like darker individuals in Indian media, Summaya is considered less attractive than lighter-skinned women. People comment on her features, saying:

“what strange coloured eyes. [A] pity they [are] not green,” [referring to] her yellow-brown eyes. She was what one termed ‘gangly’, with limbs splayed out awkwardly, plus she was a head taller than most of the boys in her class. She was not pretty. Yet neither was she unspectacular. She radiated some mysterious presence. Maybe it was her height or arched eyebrows or her opinionated views, but when Summaya Ballim walked into a room[,] people noticed her. If she was in a crowd, a person’s eyes would automatically fall on her. She was netball captain, she was the newspaper editor and even if she didn’t have many friends, people knew who she was. Boys knew who she was. She was *that* girl – the one they secretly lusted after but publicly ignored. (20)

The extract explores how Summaya defied social norms. She challenged the ideas of feminine beauty among Indian females. Although height is generally characteristic of masculinity, Summaya was “taller than most of the boys in her class” (20). She was an accomplished student and outspoken, which contradicted patriarchal notions of the submissive woman. Just as Freida was sexualised in her adolescence, Summaya was “lusted after” by “boys” (20). This indicates how early children are robbed of their innocence when the emphasis is placed on marriage. In adulthood, Summaya “abhorred women who followed fashion trends, draped in fancy shawls and expensive handbags” (60-61). Since she was alienated due to her uniqueness during her youth, Summaya rejected the ridged concept of femininity, which depicted women as shallow, materialistic beings vying for the attention and approval of men.

Khan's depiction of Laila, Summaya's friend, resembles Wicomb's portrayal of Moira. Laila is described as:

a pretty girl. Some (only the special ones) would say unusually pretty. Her hair was wavy and she had porcelain skin. She had delicate features.

But they were too small to be noticeable; her eyes, her face and her lips. When she was young, people had said, "Oh what a beauty she'll grow up to be" and "She'll make the boys dance this one." But she grew up and stayed small and her beauty grew into itself (like roots beneath the earth). And only when someone studied her properly, in the right light, did they see how beautiful she was. [Like a] princess. "What a pity" people said when she had grown up and she was Just pretty. "She could have been a stunner" and they looked at her like it was her fault that her beauty had not developed. (108)

Unlike Summaya, Laila was praised for adhering to conventional beauty standards. Her natural appearance as a child was pleasing to others. However, her public appeal only lasted during her younger years. Using the above, Khan indicates that societal acceptance is not guaranteed in the Indian community. Summaya's thoughts about Laila differ from Frieda's opinion of Moira since Summaya does not regard her friend as a competitor. Instead, she is an ally who understands the precarious position that women are forced into.

Summaya distances herself from the women in her community who perpetuated stereotypes. Her aunt, Fareeda, was someone who "embodied everything Summaya detested in a woman, [she was] loud, manipulative, hypocritical and rude" (124). Fareeda symbolises the discord among Indian women, which erupts from hierarchal structures. Since Fareeda is an elder in the family, she expects the respect of younger women without reciprocating. Ironically, she warned Khadeejah about the dangers of letting Summaya remain unwed for too long, yet Fareeda has never been married. This aroused Khadeejah's fears as Fareeda exemplified the misery awaiting spinsters. The value awarded to outside opinions concerning private matters is a flaw in Indian society. Despite the domineering directives from her family and socially accepted practices among Indian women, Summaya's character pushes against the boundaries. As a modern Indian woman, she does not cling to shallow versions of her culture circulated by global media. Contrary to the aspirations of older generations, Summaya values independence. She reflects the hybrid identity that South African Indian women are creating. Her South



African citizenship encourages loyalty to her country of birth. Summaya distances herself from the prejudiced aspects of her community.

While in her “stuck-in-the-middle” phase, Aneesa begins to “wonder when she would be beautiful”, and in doing so, she contemplates when she would be considered mature (126). Her introspection is reminiscent of Freida’s contemplative period at the train station. Similarly, Aneesa wonders “when boys would also turn to look at her and whisper [that she was beautiful]” like her mother (126). At this age, Aneesa understands that she will eventually seek male approval to validate her appearance. This young character is on a journey of self-discovery, and Khan indicates that her identity is formless but influenced by her experiences. In thinking about the changes that she would undergo over the years, Aneesa pondered:

Would her eyes change colour? Would her nose lose its button shape? And if it did, what shape would it take? How much could the skin stretch and twist and change? When you looked at photos of children they looked very little like the adults they grew into. Eyes became smaller and sadder, lips stretched into cupid bows, noses squirmed into new skin and new shapes. People changed.

*Inside and out.*

People said, don’t change Aneesa. Stay as sweet as you are. But what if she changed and couldn’t help it? Then she thought, no, she would never change her personality. She would never betray her Now-Self. Never. But she became worried that she might change without knowing. What if change crept up on her like a shadow that she didn’t know was there until it was upon her. Or what if it happened slowly. Little things she wouldn’t realise until she had changed too much. Then her Future-Self would betray her Now-Self. She tried to remember if she was the same person she was two years ago.

And what if she changed for the better? Then what. (162-163)

Aneesa’s astute observations signal the start of her search for belonging, hindered by the anonymity of her father, whom she seeks to make sense of her identity crisis. Aneesa does not change outwardly, but by the novel’s conclusion, trauma forces her to view the world differently. After the violent burglary at Khadeejah’s house, “something had broken within” Aneesa and “change had come” for her so that “she was no longer a stuck-in-the-middle child” (336). Aneesa realises her fragility as a woman in a country where incidents of violence are ever-increasing. The event causes her absent father, Faheem, to reconnect with her. Aneesa

holds him accountable for abandoning his family and contributing to their brokenness. Thereafter, she begins her healing process.

### **Conclusion**

Shubnum Khan's *Onion Tears* (2011) shares similarities with Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) and Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007). These authors shift their character narratives between past and present, showing the importance of protagonist growth and establishing continuity. Highlighting the intersectionality between these novels regarding issues of class, race, and gender inequality illustrates how the themes affect women of different racial classifications. Moreover, each novel responds to violence against women, community stereotyping and loss of identity, indicating the significance of female voices in literature. Khan's female characters represent the three stages that have impacted Indian South Africans, namely, apartheid, the period of transition and post-apartheid. She demonstrates how South African Indian voices can be used in literature to close the gap between fact and fiction. This dissertation chapter indicates how post-apartheid 'Afrindian' literature unites the experiences of the past with the realities of contemporary South Africa. This genre is a gateway to understanding the position of women in the Indian community. *Onion Tears* is a testament to the challenges that the Indian population have faced and overcome since colonialism. Furthermore, Khan's writing exposes how the conventions of the apartheid era have shaped contemporary Indian identity.

## Conclusion

My research reveals how the experiences of women of colour as citizens of South Africa are linked and how their intersectional relationship can help these women cast off the legacy of apartheid, which has succeeded in dividing the country on racial lines. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* remarks, “[h]ate is not inborn; it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being [...] [h]ate demands existence and he who hates has to show his hate in appropriate actions and behaviours; in a sense, he has to become hate (1967, 53). From colonial and segregationist hatred of the non-white ‘other’ to people of colour hating each other, hate has crippled South Africa. This study’s primary aim is to highlight the intersections between the experiences of Black, Coloured, and Indian South African women. The texts explored illustrate the points I foreground in this dissertation. The selected novels are written by women in the groups being studied. Although their writing is fictitious, each author draws from her experience as a woman of colour in a country that is fixated on racial differences. This allows for an in-depth analysis of class, race, and gender issues. The reference to case studies from South African history in each chapter, such as Sandra Laing’s story, the looting, unrest, racial tensions, and the Coronavirus pandemic, illustrate the complex relationships between literature, history, and society. Using critical material and South African literature, I have shown that class, race, and gender are inextricably linked to identity formation.

I conclude my argument by illustrating the relationship between the chosen works of fiction and the three seemingly unrelated communities. Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* (2007), Zoë Wicomb’s *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), and Shabnam Khan’s *Onion Tears* (2011) contain similar portrayals of gender discrimination, class-based hierarchical inequality and racial bias endured by non-white South African women for decades. Many of the similarities between the texts pertain to views on interracial relationships, marriage conventions, power struggles manifested through violence, and lingering apartheid influence. Furthermore, each novel addresses how European beauty standards have negatively impacted women of colour by influencing community norms. Although Wicomb’s narrative is written and set two decades before the other texts, her commentary on the Coloured condition aligns with Matlwa and Khan’s portrayal of their communities and their critiques of South African society. Each author uses fictional narratives to address fundamental issues that have affected South Africans for

several generations and require intervention. I have briefly referred to some parallels between the texts in chapters two and three. If read independently, the novels do not appear to have any links as each is set in a different location and focuses on women in varying stages of their lives. However, I used intersectionality to highlight the connections between each group. The intersection of class, race, and gender is the common thread that makes the protagonists allied in their respective struggles. The characters experience social realities that allow readers to identify with their circumstances and choices. This concluding section elaborates on similarities mentioned in previous chapters and explores the generational and socioeconomic differences, allowing each narrative to form a unique perspective.

*Coconut* highlights the struggles experienced by the Black middle class. Ofilwe and Fikile represent opposite extremes of the same continuum. They are disadvantaged by standards set to exclude them. In their bid to find acceptance, they ostracise each other and adopt a colonial attitude toward members of their community. The text indicates that class is a social construct influenced by those in positions of power, while gender roles are rigid for women of colour. Matlwa's protagonists are victims of their prejudice as they perpetuate cycles of jealousy and hate. Solidarity among women and the Black community is ignored since each has battles to fight and no time to invest in or understand the struggles of the other. Chapter One, focusing on *Coconut*, discusses themes such as poverty and limitations to transformation in South Africa. Fikile's narrative highlights pervasive poverty among black people apart from Ofilwe's family, which belongs within the one per cent of the population who have benefitted from affirmative action. Class and race are pivotal factors impacting the identity crises of post-apartheid young Black women. Fikile is an example of someone occupying the lowest position on the pyramid of class and race while Ofilwe is at the peak. The text highlights that although there was a change in government, social relations are untouched. By referring to the BEE and Quota System, this dissertation indicates how policy failure persists because the circumstances of non-white people have hardly changed. These attempts at inclusivity aim to change the lives of the poor or previously disadvantaged, but the problem of poverty has not been effectively addressed. Instead, racially charged policies have created the opportunity for exclusion, corruption, and exploitation of those who require intervention efforts. Furthermore, just as apartheid used legislation to stir dissension between communities of colour, these policies, which appear as un/intentional exclusionary practices, continue to divide people.

Chapter Two, dealing with *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, tackles issues affecting women at different stages of life by documenting Frieda's growth as a woman navigating racial ambiguity. Frieda's low self-esteem, negative body image and the effects of colourism elaborate on the theme of identity introduced in Chapter One. These topics are still and will continue to be relevant. Policy failure is evident when Frieda returns to South Africa expecting change but is disappointed. This is explicitly highlighted when she visits a White doctor and has to wait in the yard instead of the waiting room where her father assured her that Coloured people were allowed. Concerning marriage conventions, Frieda discovers that Moira is far from marital bliss despite her marriage fitting the criteria of a good match in their community. In society's misogynistic view, Moira is better off than her friend because she is married, yet Frieda is financially independent and successful in her field. Frieda's childhood isolation still haunts her in adulthood, while other members of the coloured community have opinions on her success. The subdivisions in Coloured communities amount to a caste system with lighter-skinned people at the top of the hierarchy.

In light of the above, this study's third chapter analyses *Onion Tears* and compares these selected novels. Khan uses her characters to emphasise the prejudice among Indian women. During childhood, Summaya was criticised for her unusual appearance, yet individuals could not deny her attractiveness. As an adult, she is judged for her failed marriage. Despite the bias of her conservative community, Summaya is not governed by backward ideals. During apartheid, when interracial relationships were forbidden, Summaya indulged in a romantic affair with Mark Green. This is reminiscent of Frieda's dalliance with Michael at university. Their defiance is an essential quality for transformation. The effect of education as a tool to remove barriers is evident in their willingness to go against the apartheid government. Khadeejah remains trapped in the past, believing she occupies the lowest position in the racial hierarchy as a woman of colour. She unsuccessfully tries to educate her granddaughter, Aneesa, about the unwritten rules she is bound by as an Indian female. However, as a product of the postapartheid era, Aneesa forges her path without the predisposition to propagate racial and class division.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, our country is yet to become a Rainbow Nation. Many factors impacting this have been outlined in this study. However, there are points of intersection that citizens can use to connect with and better understand each other. Although this project only focuses on women, future studies could expand on these findings. The historical context of apartheid, which sought to separate by race and dehumanise people of colour, could be a starting point for South African communities to acknowledge how they have been deceived and wrongfully turned against each other. Similarly, women of colour are all, in some way, impacted by global trends that seek to create a homogenous group by skewing beauty standards in favour of European women with fair complexions. Specifically, this ideology portrays lighter skin as more desirable. Colourism is prevalent in each community, as analysed in this dissertation. This discrimination is a barrier to racial reconciliation in South Africa as it promotes hierarchical perceptions of women. Hewitt and Kaunda indicate that the subtle conditioning that women of colour face, which causes a yearning to alter their appearance drastically, highlights a “serious crisis of identity” (2018, xx). This relates to the objectification of women according to physical attributes, something each protagonist experiences. *Coconut, You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, and *Onion Tears* illustrate the problem of women being sexualised from a young age, regardless of race. This is reinforced by the communal beliefs surrounding marital choices. However, this issue also leaves room for defying social norms as women reject archaic beauty practices and choose partners according to personal preferences instead of community attitudes.

Skin colour also impacts marriage conventions among the selected communities. Each author shows her community’s perception regarding darker-skinned women’s romantic prospects and, implicitly, their ability to give birth to attractive children. This perspective devalues many women of colour regardless of race and prompts ingroup rivalries. This also breeds exclusivity complexes whereby the authenticity of an individual is questioned if (s)he fails to fit the archetypal idea of his or her ethnic group. This outlook is passed down through generations and causes women to fear straying from the norm. Although entrenched by decades of dictatorial domination and cultural beliefs, this attitude is derided by a new generation of South Africans represented by characters like Aneesa, Hoosen, Fikile and Ofilwe. The selected novels indicate that beyond racial inequality, South African women deal with other discriminatory actions that shape how they view themselves and others. Gender dynamics are also illustrated through the protagonists’ lives. Discourse on gender-based violence has proved relevant in

South Africa for decades, with stories of rape, abuse and murder circulating through the media constantly. Khan, Matlwa and Wicomb use the literary sphere of influence to raise awareness of the voiceless women who face physical, sexual, and verbal abuse from men trusted by these victims as well as strangers. Although the selected novels are breakout texts for each author, these women are not afraid to tackle sensitive issues boldly.

Class distinctions are manifested differently in each novel (among each group) but are undeniably present. For the protagonists of *Coconut*, class is linked to money, connections, race, complexion, and education. Among Frieda's people, ancestry and language are the dominant forms of determining one's place in the hierarchy. In the Indian community, financial position, career and, in some instances, former caste classifications show how individuals are regarded. Economic disparities led to conflict between communities initiated by the apartheid government that favoured certain groups to hinder united efforts to overthrow the fascist system. The misplaced anger of the previously disadvantaged allows for persistent policy failure and state corruption. For this reason, little has changed in almost thirty years. This dissertation illustrates that many societal issues are connected to those that women of colour exclusively experience. The research also indicates that most of these problems are due to seeds planted by the apartheid regime. Subsequently, the difficulties persist because blame is misdirected, and racial groups cannot find common ground. Each text determines that women of colour occupy a space between their South African identity and racial classification. They are generally unable to accept and exist in their duality. The consequences of a painful past have further placed them in a precarious socio-political position. Many are strangers to the benefits of democracy, such as Fikile, who lives in poverty. There is pressure on the youth to break generational curses while carrying forward tradition and adapting to a globalised society. Thus, many struggle to find their niche and appease elders. As a result, modern women distance themselves from their community norms. Recognising the complexities of being a woman of colour in South Africa, coupled with the reality of shared struggle, allows this group to break barriers arising from the past.

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