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**Author**

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**Publication Date**

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Pigments of Our Imagination:  
Anthropological Myths, Racial Archives and the  
Transnationalism of Apartheid

A dissertation in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements of the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Comparative Literature

by

Kirk Bryan Sides

2014

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pigments of Our Imagination:  
Anthropological Myths, Racial Archives and the  
Transnationalism of Apartheid

by

Kirk Bryan Sides

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Jennifer Sharpe, Chair

“Pigments of Our Imagination: Anthropological Myths, Racial Archives and the Transnationalism of Apartheid” repositions South African cultural production within discourses on Africa, the Black Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean. By focusing on apartheid’s intellectual origins, this project begins by mapping the production of a transnational race discourse between Germany and South Africa in order to situate apartheid within a broader circulation of ideas on race and colonial governmentality. I argue that this transnational dialogue embodies a larger shift in the racial technologies utilized by nation-states over the course of the twentieth century, in which the employment of anthropology gained increasing significance in the development of national race policies. Exploring the ways in which pre-apartheid intellectuals articulated a ‘new language’ for representing race to the state, I demonstrate that as apartheid ideology coalesced it

did so under an increasingly cartographical rubric for imagining how races were to be organized within South Africa. As a form of colonial racial governance, I show how apartheid's geographical mapping of race was also ideologically buttressed by a historical imperative of projecting ideas of racial difference and distinction back into the southern African past. I argue that this mythologizing was part of apartheid's attempt to 'ground' itself as an organic, and indigenous, ideology of the South Africa nation. In order to interrogate this racist mythology, I trace a history of South African cultural production – from early, pre-apartheid black literature to contemporary performance and visual art – that, in demonstrating a consistent discourse on racial and cultural creolization in South Africa, runs counter to apartheid mythologies of separation. In the final chapter, I move towards an 'oceanic' critique of apartheid's rigid, continentally-based system of classification. I argue that the visual economies of the Indian Ocean offer a regional vantage point from which to view South African apartheid as part of a nexus of transoceanic exchange across the southern tip of Africa. I conclude that a history of creolization discourse in South Africa not only undoes the equation of apartheid as an exceptionalist, national anomaly, but also demonstrates South Africa's entanglement in in the global circulation of racial ideas.

The dissertation of Kirk Bryan Sides is approved.

David Theo Goldberg

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Dominic R. Thomas

Jennifer Sharpe, Chair

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2014

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Manoush Aghakhani, who has been an active and patient reader and listener to nearly every word of this text in its various manifestations, to my family Bryan Sides and Julie Sides, and to Vicki Papaemanuel for clearing some of the path before me; and to my dissertation committee members, Jenny Sharpe, Françoise Lionnet, Dominic Thomas and David Theo Goldberg for their thoughtful criticism and invaluable insights.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Taking stock of intellectual debt, in being largely an account of one's life, is a difficult and necessarily incomplete reckoning. In approaching this Sisyphean task, I want to begin by thanking a number of teachers whose influence is clear not only in this project but also in the daily intellectual practices of my life, even if these individuals might remain unaware of their impact. This dissertation is a token of my gratitude to a number of individuals. Firstly, to Georg Kleine, whose mentorship many years ago was both exacting and unwavering, even if I didn't understand what it meant at the time. To Roy van Neste, and countless afternoons in office hours and for teaching me what it meant to write. Also, to Doug Sparks, for whom there are too many anecdotes and examples of how your influence continues in my life: for walks through the streets of New York; for Chaucer, for Nietzsche; for Dylan, and for an example of academic humility that has remained with me all these years. Finally, to Zhand Shakibi, who knew something of me before I did, and has traveled from similar places.

I am forever indebted to Jenny Sharpe, who entertained my extremely preliminary ideas, and who had the intellectual patience to help me form them into this completed dissertation. Her advice and sense of critique as a mentor remain my sources of diligence. I hope I have become a better writer and a better thinker for her keeping me on my toes. I will happily spend my academic career fulfilling the intellectual and professional debt to Françoise Lionnet, who has been the source of myriad and productive paths throughout my graduate tenure; and for a ceaselessly graceful style of academic rigor, a style I can only hope to emulate. I would also like to thank Dominic Thomas, who remains very close to the genesis of this project, as well as David Theo Goldberg, who has selflessly shared contacts, resources, and insights. To Allen and Polly Roberts, I do not know how to say thank you for such academic and intellectual generosity,

which are also sources of this project. Gil Hochberg believed in me at a crucial moment in my life, and it has made all the difference. Gil didn't flinch at a young, naïve and would-be graduate student; I believe she saw that my slight unorthodoxy was a sign of my determination. In many ways she is the reason I came through a graduate program in Comparative Literature. For this I am eternally grateful. Aamir Mufti remains one of the most formative influences in my academic career: your critical approach has been a compass. Ali Behdad and Efrain Kristal also deserve recognition here, for being remarkable examples of academic leadership as chairs of Comparative Literature at UCLA during my tenure; and for both of them always believing in me, even when I was unsure of myself. Of course, any of the faults or shortcomings of this project remain my own, and deserve apologies in advance.

There are those relationships whose impact manifests only over the course of one's life. There are two such individuals whose critical minds, sustaining conversations, and collaborations have made this project what it aspires to be, Indra Mukhopadhyay and Duncan M. Yoon. To Indra, who knows friendship beyond conditions or explanations, and to Duncan, whose loyalty has sustained me in dark times, I look forward to a lifetime of friendship and intellectual exchange with you both.

I have also been fortunate enough to receive generous institutional funding during my graduate tenure, and especially while in the research and writing stages of this dissertation. I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, for two research fellowships to collect archival material, which brought me to South Africa and Mauritius, and where I was able to gather enough materials to sustain me well into my academic career; a priceless contribution. Thank you as well to the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program, and Audrey Mbeje, for providing the funding and seamless program infrastructure to

undertake an intensive study of isiZulu in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. My readings of *Chaka* in Chapter Three are indebted to my time with this program. The International Institute of the University of California, Los Angeles provided a generous Fieldwork Fellowship to return to South Africa in order to collect more archival materials. Also, the Palevsky Family Fellowship, the Harry and Yvonne Lenart Fellowship, and of course the UCLA Department of Comparative Literature, all of who have provided generous institutional affiliation and funding at various stages in the completion of this project. Also, many thanks to the organizers and conveners of the Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism, especially Achille Mbembe, Kelly Gillespie, Leigh-Ann Naidoo, and Julia Hornberger, for their creation of an unparalleled environment for the generation, gestation, and exchange of ideas; and for an intellectual and academic conviviality I have rarely seen. Much of this dissertation was borne in those Johannesburg conversations.

Portions of this project have appeared elsewhere in various manifestations and in differing forms. Excerpts of Chapter Four, on Berni Searle, appeared in an article published by *Image and Text*, in South Africa, and many thanks to the editors for permissions to include those sections in this project. Each of the chapters has been presented at different stages at myriad venues, and I thank all of the institutions that have hosted my work as it has coalesced into this dissertation, of course, most especially University of California, Los Angeles. Also, thanks to University of the Witwatersrand, WiSER, the University of Johannesburg, and Princeton University. Special thanks must also go to Wendy Belcher, who has been a supportive colleague and friend, and to Kerry Bystrom, as well as Leora Farber.

Finally to my family: to Bryan and Julie Sides, who have never said “no,” but only “how?” Their support has known no limits; nor has their enthusiasm, excitement, or their

genuine interest in my work ever waned. I remain truly amazed at where you two have arrived and what you have come through. Your stories have always been the reason behind what I have tried to do. Vicki Papaemanuel was the light ahead of me, clearing some of the path, and showing me some of the way. I saw the world through you first, and you told me what I could become. George Papaemanuel, a brother closer than blood, who has helped me find my center more than once. And to my extended family and friends, whose love and friendship my work has often, unfortunately, taken precedence over – I only hope I can continue to return the affection, respect, and patience you have shown me. The Aghakhanis have been my family away from home for many years, and have given me the most important piece of my life. Tony and Elaina Barulic, and Jeremy Davis, you have remained my closest and oldest friends; like siblings each of you. Manoush: my confidant, my co-conspirator in life, and my base. You ground me, both intellectually and personally, in ways it will thankfully take a lifetime to understand. Your patience is staggering and your determination a rare beauty. You remain my light over the water.

Many thanks and much love to all the others whose impact remains as a trace on this work. You too are part of this story.

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## Introduction

### **Cartographies, Geographies and Classifications: Landed Racial Imaginaries and Towards a Creolization History of South Africa**

“...the way was opened up to the emergent march, the culmination of a century-long trek, if not quite straightforwardly, or inevitably to the apartheid state. Far from anomaly, far from oddity, the apartheid state had roots in the modernizing history of South Africa, if not in Europe’s colonial extension (of itself.”

– David Theo Goldberg

In 1950, Theophilus Ebenhaezer Dönges, then Minister of the Interior for South Africa, introduced the now infamous Population Registration Act with an explicit declaration that, “The determination of a person’s race is of the greatest importance in the enforcement of any existing or future laws in connection with separate residential areas.”<sup>1</sup> While many have referred to the Act itself as the cornerstone of apartheid legislation, calling as it does for the categorization of the entire population of the Union into three distinct groups, White, Black, and Coloured, as well as a central office of classification to undertake such racial bureaucracy, Dönges’ preamble to the Act is equally important for the economy and poignancy of its racial ‘logic.’ There would be, there must be the preamble insists, a correlation created by the state between a “person’s race,” the place they resided, and thus the racial topography of South Africa as a nation. Upon ratification, it was incumbent upon the South African government, now two years into National Party leadership, to determine and maintain a connection between race and land. According to the preamble as well as the legislation itself, race would be the determinate, and explicit, index for nation formation as well as what form the nation would take.

It was on the heels of this foundational piece of legislation that the Group Areas Act (1950) provided for the comprehensive segregation by colour of all commercial and residential

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* Press (Charlottesville: University of Virginia



arrangements at every level of society, from urban centers to remote villages. Dönges validates the segregation of the Group Areas Act with a predictable rhetoric, relying on an explicit moral obligation – incumbent upon the state – to reduce racial conflict, otherwise assumed to be a natural occurrence of racial encounter. The Minister states that the Group Areas Act was: “designed to eliminate friction between the races in the Union because we believe, and *believe strongly that points of contact – all unnecessary points of contact – between the races must be avoided*. If you reduce the number of points of contact to the minimum, you reduce the possibility of friction. Contact brings about friction, and friction brings about heat, and may cause a conflagration.”<sup>2</sup> Wrapped in a mechanical metaphor smacking of apartheid’s desperate attempts to inculcate itself into a global imaginary of modernity and progress, Dönges’ statement also belies the regime’s anxiety around the fundamental question of potential race contact and mixture. As David Theo Goldberg notes, apartheid was a “political theology of race,” and that, “in sacralizing race, apartheid extended new definition to nineteenth century high colonialism... assuming at the same time especially aesthetic elements of fascist ideological representation... Apartheid was the social absolutization of race, rendering its conceptual frames foundational in defining the body politic and its terms of relation. *Race defined all, was everywhere present*.”<sup>3</sup> Apartheid, through a legal program of segregation and an intellectual project of historical delineation of races, would systematically deny the potential for social, cultural, and especially racial entanglements, as these intimacies were thought to be antithetical to strong national formation.

Dönges’ statements also belie the first of two foundational impulses of apartheid: the first orienting principle is clear in the Minister’s address, which focuses on curtailing all present and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 54; emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 301; emphasis mine.

future interracial contact. South Africa, in the imagination of its early, segregationist and apartheid architects would be a nation founded upon division, not only of its people, but also of the land upon which those people lived. Apartheid as a national logic projected a future where division, both racial and geographical, would supposedly create national harmony; the lack of friction Dönges speaks about. The second principle, which I will address below, entailed a project of mythification by which (racial) difference would also be projected back into the past. In order to create a ‘modern’ nation based on present and future separateness, the history of South Africa would also be a history of difference and separation. Indeed, apartheid’s vision of modernity was based upon and justified by this mythology of a racially delineated past.

The speeches of apartheid politicians, such as Dönges and Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd – National Party Prime Minister and popularly known as the “architect of apartheid” – ensured that apartheid’s vision of the future was a racist modernity grounded upon various ‘logics.’ For instance, while Dönges relies on mechanical “friction,” Verwoerd’s couches Separate Development in a rhetoric of eco-logical division, which will be discussed below. Ultimately, this future-oriented political rhetoric relied equally on the historical myths of separation that could be offered by anthropology in the service of the state. While anthropologists and ethnologists who worked for the South African Native Affairs Department would deny accusations of being ideologues for the apartheid state, many politicians would equally eschew the importance of anthropology (and human/cultural ‘sciences’) in the building of the ‘architecture’ for the racist vision of South Africa. However, upholding a future of apartheid, or separateness, necessitated a certain kind of thinking about the country’s past that was predicated on racial differences and their geographical originariness and, by extension, delineation. In this way, apartheid was just as much a historical project as it was one that reached towards a racialist

vision of the future. Through this anthropological work, the difference and resultant separation was made to look like a ‘natural’ consequence of South Africa; that is, South Africa, its geography, its peoples, its races and cultures, etc. were seen to historically divide themselves naturally along racial and ethnic lines.

Apartheid represented itself as a fundamentally national project, a project grounded and rooted in the particularities of the South African nation of the Cape Peninsula. However, “Pigments of our Imagination” argues that the ideological and intellectual construction of apartheid, despite this ‘grounding’ rhetoric, was in many ways the result of transnational, and transoceanic, discourses on race, and in this way shifts the geography of South Africa to its location between two oceans. This repositioning presents two different kinds of topographies as models or modes for reading the history of race in South Africa. The apartheid imagination ‘grounded’ its segregationist practices by rooting its mythologies of difference in the southern African soil and envisioning the continental carving up of South African identities along racial/national lines. In opposition to this land-based paradigm for organizing race, I move in the final chapter towards a reading of the visual work of Berni Searle in order to trace an oceanic imaginary as topographical critique to apartheid’s supposed ‘grounding.’ An oceanic critique of apartheid not only presents a broader cartography within which to place the history of South Africa but, by viewing it as a transoceanic peninsula, South Africa’s histories of race loom as less exceptionalist and can be more productively seen as part of a larger regional and global exchange of racial ideas. Placing apartheid between two oceans undoes the myth of it being an exceptional anomaly of South Africa’s *national* history. Rather, I will argue that the experience of racial categorization and policing that took the form of apartheid in South Africa, is actually

part of a much geographically broader and longer history of race and racism characteristic of South Africa's cartographical placement in the world.

In order to 'ground' a racist vision of the national future in the historical soils of southern Africa, the South African government cultivated an intricate relationship with the discipline of anthropology in the form of the Native Affairs Department and its Ethnological Section. The segregationist politics of apartheid required the ethnological discourse of racial origins and ethnic homelands in order to fully articulate its organizing principles of both future and historical separation. By the time Dönges makes his preamble to the Population Registration Act and inaugurates nearly a half-century of apartheid rule in South Africa, this collaboration between the state and its anthropological producers of racial 'knowledge' had in fact been quite established. In 1935, Nicholas J. van Warmelo, then Head of the Ethnological Division of the Native Affairs Department, produced a hefty volume entitled *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa*.<sup>4</sup> Van Warmelo's *Preliminary Survey* (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter One) locates itself in a national climate of concern over the perceived lack of 'knowledge' of South Africa's 'native' peoples, to which van Warmelo imagines himself providing the "preliminary" knowledge needed to address questions of national(izing) concern. Van Warmelo opens his study by noting that, "The need for a collection of material such as is now issued in this volume has...long been felt by students of South African ethnology and native affairs."<sup>5</sup> Van Warmelo notes that while South African ethnology had produced some studies, "many of *our* tribes remain *practically* unknown to this day."<sup>6</sup> I want to emphasize here both the ethic of trusteeship and colonial paternalism in van Warmelo's possessive view of "our tribes," a

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas J. van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa*. Pretoria: The Government Printer, Department of Native Affairs, Ethnological Publications Vol. V, 1935.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

collective, national positioning, and delineation, of white South Africans vis-à-vis so-called “natives.” But also, van Warmelo’s otherwise simple declaration belies a more sinister, and racialist, pragmatism signaled by his desire to provide information that would make Bantu-Speaking peoples, as he says, “practically” known to the South African state.

Moreover, van Warmelo is unequivocal about the role that ethnography would play within the South African state. Ethnographical work would resonate with and inform upon governmental policies to do with land, population management, as well as economical planning. As Governmental Ethnologist, Van Warmelo betrays the priorities of his ethnographical practice by listing the particular features of South African “tribes” that his work will focus on: “(1) the numerical strength of the tribe, (2) the extant and the nature of the land occupied, (3) where that land is situated, and (4) the affinities of the tribe.”<sup>7</sup> The betrayal this language registers is signaled by the order of these indexes of cultural knowledge production, the cultural element (“affinities of the tribe”) coming last after all the considerations of population densities and geographies. The anthropologist, according to van Warmelo, would be invested in the indexes of state control. Nor does he stop here, but continues to expound on how ethnology is invested not only in historical narratives connecting race to geography but also how ethnology was quickly becoming one register of the language of race spoken by the South African state. He writes that:

Now the distribution of population is a factor that has to be taken into account in almost every calculation of a *practical nature*, as far as government and policy are concerned and at a glance at the map makes one realize, more vividly than mere figures can, that whatever equilibrium exists between the crowded reserves and surrounding European-owned land must be very delicately

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

poised... There is another point in connection with land, namely that of tenure... This question is of importance whether ethnologically, economically or politically...<sup>8</sup>

Van Warmelo, a trained philologist, makes clear that the study of Bantu languages in South Africa, the collection and classification of dialects, their myths, legends and fairytales, would be in the service of the racial and political economy of the state; the past would be racialized in the service of a racist state future.

Van Warmelo, in his work under the Native Affairs Department, and in the development of a particular 'style' of ethnographical knowledge production, registers an increasing functionalization of race; a pragmatism that was curiously and perhaps paradoxically mixed with carefully cultivated mythologies of race and national belonging. I will argue that van Warmelo creates a particular language of race, an increasingly economical discourse for surveying and representing race that is also reliant on a mythology of racial difference as constitutive of the South African past. Moreover, van Warmelo is adamant that his economical racial language was best articulated through the visual registers of cartography. Maps, he argues – to the point of a marked divergence from his mentor – provide the most pragmatic, digestible form of racial knowledge for the segregationist state. Chapter One will discuss in detail the importance of van Warmelo's shift towards racial cartography. However, it is important to note here that, Van Warmelo, in serving as Government Ethnologist for nearly forty years, was largely responsible for the development of a certain style of representing racial identities to the South African state, a style that, in its departure from its intellectual sources in German philology, charts a genealogical shift in race thinking over the twentieth century. I argue that it is van Warmelo's racial language and increasing reliance on cartography that comes to represent a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; emphasis mine.

functionalization of race vis-à-vis the state largely characteristic of twentieth century racial policing by nations across the globe. In this way South African apartheid was neither racial zenith nor nadir, neither exception nor anomaly on the spectrum of racist regimes, but rather part of a genealogy of racisms and their development across the twentieth century and across the world.

Part of the state's functionalizing of race meant that the reading of the South African (racial) landscape would become increasingly a project of seeing the ways in which racial difference was embodied within the topographical variegation of the country itself. Moreover, according to this anthropological nationalism, these divisions and differences were located/locatable historically. Race was always a narrative of origin, or so the national story of apartheid went. I will argue that despite this official race language of the state, based in epistemologies of difference and separation, that South Africa has also produced discourses on creolized racial and cultural identities, articulations of mixture and historical entanglement between and amongst different groups of people. In this way, apartheid represents a mythologizing that projected its divisiveness back onto a past that can otherwise be characterized as creolized. I will discuss below how creolization becomes a mode for reading and writing the historical register of South Africa, and in this way can offer a counter-discourse to the apartheid myth of nation.

“Pigments of our Imagination” intervenes into a body of thinking on the history of South Africa that traces the origins of apartheid as emerging solely from a mixture of national social, economic and geopolitical tectonics between the various colonies of the Cape and the British Empire. Apartheid, in this paradigm, is seen as the product of Afrikaner nationalism and largely to the exclusion of global examples, influences, and transnational dialogues on racial governance

that are also woven into the fabric of apartheid. For instance, in David Welsh's monumental study of *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, the racial program is characterized as the largely cumulative product of an increasing racial repartee between Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans over the politics of enfranchisement. To this, Welsh notes the country's "rapid social change, poverty, including the substantial economic inequality between Afrikaners and English, and perceived threats to Afrikaner identity" which simultaneously produced a "radical Afrikaner nationalism."<sup>9</sup> Histories such as Welsh's rely on a strictly national hermeneutics, and one that, like much of the most virulent debate over South African historiography, is propelled largely by questions of apartheid's relationship to economy. Thus even the self-proclaimed "authoritative" *Cambridge History of South Africa* maps the evolution of historical thinking in South Africa as animated by the central question of economy, noting that, "the most vehement of the debates in South African historiography...the clash between the liberals and the radicals, or Marxists, from the later 1960's onwards" was marked by "the issue of contention...[which] was whether capitalism profited from apartheid."<sup>10</sup> The amorphous body of racial discourses and political expedients that went into the formulation of apartheid are generally honed into a finer point of national history writing.

Others such as Hermann Giliomee, while still remaining largely locked within this national paradigm of investigation, admit of a more global texture to the piecing together of the apartheid racial imaginary. Giliomee notes that pre-apartheid intellectuals and politicians "drew on the American South for a precedent to cope with South African native problems...[and] in introducing that cornerstone of segregation, the Natives Land Act of 1913, he [Cape liberal, J.

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<sup>9</sup> Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, Bill Nasson, eds., *The Cambridge History of South Africa vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2-5.



W. Sauer] cited the work of the influential Henry Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*...”<sup>11</sup>

However, Giliomee makes such concessions towards a seemingly broader historiographical frame at the expense of other potential influences such as German Romanticism, or the more sinister associations to Nazism.<sup>12</sup> Nigel Worden succinctly summarizes the issue here, that while “the ending of apartheid has not yet produced a new version of national history akin to those that emerged in many post-colonial countries”<sup>13</sup> there have been major gains in historical revisions from the critical positions of gender analysis and postmodernist questions of historical invention, and orality versus written sources. However, Worden rightly notes that, “What is still lacking is a truly indigenous historiography.”<sup>14</sup> Since Worden’s writing (2007), there have been some articulations of what might be called an “indigenous history,” and I argue that these have been histories that focus on both gender critiques,<sup>15</sup> but also on issues of creolization.<sup>16</sup>

Sarah Nuttall’s work on “entanglement” – as a historical condition, but also as a mode or register – is a seminal example of an indigenous history for approaching racial segregation and racial thought more broadly in South Africa. With the peninsula of southern Africa in mind, Nuttall writes that, “entanglement is a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved

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<sup>11</sup> Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2011), 303.

<sup>12</sup> See Giliomee’s, “The Making of the Apartheid Plan, 1929-1948,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29.2 (2003): 373-392. He is unequivocal that apartheid was inculcated from the genealogy of German Romanticism and the later *volksnationalism* of Fascism.

<sup>13</sup> Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2007), 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, the work of Zine Magubane: “Which Bodies Matter? Feminist Post-Structuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the Hottentot Venus” *Gender and Society* Vol. 15 no. 6 (December 2001): 816-834; “Black Skin, White Masks: Black Masculinity in the Postmodern Age” *Men and Masculinities* 4.3 (2002): 233-257.

<sup>16</sup> See, Zoë Wicomb, “Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa” in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Also, Erasmus, Zimitiri, ed., *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Kwela Books 2001); also, “Creolization, Colonial Citizenship(s) and Degeneracy: A Critique of Selected Histories of Sierra Leone and South Africa” *Current Sociology* 59 (2011): 635-654.

with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness.”<sup>17</sup> Rather than the South African landscape supposedly predisposing the nation towards separation – the myth conjured by apartheid thinking – Nuttall imagines the southern tip of Africa as a geography productive of creolization and mixture.

Nuttall’s notion of entanglement comes from Édouard Glissant’s own reading of the potential of creolization as a mode to undo the historical violence of colonial/racial oppression. Glissant is clear that the cultural and racial violence of colonialism rests on the “ethnographic approach,” part of the colonial episteme that “insis[ts] on fixing the object of scrutiny in static time, thereby removing the tangled nature of lived experience and promoting the idea of uncontaminated survival.”<sup>18</sup> Alluding to Glissant’s assertion that, “we must return to the point from which we started, not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish,”<sup>19</sup> Nuttall encourages a return to points entanglement or, “point d’intrication”, in the South Africa past. In the chapters that follow I will return to various representations of entangled points in the South African literary and artistic imagination, moments which not only articulate a creolization discourse to critique the mythologies of apartheid separation, but also open up more expansive imaginings of South Africa in the world. By looking at both literary and visual arts from South Africa, I will argue not only for a history of unique forms of creolization within this country, but also for the

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

larger sense of South Africa's entanglement in the world. I argue that South African creolization not only un-thinks apartheid mythologies of difference within South African, but also points towards the ways in which apartheid itself was less the racist anomaly of southern Africa and more the result of a global discourse on race and racial governance.

Nuttall presents the idea of entanglement as an emergent mode of sociality defining the post-apartheid moment, and it is from here that she calls for reading "new archives" of South Africa. In other words, while this move is critical for seeing South Africa as a creolized and creolizing space, I move to shift the direction of the Nuttall's critique. If Nuttall sees the post-apartheid present as offering a paradigmatic shift through which to view histories of creolization in South Africa, I will argue for a more genealogical gesture of beginning with historical moments of creolization as critical spaces from which to view the post-apartheid present. More than simply historiographical semantics, this reversal moves to find moments of creolization as sites of interrogation for thinking about other narratives of modernity in South Africa.

Entanglement and creolization are, for this project, firstly historical indexes of national formation and national interrogation; historical foils to the mythologies of difference and separateness upon which apartheid was built. In the chapters that follow I want to imagine the historical implications of this term "entanglement" for thinking about race in South African literary and cultural production. In doing so, I will make an argument for a history of creolization discourse coming from the South African artistic imagination over the course of the previous century up to the present.

Registers of entanglement and creolization, through which to articulate the histories of South Africa, provides a productive counterpoint to the project of delineation outlined by Dönges' introduction to key apartheid legislation. I am particularly interested in the historical

implications of such an entangled reading. Apartheid, like other colonial imaginaries was a historical project, projecting myths of difference and divisive maps of originary homelands back into the archive of southern Africa. As a form of racial terror, apartheid's intellectual project – like much of Western colonialism – was “not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated people.”<sup>20</sup> Fanon's reading of the historical project and projections of colonialism resonates with the apartheid historical imagination as well. He writes that, “colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.”<sup>21</sup> Apartheid as a colonizing system developed an intricate mythology of difference, which was – rather importantly – based on the imagined relationship between land, or geography, and race; as stated so economically by the Minister of the Interior, Dönges. “Pigments of our Imagination” argues that apartheid developed in relation to, and in opposition against contemporaneous and historical discourses and experiences of cultural and racial creolization.

Chapter 1, “In and Out of Africa: The Race of Anthropology and Towards a Transnational History of Apartheid,” explores the formulation of apartheid as both an ideologically and intellectually transnational configuration, which in turn can be read as part of a more global discourse on race and racial governance. Rather than a unique or exceptional political expedient specific to the South African nation in the middle of the twentieth century, it reads apartheid as arising – at least in part – from a transnational discourse between German anthropology and South African ethnography, and dating back at least to the early part of the century. I position this idea of apartheid – as one result of a global and transcolonial dialogue on

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<sup>20</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 210.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

race – against the prevalence of an ‘*apartheid as history*’ paradigm, a historiographical privileging that collapses South African history into apartheid history. Specifically, I relate the anthropological discipline of German *Afrikanistik*, which fell under the larger umbrella of *Volkerkunde*, to its South African ethnological correlate, *volkekunde*. I argue that this relationship between the racial discourses of South Africa and Germany is particularly symbolic for demonstrating how the racial economy of apartheid – otherwise read as a national(-izing) project – was in many ways the product of a transnational construction of race and racial identity.

I suggest that the first quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a transition from a more philological German tradition of studying Africa, towards not only a greater disciplinary fluidity or conflation, but also an increasingly functionalist language of race within the South African apartheid imaginary. Within this larger discussion of discursive exchange and influence between Germany and South Africa, I focus on what I see as two representational figures, Government Ethnologist of South Africa Nicolas J. van Warmelo and preeminent German philologist Carl Meinhof. Van Warmelo’s divergence from Meinhof, his mentor, over the issue of maps as suitable visual economies for linguistic/ethnic categorization marks a shift in the transmission of racial thinking into South Africa, and literally onto the South African landscape. Within this transition there is a shift in the conception of race and the language used to represent it, towards both an increased functionality, as well as an intensification of the idea of racial ‘fixity’ as it was literally mapped onto and across the South African landscape.

Firstly, by looking at ideological and institutional translations of German racial and cultural theory into and onto the South African social and cultural topography, I argue that apartheid, rather than being a unique South African expression of racism, was indeed

symptomatic of a more global discourse on race. Second, while being a product of transnational discourse on race, the pre/apartheid imaginary was also always attempting to firmly ground itself in the geographical specificities of South Africa itself. I argue that the collapsing of linguistics into ethnology and, further, onto geography, represented a mapping that attempted to write over a history of creolization in South Africa. I argue that the early pre/apartheid imagination also viewed the project of racial governance in more cartographical ways than many of its colonial predecessors. Apartheid's departure over the question of mapping race from its earlier influences in German anthropology also takes on an ecological symbolic economy as a way to politically 'ground' apartheid in the geography of southern Africa.

Chapter Two, "Geographies of Creolization: Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* and the 'Forgotten' Canon of African Literature," consists of a comparative reading between Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1925) and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). I begin by noting that, although it is characterized as one of the earliest expressions of the African novel, Mofolo's *Chaka* is largely overlooked in the criticism of African Literature. I argue that Mofolo's refusal to offer an authenticating narrative of origin, as well as his deprivileging of the colonial encounter as catalyst of modernity, earns *Chaka* a place in the 'forgotten canon' of African Literature. My claim is that Mofolo imagines an ethnically entangled pre-colonial Africa through the novel's textual creolization, or mixture of literary and anthropological discourses. This is then represented through the novel's creolized, 'trans-ethnic' narrative voice. Returning to the 'forgotten' *Chaka* text in this way, I posit an alternative history of the African novel, a history which does not take for granted mid-twentieth century independence as the originary moment of either African modernity specifically or articulations of postcoloniality in the African context more generally. Indeed, it is Mofolo's articulation of an African modernity under the sign of pre-

colonial creolization, rather than of original racial purity, that ultimately exposes many of the biases of our own contemporary critical approaches to the field of African Literature.

My reading of *Chaka* is imperative for establishing a history of creolization based in the South African cultural archive, and as such provides another mode for reading South African literary history. The basis for the comparison to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is that it will establish another literary investigation into African articulations of modernity. Moreover, the project of finding sources of creolization discourse in the African cultural archive interrogates Africa's place as supposed receptacle of racial originariness, especially within diasporic discourses. Whereas, in many articulations of anti- and post-colonial blackness and African diasporic identity, Africa comes to hold a static, ethnographical place, I argue that Mofolo offers a way of reading that moves beyond equations of diaspora with creolized dynamism. In other words, Mofolo's narrative imagines a pre-colonial African world of movement, mixture and creolization. In *Chaka*, African pre-colonial history becomes a site for articulating a modernity based on this encounter and mixture, a creolization which in many ways precludes the trope of Western vs. non-Western violence and relocates our conceptions of what we might call postcolonial aesthetics. In this way, the perennial problem of reading *Chaka* is our problematic approach to African Literature as a field. The novel unsettles narratives of where and when things are supposed to be in relation to both Africa and its place within a Western narrative of modernity. It rethinks the notion of origin for a modern South African nation, as well as what was imagined to have existed before, *Chaka* neither re-inscribes the lines of modernity as running solely between the West and non-West, nor does it allow us any nostalgic imaginings of the pre-colonial past.

Chapter Three, “Apartheid’s Transnational Other: Remembering Slavery and Rethinking Race across the Atlantic,” extends the conversations on how discourses on creolization in the South Africa literary canon can help to rethink narratives of modernity in relation to both African and African diasporic racial identities. South African author Zakes Mda’s 2007 novel *Cion* charts an alternate Black Atlantic cartography by offering a post-apartheid perspective on a post-bellum and supposedly post-racial America. Mda’s black Atlantic asks us to think about transoceanic connections linking different spaces across a body of water that are not necessarily determined by the legacy of transatlantic slavery, and yet still offers a way for thinking about how race is remembered and performed in the Atlantic world. Mda’s transatlantic imaginary begs for a comparison between two exceptionalist narratives of racial modernity – the United States and South Africa – and thereby interrogates the hegemony of slavery paradigms for thinking about race in the Atlantic world. Rather, Mda asks for considerations of interactions with and entanglements between transatlantic slavery and other forms of racial oppression that might come to form a global discourse and experience of race and racism. I follow Mda’s prompt by working towards a comparison that would see not simply the similarities and differences between the United States and South Africa, but indeed a shared history of dialogue between these two spaces spanning at least the length of the twentieth century. Ultimately, if the development of early apartheid discourse was influenced by the more established Jim Crow segregationist legislation of the southern United States, prompting South African policy to call for more intense racial segregation within its own national model, then Mda’s novel is even more provocative for staging a twenty-first century South African protagonist whose views on race, aesthetics, and politics mark a discourse of creolization, or cultural, racial and aesthetic mixture, as an outlet for American racial woes. I conclude that Mda charts a transnational “southern



imaginary” of post-slavery America from a post-apartheid South African perspective; two ‘souths’ of the Atlantic world that in their discourses of creolization complicate the racial mappings of postcolonialism, the geographies of the postcolonial novel, as well as the hegemony of the Black Atlantic paradigm.

The fourth and final chapter, “Framing the Debate on Race: Creolized Histories and Oceanic Futures in Berni Searle’s *Colour me Series*,” focuses on the visual and performance work of Cape Town artist Berni Searle, whose *Colour Me* installation series displaces the centrality of the apartheid historical moment for thinking about race in South Africa. Searle’s foregrounding of spice powders maps a much broader and longer history of race operating across the southern tip of Africa and into the Indian Ocean. While Searle’s works do engage with the history of ethnography by staging racialized and gendered bodies, I contend that her critique is not particular to South African apartheid, but rather traces a history of racial ideas and their entanglement with commodity exchange across the southern Atlantic and Indian Oceans. I conclude that Searle places the racialized South African female body within a narrative routed through the channels of the Spice Trade and the rise of global capitalism. Through a retooling of the commodities of historical imperial routes, her artwork imagines an oceanic and creolized history of race in South Africa. Not only does it imagine a ‘global’ history of apartheid – seen specifically from the vantage point of Indian Ocean Spice Trade routes – but it also provincializes the racist regime of South African apartheid as *one* manifestation of racial terror on a broader, regional, spectrum of imperial racism. This chapter suggests that Searle’s more expansive framing of the visual field, in which she explores the histories of race in South Africa, does much to unthink the hegemony of the apartheid trope for writing the history of South Africa. Through the interaction between spice powders and the female body, Searle frames a

critique of apartheid as part of a larger race-gender history of imperial presence across the transoceanic regions surrounding South Africa.

Searle's work thus offers an interrogation of the global positioning of South Africa *vis-à-vis* the histories of the spice trade as well as the unique inflections of claiming a 'coloured identity' in South Africa. While the body of criticism that surrounds her work tends to focus solely on its racial and gender resonances within a South African context, and thereby reinscribes a hegemonic apartheid historiography, I will argue that Searle's work is an intervention into race and gender studies that thinks beyond the national frame. In these works, the local development, application, experience of race is always involved in a dialogic production between local and transnational forces. By using spices as subject matter of her work, Searle succeeds in opening up the South African fields of both race theory as well as aesthetic practices. Through the symbolic economy of spices, the Indian Ocean becomes a critical cartographic space allowing for more fluid histories than the continentally based myths of nation foundational to apartheid discourses.

This last chapter, in arguing for an Indian Ocean history of apartheid, attempts to open up the South African nation to an oceanic perspective. A South African race history that is also part of a history of the spice trade in the Indian Ocean presents the continental carving up of apartheid mapping to a more fluid, oceanic cartography of investigation. The Indian Ocean then becomes a critical perspective, counterpoised and yet entangled with the racial logics of the apartheid era over southern Africa. In staging two different kinds of cartographies, I argue for placing into productive tension two imaginaries, two topographical models for thinking about the histories race, people, and exchange in this region. I conclude that, rather than an anomaly, apartheid constituted a discourse on race and governmentality characteristic of, and indeed in

conversation with, much of the racial politics of the twentieth century. As such, “Pigments of Our Imagination” argues that a transnational history of apartheid in South Africa is a way to think differently about both the relationship between race and the formation of national identity, as well as ideas about Africa and modernity and their representations in literature. A history of creolization in the literary and artistic production of South Africa presents a mode of reading that complicates the mythologies – of originariness, of separateness and purity – of the apartheid and post-apartheid imaginary.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **In and Out of Africa: The Race of Anthropology and Towards a Transnational History of Apartheid**

“...virtually no historian of southern Africa...looks to the impact on Cape settlers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of changing ideas of race in Europe. Historians who discuss at length whether slavery gives rise to racial rationalization, in the Cape as elsewhere, or whether race may have been formative in the negotiation of social relations from early settlement onwards, restrict their discussions in the very posing of the binary completely to conditions at the Cape. *The hold national history fixes fast*. But the counter-conditions cut against this fixation.” – David Theo Goldberg

“If Volkekunde was used as a basis for their role as ‘architects’ of this new system [apartheid], there has to be some theoretical linkage between the science and the politics.” –W.D. Hammond-Tooke

This chapter maps the relationship between the racial discourses of South Africa and Germany in order to demonstrate how the racial economy of apartheid – otherwise read as national(-izing) project – was in many ways the product of a transnational construction of race and racial identity. More specifically, I want to suggest that the first quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a transition from a more philological German tradition of studying Africa, to a greater disciplinary fluidity between language study and anthropology in the South African context. Within this transition there is a shift in the conception of race and the language used to represent it, towards both an increased functionality, as well as an intensification of the idea of racial ‘fixity’ as it was mapped across the South African landscape. Drawing on a German tradition of philological classification, South African anthropology increasingly imagined a national taxonomy in which language was equal to both racial and geographical ‘origins.’ By

focusing on South African anthropologists and ethnologists, and their construction of a racial program, I look particularly to those elements of *Afrikanistik* (the German study of and discourse on Africa) that resonated as expedient to South African racial discourse. First, by looking at ideological and institutional translations of German racial and cultural theory into and onto the South African social and cultural topography, I argue that apartheid, rather than being a unique South African expression of racism, was indeed symptomatic of a more global discourse on race. Second, while being a product of transnational discourse on race, the pre/apartheid imaginary was also always attempting to firmly ground itself in the geographical specificities of South Africa itself. I argue that the collapsing of linguistics into ethnology and its extension into geography represented a racial mapping practice that attempted to write over a history of creolization in South Africa. I want to show how the pre/apartheid imaginary comes in the form of an increasingly cartographic structuring of the South African racial and cultural topography, as well as the adoption of an ecological rhetoric in order to ground the principles of separate development in the very soil of southern Africa. This precipitates a larger argument about the ways in which the South African geographical body has been made to perform certain rhetorical work vis-à-vis the racial discourses that have attempted to capture its populations. In other words, we can see how the geography of South Africa is written as if it predisposes the space towards segregationist racial arrangements.

I begin by looking to the historical moment preceding apartheid, particularly the nineteen twenties through the early forties, when South African intellectuals engaged in a rigorous production of racial ‘knowledge’ as political and ideological expedient to a recently nationalized and (perhaps awkwardly) post-colonial country. While racial segregation was nothing new to the cultural landscape of southern Africa. Indeed, under British colonialism, and before that under

Dutch colonial mercantilism, various forms of segregation prevailed. The first half of the twentieth century saw not just an acceleration of these racist structures in South Africa but also an intensification of its global connections. I position the idea of apartheid as implicated in a global dialogue on race against the prevalence of an ‘*apartheid as history*’ paradigm, a historiographical privileging that collapses South African history into apartheid history.<sup>22</sup> Sarah Nuttall tells us, “South African studies has, for a long time, been overdetermined by the reality of apartheid – as if, in the historical trajectory of that country, apartheid was inevitable, in terms of both its origins and its consequences; as if everything led to it and that everything flows as a consequence of it.”<sup>23</sup>

In order to counter this master narrative for writing South Africa, Nuttall proposes “new archives and new ethnographies” for approaching a past that is more entangled and inchoate than what can be viewed through the ‘apartheid historiographical’ lens.<sup>24</sup> In this chapter, I will attempt to provide a new reading of the ethnographic archive. In this reading of the anthropological imagination – which both preceded and precipitated formal apartheid – I will map the transnational horizons of the apartheid imagination. I do so in order to argue that indexes (such as linguistics, folklore, literature, etc.) for mapping racial identity – structures typically read as culturally or nationally specific – actually travel as transnational markers of global racial dialogues.

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<sup>22</sup> In this project I am less concerned with the ‘motivations’ for apartheid, whether it be as a socio-economic solution to South Africa’s “poor white problem” of the early twentieth century, or as the solution to intra-political machinations of the National Party. Rather, I am concerned with how South African intellectuals and politicians sought solutions from various other colonial and segregationist contexts around the world in order to structure South African racial dynamics.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Nuttall, “City Forms and Writing the ‘Now’ in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30.4 (2004): 732.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Specifically, I want to look at the genealogy between the anthropological discipline of German *Afrikanistik*, which fell under the larger umbrella of *Volkerkunde*, and its South African ethnological correlate, *volkekunde*. Between these two classificatory systems lies a trajectory of relations around the racial triad of culture, language and geography. From German *Volkerkunde*, came a way of understanding race as a cultural-linguistic phenomenon grounded by notions of geographical originarity. In the German taxonomy of Africa this approach was formalized as the *kulturreis* (or cultural circles) school of thought. I focus on this anthropological index for the delineation of ethnic and racial identity, precisely because it represents a fulcrum around which multiple discourses – literary, anthropological, geographical – come together to articulate a racial ideology with powerful traveling potential during the middle years of the twentieth century. More particularly, the transnational ‘appeal’ of the *kulturreise* approach means that its modes of racialization – the mytho-literary, the geo-ethnic – though coming from a German imaginary of Africa, became particularly appealing to a South African intelligentsia who were trying to imagine a way to contain what it saw as the ethnic inchoateness of southern Africa.

Within this larger discussion of discursive exchange and influence between Germany and South Africa, I focus on what I see as two representational figures, Government Ethnologist of South Africa Nicolas J. van Warmelo and German philologist Carl Meinhof. Van Warmelo’s divergence from his mentor over the issue of maps as suitable visual economies for linguistic/ethnic categorization marks a shift in the transmission of racial thinking into South Africa, and literally onto the South African landscape. This shift inaugurates a more static and taxonomical language for speaking about race in South Africa, a racialist language that, while it was being functionalized by the state in unprecedented ways, was trying to symbolically shore up the concurrent development of a discourse on creolization as model for South African

identity. There is a certain irony that in the transmission of racial discourse from Germany to South African the language for discussing race at once adopts a more fluid disciplinary approach while simultaneously distilling itself into a more reified and pragmatic lexicon.

This chapter will conclude with a contemporary call made by South African cultural theorist Sarah Nuttall to read the South African topography as a space of creolization in response to the persistence of apartheid discourses of separation. In the chapters that follow, I will attempt to answer this call by looking to the ways in which the South African cultural archive develops discourses on creolization. I argue that the segregationist platforms of South Africa, in the form of state sponsored ethnography and the development of the National Party's plan for separate development, were in many ways attempts to suppress what were perceived to be potentially overwhelming elements of creolization and mixture across the South African racial and cultural landscape. In this way, I want to suggest that apartheid can be read as a direct response to fears over creolization, or cultural and racial mixture, as a model for articulating both national identity and a sense of South African modernity. Instead, pre/apartheid discourses mapped out a segregationist paradigm of racial and cultural uniqueness as modes for articulating an exceptionalist version of South African modernity.

Before considering the imbricated relationship between German anthropology and the South African branch of ethnology known as *volkekunde* during the first half of the twentieth century, it must be pointed out here that there existed in South Africa, during this period, two major strains of anthropological and racial thinking: that is, the social anthropology of the A. R. Radcliffe-Brown variety – largely practiced by English-speaking whites – and the culturally-based, diffusionist ethnology of *volkekunde*. Influenced by and related to the German model of *Volkerkunde*, South African *volkekunde* was practiced almost exclusively by Afrikaans speakers.



Despite the language distinction between these two systems of racial thought, not to mention their often-bifurcated cultural affiliations – which mapped onto chilly ethno-national divides – social and cultural anthropology in South Africa often served the same racial master, working as they did to buttress an eternally precarious white supremacy. Social anthropology in South Africa was a discipline informed by that particular brand of (English imperial) liberalism, which could at once proffer the heavy hand of paternalism to the indigenous of South Africa, while scapegoating the practitioners of *volkekunde* in particular and Afrikaans-speakers in general as the frontline in a race-relations war. Nor was this a particularly new strategy vis-à-vis the major groups involved. However, it is important to remember that ultimately both social and cultural anthropology were involved in a project of minority (white) rule and the intellectual work of both disciplines was incorporated into a larger body of segregationist policy. This is all to say that a proper genealogy of the diffuse intellectual origins of apartheid would have to excavate along both these lines. However, it will become clear why this project chooses to focus primarily on the *volkekunde* obsession with the cultural materialism of race.

In this section I will trace the entangled racial imaginary between the German field of study known as *Afrikanistik* and the anthropological sub-discipline-cum-policy-machine in South Africa, ethnology, or *volkekunde* as it was known in its Afrikaans manifestation. The chapter follows the transnational nature of the discourse on and cultivation of racial ideas between these two areas, centering on specific scholars. While chronicling the transition from the biological racism of the nineteenth century to the cultural and linguistic (liberal) segregationism of the twentieth, the following chapter will also document the affinity that South African scholars had for the German linguistic discourse on Africa. Moreover, I will show how it is this affinity – for the linguistic taxonomy of race – that becomes interred across the South African landscape

during the later half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the chapter explores the forms that the investigation and indexing of racial identity takes in South Africa. For instance, I look to the role played by both linguistics and ‘native literatures’ in the cultivation and delineation of racial identity within anthropological and ethnological paradigms in South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup>

### **Germany’s Colonial Nostalgia and South Africa’s Racial Futures: Carl Meinhof’s Africa and the Theological Language of Race**

If, as Sara Pugach writes, “Germans and white South Africans shared similar concerns at the turn of the twentieth century,”<sup>26</sup> then I would argue that racial organization and racial governance became shibboleths to modernity for both groups. While Germany had lost its colonial claims to modernity to the preeminent world powers Britain and France, white [Afrikaans-speaking] South Africans felt they had forever been written out of modernity during their own strange colonial experience, in the aftermath of the so-called ‘Anglo Boer War.’ It is ironic that in terms of theory *on* Africa, Germany at the turn of the twentieth century lead the Western European world, while they languished behind in terms of practical (colonial)

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<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the indexing of ‘native folktales’ – or “indigenous literatures” – is a tradition in South African anthropological work that precedes both the nation-state of South Africa and the intellectual discipline in it. In fact its originary moment might be said to exist in a text such as W. H. I. Bleek, and L.C. Lloyds now iconic *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (though not published until 1911, these represent collections done during the middle of the nineteenth century). This text became precedential to later generations of ethnographic workers for its perceived integrity and fidelity to the linguistic dimensions of the tales themselves, as well as for breadth and timeliness of the collection. Timeliness, because the publication of *Specimens* was a matter of extreme politic, when claims to national ownership reached a deafening pitch. Moreover, even the title represents a transitional moment between the nineteenth century biological discourses on race and the cultural paradigms dominant in the twentieth. There is a conscious and active speciation of narrative enacted by this text, a critical move for the ethnographic imagination of the early twentieth century. It is also important to note that Bleek was a German linguist who spent much of his working life in South African documenting the language and folklore of the Khoi and San peoples.

<sup>26</sup> Sara Pugach, *Africa in Translation: A History of Colonial Linguistics in Germany and Beyond, 1814-1945* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 89.

application *in* Africa. Other than an otherwise heavy missionary presence, by the nineteen twenties, Germany had very little ‘national’ presence on the continent, and this must have led to something of a crisis of modernity, especially as the other two major European powers, France and Britain, were defining the boundaries of modernity according to their robust interaction with their colonial holdings in Africa.

In South Africa the situation for Afrikaners is similar. Spurned on by the dreams, or delusions, of manifest destiny’s grandeur, a new South Africa built not so much from the ashes of the British imperial structure than on its back, the National Party’s platform was an awkward blend of expansionism through containment. The apartheid plan, from its humble beginnings as the otherwise liberal mode of missionary segregationism, espoused a theologically inflected recognition of the integral nature of African languages as sacred mediums for the message of God to all his different peoples, developed into a heady mix of theo-political messianism. In other words, modernity for southern Africa would be spoken in the language of God, and that sacred language would be each according to its own (race). The conflation of language with race and the subsequent imaginative mappings onto ‘originary’ geographies was obviously an important shift in the construction of modernity narratives for both Germans – ousted from the ranks of global imperialism –and white Afrikaners, who felt a sense of collective oppression at the hands of the British within South Africa. For both marginalized groups, philology became a fundamental index for constructing a narrative of modernity vis-à-vis African racial identity. As Pugach writes, “One justification for relegating Africans to specific districts was their supposedly long histories in those areas, which could be determined through grammatical and lexical comparison. The protolanguage of a group could be traced to its source, and that would

be considered the group's "ancestral" homeland."<sup>27</sup> It is quite easy to see how the German study of language and race at the beginning of the twentieth century became increasingly appealing to a doubly minoritized white Afrikaner population in the process of national formation.

Carl Meinhof, in prescribing the ethnographical and philological work to be done in South Africa transmits a certain theological and racialist conception of modernity, a modernity to be brought about by an increasingly categorical structuring of peoples, languages, and space. Meinhof, based at the University of Hamburg, was perhaps the preeminent Africanist scholar of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and mentor to a whole generation of South African intellectual who returned to their native country to fill the ranks of either the South African academy or the Native Affairs Department, or both. Upon returning from a research trip to South Africa and after lamenting the irrecoverable desecration of much of its indigenous culture in the grindstone of "European culture," Meinhof pleads for the importance of each racial group's relationship to their language:

People are beginning, sporadically, to recognize that it is language which contains the soul, blessing, and honor of the *Volk*, as a Bushman [sic] has already so elegantly put it. For each language a dictionary, we seek an orthography for it, *attempt to transcribe fairy tales in it*, but it is perhaps already too late; the Negroes are the victims of European education. They should not have been taught English or Afrikaans, but have had a sense of their own culture kept

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

alive through their mother tongue; (instead) this has been  
irretrievably neglected.<sup>28</sup>

Spoken in 1928 upon arriving back in Germany from a trip to South Africa, Meinhof articulates a manifesto of sorts, a mandate to capture, through language, what was perceived as an ever-vanishing African present. Meinhof's prescription is to codify, through "orthographies" for each language, not only Africa, but also each 'African type', each group's distinct and pure spiritual self captured in the semiotic variance of its language. It needs to be stressed here that this otherwise imaginative mapping begins to adapt not only a more functionalist and ultimately violently pragmatic approach in the transposition from the German to the South African context.

Meinhof's sentimentality is as also characteristic of the impulse behind James Clifford's notion of "ethnographic salvage,"<sup>29</sup> whereby (usually white European) liberalism imagines itself a savior to indigenous groups quickly disappearing at the hand of European imperial expansion. While Meinhof's philological preservation is important in the cultivation of orthographies, there is a Eurocentric narrative of modernity inherent in his impulse to which I will return in my second chapter. Meinhof's philology, as it becomes applied as a project of nation building in South Africa, relies on a narrative of modernity whereby African pasts are stable, pristine and populated by distinct and discrete groups only to be entangled by the imposition of European imperial modernity. I will argue below that author Thomas Mofolo offers a contemporaneous argument against this ossification of the African past and consequent denial of modernity to the African subject. I will be looking to Mofolo as articulating an "Afro-modernity"; that is, a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 90; emphasis mine.

<sup>29</sup> James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in *Writing Culture*, eds., James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 98-121.

worldly sense of history and subjectivity originating in Africa, amongst Africans, and largely irrespective of encounter between Europeans and Africans.

It can be argued that Meinhof's focus on linguistic classificatory schemes appealed to students traveling from a young and rapidly industrializing South African nation because, "Philology...could both demonstrate the natural inferiority of Africans inherent in their more 'primitive' isolating and agglutinative languages *and find spaces for them geographically removed* from European communities but close enough to provide the manpower needed to keep the colonies running."<sup>30</sup> Meinhof's manifesto articulates what becomes the holy trinity of the anthropological imagination – language, culture and geography – otherwise unique indexical entities that had become sacredly entangled manifestations of the same anthropological deity: race, in the service of nation building.

For Meinhof, European modernity as it was been visited upon Africa, has caused mixture and ultimately dilution. As languages interact the 'weaker' one recedes into the memory, and thus the soul of a people, the "Volk," is lost. Meinhof's call then is for the cultivation of 'collective individuality,' that each group's identity be protected from the corrupting influence of others, especially the implied hegemonic potential of the European. Meinhof's is a different form of modernity, one that will manifest into the future through a cultivation of the past. Indeed, the modern Euro-African relationship in Meinhof's prescription would see the European interlocutor transcribing difference across the African topography; this strange figure of antiquarian modernity collecting "fairy tales" as the indexes of autochthonic purity, racial difference, and ultimately acting as a safeguard against European erasure. In Meinhof's view, it is through an African past, its fairytales, and more importantly the careful taxonomy of the variegation between these mythical literatures, that a new form of European modernity might be articulated.

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<sup>30</sup> Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 89; emphasis added.

Indeed Meinhof's vision proves to be the case for southern Africa. For, as Pugach relates, "Meinhof became the doyen of African studies, known not only in Germany and South Africa but also far beyond, his ideas on ethnicity and language dominated the field and came to determine how African groups were classified."<sup>31</sup>

Beginning with the influence of German racial thought on South Africa, it is important to elaborate on the specific contours of this thought as it will be formative to South African racial policy. German racial thought at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was "*culturally or linguistically* defined," and formed the 'knowledge' base for a racism that "was distinct from biological racism."<sup>32</sup> Pugach chronicles the progression of African language studies in Germany from its origins in missionary circles on the African continent to "its entrenchment in metropolitan academia during and after Germany's brief colonial period."<sup>33</sup> The critic conflates this shift with a related intensification of the German national(-izing) project; the scramble for Africa produced Germany's own scramble to catch up with the other European colonial powers. Africa in many ways provided the fertile ground for this national project, as ideas on race, culture, linguistics and even literature were professionalized and 'perfected' on the subject(s) of Africa. Pugach writes that, "the racialization and professionalization of African studies also went hand in hand with an increasing objectification of Africa."<sup>34</sup> The "colonial dreams" of mapping African nations, according to cultural, linguistic, and narrative divisions became formative to "German national identity" and, hence, of a propagation of narratives of where modernity was produced, or where it occurred.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Before German understandings of Africa were the national project of an increasingly racist and professionalized academy, Africa was translated through the ecumenical imagination of a very active German missionary presence across the continent. Because these missionaries were not part of a colonizing tradition in the formal sense, they initially imagined their presence in Africa – as well as the intellectual work they produced – in uniquely transnational ways. Indeed, “instead of imagining themselves as part of a nation with fixed political boundaries, these missionaries identified with a transnational Protestant community.”<sup>36</sup> This is important because it means that not only were the initial understandings of German colonialism formed in the crucible of “global networks of exchange and communication” in and on Africa, but also, more importantly, because Germany pioneered much of the nineteenth and twentieth European academic understandings of Africa, “African language [and racial/cultural] studies emerged in this expressly international context.”<sup>37</sup> The genealogy of German cultural anthropology that was to later become formatively entangled with the nationalist projects of a pre-apartheid intelligentsia, was based at least initially on an internationalist understanding of European presence in Africa, thereby forming a transnational epistemology through which constructions of African cultural and racial identity were formed.

I do not want to suggest that because the foundation for European understandings of African racial identity during this period was the product of a transnational imaginary, that these racial identities were thought to be fluid, or that European racial thought did not also rest on the bedrock of separationism. Indeed, it has been noted by various scholars that apartheid’s etymology traces its origins to its first use in the Dutch Calvinist Reformed Church, as a mode by which each race was addressed in its mother tongue, the transmission of God’s word being sacred

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



only in one's own language. Rather, I want to suggest that apartheid was a paradigm of expediency, and in order to address a rapidly shifting national terrain, apartheid architect's had recourse to a transnational pantheon of racial discourses. For instance,

German missionary rhetoric on language and culture proved extremely appealing in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Africa. German ideas concerning racial separation, both in theory and practice, resonated in a country where questions of human classification took on more immediacy, as African and European populations were coming into increasing contact with each other, and whites, especially Afrikaners, began to fear for their national survival.<sup>38</sup>

If South Africa was looking for rigidly categorical theories of race to assuage the increasingly painful intimacies of an industrializing colonial dynamic, then it certainly found them. The irony being that these ideas on racial separatism and cultural nationalism – as mentioned above – had a curiously transnational history of their own. Not only that, but as the affinity between the German study of Africa – *Afrikanistik* – and South African intellectuals grew, so too did the symbiotic sharing and co-creation of racial theories which came to shape both respective nations. What proves interesting is how quickly this history of transnationalism is erased by the apartheid mythology of naturalization; or rather, indigenization as it was mapped onto the South African soil. Apartheid memory tells a tale of separation emanating out of the very landscape of southern Africa; ethnology and apartheid policy (two sides of the same racist coin) were simply retracing lines seen as already written onto the geography. This naturalization of racial difference

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 14

also points towards how porous racial concepts were in their early transference from the German context to the South African.

Saul Dubow makes this point in his study *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, by pointing towards both the malleability of the concept of race as well as the waning prominence of science in discourses on human difference with the advent of apartheid. Dubow notes that, “With respect to race, the notion of the ‘Boer experience’ functioned as the court of final appeal.”<sup>39</sup> This “common sense” or what I call a “collective tale” of racial identity allowed apartheid ideologues a considerable amount of rhetorical leeway, “permitting the defence [sic] of separation on grounds other than racist<sup>40</sup> ones.”<sup>41</sup> Dubow notes that, “Thus, when the moderate theologian G. B. A. Gerdener attempted to refute allegations during the 1950s that apartheid could be equated with Nazi ideas of racial superiority, he did so on the basis of culture and experience. Separate development and the preservation of white civilization had nothing to do with foreign ideologies: ‘It grew out of our history and had already stood the test of time.’”<sup>42</sup>

It is worth looking briefly at the slippages within early apartheid discourse that mark this transition between an earlier ‘race as biology’ paradigm and ‘race as group narrative’, especially in articulations of Afrikaner nationalism. It is informative to note the paradigmatic traps that such an admixture between racial indexes – that is between ‘race as biology’ and ‘race as collective narrative’ – caused in the various articulations of identity in South Africa, especially concerning the Afrikaner genealogy. Elaborations of Afrikaner identity during the first half of the twentieth century struggled to find an idiom that was neither derivative nor blatantly contradictory. Dubow notes that two of the key foundational myths of Afrikaner identity – that

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<sup>39</sup> Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1995), 268.

<sup>40</sup> In a purely biological sense.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

is, being a distinct race and one specifically chosen by God – were ironically taken from English-speaking writers.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the attempts to consolidate the Afrikaner identity as distinct represented a unique amalgam of these two racial registers, ending with something of an arrested creolization. A leading Afrikaner zoologist and proponent of “positive eugenics,” Gerrie Eloff, beginning with the notion that the tropics proved detrimental to most Northern racial stocks, lauded the Afrikaner racial fortitude precisely because of the latter’s perceived advantageous racial mixture. Eloff writes of the Afrikaners as:

Armed with a strong constitution, a tanned skin which afforded protection from the sun’s rays, sufficient sweat glands for cooling in a warm climate, multitudinous offspring and a persevering disposition with most of the qualities of the Norse race, and an aversion to interbreeding (*verbastering*), a *volk took root in this land through adaptation and tradition stretching over 10 generations.*<sup>44</sup>

Note here the foundational attributes of both dynamism and stasis in the formation of the “*Boerevolk*.” The Afrikaner (racial) nation seems to exist in the historical crucible of both mixture (“adaptation”) and ossification (“tradition”). Indeed, even though it is precisely the historical process of racial mixture – Afrikaners supposedly “benefiting from a unique combination of Nordic (Dutch and German) and Alpine (French Huguenot) racial traits”<sup>45</sup> – to which the Afrikaner robustness was attributed, the admittance of racial creolization was ultimately arrested by the pre/apartheid mythology.

If racial mixture elevated the Afrikaners to God’s chosen (white) people on the African continent, then it had also taught them a valuable racial lesson: that future mixture –

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 273

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 271-2; emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

“*verbastering*” – would only lead to degeneration; or so went the mythology. Yet another irony of such a racial narrative is that it “define[s] the unique qualities of the *Boerevolk* by conceding that races were neither pure nor static categories.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed the reverberations of this mixture seem to have reached some perfect pitch in the supposed racial harmony presented by the Afrikaner peoples. In the early part of the twentieth century, constitutional law professor and self-proclaimed “Afrikaner Calvinist” L. J. Du Plessis saw Afrikaner racial identity in a slightly grandiose, but revealing, trans-hemispheric paradigm, as “combin[ing] Northern solidity and Southern adaptability.”<sup>47</sup>

If pre/apartheid racial discourse initially admitted of the idea of creolization as seen above in the Afrikaner example (but this is also the case for all the Bantu peoples under the purview of the apartheid state), then there was a definitive shift towards a conscious halting or shoring up of such mixture as a project of national importance. Thus with the return of a young generation of philologically trained ethnologists from Germany, there is a marked move towards a rhetoric of chosen-ness and singularity as vehicles for nation building. This sense of *volksie*, or that which is a group’s own, comes in part from the importation of what T. Dunbar Moodie calls an ideology of “neo-Fichteian nationalism,” a broad conception of the national organism drawn from an older genealogy of Germanic Romanticism, in which Moodie also includes, J. D. Herder and F. E. D. Schleiermacher.<sup>48</sup> Moodie compiles a list of “Young Afrikaner intellectuals...coming home after doctoral study in Europe inspired by the ideals of neo-Fichteian nationalism,” though he revealingly only names half a dozen German cities.<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>47</sup> J. L. Du Plessis. *Problems of Nationality and Race in Southern Africa* (London: Diplomatic Press and Pub. Co., 1949), 6.

<sup>48</sup> T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 185.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

cultural, racial and geographical exceptionalism of the national body within the rubrics of German Romanticism resonated with the eschatological visions of manifest destiny animating Calvinist Christianity in South Africa. In this fusion, the nation was special, not only in an ontological sense of being singled out by God, but also in the more everyday epistemologies of policy and politics meant to maintain this singularity. If the nation was special, it certainly had no illusion of being alone. Indeed, the Christian Nationalism of *Afrikanerdom* was intended to apply to all the nations of the earth<sup>50</sup>.

In his now canonical study, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, T. Dunbar Moodie somewhat uncomplicatedly translates the Afrikaner term *volk* as “People” because, as he argues, “To leave the term untranslated might have implied an association with the tradition of German Volkism”<sup>51</sup> He further justifies this disentanglement by stating how the “original meaning of the Afrikaans term [*volk*] was closer to Rousseau than to Hitler...”<sup>52</sup> Similarly to Afrikaner historian and sometimes apologist Hermann Giliomee, Moodie distances the Afrikaner orientation from the Nazism of the 1930’s and 1940’s through an identical and fictive resonance to the earlier notions of national belonging. Again, what is missed here, for all the focus on national particularities, is a both a global sense of the movement of racial ideas, as well as the significance of the ideological

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<sup>50</sup> Dubow notes that despite the intense aversion to internationalism within Afrikaner nationalism, “politicians and intellectual proved sensitive to international criticisms” (Saul Dubow, “Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of ‘Race’” *Journal of African History*, 33, (1992): 230). In order to ideologically combat the natural associations between apartheid and other system of racial segregation such as the Nazi regime, apartheid thinkers portrayed the program as “positive policy designed to minimize racial conflict...Indeed, by the 1960s, prime minister Verwoerd was to defend apartheid on the grounds that it offered blacks similar opportunities to those in newly independent African states to the north” (Ibid.). Apartheid, in its attempt to articulate a more universalist applicability of separateness, stages itself as something of (an albeit awkward) post-colonial discourse of national consciousness.

<sup>51</sup> Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, xi.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

connections between the German volkism and the Afrikaner project fostered by the transnational production of racial knowledge between the two spaces.

In addition to Moodie's "neo-Fichtean nationalism," declaring the singularity of the racial nation, pre/apartheid discourse fused a neo-Calvinism in which national singularity was a function of "God as the Great Divider."<sup>53</sup> This theological doctrine has been traced back to Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, who was perhaps best known for his concept of "sphere sovereignty."<sup>54</sup> Afrikaner racial mythologies seem to have profited much from the theological tenets of Kuyperian neo-Calvinism, especially regarding the relationship(s) of society to the individual, and the organic and singular nature of the collective (read, 'nation' and more specifically the racial nation). Belonging to a particular formulation called neo-Calvinism, Abraham Kuyper's (1837 -1920) theology set him in opposition to the "ideas of the Enlightenment and French Revolution," and moreover, "he sought to oppose corrosive individualism and uniform internationalism which he associated with liberal secular humanist ideals."<sup>55</sup> Kuyper articulated a schematic view of society as a composite of various spheres: commercial, social, individual, etc. each with its own level of autonomy or sovereignty vis-à-vis God's power. Not only did this configuration do much to limit the ideological and practical power of the state in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Holland, but it served well the Dutch neo-Calvinists as a religious and political minority there. Perhaps then the affinities for a recently war-beaten Afrikaner population who perceived themselves as increasingly culturally, linguistically and politically marginalized vis-à-vis the imperial prerogatives of Britain can be clearly seen.

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<sup>53</sup> Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 259.

<sup>54</sup> See, Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 257-261; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 462; Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, 54-57.

<sup>55</sup> Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 259.

Dubow notes that, “the impact of Kuyperian ideas on Afrikaner nationalism was considerable in the formative years of the 1930s and 1940s.”<sup>56</sup> Though David Goldberg does not mention Kuyper specifically, I locate the Dutch theologian’s articulation of neo-Calvinism and its service to the national(-izing) rhetoric of Afrikanerdom within what the critic terms “a political theology of race.”<sup>57</sup> Goldberg writes that in South Africa specifically, “Over time, race comes to generate a secularized theology and a civic religion, underpinned initially by appeals to God’s dictum but increasingly resorting to claims to scientific validation.”<sup>58</sup> Race becomes the coded political language that registers a sublimation of the religious imagining and ordering of the world for a ‘modern’, national and now racially coded version; one which had the power to sublimate the older colonial and ethnic antagonisms of South Africa’s two main white populations, British and Afrikaner.

Goldberg also notes how a racial political theology could articulate a racially bound, spiritual – and national – community:

Entangled with an intense religiosity, polygenesis and later eugenics took on their own populist expressions at the outer limits of settler colonialism, seeding the early lineaments of a novel, *political theology of race*. Within emergent South Africa, an elaborating racial theo-politics began to unify white coherence across these differences [between boer and British] into the ruling racial class.<sup>59</sup>

While there is much to be said about the potential resonance between Kuyper’s abstract notions of “sphere sovereignty” and the tangible policy of “homeland administration” in South Africa, I

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<sup>56</sup> Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 259.

<sup>57</sup> David Theo Goldberg, “A Political Theology of Race,” in *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*, 245-326.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

think it most important to mention the larger ideological import of Kuyperian thinking which focused on the theological foundations of the concept of division. Kuyper – amongst other theologically based apologists for segregation at the time – expounded upon the biblical episode of Babel to justify the separation of peoples. Interestingly, there is a latent imperial allegory in Kuyper, and later Afrikaner nationalists, which highlighted God’s act of division as a counteraction to the world imperial aspirations of Satan. Herman Giliomee writes that Kuyper “at the turn of the century said that the ordering of different nations and states could be traced back to the Tower of Babel, where God introduced the confusion of tongues to counteract the Devil’s attempt to establish a world empire.”<sup>60</sup>

Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism is first given an Afrikaner voice in the form of J. D. Du Toit, national poet and theologian, who offers an address to the 1944 *volkskongres*, entitled “The Religious Basis of our Race Policy.” Du Toit’s rhetoric labors under the same narrative pressures described above: highlighting the special historical adaptability (i.e. their result as “miraculous intermingling of [white] blood”) of the Afrikaner people, while simultaneously underwriting the need for the preservation of this singularity, especially against the dangers of modern *samesmelting*, or racial creolization and mixture.<sup>61</sup> According to Du Toit, and other neo-Calvinist Afrikaner nationalists, the Afrikaner people were indeed the product of much race mixture, but due to the special caveats of ‘white’ mixture and that this had indeed been part of God’s plan for the creation of a “new type,” something of a redemption project in an otherwise dark Africa, the Afrikaner theological racial profile could incorporate the historical realities of mixture with the perceived future necessities of separation.

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<sup>60</sup> Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 462.

<sup>61</sup> Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 258.



Du Toit is succinct in positioning this “new type” in the (racial) cosmos, claiming that, “First, what God has joined together, man must not separate. This is the core of our plea for the unity of the people [*volkseenheid*]. Second, we should not bring together that which God has separated. In pluriformity the counsel of God is realised.”<sup>62</sup> Racial mixture, at least sacred and sanctioned liaisons in the service of God’s plan, can not only be justified, but even praised as advantageous; a strange theological Darwinian racism in the name of survival. However, Afrikaner nationalism and, then subsequently, apartheid meant to arrest the development of such ‘dangerous’ – and transnational – creolizations that were not seen as divinely sanctioned. The irony must be again pointed out that it is through the conglomeration of transnational and theological racial discourses that Afrikaner national rhetoric develops a virulent critique of what it saw as degenerative cosmopolitanism, internationalism, etc. And more to the point of this chapter, this gap in racial logics – logics in the service of solving the crises of national (identity) formation – was again solved only through a looking outward, and a transnational entanglement of theological and racial discourses in order to arrest process of creolization internal to the South African national space.

Undoubtedly, the strain of South African ethnography called *volkekunde* also represented a complicated amalgam of ideas about how race and culture function, but what is especially salient about this discipline is the way it desperately sought to link race and culture to geographical coordinates. Writing on the genealogy of *volkekunde*, and its worldly relationships to other racial discourses, John S. Sharp writes that, “in so far as South African *volkekunde* deals in more than descriptive ethnography, it assigns overwhelming explanatory power to the

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 258.

phenomenon of ethnicity, which it conceives in the narrowest, most rigid terms possible.”<sup>63</sup> Sharp continues to define “Ethnos theory” as “start[ing] with the proposition that mankind is divided into *volk* (nations, people) and that each *volk* has its own particular culture, which may change but always remains authentic to the group in question... An individual is born into a particular *volk*; its members are socialized into its attendant culture; therefore they acquire a *volkspersoonlikheid* (a volk-personality).”<sup>64</sup> It is this adherence to the “power” of ethnicity that on the one hand forms the basis of an ideological distortion of Adam Kuyper’s notion of “sphere sovereignty” for a more Fichtean-tinged, German Romanticist idea of the “absolute state.”<sup>65</sup>

This distortion can be read at least partly as a function of the Afrikaner secret society, the Broederbond’s, affinities for German conceptions of cultural nationalism. Indeed, many of the members of the Broederbond conducted their studies in Germany, especially during the three decades preceding the apartheid’s formalization. Sharp writes that, “It is well-known that the ideology of early Bond spokesmen was fashioned from two principal intellectual sources – the writings of the Dutch theologian and politician Kuyper and the German idealist philosopher Fichte.”<sup>66</sup> While Kuyper stresses the “sovereign sphere” of the individual, their conscience, under the ideological climate of a South African, ethnos-focused *volkekunde*, “sovereign spheres became the ‘volke’ of the world and of South Africa in particular, each with its own ‘right’ to autonomy.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, in his genealogy of South African anthropology, Sharp cites T. Dunbar Moodie, noting, “that it was the influence of men such as Diederichs, Meyer and Cronje (a Pretoria historian) [to this I would most certainly add Meinhof’s ethnological progeny of

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<sup>63</sup> John S. Sharp, “The Roots and Development of Volkekunde in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 8.1 (1981): 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Werner Eiselen and van Warmelo] which brought about the distortion of Kuyper's doctrine. These men returned from studies in Germany in the 1930's and were... 'heavily influenced by National Socialism,' through which presumably they acquired familiarity with Fichtean ideas."<sup>68</sup>

Dubow, prominent historian of segregation and racial ideas in South Africa, echoes this history, noting that:

Kuyperian and German *volknationalist* views share a common romantic inheritance in their cultural idealism and hostility to rationalist thought. Both lay stress on the organic link between culture and nationhood, the idea that the creativity of the individual is best expressed through the collective of the group, and the belief that nations [read racial nations] are subject to divine historical destiny.<sup>69</sup>

The ideological shifts of apartheid's early moments of formation represent larger ideological tectonics involving a rise of totalitarianism within the logics of nation-states around the world in the mid-twentieth century. Apartheid's proclivities for Fichte, Kuyper and a *mélange* of German romanticism embodies a larger, global shift that witnesses a waning of the valuation of the individual in the political economies of nations the world over. Apartheid was a privileging of collective identities at the expense of the individual, especially vis-à-vis the polis. This ideological shift required a different form of mapping for representing the idea of the nation geographically; indeed there is a different mythology of the nation registered in the move from German *volk* nationalism to the rhetoric of apartheid.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Saul Dubow, "Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of 'Race'" *Journal of African History* 33 (1992): 220.

Apartheid and pre-apartheid intellectuals garnered more than a Fichtean throwback to German Romanticism through its transnational racial dialogue with Germany. As Sara Pugach writes, “The Afrikaner scholars who journeyed to Germany or demonstrated interest in German linguistic theories on Africa were intrigued with them precisely because the German methodology for determining group origins *offered a solution to the question of where each ‘tribe’ had geographically emerged, and thus where it ‘belonged.’*”<sup>70</sup> From the Dutch theological influence and German academic resonance, pre/apartheid intellectuals built up a store of racist infrastructures for governing the population of South Africa. More than simply a program of white supremacy or reactionary Afrikaner nationalism, the ideologies that were eventually unified under the moniker apartheid represented a long and varied series of expedient amalgams, from theological, academic, and political discourses, on how to manage race.

### ***Kulturreise: the Language of Race and the Space of Homelands***

The *kulturreise*, or ‘cultural circles’ model of ethnic grouping represents a larger movement away from the ‘scientific’ racism characteristic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century towards more culturally based forms of racial and racist organization. Within this shift, I want to show how models of racialization such as apartheid were intellectual migrations towards cultural-linguistic, and even narrative based, markers for the production of racial ‘knowledge’ and the delineation of racial identity. Phenotypes were gradually being replaced by the folktale. The mythological – even the narratological – come to figure as ethnographic and racial marker, which in turn are linked with supposedly corresponding geographies. The development of the *kulturreise* approach as it was transferred and transformed from Germany to South Africa saw the entanglement of literature and anthropology around the fulcrum of race. This triad for classifying

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<sup>70</sup> Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 15; emphasis added.

populations in turn becomes increasingly functionalized and politicized as a national platform for apartheid South Africa. Below I will explore how this model comes to inform national projects of literary, cultural and ethnic classification across South Africa. In the second chapter, I will read Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* as problematizing the narratives of originariness, ethnographic stability, and modernity applied to the South African racial topography by this model.

I want to suggest, precisely because of the influence of German Africanist Carl Meinhof on a generation of South African intellectuals and policy makers, that there is a direct genealogy between the *kulturreise* model of capturing race in radiating ethno-circles and the South African institution of the "Homelands Policy," which sought to confine each race within its supposed originary geographic home. From the tutelage of Meinhof, perhaps the most influential Africanist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, young South African scholars found in the *kulturreise* approach, a model for pragmatic application in the formative moments of nation building during this period. Ultimately, Meinhof and the German racial imaginary represent a complex of often-contradictory set of ideas on race. So, for instance, while Meinhof defended an African colleague who married a German woman against attempts by the university to have the man fired, he whole-heartedly cultivated a form of cultural paternalism towards Africans, while also railing against ideas of biological inferiority. So, while it is difficult to label Meinhof as an outright racist, it is certainly true that he was a staunch colonial ideologue as well as a member of the Nazi party. Indeed, "Meinhof joined the Nazi Party after it came to power in 1933 because of a belief that Hitler would restore the German colonies"; a strange 'post'-colonial nostalgia that perhaps blurred Meinhof's racial vision.<sup>71</sup> Meinhof himself represented a shift away from the biologically inflected racial thought of the nineteenth century, focusing instead on a culturalist and linguistic paradigm for reading race. To join the Nazi Party then reveals the

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<sup>71</sup> Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 87.

nearly blinding pragmatism of colonial ideology, as the Party itself was based on a pseudo-scientific mode of racial thought. The reversion represented a strange and distorted reversion to early notions of race as biology.

In this section, I am most interested in one of Carl Meinhof's students, Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo, as their relationship captures both the influence of German racial thinking, but also an important break with this model. After completing a degree in English and classical literatures in South Africa, van Warmelo took up studies at the University of Hamburg in the Department of African and Pacific Literatures under Meinhof. Upon completion of his degree in Bantu literatures, van Warmelo, rather than permanently taking up the academic position offered to him in Hamburg, returned home to become the head Government Ethnologist for the Native Affairs Department in 1930, a post he would hold until his retirement in 1969. For nearly forty years, van Warmelo was the fountainhead of racial knowledge cultivated under the aegis of the South African government, producing a massive oeuvre within the Ethnological Publications of the Native Affairs Department and being credited largely with providing the architecture for apartheid's Homeland Policy. While van Warmelo persistently denied any labeling of himself as an ideologue, his impact on the cultivation and dissemination of linguistic information and ethnic classification for the South African government is undeniable. Indeed, it may be his staunchly apolitical public persona that made van Warmelo appear relatively innocuous – especially compared with other of Meinhof's South African students, such as Warner Eiselen. But in this respect van Warmelo proved to be more unfortunately impactful in the delineation of South Africa's populations and the formulation of apartheid's plan of separate development.

W. D. Hammond-Tooke, who spent some time working under van Warmelo during the latter's heading of the Ethnological Section of the Native Affairs Department, writes that van

Warmelo initially saw his task at the Section “as defining the ethnographic field,” and this we are told he attempted through the “provision of a database.”<sup>72</sup> Much of van Warmelo’s contribution to ethnography in South Africa could be placed under the heading of ‘systematizing.’ Indeed his first major work, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa* provided something of a watershed, both in terms of ethnographic knowledge production, but also stimulating a classificatory fervor that proved expedient to the coterminous production of “Native” policy.

Hammond-Tooke writes that in the production of the above monograph:

Every magistrate in the Native Affairs Department was recruited to assist in a survey of the groups of his district...It also laid the foundation for the classification of the Bantu-speaking peoples that was to be the basis of both further anthropological research and of the system of Bantu Authorities and homelands to be erected in the 1950’s by the apartheid regime.<sup>73</sup>

While van Warmelo’s intensely classificatory stance often earns him the description of “untheoretical,” it is argued that he “was in fact much influenced by the German textual-linguistic tradition of ethnology” and most specifically by Carl Meinhof, a “linguist turned anthropologist.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed Meinhof forms the major connection between these two national imaginaries, as many of the foreign-trained Afrikaans-speaking anthropologist who returned to South African – either to fill academic or administrative posts – trained under Carl Meinhof in Hamburg. Even personally, van Warmelo represents something of the transnational nature of the anthropological-policy dynamic of the mid-twentieth century. Again Hammond-Tooke writes

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<sup>72</sup> W. D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa’s Anthropologists* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1997), 112.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

that, “It is important to note that he was not an Afrikaner in the cultural sense. He had married the daughter of a German missionary to the Venda and spoke German at home.”<sup>75</sup>

Before looking to an important ideological split between van Warmelo and Meinhof, one which registers a new, functionalized language of race in South Africa, it is important to understand the position *volkekundiges* (practitioners of the particular branch of anthropology *volkekunde* in South Africa) held towards the “ethnos” concept. This concept formed the very horizon of cultural thought articulated within the *volkekunde* imaginary. As John Sharp explains, “in so far as South African *volkekunde* deals in more than descriptive ethnography, it assigns overwhelming explanatory power to the phenomenon of ethnicity, which it conceives of in the narrowest, most rigid terms possible.”<sup>76</sup> Though this give us some sense of the integral importance of ethnicity to *volkekundiges*, more explanation of the concept itself is needed in order to understand the paradigm through which *volkekunde* was translating the cultural realities of black South African into the racial ‘knowledge’ informing government policy.

Firstly, it is important to understand that although *volkekundiges* derived the ethnos concept “from the work of German anthropologists of the pre-war period,” it is in South Africa that this concept is given a particular topographical and functionalized resonance; that is, ethnos theory structurally applied to geography.<sup>77</sup> In South Africa it is the very kernel of German idealism – the uniqueness of the *volk* and its sacred entanglement with native soil – formulated as a structuring national policy for organizing racial difference. This is the seminal importance of the transposition from German anthropology to South African ethnography: the application of the *volk* or ethnos concept to a social engineering scheme based on racial-geographical discreteness. But to return to the ethnos concept, Sharp writes that,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>76</sup> Sharp, “The Roots and Development,” 19.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



Ethnos theory starts with the proposition that mankind is divided into *volke* (nations, peoples) and that each *volk* has its own particular culture, which may change but always remains authentic to the group in question. The entity comprising a group and its culture is an ethnos...An individual is born into a particular volk; its members are socialized into its attendant culture; therefore they acquire a *volkspersoonlikheid* (a volk-personality). It follows that the most important influence on an individual's behavior in any social context is his ethnos membership.<sup>78</sup>

In what follows, I hope to demonstrate not only the importance of the ethnos concept but also the fragmentary and fractured way in which it is *constructed* by the ethnological worker, in this case van Warmelo himself. Through a reading of a single ethnography written by van Warmelo, I want to argue that despite the attempts to make ethnic and racial groups discrete in the anthropological, and political imagination, the discourse itself is a creolized and creolizing construction of racial identity.

In 1953 N. J. van Warmelo published *Die Tlôkwa en Birwa van Noord Transvaal*,<sup>79</sup> an ethnographic study of the Tlôkwa and Babirwa peoples of the Potgietersrust district of the Northern Transvaal region. Van Warmelo opens the text conventionally enough, with a historical gloss of the 'tribal' movements and migrations in the region as well as the waxing and waning of their population over the last several generations leading up to the middle of the twentieth century. What is intriguing about van Warmelo's text is the way in which it becomes more than

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> N. J. van Warmelo, *Die Tlôkwa en Birwa van Noord Transvaal: Ethnological Publications No. 29*, Pretoria: Staatsdrukker, 1959.

just a vessel for the transmission of ethnographic ‘knowledge,’ particularly with regards to the form of this ethnography. In other words, this ethnography is constructed through the imagination of multiple authors and across the chronological horizons of multiple generations. Structurally, the text unconsciously deconstructs the sanctity of (ethnographic) language through a unique anthropological ‘creolization.’ Perhaps most importantly, it transgresses the otherwise interdict cultural and racial boundaries between ‘Native’ and anthropologist, and between white and black. Formally, van Warmelo’s text constitutes an identity – however unconsciously– through the processes of textual mixture, weaving the imaginaries of multiple subjectivities. If van Warmelo meant to define and delineate the ‘exact’ ethnic identity of the Tlôkwa and Babirwa, he ends up writing in an ethnographical style that creolizes all the actors involved, most especially himself, the ethnographer.

Van Warmelo introduces this peculiar textuality in a rather nonchalant gloss, saying:

The texts which follow below were written by Christoph Mohwasa, son of Nakedi Mohwasa, one of the oldest informants, and a teacher. He wrote part of the text (which is a collation from several efforts spread over years, plus fragments written by myself), for Rev. W. Trott of Leipzig<sup>80</sup> ...Mohwasa also wrote about his people for the Department. He used the Sotho taught in schools. This was changed by me into the Birwa as spoken today, in consultation with the chief and the best of his councilors, who also of course had to

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<sup>80</sup> Van Warmelo also gives us some insight into Trott as an anthropological figure, stating that, “Trott was the first man to enquire into Birwa traditions and make notes about the people, just as he was the first to devote an time to the study of the makeup and history of the numerous small groups that inhabit these parts, the first thoroughly to record local place-names...and the first, in fact, to attempt any anthropological enquiry here at all” (Ibid., 26).

help a great deal to elucidate what Mohwasa had written down in a brief and often obscure way.<sup>81</sup>

The series of placements and displacements prefacing this ethnography give it a particular form, what I want to suggest is a creolized ethnographical style, articulated by the structure of this text. I argue that what is ostensibly a snapshot capturing the ethnographic essence of a people in the service of a panoptical racial state can be read as a (racial) tale told by many and mixed voices, and which ultimately reveals the de-essential, entangled, nature of racial identity coupled with the shared modernity of the figures within this tale.

It begins with a fracturing of the anthropological subject, perhaps nothing revelatory until read in conjunction with the modes of making the enquirer, van Warmelo, himself a subject of anthropology. We can imagine that the informant-author, Christoph Mohwasa, writes from the perspective of a certain intimacy with the general practice of the anthropological relationship, his father, Nakedi, being “one of the oldest informants.”<sup>82</sup> If indeed Christoph has grown up in the shadow of his father’s relationship to van Warmelo, and indeed, to “an informant subjectivity,” how might this shape Christoph’s conception of cultural knowledge and practices? A teacher as well as an anthropological informant, the father Nakedi’s positioning might mean that the textual life-world his son offers van Warmelo is an ontology that in many ways van Warmelo himself has contributed to constructing.

In other words, this text draws attention to the fact that Christoph’s representation of a life-world was most likely recognizable to van Warmelo since the latter had already been so active in producing a hegemonic vision of this world in conjunction with Nakedi, Christoph’s father. This is a racial tale, told in part by the voice of van Warmelo the anthropologist, a tale

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

that comes back to the teller, suddenly staging him as part of the tale itself. If van Warmelo was struck by the potentially uncanny nature of Christoph's interlocution, he obviously never mentions it in the text. The point is that Christoph's is a world where racial identity is constructed in a crucible of patriarchic pedagogy and foreign interlocution, and underlining the fact that the idea of race produced by this text is less about the 'truths' of placed ownership and more about the 'fictions' of mixture.

Spanning the generational gap between father and son informants, this text triangulates the otherwise vertical relationships of individual and cultural/racial filiation. Rather than a trajectory of father-to-son transmission of racial and cultural knowledge, instead this is the text of a son whose father also acted in the role of anthropological informant, and to the same enquirer, van Warmelo. In fact the one constant here is not racial/ethnic essentialism of the Birwa tribe or some primordial expression of its supposedly persistent nature, but van Warmelo himself. Instead of recording the ethnographic 'knowledge' that the discipline of anthropology purports to, this narrative reveals the integral role played by anthropology in the creation of that very knowledge it seeks. In spite of itself, the apartheid project of racial classification – a behemoth bureaucracy driven by logics of essentialism and delineation – in these moments of intimate contact, unconsciously fosters identities through processes of mixture. In turn it is these mixtures or creolizations that impart a sense of contemporaneity to the tale, a modernity shared by all its characters. Reading for the creolizing nature of the anthropological tale, especially in this South African context, is important as it provides a lens through which to peer transgressively across racial and ethnic boundaries being constituted precisely through this kind of state-sponsored ethnographical work. Also, reading the ethnographic tale as a creolized and creolizing one, repositions its figures within a shared modernity.

Though van Warmelo had been appointed Government Ethnologist for the Native Affairs Department some twenty-three years earlier,<sup>83</sup> this ethnography comes a mere 3 years after the National Party's implementation of the infamous Population Registration Act, No. 30 of 1950.<sup>84</sup> South Africa was in the throes of a moment where ideas of racial essentialism became entangled with those of national belonging, precipitating violent geo-political machinations. The idea here is that anthropology found itself in the service of a regime of rhetorical absolutism that was, more often than not, failed by its practices on the ground. Despite its integral role in the production of 'the knowledge of difference', anthropology was in many ways operating on the side of 'failure', struggling to produce racially essentialist and nationally absolutist knowledge invariably through practices of racial collusion, influence and intimacy.

Compounding this ethnographical 'family drama' of the Tlôkwa and Babirwa is the multiple or fractured authorship of the text, an element which decenters both the perspectival and temporal stability of the racial life-world of the narrative. Van Warmelo tells us quite frankly that Mohwasa's text is a "collation from several efforts spread over years," which means that any supposed crystallization of racial or cultural identity is instead spread over a period that surely masks changes occurring to the collective ethnic body of the Birwa. In other words, if ethnography, especially in the service of the "Departement van Naturellesake," is meant to paint a cohesive tableau of (various) racial lives, Mohwasa's "collation" subverts this by creating a collage of racial/cultural snapshots over time. The temporal displacement of the text speaks less to the primordial essentialism which it is intended to and more to the changing modernity of the

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<sup>83</sup> Much of van Warmelo's earlier work, coming before the advent of the of formal apartheid provided an anthropological/ethnographic foundation for the subsequent systematization of racial segregation that would come under the apartheid program.

<sup>84</sup> Indeed, this is only 5 years after the victory of the National Party in 1948, and in a global climate of nation-state consolidation, ethnic absolutism, and refugee-ism.

Birwa people, offering a fragmentary and piecemeal picture of a people caught in the modernizing forces of a twentieth century South Africa.

Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi quotes van Warmelo on the latter's particular methodology vis-à-vis his interlocutors and the resultant anthropological text:

The practice, in collection of ethnographical data, of allowing people to speak for themselves, is no doubt a sound one. One can then hear them state matters from their own point of view, in their own language and in the correct technical terms. This will have more value for latter generations than the observations of a European, who cannot but see things from his own point of view and who usually gets very much in the way when the reader wants to see the object he is studying...*The text therefore is what the native actually said; everything else in the book is the product of a European mind.*<sup>85</sup>

No doubt van Warmelo's bit of methodological modesty did much to quell any misgivings he might have felt about his anthropological footprint left not only on the societies he observed but also on the resultant text he produced. But more interesting is the belief that these two ontologies – figured in van Warmelo's methodology as vocal registers – remain unique and separate. It is obvious how the ethnographer believes he has mediated his impact on “the object” leaving it anthropologically crystalline for “future generations,” but I argue that paying attention to this racial voice, the language that it speaks and thus the kind of (racial) tale it is made to tell, is significant in the sense that despite the anthropologist's assurances to the contrary the (racial)

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted in, Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi, “‘Colonial’ Experts, Local Interlocutors, Informants and the Making of an Archive on the ‘Transvaal Ndebele,’” *The Journal of African History* 50.1 (2009): 8; emphasis mine.

tale that is told is from a chorus of voices producing a polyphonic<sup>86</sup> narrative of South African racial identities.

Van Warmelo's preoccupation with language means that the ethnographic knowledge he produced was conceived of as a form of racial dictation, or taking down what the "native actually said." There is the resultant belief that 'racial knowledge' was thus unmediated by the forms of 'knowledge' that captured it. Moreover, as long one was 'literate' in the languages (of race) to determine where the "native's" voice ended and the "European's" begin then the racial "text" remains decipherable.<sup>87</sup> Despite these assumptions, what van Warmelo's text actually demonstrates is an emergent form of racial textuality and in turn a racial theorization of South Africa, each relying on a set of related indexes – language, cultural practice, and geography – that are narrated through the creolized and creolizing anthropological imaginary. While attempting to articulate a vocabulary of difference, van Warmelo ironically and certainly unselfconsciously, speaks in a register of entanglement and intimacy rather than separation. The racial tale teller is exposed to be part of a narrative polyphony, and, indeed, in being shown to be part of the tale itself undermines the presumed bifurcation of 'primitive' and 'modern', revealing the radical modernity of the entire tale as well as of all its actors.

We must also contend with the complicated role of van Warmelo's 'authorship' of this text. To Mohwasa's "collation...spread over years" van Warmelo lends an augmenting displacement of "many fragments written by myself [van Warmelo]."<sup>88</sup> But it is the precise way in which van Warmelo 'writes' these fragments that lends a slightly schizophrenic quality the

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<sup>86</sup> What I mean to suggest is polyphonic in the truest sense that there are multiple registers within the same articulation, rather than idea of multi-vocal where each voice resides next to the other. The idea is the if these ethnographies are narratives of South Africa's racial identities, then they are told in mixed and multiple registers that undermine the very function of delineation they are meant to purport.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

racial subjectivity produced by the text. This splintering by van Warmelo happens first at the level of the text's language(s). Van Warmelo' relates that Mohwasa wrote in "the Sotho taught in schools" but that "this was quickly changed by me into the Birwa as spoken today."<sup>89</sup> This is an interesting translation for the unexpected trajectories of power it elucidates, as well as for the way in which it reveals the creolized production of racial identity at the level of language.

Though it is perhaps surprising that it is the colonial ethnographer who places the text into the less dominate, less hegemonic language – from the more official seSotho "taught in schools" to the more 'colloquial' Birwa – this is not the first linguistic/cultural transformation the text has undergone. We must assume that not only were Mohwasa's ethnographies originally taken down in the daily, 'spoken' languages of the baBirwa and then written into seSotho, but as his fieldwork spanned many years, we might also say that that the dialectic evolutions of these spoken languages is masked by Mohwasa's homogenizations; further complicated by van Warmelo's (re-)splintering 'colloquialization'. This is a creolized and creolizing ethnography, articulating the ways in which apartheid, despite its rhetoric and practices of separation, was unconsciously involved in processes of creating an archive of racial knowledge that was based on the antitheses of racial purity and native primitivism. I argue that looking towards these entangled elements in Van Warmelo's text points towards another possibility of reading the South African racial archive from the perspective of creolization. In this way, I want to suggest a narrative of modernity in South Africa other than the hegemonic one purported by apartheid and founded upon racial delineation. This narrative, a different tale of race, is based on a long history of collusion and mixture stretching back into the archive and, indeed, as we will see in the following chapter was accessed by some of South Africa's earliest literary figures.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.



## **Racial Mapping and Maps *as* Race: the Debate between Carl Meinhof and N. J. van Warmelo**

In terms of the mapping of colonialism, the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which resulted in the division of the African continent among the (Western) European powers, marks perhaps the quintessential example of the violence meted out by modern colonial mapping on/onto Africa. However, I want to suggest that the South African apartheid and pre-apartheid case provides an instructive moment in this history of colonial mapping. From the Berlin Conference's "scramble" for Africa to apartheid's "Homelands" of separate development, there is a transition from a cruel but otherwise simple cartographic 'carving up' of Africa to satiate the appetites of European imperialism, to the honing of a racialist imaginary that saw the world as dividing itself into sovereign racial spheres. If the Berlin Conference represents a cartographic cannibalism, a threatening application from the outside of a devouring *technology of* colonialism, then it has also come to represent something of a pinnacle of modern colonial practice. I want to suggest that from this highly symbolic moment to the formulation of apartheid there is qualitative shift, not only in the mechanism of colonization but also in the ways in which the colonial imaginary envisioned the racial underpinnings of its project.

Perhaps because apartheid is never free of contradictions, it can be read as a more practical – or functionalist – application of racism while also simultaneously being a more metaphysical abstraction of racial thinking than earlier colonial examples of mapping. In other words, what we see in the transposition from Meinhof to van Warmelo, from Germany to South Africa, is a profound relocation of the technologies of difference. Racial and ethnic delineation was no longer a function of the colonial apparatus. Rather the African continent itself was seen as a geographical ecosystem of human difference. Colonial practices, such as the ethnology

practiced under the Native Affairs Department in South Africa, shifted their paradigms for apprehending the colonial space, and hence altered their views of themselves as practitioners, from *technicians* of boundaries (geographical, or racial, or both) to *readers* of variation, becoming increasingly ‘fluent’ in the ‘languages’ of difference spoken by the African landscape. The African geography was being read as productive of, indeed predisposing towards, linguistic, and cultural, and hence racial variegation; geography was (becoming) race.

This transition, from applying difference to the reading of it across the colonial landscape, is embodied in the relationship between Carl Meinhof and N.J. van Warmelo. After a genial mentorship in Hamburg, Meinhof secured a short teaching arrangement for van Warmelo in order for the latter to stay on in Germany. However, van Warmelo was soon compelled to return home to his native South Africa. Unlike Meinhof who visited Africa less than a handful of times in his life, van Warmelo valued being in proximity to his anthropological subjects, writing to Meinhof that from his Pretoria home he could travel “an hour and a half by motorcycle to the Berlin Mission Station [where] Matabele who had emigrated here well before 1800” and allowed him to collect texts about their customs, and “even more fairytales than I already have.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, van Warmelo spent the rest of his life in South Africa, most of it as the Government Ethnologist for the Native Affairs Department. He was even known to take his family on vacations to rural areas in southern Africa, only to spend his days collecting, cataloguing and indexing linguistic and ethnographical entries.

But a desire for proximity was not the only departure van Warmelo took from his Hamburg mentor. While both Meinhof and his student saw philology as a historical project – that is, the scholar of language could, with careful and comparative analysis determine the history of

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Sara Pugach, “Carl Meinhof and the German Influence on Nicholas van Warmelo’s Ethnological and Linguistic Writing, 1927–1935,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30.4 (2004): 832.

its speakers –van Warmelo “was, however, somewhat more open about the advantages of disciplinary conflation,” and indeed believed that one could “distil ethnological information from linguistic data.”<sup>91</sup> It was in this way that van Warmelo was something more of a ‘presentist,’ if not in his approach, then in the impact of his work. Whereas Meinhof was concerned primarily with the origins of the various contemporary Bantu languages spoken across Africa, van Warmelo imagined historical work to provide ethnographic and racial insight into various groups, as well as to be used in conjunction with demographical – and hence much more practical – information. It is in van Warmelo’s ‘disciplinary conflation’ mixed with an ‘ethnographical pragmatism’ that we begin to see a new language of race developing in the transposition from Germany to South Africa.

This shift is seen most markedly in the debate between Meinhof and van Warmelo over the translation of the former’s *Grundriss einer Lautlehre der Bantusprachen*, or *Introduction to the Phonology of the Bantu Languages*, from German into English. The debate, as Sarah Pugach has masterfully reconstructed from correspondence between the two, was over the inclusion of a map in the English version. A seemingly minor detail, I argue that van Warmelo insistence on mapping the linguistic and ethnic distributions of South African Bantu speakers is actually quite a symbolic shift in how race was being imagined, especially with regards to geography. Firstly, as noted above, Meinhof’s *Grundriss* was a fundamentally historical project, attempting a first step in the (re-)construction of “the whole course of development from beginning to end” of the Bantu language family.<sup>92</sup> To this end, Meinhof’s *Grundriss* includes an analysis of “Ur-Bantu”, or original Bantu, from which he believed modern, spoken Bantu languages could be more productively transcribed and compared. Using continental, mostly German, philological theories

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 835.

<sup>92</sup> Carl Meinhof, *Introduction to the Phonology of the Bantu Languages*, trans. by N. J. van Warmelo, Alice Warner (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer/Ernst Vohsen, 1932), 19.

Meinhof “distilled from contemporary Bantu languages what he believed was an approximation of the form and vocabulary of their ancient ‘parent’, the first Bantu language.”<sup>93</sup> Using both “Grimm’s Law” of linguistic morphology as well as A. Schleicher’s theory of the “hypothetical prototype of Indo-European” as origin language for dialects spanning from England to India, Meinhof believed that in positing “Ur-Bantu” he could show “clearly enough that it does not, and cannot, suffice to compare two languages with one another, when both are derived from a third form, the parent language of both. It is with this latter that they must be compared.”<sup>94</sup> While Meinhof was considered a skilled and detailed technician, his project in the *Grundriss* was an expansive, and theoretical one, concerned more with positing this linguistic base to a Bantu past than in the strict delineation of contemporary Bantu languages or their speakers.

Because of the more abstract and theoretical nature of Meinhof’s philological history, he disagreed with his student and translator, van Warmelo, regarding a supplementary map to be added to the English version of the *Grundriss*. Concerned more with reconstructing a historical trajectory of the Bantu, Meinhof believed “that a stripped-down map with only a small selection of languages from the vast Bantu family would suffice, and that other features...such as the topographical characteristics of the land, could be omitted.”<sup>95</sup> Van Warmelo on the other hand, “seemed intent on filling the map as much as possible and did not like the idea of leaving large gaps on it...[his] map would be one of multiplicity, demonstrating the vast host of Bantu groups present in Africa and *giving them geographical fixity*.”<sup>96</sup> If Meinhof saw language as a key to the past, then van Warmelo mapped the present, working across disciplinary boundaries, and

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<sup>93</sup> Sara Pugach, “Carl Meinhof and the German influence,” 828-9.

<sup>94</sup> Carl Meinhof, *Introduction to the Phonology*, 20.

<sup>95</sup> Sara Pugach, “Carl Meinhof and the German Influence,” 830-1.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 831; emphasis added.

employing history, philology, and ethnography to “fix South Africa’s ‘tribes’ and give them an overarching classification.”<sup>97</sup>

As early as 1930, Van Warmelo began to undertake just such a project to weave together an ethnological and philological investigation of the origins of the Bantu peoples in his early piece entitled “Early Bantu Ethnography from a Philological Point of View.”<sup>98</sup> As a philologist “seek[ing] help in other fields, ...in anthropology and ethnography,” van Warmelo’s investigation rests on two seemingly contradictory fulcrums: racial origins and racial classification.<sup>99</sup> Initially confronted with the “problem” that linguistic uniformity across the Bantu languages did not map onto the ethnographical unity of the peoples in question, van Warmelo constructed a hypothetical historical origin for the Bantu. Similar to Meinhof his mentor’s project of reconstructing a hypothetical Ur-Bantu language, van Warmelo’s investigation attempts to think across linguistic, ethnographical and historical traces in order to posit a racial homogeneity seen as otherwise lacking. Van Warmelo explains what he sees as this discrepancy between linguistics and race:

In the Bantu field, where the uniformity of the language would naturally lead one to expect anthropological uniformity too, there is another surprise. The exceptional homogeneity and compactness of the Bantu family of languages has no parallel at all in the anthropology of the peoples that speak these languages. In fact, there is no such thing as a Bantu race, nor is there a

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Nicholas J. van Warmelo, “Early Bantu Ethnography from a Philological Point of View,” *Journal of the International African Institute* 3.1 (1930): 31-48.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 32.

characteristically Bantu type of culture and civilization for that matter.<sup>100</sup>

Van Warmelo takes Meinhof's project one step further by claiming that even though the "Bantu-speaking peoples are of a mixed descent," and "a mixture of comparatively early times," he could demonstrate "conclusively that the Bantu languages are in the main derived from one clearly distinct parent from of speech, viz. the original Bantu language, *and this of course presupposes a distinct 'ancient Bantu people, whatever that may have been.'*"<sup>101</sup> Unable to contend with racial heterogeneity, especially one not able to be completely mapped onto a linguistic homogeneity, van Warmelo reaches back to an ancient mythical past – one accessed only through a conflation of linguistics with race – of pure racial origin.

After the translation of Meinhof's *Grundriss*, van Warmelo's next major work, a massive tome published by the Ethnological Publications division of the Native Affairs Department, entitled *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa* (1935)<sup>102</sup> continued on with both the themes and interdisciplinary practices of the "Early Bantu Ethnography," and with an increasing air of functionality. Van Warmelo, at this point five years into his tenure as Head Ethnologist of the Native Affairs Department, continues to belabor a justification for looking at the question of racial classification through multiple analytical and disciplinary paradigms. In his introduction, van Warmelo unequivocally dismisses a classification of Bantu peoples "on purely historical grounds", saying that it is "entirely out of the question."<sup>103</sup> This he chalks up to both the perceived inadequacies of the "traditional history of the natives," which he believes only extends back a few centuries, as well as a general lack of historical knowledge regarding large

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 35; emphasis added.

<sup>102</sup> N. J. Van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa* (Pretoria: Government Printer, Ethnological Publications No. 5), 1935.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 7.

numbers of ‘tribal’ and ethnic groups. Much of this lack of knowledge is attributed to the myriad migrations and scatterings of ‘tribes’ that, consequently, no longer form a cohesive unit. Van Warmelo claims that the pursuit of history regarding such peoples “becomes purely academic.”<sup>104</sup>

If history, for van Warmelo, is not the methodological answer for classifying racial identity, then neither is a “purely ethnological” approach. This, he argues, is also because of certain gaps in ethnographical knowledge, gaps in knowledge of “material culture” widened by the *difaqane*, the scattering of people across southern Africa in the nineteenth century. Van Warmelo, is also distrustful of a purely ethnographical approach because, as he states, “Judged only by these criteria, tribes but remotely connected and still partly speaking different languages might be grouped together in a way that would not tend to clearness.”<sup>105</sup> Van Warmelo prescribes a classificatory approach that combines history, ethnology and language in order to map racial “clearness” across the South African landscape. He argues that the inclusion of “a careful comparative analysis of structure and vocabulary will afford a most welcome avenue to deeper insight into *origins and relationships*.”<sup>106</sup> Or, in other words, this triad presented a way to contain cartographically both racial purity and racial mixture.

The *Preliminary Survey* represents a massive distillation of linguistic, ethnographical and genealogical material on the “Bantu tribes” of South Africa. Included in this taxonomy, are many graphical representations of geographical distribution of the peoples being surveyed. Van Warmelo is also explicit about the cartographical function of his work implied in the titular “Survey.” In addition to being a ‘survey’ in its sweeping and “comprehensive” scope, “it is also a

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

survey in that it deals with geography, with areas and figures.”<sup>107</sup> If we have moved quite some way from the focus on language in Meinhof’s work, van Warmelo is also quite explicit about the potential function of this compendium of material for a South African government, especially concerning the knowledge of where and how many “Bantu” were to be under its surveillance.

With regards to “tribal” populations, Van Warmelo states:

Regarding the enumeration there is little more to say, except that it may be taken to be fairly complete. It is unlikely that any important tribes recognized by the administration, or not recognized but known to the administration, have been missed. Besides these, which naturally form the majority of all the tribes that we can possibly have, there are a number of tribal names which have been included in the Index for the sake of completeness, though I am unable to say whether such tribes really exist or whether it is only a memory of them that lingers...”<sup>108</sup>

Even if van Warmelo admits to a certain inadequacy in his ability to capture all the Bantu peoples within South Africa, there is registered in his remarks a definite attempt to do just that. Thus, there is a slippage between the multiple registers of the volume’s titular work of being a ‘survey’: that in attempting to comprehensively map such a panoptic and panoramic ‘survey’ of ‘native’ South Africa, van Warmelo betrays this ethnography as also a more superficial survey. The work being done by South African government officials such as van Warmelo, in displaying apartheid’s pervasive spirit of ethnographical surveillance revealed the ways in which racial realities were of less concern to the government than racial surety. Van Warmelo’s *Preliminary*

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 6.



*Survey* is both a literal and figurative map for representing simply, in a distilled semiotics of graphs, tables, figures and detailed maps, the racial topography of South Africa to a governmental bureaucracy that had charged itself with a trusteeship over a “tribal” population it perceived as largely inchoate. Van Warmelo, as Government Ethnologist, saw himself as a translator, re-presenting race in a language made functional to the state.

This language of maps, borders, and classificatory lines translated what was otherwise seen as racial ‘messiness’ into the clarity of delineation. This is partly why van Warmelo stresses the importance of actual maps in his re-presentation of race. Sara Pugach argues similarly that, “van Warmelo’s 1935 text [*The Preliminary Survey*] ‘fixed’ as many Bantu – and even non-Bantu languages [and thus people] as possible, so that they could be accessible to government officials, district administrators and others interested in knowing the locations and genealogical relationships of the ‘native’ South African population.”<sup>109</sup> Struggling with various concerns over population control, regulation and movement the South African government during this period desired knowledge of its populations; not academic knowledge but a functional and pragmatic body of facts it could use to apprehend these questions and in the development of a grand scheme of modern social engineering.

In the articulation of a pre/apartheid racial modernity Meinhof’s work “provided a template for charting South African history and its planned future” by map[-ping] the terrain on which whites could locate and analyze their black neighbors.”<sup>110</sup> The South African racial imaginary at this moment was a cartographical one. And the future was a horizon of grids and lines reflecting the ‘natural’ difference of peoples in this nation. Again, there is a shift in racial discourse from applying difference and delineation to the reading of it. As mentioned above,

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<sup>109</sup> Sara Pugach, “Carl Meinhof and the German Influence,” 833.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

racial and ethnic difference was seen as the sacred language of God, and the racial practitioner (from the anthropologist to the policy maker – sometimes the same individual) needed only to read this divine message as it had been writ large across the South African landscape.

Paraphrasing the spirit of *volkekunde* for ‘applied anthropology’, John Sharp relates the foundational aspects of this imaginary: “Ethnoses are the functional units within mankind; *God brings each ethnos into being in particular historical and geographical circumstances and gives each a calling.*”<sup>111</sup> Because racial and ethnic delineation were the engines of both historical, but also geo-political movement for the South African state, instances of uncontrolled or unsanctioned (by God in the Afrikaner case) mixture or creolization were anathema to national or racial identity. These instances in the historical archive had to be either erased or properly delineated as their own racial, ethnic, and potentially national identity. This is one reason why in Meinhof’s proposal for the maps to be appended to the *Grundriss* he locates only the major dialectical groups, the smaller regional variations being subsumed under the broader categorical names marking the landscape. This is antithetical to van Warmelo’s nearly exhaustive approach in mapping all the ‘native’ people of the Union; this is largely because the focus has shifted from philology to ethnicity – and indeed, purity – as a national model of identity. National identity could not be based on a heritage of mixture, and so this was written out, or rather mapped over by the ‘clear’ lines of separation. We will see in the following chapter, how contemporaneous writers such as Thomas Mofolo attempted to think against this model of arrested creolization for South African national identity. Such writers and thinkers posited a cultural and racial archive of both historical and ongoing creolization and mixture as a way out of the ethnographic cul-de-sac that this state anthropology represented.

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<sup>111</sup> Sharp, “The Roots and Development,” 23; emphasis added.

Part of what van Warmelo shows us is that, whereas his mentor Meinhof's focus on languages had revealed an overwhelming amount of commonality and influence amongst the various dialects of the Bantu language family, van Warmelo's application of philology to a model of ethnographical study invested in origins, shifted both the academic and the official state focus to questions of how these languages could be mapped in terms of racial origin. If Meinhof looked to the ancient, even mythical and imagined past to conjure an originary form of Bantu language, he did so without pretensions to a potentially corresponding homogenous ethnic group, whereas van Warmelo's represents a functionalized history in the service of racially mapping the future. As he himself describes in the introduction to *The Preliminary Survey*, the surveying or mapping of populations has to be take "into account in almost *every calculation of a practical nature, as far as government and policy are concerned.*"<sup>112</sup> As one critic notes, *The Preliminary Survey* was a roadmap for the government, "as it provided a template for charting South African history and its planned future as a whole."<sup>113</sup>

Van Warmelo in many ways represents the subtle blending of policy and pragmatism with ethnography and ideology in the service of a taxonomical furor marking the South African political and cultural landscape. W.D. Hammond-Tooke, a former member of the Ethnological section under van Warmelo, writes apologetically – and perhaps somewhat hyperbolically – that van Warmelo's "was a mind *essentially non-theoretical*. A gifted linguist, his penchant was for the lexigraphical and taxonomic rather than the syntactical and analytic."<sup>114</sup> Not only is van Warmelo influenced by anthropological theory, particularly the linguistic-anthropological mapping of race which in turn can be said to resonate with the larger German school of diffusionism and *kulturreis* method of classification, but I would argue that van Warmelo

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<sup>112</sup> Van Warmelo, *Preliminary Survey*, 6

<sup>113</sup> Pugach, "Carl Meinhof and the German Influence," 833.

<sup>114</sup> Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters*, 114.

himself was responsible for the creation and application of a certain kind of racial theory, a particular language for representing race.

If apartheid can be read as at the end of a trajectory of racial discourse drawing inspiration from the abstract *volknationalism* of German Romanticism then perhaps there is a way to see this moment of transition between the two spaces as the articulation of a kind racial theory; a theorization that, in aesthetic terms, was a de-abstraction of race, a concretizing of principles, namely through language, culture and geography, all under the national banner. This functionalist putting to work of the *volksgeist* might otherwise be read as utilitarian instead of theoretical, but if we look at the textuality produced by this racial pragmatism, we can see the application of a theory on race, a theory which in turn was culling from various discursive sources. Van Warmelo's was a theoretical project with a practical aim. Consequently, his work can be read under the sign of 'legibility.' If, as Legkoathi writes, van Warmelo's impact was "to make African societies legible to the state," then we can begin to see how race came to function as a language that could mediate, or translate, a budding nation *to itself*.<sup>115</sup> This too has to be taken into account when speaking of a 'South African racial theory' or a 'theory of South African race': that race – as a concept, but also as a practicable tool – functioned as a translational semiotics, one which could both articulate a national sense of self, but also position that geographical body vis-à-vis a world of difference.

This last point, I will argue in subsequent chapters, has been a crucial paradigm through which the literary production of the twentieth century in South Africa has come into being. That is, as a textual practice South African literature has walked a precarious line – what Leon de Kock calls "the seam" – between being a space of difference to the world, and feeling that

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<sup>115</sup> Legkoathi, "Colonial' Experts, Local Interlocutors," 12.

difference to itself, or a “literature that has been, almost by definition, *other to itself*.”<sup>116</sup> I argue that this literary trend developed because of and in conjunction with the anthropological discourse on race in South Africa, especially as this ‘writing in/of difference’ became a textuality of national becoming during the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps the irony is that the literature of apartheid/the literature of apart-ness, is a textual practice that, in trying to make representational sense of separation – of the “other[ness] to itself” – reads as a familiar and entangling idiom of mixture and comingling. I will turn to this aesthetic in subsequent chapters.

Returning first to this idea of a racial textuality produced by anthropological knowledge, I want to look briefly at one of van Warmelo’s most curious works, *Language Map of South Africa*, Number 27 of the Ethnological Publications undertaken by the Department of Native Affairs.<sup>117</sup> Shorter in length than almost anything van Warmelo published, the *Language Map* is curious precisely because of its unassuming nature. A mere 20 pages, the *Map*, or *Taalkaart*, epitomizes an economy of ‘racial style’ that purported to make readable an otherwise inscrutably variegated racial terrain. In its brevity, the *Map* positions itself as filling in the gap of ethnological knowledge, a condition Hermanus Cornelius Martinus Fourie – one of van Warmelo’s chief sources and influences besides Meinhof – had earlier diagnosed regarding the South African state.<sup>118</sup> If the final result was a somewhat complex cartographical rendering of South Africa along the lines of apartheid’s racial ideology, then the intellectual ‘remedy’ proposed by van Warmelo was a decidedly simplified one. The racial text(-uality) of South Africa was premised precisely on this simplification, on a rendering practical of otherwise indecipherable native knowledge; indecipherable *because* it was “native.”

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<sup>116</sup> Leon De Kock, *South Africa in the Global Imaginary*. eds., Leon de Kock, Louise Bethlehem, Sonja Laden (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>117</sup> N. J. van Warmelo, *Language Map of South Africa/Taalkaart van Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria: Union of South Africa, Department of Native Affairs, 1952).

<sup>118</sup> Adam Kuper, "Fourie and the Southern Transvaal Ndebele," *African Studies* 37.1 (1978): 107-124.

The South African state wanted (racial) translation: from the “folklore” of its indigenous peoples to the narrative of modernization under the National Party racial signification was a semiotics of distillation. As Jean and John Comaroff write, “European historicism allows only one trajectory to non-Western societies if they are to be recognized as part of the grand human story: they must undergo a *visible* metamorphosis – fast or slow, effective or otherwise – to Western capitalist modernity.”<sup>119</sup> Quoting from Chakrabarty, the Comaroff’s continue by writing “Their [non-Western societies] diverse, variously animated life-worlds have to be translated in the ‘universal and disenchanted language of sociology.’”<sup>120</sup> This making visible is part of the anthropological demystification and disenchantment van Warmelo provided to the South African state, translating not only language as such but the tales told in various language into readable racial symbols of a South African national cartography. This process of translation – of making legible – was equally a process of (Western) history writing. In other words, the “visible metamorphosis” was one in which indigeneity – in this case indigenous narrative/language – was rendered as racial(-ized) and as a means of writing the ‘native’ into modern national history. “European historicism” required race in order to make legible and thus ‘historical’ the otherwise opaque and ‘primitive.’

If van Warmelo had earlier insisted on the centrality of maps to the practice and intellectual production of ethnography (even to the point of diverging from his mentor and perpetual interlocutor, Meinhof) in his *Preliminary Survey*, then by the time he compiles the *Language Map* in 1952 we witness an increasing textual and ideological pragmatism, to the extent that this *Map* is without maps. How then do we read the symbolic importance of this text, as well as the importance of symbols – which are conspicuously not there – within this text?

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<sup>119</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South; or How Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa* (Boulder CO/London: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), 3.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 3; emphasis mine.

Looking at the longer etymological genealogy of the “Language” portion of van Warmelo’s title as it is written in Afrikaans, “*taal*,” we can read the contours of his theorization of race. *Taal* in Afrikaans and contemporary Dutch signifies ‘language’, making van Warmelo’s English text otherwise simply translated as *Language Map*. However, looking to earlier Dutch and English etymological manifestations – in Middle Dutch and in Middle English as *talen* – *taal* is more precisely an account, a series of relations, a tale that is told, or spoken. As the visual maps of van Warmelo’s *Language Map* fade into the symbolic, all that we are left with is language – *taal*, a theoretical discourse that would indeed be used for the purposes of mapping by the apartheid state. If language had been the key indicial structure for dividing races, it seems that increasingly the category of race was *a priori* being used to delineate the language(s) of modernity. The *kaart* portion of van Warmelo’s volume fades as recognizable symbol and is superseded by the *taal* which makes the former now largely symbolic; a map which is not there. Or rather is there, but only spectrally as the line that separate languages and cultures. The metaphorical map is the disambiguation of race. There is no need for the cartographical sign if one has the metaphorical – symbolic – function of race, whose sole purpose is to delineate. What we are left with is all *taal*, the language and the tale of race as a way to talk about a certain form of modernity in South Africa.

The *Language Map* then is a ‘reckoning’, an ‘account’, a ‘tale’ of race and geography in South Africa; both a narrativization, a history of spaces and a counting, a *figuring*, in both senses, of those spaces. With the titular ‘map’, or *kaart*, sublimated, we might read van Warmelo’s text instead as “Language of South Africa.” What is this language? Rather how does South Africa speak? What van Warmelo creates in the *Language Map* is a text about textuality, a language for speaking about the languages of South Africa and, ultimately, a theory of race as it

relates to national identity. Van Warmelo comments on the ‘language’ of his classificatory scheme, saying, “This classification is based on a blending of all sorts of criteria. While it has a certain *practical usefulness*, it also has the defect that it creates a false impression of clarity where actually there is nothing but problems. It is a *misleading simplification*.”<sup>121</sup> The apartheid state increasingly was willing to over look this so-called “defect” in exchange for the intensification of this “certain practical usefulness.”<sup>122</sup> Speaking of the imaginative divide – in the “fiction of the modern mind” – between history and ethnography, the Comaroffs write that, “ethnography personifies, in its methods and its models, the inescapable dialectic of fact and value. Yet most of its practitioners persist in asserting the usefulness – indeed the creative potential – of such “imperfect” knowledge... They have even, at times, found the contraction invigorating.”<sup>123</sup> Whether consciously or not, the apartheid regime was certainly vivified by this ethnographic contradiction, writing a language of race that even when it encountered South Africa’s history of racial and ethnic mixture, still spoke categorically. This was because, as Robert Gordon describes, “Afrikaner anthropology has played a significant role in the legitimation and reproduction of the apartheid social order on two levels: as an instrument of control and as a means of rationalizing it.”<sup>124</sup> It was this language that told tales of purity and discreteness when there was none, in order to legitimate a division of the South African nation. It was also this language that was to be a creed of modernity for national development.

We see another connection between Meinhof and his intellectual progeny in van Warmelo’s contribution to a massive classificatory compendium entitled somewhat predictably,

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<sup>121</sup> Quoted in Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters*, 115.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>124</sup> Robert Gordon, “Apartheid’s Anthropologists: the Genealogy of Afrikaner Anthropology” *American Ethnologist: the Journal of the American Ethnological Society* 15 (1988): 536.



*The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa: An Ethnographical Survey*<sup>125</sup> (1937) and edited by the renowned South African anthropologist Isaac Shapera. Van Warmelo's contribution is an ambitious exploration of the relationship between classificatory schemata and historiographical perspective. Titled "Grouping and Ethnic History," the piece is a meditation on a South African philosophy of history, one that is inextricably entangled with the fabric of a series of colonial encounters as well as a perceived divide between "Western" and "Native" models of history. It is ironic that while van Warmelo is obviously guided by a taxonomical impetus here, his semiotic field is actually quite unstable, often slipping between native "traditions" and "history" in his charting of the South African ethnological topography. Indeed one wonders whether van Warmelo's concern here is primarily ethnographical or historiographical. Does the titular "Grouping" have more to do with divergent historical models, which in turn map onto a larger racial division? As the piece opens, we are presented with this historiographical division: "Information concerning the history of South African Bantu tribes comes from *two sources, European and Native.*"<sup>126</sup> White narratives and black narratives, this seems to be the pertinent "grouping" as van Warmelo spends much space elaborating on what is constituted by the latter. To such an extent that the other side of van Warmelo's titular divide, "Ethnic History" itself becomes suspect. On the one hand, van Warmelo purports to transpose something called "ethnic history" as if this was a stable category in and of itself, and not problematically constituted, translated, and otherwise mediated by "Europeans"; perhaps a liberal attempt to give historicity to those falling under the category of "ethnic."

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<sup>125</sup> Isaac Shapera, *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa: An Ethnographical Survey*. London: G. Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1937.

<sup>126</sup> N. J. Van Warmelo, "Grouping and Ethnic History" in Shapera, *The Bantu Speaking Tribes*, 43; emphasis mine.

On the other, we have here this category, of “ethnic history,” which we are made to read as “Native sources,” and this category seems to be useful for this project only in so far as it can complement and contrast “European” history in the project of ethnic delineation. The other reading then of van Warmelo’s piece is something like this: that by focusing on “ethnic history,” a racialized form of narrative, one defined in distinction and difference, the paramount “grouping” will be clearly seen, that is the one between white and black, European and Native. Those who are determined to have an “ethnic history” are those who, for “some practical use” need to be “grouped.” On the value of this ethnic history, van Warmelo is characteristically caught between the liberal patronizing of anthropology’s appreciation for “native sources” and his sense of Western historiographical supremacy. Firstly, van Warmelo defines ethnic history as “the traditions, legends, and tales handed down from generation to generation in each tribe.”<sup>127</sup> There seems to be an implied debate here regarding orality versus the literary, in which van Warmelo laments that these “tales” have not been, in larger degree, transcribed and “recorded.” Also, those that were written were predominately taken down in a European language, without a “scrupulous regard for the actual letter and phraseology of Native tradition.”<sup>128</sup>

However, if van Warmelo is unequivocal in his estimation of the immense practical value of Native folklore *for* the European, he is less so about the historical value of such sources. The reader of ethnic history is implored to “bear in mind that, at the very best, Native tribal tradition is weak in chronology and scanty in regard for truth. As a rule, three hundred years is the limit of possibly reliable tradition. Beyond that, legend and fairy tales begin to luxuriate.”<sup>129</sup> Indeed, the ethnic narrative holds great importance, and it could not be otherwise for a linguist/ethnologist, but it seems that the value of such sources, as “traditions, legends and tales,” rather than

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 43-4.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 44.

historical, is purely ethnographic and taxonomical. Evacuated of historical integrity by van Warmelo, “Native tradition” is read as less of an additional source in the grand historical narrative of southern Africa, and more as a function of the grouping of southern Africans; native history becomes the source, or the fulcrum, of racialization. ‘Native’ narrative then possesses practical value in that it could provide the (European, anthropological) reader with racial information, while it was read as of little worth to the historical narrative of the South Africa nation.

What van Warmelo is at pains to stress here, as well as elsewhere in his work, is the paramount function of geography in the production, distribution, and maintenance of ethnic variation. Van Warmelo expounds at length on how geography comes to be the panacea for reading race in the “ethnic” archive:

It will further be seen that the [ethnic] grouping largely coincides with geographical distribution, and also that the groups are almost a picture of the language-groups of South Africa. *With primitive folk it cannot be otherwise.* Roads, travel, and communications being virtually non-existent, or at best feebly developed, *a geographical unit inevitably becomes the seat of a particular dialect and form of culture, provided it be left alone.* It is the migrations, and the enclaves of not yet assimilated conquerors or conquered which these leave in their wake, that therefore make the exceptions and provide the surprises.<sup>130</sup>

It appears that language and culture, the dyadic index of racial identity, function for van Warmelo as primarily, and somewhat deterministically, in relation to geography. With

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

“primitive folk”, we are told, lack of resources and technology – in other words the infrastructures of modernity – these factors are superseded by geographical boundaries. Van Warmelo’s “Grouping” takes on another valence here as it is made to do the symbolic work implied in the geographical accumulation of various language-culture (racial) groups. If the South African geography is deterministic of not only the maintenance of racial identity but indeed its very production, then van Warmelo can present his “grouping” as merely an ethnographer’s dictation of an otherwise naturally determined racial situation. In other words, the anthropologist here is not performing the ethnographic work of grouping per se, rather he is merely reading the racial topography of South Africa; it is not *his* grouping, but the landscape’s.

The technologies of race were shifting in such a way that ‘reading’ race required certain fluencies in the semiotics not only of “Native” languages, but also cultures, and the often fraught ‘historical’ relationships of these two with geography. While Saul Dubow argues about the ‘science’ of race in South Africa and how a “biological concept of race informed apartheid theory” – even if it remained “infer[ed]” or “suggest[ed]” – I would argue here that more important was the increasingly paramount cultural ‘science’ of race.<sup>131</sup> Dubow notes that, “Both for pragmatic and doctrinal reasons, the diffuse language of cultural essentialism was preferred to the crude scientific racism drawn from the vocabulary of social Darwinism.”<sup>132</sup> In these efforts to mollify an outwardly racist lexicon in which to articulate a program preserving racial and economic supremacy, it is precisely the scientific paradigm of the linguist and anthropologist – represented by van Warmelo – that proved particularly attractive to the burgeoning Afrikaner Nationalist movement as well as the incipient ideology coalescing under the banner of apartheid.

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<sup>131</sup> Saul Dubow, “Afrikaner Nationalism,” 209.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Because apartheid in its early formulations (and perhaps for its duration) was far from being a monolithic ideological or practical entity and existed, rather, initially, as “a somewhat inchoate set of intentions and slogans,” many have argued for varying sources of apartheid ideology, from German Romantic nationalism, German missiology, neo-Fichteanism, neo-Calvinism, Jim Crow Segregation of the American South, etc.<sup>133</sup> But few have stressed the importance of how all of these interacted in the circulation of discourses on race that found ‘scientific’ grounding in the language of anthropology during the first half of the twentieth century in South Africa. What seems clear is that during this intense moment of not only growing ideological nationalism, but also practical considerations of geo-political national formulation any language that could speak to the relationship between race and geography in such a way as to both satisfy the practical demands of a white supremacy while also mollifying the ideological concerns of a white liberalism would be readily adopted. Especially if this register was one inflected by both scientific objectivity of classification as well as the emotionalism of the more mythical notion of origins. South African ethnology spoke such a polyvalent language. In a bizarre racial grammar, ethnology could articulate a geographically segregated future while speaking about an ethnic past. Sara Pugach notes: “One justification for relegating Africans to specific districts was their supposedly long histories in those areas, which could be determined through grammatical and lexical comparison. The protolanguage of a group could be traced to its source, and that would be considered the group’s ‘ancestral homeland.’”<sup>134</sup> This language is made to serve the apartheid regime by cloaking in an intellectually respectable garb, the language of justification for racial segregation, all the while capitalizing on the rhetorical heartstrings of the apartheid mythology of origins.

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<sup>133</sup> Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 275.

<sup>134</sup> Sara Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 89.

## The Anthropology of Politics: Writing across Categories and Creolized Language

The ethnographic encounter itself becomes, here, the subject of the book, a fable of communication, rapport, and finally, a kind of fictional, but potent, kinship.

- James Clifford

In 1932, the South African Inter-University Committee for African Studies called for a sub-committee in order “to gather information upon the languages of the Union, to ascertain what research has been and is being carried out, and to make recommendations for further research and the development of literatures.”<sup>135</sup> The committee developed a short questionnaire regarding the study of (“indigenous”) languages and literatures, with responses to be directed towards such categorical headings as “Grammatical,” “Lexicographical,” “Folklore,” “Ethnology,” “History,” etc., The questionnaire was then disseminated to intellectuals deemed experts within given language groups. A sort of ‘State of the Union’ and its languages, the proposed study seemed innocuous enough given the patronizing anthropological discourse of the day. These ‘experts’ were to offer a survey of the field regarding all “available literature” and “linguistic field work” being done, as well as to offer opinions on “what linguistic research...should be done?” and “In what direction should the literary development of the language be encouraged?”<sup>136</sup> In such an exercise, one sees the early signs of a racist political ideology seeping into the infrastructures of cultural work in the form of taxonomy, trusteeship, etc. The result of the study was a lengthy compendium, editorialized by C. M. Doke, then Director of Bantu Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, fully titled “A Preliminary

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<sup>135</sup> C. M. Doke, “A Preliminary Investigation into the state of the Native languages of South Africa with suggestions as to research and the development of literature” *Bantu Studies: A Journal devoted to the Scientific Study of Bantu, Hottentot and Bushmen*. 7:1 (1933), 1; henceforth “Preliminary Investigation”

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

Investigation into the state of the Native languages of South Africa with suggestions as to research and the development of literature.” The report was adopted by the Committee in January of 1933, and published in *Bantu Studies* – the major scholarly journal on such issues in South African at the time – in March of the same year.

The study itself labors to address two predicaments, namely the “difficulty encountered” in classifying the languages of the Union and what to do about the growing phenomenon where “the Natives themselves are really beginning to make their contribution to the literature.”<sup>137</sup> Though the latter is not described as a problem as such, I argue that many of these “Native” contributions actually disrupted the taxonomical impulse of the Investigation itself. Thomas Mofolo’s work, which will be discussed at length in the following chapter, is an example of this disruption. Because, as I will argue, Mofolo’s *Chaka* (1925)<sup>138</sup> thinks of cultural production as an act of creolization, the report, while left with no choice but to praise Mofolo, cannot help but belie a certain discomfort with what the author had produced. When the “Preliminary Investigation” comes to Southern Sotho, the language of Thomas Mofolo in which *Chaka* was first written, the language of the report itself articulates the bind of an anthropology in the service of a racialist state, one seeking a national platform of cultural, ethnic, and racial delineation and, ultimately, segregation. The Section on Southern Sotho begins as follows:

It is acknowledged that Southern Sotho (*Sesotho sa ha Moshoeshoe*<sup>139</sup>) is much more mixed in origin than either Tswana or Northern Sotho, but owing to its strategic position in regard to

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Mofolo. *Chaka*. trans., Daniel P. Kunene. London: Heinemann, 1981.

<sup>139</sup> Note here that even the anthropological classification of the language is based on the nineteenth century ruler of the Basotho as the embodiment of a linguistic, cultural and ethnic origin.

missionary work it has built up a literature far outstriding [sic] the other members of the cluster.<sup>140</sup>

A tension exists in this assessment of the Southern Sotho dialect, one which foregrounds certain cultural and racial – and even geographical – assumptions about the production of literature. There is a certain animating, if implicit, claim being made by this type of taxonomy: that a language, which is creolized in nature (“mixed in origin”), is not capable of producing a (national) literature. Thus, Doke must claim that Southern Sotho’s literary exceptionalism is a function of its relationship to the robust missionary presence across the Transvaal and Lesotho. Furthermore, perhaps “more than any other South African Bantu language, with the possible exception of Xhosa, Southern Sotho may be said to have a literature.”<sup>141</sup> A strange concession on Doke’s part.

Thomas Mofolo’s epic work, *Chaka*, is upheld by the report as the seminal example of this “exceptional” literature. However, when reading this “Preliminary Investigation,” one wonders whether, despite the author’s insistence on missionary influence, if the development of a literature in the Southern Sotho dialect had rather something more to do precisely with its creolized formation, its “mixed origin.” In other words, despite the auspices of the research, itself part of a larger discourse on the socio-economic engineering program gaining speed during the 1930’s in South Africa (a program equally of ethnic and cultural classification), there also seems to reside a tension around the apparently overwhelming evidence of creolization in the cultural production and history of the country. The report’s initial words on where its analytical gaze will fall belie the political and economic motivations behind the research. In describing the report’s taxonomical methodology for “the classification of the native languages of South Africa,” Doke

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<sup>140</sup> C. M. Doke, “Preliminary Investigation,” 18.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.



briefly glosses over both the “Bushman” and “Hottentot” languages, followed by a justification for the report’s focus on “that unique language family in Africa,” the “Bantu languages.”<sup>142</sup> The “Investigation” urges that, “It has been considered wise in this present survey to include an investigation into each of these types, *though it will soon be seen that all the major problems and suggestions are concerned with the members of the Bantu family. For economic and population reasons this must of necessity be so.*”<sup>143</sup> Summarily ignoring the “problems and suggestions” which related to the populations of the Khoi and San peoples – largely considered nostalgically as relics of the country’s past – the report focuses on classifying the members of the Bantu speaking group, as this group on the whole posed the greatest hurdles to the geo-political and economic expedients of the South African government.

The “Preliminary Investigation’s” figuring of the “Bantu” majority of the South African population came on the eve of the 1933 general election in May, which saw a tectonic shift in the governmental trajectory of South Africa: though a coalition of the two major parties – Hertzog’s National Party and Smuts’ South African Party – remained at least ostensibly intact, the balance of power shifted to the National Party, increasing the fortification of a racial infrastructure over South Africa. The products of such cultural work as Doke’s “Preliminary Investigation” and their implementation by governments in South Africa, especially leading up to and during the apartheid era has been well documented.<sup>144</sup> But Doke’s “Preliminary Investigation” does provide a perfect example of the pre-apartheid colonial push to appropriate cultural work for the purposes of a racist political economy. The ideology of the report attempts to be clear in its

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.; emphasis mine.

<sup>144</sup> See for instance: Keith Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: Total Information in the Making of Apartheid,” *History Workshop Journal* 59 (Spring 2005): 83-108; Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe, “The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa,” *Review of African Political Economy* 7 (Fall 1976): 87-107. For an apologist account of this relationship, see W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa’s Anthropologists 1920-1990* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand UP, 1997).

stringent methods of delineation of a population who poses the greatest “problems” even while revealing itself to be conflicted.

Though this investigation perpetually attempts to map the boundaries of difference across the South African topography, it constantly runs into instances of creolization, forcing it to write over these spaces with a more categorical rhetoric. For instance, in a section of the report titled “The Classification of the Native Languages of South Africa,” further sub-sectioned, “The Classification of the South African Bantu Languages,” Doke notes that, “The first main classification of Bantu languages is probably best made by a division into ‘types’ or ‘zones.’”<sup>145</sup> Despite the unequivocal nature of the project, one senses the provisional nature of the language in the caveat that organization into “‘types’ or ‘zones’” is “probably” the preferred means of clarification. This ‘clarity’ is further undermined by Doke’s qualifying footnote that, “In regards to this nomenclature, Professor Lestrade points out that the terms ‘zones’ and ‘clusters’ are too static, and suggests ‘foci’ and ‘nuclei.’ The whole terminology must be considered tentative.”<sup>146</sup> It was under G. P. Lestrade that the Ethnological Section of the Native Affairs Department in South African was established in 1925, a governmental division who even Hammond-Tooke notes that, “As a specialist section... supposedly with expertise on ‘the Native,’ the question as to its involvement in the formulation of apartheid policy is an obvious one.”<sup>147</sup> Doke’s “Preliminary Investigation” then forms part of a discursive body that attempted to shore up the relationship between cultural production – in this case literature – and ethnic identity, and further mapped this connection onto the South African geography. The problems this report finds are in the myriad instances where this relationship between an ethnic “type” or “zone” and its literary/cultural production is neither stable, nor possessive of originary purity.

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<sup>145</sup> C.M. Doke, “Preliminary Investigation,” 3.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 3, footnote no. 2.

<sup>147</sup> W. D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters*, 109.

Doke's "Preliminary Investigation" then is part of a larger project of state-sponsored classificatory mappings, such as the above-mentioned undertakings of N. J. van Warmelo Government Ethnologist of the Department of Native Affairs. Van Warmelo's *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa* was published just two years after Doke's, in 1935, by the Department's press. It is in this climate of collecting narratives for the production of a fictive racial/geographical clarity, that Doke's "Preliminary Investigation" names Thomas Mofolo's "great historical novel, *Chaka*," as giving the Southern Sotho dialect a literature. But on the whole the report seems unable to assimilate either Mofolo or his literature into its schema. Doke not only gives just as much credit to F. H. Dutton, Mofolo's first English translator, but also patronizingly recommends that Mofolo be commissioned to write a "Life of Moshesh" the legendary nineteenth century consolidator and ruler of the Basotho, Mofolo's own ethnic group. Doke argues that, "Mofolo could be induced to undertake this if an outline, *especially regarding origins*,<sup>148</sup> were given to him to work upon."<sup>149</sup> Aside from invalidating the large amount of ethnographical fieldwork – but on Zulu customs – Thomas Mofolo had already demonstrated in the creation of *Chaka*, the desire expressed by this recommendation again belies the investigation's need for a neater relationship between the various "types" of "Bantu Peoples" and various "Bantu Literatures", especially where "origins" are concerned. The explicitly ethnographic style of Mofolo's text both lends it a decidedly complicit stance regarding its anthropological and missive influence, while it is ostensibly also this 'style' that captures the attention of the larger, white anthropological imaginary following its 1931 translation into English.

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<sup>148</sup> There are two further mentions of Mofolo in the Investigations section on recommendations for Southern Sotho, calling for: "(i) Preparation of a 'Life of Moshesh.' [T. Mofolo to be approached to write this, provided an outlined be supplied, particularly regarding origins]"; "(ii) Preparation of the "Story of Mohlomi" from a collection of the legends [Mofolo to be consulted]" ("Preliminary Investigation," 30).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 19; emphasis mine.

If the investigation were to look to closely it would have perhaps found Mofolo's *Chaka* to be a novel ultimately about a certain South African instance of creolization, despite its ethnographic gaze – or rather, precisely because of it. As I argue in the following chapter, Mofolo engages in an intra-colonized anthropology in the production of the *Chaka* text, and what results is a form of 'auto-ethnography' so characteristic of later post-colonial writing. However, in Mofolo's text the 'auto,' rather the ethnographic subject, is a mixed one, represented through multiple racial, cultural and linguistic registers. Perhaps even more confounding to the investigators, was the fact that Mofolo was not talking here about the transculturation precipitated by Western colonial encounter. Indeed, Mofolo's text generates a discourse on creolization whose entire purview is outside the (Western) colonial world. While anthropologists were seeking "good *vernacular* writers," to produce ethnic narratives, to "collect legends" and write narratives of "origins," what Mofolo had produced instead was an 'origin' story whose starting point was creolization, on a national scale, and between and amongst "native" groups across southern Africa.<sup>150</sup> While Mofolo is not highly laudatory of the Zulu subjects of his text, in fact he is often condemnatory, nor is he overly praiseworthy of his own ethnic Basotho. Eschewing objectivity in favor of a "tale" telling, Mofolo writes *Chaka* as a novel deeply invested in telling an entangled history as it relates to the larger national body of South Africa and the various identities within it; hardly the autochthonous racial narrative prescribed by Doke's "Preliminary Investigation."

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Geographies of Creolization: Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* and the 'Forgotten' Canon of African Literature**

I believe that errors of this kind are very many in the book *Chaka*; but I am not very concerned about them because I am not writing history, I am writing a tale, or I should say I am writing what actually happened, but to which a great deal has been added, and from which a great deal has been removed, so that much has been left out, and much has been written that did not actually happen, with the aim solely of fulfilling my purpose in writing this book. – Thomas Mofolo

One of the most terrible implications of the ethnographic approach is the insistence on fixing the object of scrutiny in static time, thereby removing the tangled nature of lived experience and promoting the idea of uncontaminated survival. – Édouard Glissant

The epic of the Zulu Emperor Chaka, as related by Thomas Mofolo, seems to me to exemplify an African poetics...It is an epic that, while enacting the "universal" themes of passion and man's destiny, is not concerned with the *origin* of a people or its early history...On the contrary, it is related to a much more dangerous moment in the experience of the people concerned... – Édouard Glissant

## ***Chaka* and the “Problem” of African Literature**

In 1912 the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (P.E.M.S.) published *Livre d’Or de la Mission du Lessouto*,<sup>151</sup> a retrospective piece memorializing the Mission’s work in Lesotho, and in which the manuscript of Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* is mentioned: “*Un quatrième manuscript, consacré par la même auteur à décrire les moeurs des Zoulous, est en moment entre les main d’un missionnaire auquel Mofolo a demandé des critiques et des conseils.*”<sup>152</sup> Though it had been written between the years of 1909 and 1910, the Mission press would not publish Mofolo’s novel for another fifteen years (1925). If *Chaka* initially presented a problem for the P.E.M.S. missionaries responsible for its eventual publication, then this ‘problem’ – of interpretation, of integration – would follow the *Chaka* text for the rest of the twentieth century. To this day the novel remains a strange placeholder in the body of written African fiction. Marginalized in many ways – *Chaka* is made to give precedence to other and mostly subsequent imaginings of both the African post/colonial struggle and African ideas on nation (and national culture), the text nevertheless functions as a perennial sounding board for the critical refiguring of myriad formations, from the field of African Literature, to Postcolonial Studies, even to the function of criticism itself. Because the re-cycling of *Chaka* criticism is inevitably written under the sign of a “problem”<sup>153</sup> with the text itself, I argue instead that these returns are actually indicative of a “problem” in the general approach to African Literature.

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<sup>151</sup> M. A. Boegner, *Livre d’Or de la Mission du Lessouto: Soixante Quinze Ans de l’Histoire d’une Tribu Sud-Africaine, 1833-1908* (Paris: Masion des Missions Évangéliques, 1912); henceforth, *Livre d’Or*.

<sup>152</sup> “A fourth manuscript by the same author [Thomas Mofolo], and dedicated to describing the customs of the Zulus, is at this moment in the hand of a missionary who Mofolo has asked for criticism and advice.” *Ibid.*, 509.

<sup>153</sup> I take a certain cue here from Simon Gikandi’s recent piece “Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 73:3 (September 2012). Though it will be discussed in some detail below, Gikandi looks to Mofolo’s *Chaka* as a way to reorient critical categorization of genre towards paradigms more sensitive to the ways in which early works of African literature display a generic syncretism that unsettles paradigms of approach to postcolonial literatures. It

In what follows I will offer a reading of three recent, seminal returns to *Chaka* in order to demonstrate how this criticism relies on a recurrent rhetoric of a “problem” surrounding the text. In each critique of Mofolo’s work there is the positing of a provisional language that I will argue can be more productively read as a South African discourse of creolization. Mofolo uses the idea of South African creolization in order to interrogate both African and European colonial forms of nation, as well as the narratives of modernity attendant upon both; narratives of modernity entangled with the increasing racialized South African state during Mofolo’s time. Re-reading Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* as a space for thinking about the possibilities of an African form of creolization discourse will show that the ‘problem’ of reading the text exposes critical lacunas surrounding the questions of authenticity and modernity, persistently constitutive tropes of the field of African Literature.

Further, the possibilities of an African creolization critique will be explored through a comparison with Chinua Achebe’s foundational *Things Fall Apart*,<sup>154</sup> in which I argue that Achebe’s “ethnographic impulse”<sup>155</sup> constructs a particular narrative of African modernity based on the arrival of European colonialism and its cataclysmic effects to an otherwise integral

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will become clear below how I pick up on Gikandi’s rhetoric of a “problem,” as well as highlighting the use of Mofolo’s *Chaka* as a paradigmatic salve to this crisis of criticism; a function I argue haunts the text across the twentieth century.

<sup>154</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* New York: Anchor Books, 1994.

<sup>155</sup> The phrase “ethnographic impulse,” belonging to Eleni Coundouriotis, conveys the critic’s attempt to reconcile what she sees as a representational impasse in early African literature between the discourses of history and ethnography. Coundouriotis argues that while, “Ethnographic description has often repressed historical context in the effort to re-create whole cultures,” the “ethnographic impulse” registers “a desire to restore the local cultures under their observation and to revise the mastering descriptions of Western ethnography” with attention to “actual historical circumstances” (*Claiming History: Colonialism, Ethnography, and the Novel*. 1999 23). Conceived largely in response to Clifford’s own reading of colonial anthropology as “ethnographic salvage”, Coundouriotis reads Achebe’s “autoethnography [as] affirming the contemporaneity of native cultures with those of the West” (38). The point, as Coundouriotis also makes here, is that Achebe achieves this “contemporaneity” through “the ethnographic impulse to reconstruct a whole culture” (Ibid.). Coundouriotis’s larger argument is also about how Achebe’s ethnographic imaginary positions *Things Fall Apart* against a discursive backdrop of “authenticity” surrounding African literature, hence making this novel a canonical watershed.

African world. Achebe's interventional feat is to imagine a model of the pre-colonial African life-world in response to the Western (colonial) epistemic "denigration"<sup>156</sup> and destruction of such spaces. But the price Achebe pays for his novelistic recuperation of integrity (in both senses) of the pre-colonial African life-world is to henceforth link Africa's modernity to Europe's; the prominence of Achebe's paradigm obfuscates the possibility of seeing other, or earlier, genealogies of African modernities. While Achebe's narrative of the transition from pre-colonial to modern African nation persistently structures critical approaches to African cultural production, I posit that Mofolo, through an African discourse of creolization, simultaneously rejects the European colonial-encounter narrative of (African) modernity<sup>157</sup> while also imagining an African past that is always already entangled.<sup>158</sup>

### **Mofolo's Creolization of Difference and Creolization *with* a Difference**

Thomas Mofolo's historical novel *Chaka*<sup>159</sup> ends in a prolonged description of the *difaqane*, the early-nineteenth century upheaval of a large portion of the population of southern

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<sup>156</sup> See, Abdul JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics: the Politics of Literature in Africa*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983.

<sup>157</sup> In doing so, Mofolo is an example of what Jean and John Comaroff call "Afro-modernity [which] has lain implicit in signs and practices, dispositions and discourses, aesthetic values and indigenous ways of knowing. Nor is it best labeled an "alternative modernity." It is a *vernacular* – just as Euro-modernity is a vernacular – wrought in an ongoing, geopolitically situated engagement with the unfolding history of the present. And, like Euro-modernity, it takes many forms" (Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, 9).

<sup>158</sup> See Samir Amin, *Global History: A View from the South*. Oxford: Pambazuka, 2011. In it Amin describes how "History is, from its inception, dealing with a system that has always been global, in the sense that the evolution of the various regions has never been determined by the interaction of forces internal to the societies in question but by forces operating on the global system..." (120). Also, see Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997): 11- 42.

<sup>159</sup> Though Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* was not published until 1925, the archives of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (P.E.M.S.) show substantial documentation regarding the writing of the manuscript in 1909–1910. This is important because it coincides with the consolidation of the four southern African colonies and the formation of the Union of South African. See more below on this. The P.E.M.S press at Morija was eventually responsible for the printing of *Chaka*, as well as being credited as publication vanguard of early written Sesotho literature. See, for instance, Daniel P. Kunene, *Thomas Mofolo and the*



Africa at the hand of the novel's eponymous character, and as a direct result of his creation of the Zulu nation. Two entangled narratives, one a Faustian parable of moral dilemma and the other an irrevocable shift in the geo-political and racial landscape of southern Africa, find themselves at a moment of climax in which Mofolo rethinks the formation of the South African nation through a South African form of creolization discourse. Mofolo's description of the *difaqane*<sup>160</sup> is an interrogation of national formation on the African continent by returning to a “*point d'intrication*” (or, “point of entanglement”) in the pre-colonial African past that, rather than articulating a narrative of origin (of the Zulu people, of the South African nation, or of its modernity), is instead a moment of South African creolization and mixture.<sup>161</sup> Mofolo emphasizes the forces of creolization at work in South Africa, by returning to a moment of “entanglement” – the *difaqane* – that functions in his novel neither as origin myth, nor proxy narrative for ‘Western encounter as modernity.’ As Édouard Glissant notes, *Chaka*, is “an epic that, while enacting the ‘universal’ themes of passion and man’s destiny, *is not concerned with the origin of people or its early history. Such an epic*<sup>162</sup> *is not a creation myth.*<sup>163</sup> Rather than writing the origins of the Zulu, or even ‘Bantu’<sup>164</sup> peoples, Mofolo chooses “a much more

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*Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1989. Also see, Albert Gérard's *Four African Literatures*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

<sup>160</sup> In keeping with the original text, I retain the Sesotho version of the word throughout. I also maintain the text's Sesotho spelling of “Chaka” rather than “Shaka” in isiZulu.

<sup>161</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 26.

<sup>162</sup> Glissant continues regarding African epic forms – of which Mofolo's *Chaka* is, for him, representative as follows: “The epic of these conquered heroes, which was also about that of their peoples or tribes, sometimes their beliefs, is not meant, when recounted, to reassure a community of its legitimacy in the world. *They are not creation epics*, great “books” about genesis, like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the Old Testament, the sagas, and the chansons de geste. *They are memories of cultural contact, which are put together collectively by a people before being dispersed by colonization*. There is no evidence therefore of that “naïve consciousness” that Hegel defines as the popular phase of the epic, but a strangled awareness that will remain an underlying element in the life of African peoples during the entire period of colonization” (*Caribbean Discourse*, 135; emphasis mine).

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 134; emphasis mine.

<sup>164</sup> Note the change in the subtitles from the 1931 English translation (F.H. Dutton) to the French translation in 1940, from *Chaka, an Historical Romance* to *Chaka, une épopée bantoue*, and the growing

dangerous moment” in order to assuage the violent affinity between nationalism and ethnic or racial identity, as well as to posit an alternative moment of modernity – one outside of European colonial contact – as formative to South Africa.<sup>165</sup> Towards the novel’s end, in a moment of near-genocidal climax, we see the face of southern African demographics change as a result of Chaka’s violent project of nation formation:

After changing the national name, Chaka brought together the young men from Zwide’s scattered nation, as well as those from nations who owed allegiance to him, and he said to them: ‘Today you have no king of your own any more, nor are you any longer a nation...if you give up your national name as well as your language, and join my regiments, and become Zulus, then you shall live...Chaka mingled them with the Zulus, especially so they become Zulus in their hearts.’<sup>166</sup>

Critics of *Chaka* find it easy to read this passage as a simple moral condemnation of violence. Often ‘over-read’ as a Christian parable, Chaka’s hyperbolic violence is typically seen as the consequence of failing to resist the tempter/diviner character of Isanusi. Nor does Mofolo dissuade such a reading, labeling Chaka the “originator-of-all-things-evil.”<sup>167</sup> But I argue for shifting the focus to what that violence actually precipitates, in order to see the multiple ways in which Mofolo’s South African form of creolization discourse, one grounded in African pre-colonial history, troubles Western narratives of modernity and notions of governance. Both the historical formation of the Zulu nation in the early nineteenth century and Mofolo’s twentieth

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need, within the rubrics of negritude, for the figure of Chaka to represent a more unified/unifying (racial) gesture.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Mofolo, *Chaka*, 106.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 137.

century treatment of it as a process of creolized mixture, become allegories of the writer's own moment. Allegories less in the Christian moral sense (in which the novel is often read) and more in the political sense that Mofolo is offering an alternative racial and political paradigm – of creolization – to interrogate his own moment of national formation.

Briefly, Glissant characterizes the mechanisms at work in the processes of creolization as “reversion” – or the “obsession with a single origin” – and “diversion” – the tactical “interweaving of negative forces.”<sup>168</sup> As prescription for displaced, postcolonial, and diasporic groups, Glissant demands that, “We must return to the point from which we started...not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, ...that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization or perish.”<sup>169</sup> In what follows, I look at *Chaka* as a literary example in which national origin narratives are complicated through a creolization of difference, while also keeping in mind that this is an example of creolization *with* a difference. In other words, Mofolo's project is to bracket from the *point d'intrication* the power of the Western and African encounter, focusing instead on other narratives of entanglement as an ‘alternative modernity’<sup>170</sup> for national identity in South Africa. If, as Glissant mentions in one of the above epigraphs, *Chaka* articulates “an African poetics,” then I will think about how the text does so through an African approach to creolization, the emergence of such a concept in the South African context, as well as what this might mean for discussions of the field of African literature and its criticism.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 13-26.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>170</sup> See, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar. *Alternative Modernities*. Durham: Duke U P, 2001.

<sup>171</sup> Doing so means looking at creolization as Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih do in their recent editorial collaboration, as: “a flexible hypothesis that allows researchers to map different relationships, modes of contact, and migration patters in and among diverse ethnic communities. As a concept creolization is simultaneously descriptive and analytical: it emerges from the experiential but provides a theoretical framework...” (*The Creolization of Theory*. Durham: Duke U P, 2011, 2). I mean to maintain

Despite the ‘difference,’ or precisely because of it, I argue below that it can be productive to think about the South African cultural archive as articulating strands of its own form of creolization discourse, unique to the particularities of historical and geographical entanglement surrounding this country that stands at a global crosscurrents of economic, cultural, and epistemological flows. Sarah Nuttall is useful here for articulating creolization through a geographical paradigm, one that takes into consideration the valences of southern African space. Perhaps one of the first to think about creolization as a theoretical paradigm applicable to the southern tip of Africa, Nuttall writes that, “Given its tri-centric location between the Indian and Atlantic world as well as the land mass of the African interior, further readings of this space from an outer-national<sup>172</sup> vantage point is likely to reinforce a *creolité* [sic.] hypothesis.”<sup>173</sup> In other words, South Africa’s geographic positioning has something to do with a creolizing predisposition. What is more, South Africa’s geographic exceptionalism – its “tri-centric location” at the thresholds of three different “worlds” – suggests that we take on a perspective that is outside or beyond the national one. As Nuttall prescribes, “an outer-national vantage point” is not only logical given the space, but this cartographic perspective would allow us to see the ways in which South Africa functions according to principles of mixture, exchange, mobility.

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this sense of “simultaneity,” while being careful to follow the editors’ prescription to use creolization as a “theoretical or cultural metaphor with great prudence” (Ibid., 23).

<sup>172</sup> For Nuttall’s use of the term “outer-national” see Paul Gilroy’s earlier discussion of the power of the configurations ‘outside’ the nation when he writes: “The history of the black Atlantic... continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people – not as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship – provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory. They all emerge from it with special clarity if we contrast the national, nationalistic, and ethnically absolute paradigms of cultural criticism... with those hidden expression, both residual and emergent, that attempt to be global or outer-national in nature” (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16).

<sup>173</sup> Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 24.

Nuttall highlights the unique, global positioning of South Africa to allow us to open the space up for further investigations that pursue a creolization line of questioning.<sup>174</sup>

Mofolo's investment in the historical and geographical "entanglement" of southern Africa, what I am calling a South African creolization, is what Simon Gikandi has termed Mofolo's "early postcolonial style," defined by a return to and refiguring of the colonial and pre-colonial archive; a return that stages the quagmire of representation within the cultural hegemony of colonial rule.<sup>175</sup> Thomas Mofolo correctly read the racial and historical impact caused by a convergence of discourses in South Africa: one a budding racist political structure that would organize the population under broad signifiers such as "African," "Coloured," etc.; the other an anthropological discourse which further divided the former into ethnic subcategories based largely on linguistic, cultural and even literary distinctions. These discourses of division, already being honed well before the formal advent of apartheid in 1948, converged in the unification politics of the South African nation in 1909. The South African state, even in Mofolo's time represented the formalization of a segregationist ideology seeking to quarantine historical intimacies. Mofolo's creolization attempts to think against separation by recuperating from the archive spaces where identity found form – common ground – in moments of mixture and entanglement, even if these collusions were precipitated by violence as in the Chaka example.

The colonial project (apartheid representing a strange post-colonial progeny of this project) being in part a re-visioning of separateness back through the colonial and pre-colonial

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<sup>174</sup> Nor is this Nuttall's first treatment of the term in its applicability to South African cultural production. In an earlier co-edited volume with Cheryl-Ann Michaels entitled *Senses of Culture*, Nuttall and Michaels corral the myriad "inflections" the term resonates with in order to think about creolization as way to break open the powerful obfuscation within the South African archive placed there by the racist mythologizing of apartheid discourse. Nuttall and Michaels write, "In South Africa...the focus has always been on separation. Apartheid social engineering did work to fix spaces and identities which today are difficult to break down, even though they are creolized despite themselves, as it were... We use the term 'creolization' because it carries an inflection beyond both multiculturalism and hybridity..." (6).

<sup>175</sup> Gikandi, "Realism, Romance," 325.

history of southern Africa, moments of entanglement were refigured by mythologies of difference. Thomas Mofolo creates a style that succeeds in recasting southern Africa's past as a series of creolized encounters between Africans that shaped the present moment of the 'modern' South African nation. Moreover, Mofolo's "tale" as he calls it, offers a pre-colonial model of politics that stands ambivalently in the crucible between a version of cultural nationalism and a critique of oppressive expressions of power. Chaka as a figure of violence on a genocidal scale cannot be fully revered as a pre-colonial hero, especially by Mofolo, who is a member of an ethnic group (the Basotho) whose collective identity is in part informed by the historical memory of Chaka's terror. But nor is Chaka fully vilified either, becoming a strangely creolized and creolizing figure, who stands in opposition to both Western modes of representation as well as colonial strictures of racial and ethnic segregation. In other words, Mofolo's Chaka is both a megalomaniacal tyrant who, in a near-genocidal project of ethnic/cultural engineering, forces the mixture of various peoples across southern African – a strange, and complicating form of creolization. Also, in Mofolo's project of excavating this figure, the author not only, "produce[s] a literature with an African referent in a language that deconstructed the mimetic contract as one of the operating signatures of colonial governmentality," but does so through acts of aesthetic, cultural and epistemological creolization; the author himself embodies the creolization he represents in his novel.<sup>176</sup> Simultaneously racialized, both ethnically specific and forged in the crucible of a trans-ethnic imagination, and popularly seen as proto-Pan-African figure, Mofolo's Chaka troubles the boundaries of an anthropologically informed, racist political imagination in South Africa. Likewise, Mofolo crosses intellectual, ethnic, and geographical borders to conjure up a Chaka that is not an uncomplicated figure of anticolonial resistance, but an enigmatic locus for interrogating the nation of South Africa and its relationship to (racial) modernity.

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<sup>176</sup> Gikandi, "Realism, Romance," 311.

In looking to the pre-colonial African past and not finding pristine stability, Mofolo articulates a different genealogy for the post/colonial nation, one whose modernity is not predicated on an entanglement with the West. Nor is Mofolo's South Africa a nation necessarily predicated on ethnic, racial and cultural separation.<sup>177</sup> Instead, the writer displaces the hegemonic significance of the colonial moment of encounter, offering an alternative "*point d'intrication*" as formative of South African modernity.<sup>178</sup> Excavating this "moment of entanglement," where "the forces of creolization must be put to work," Mofolo offers a genealogy of the South African nation that unsettles mythologies of origin animating the political imaginaries of twentieth century colonial regimes in Africa. The modern South African nation, in Mofolo's conception, is not predicated on a narrative of colonial encounter where two forces – 'Western' and 'Native' – meet in a violent subsuming of the latter. Rather, Mofolo's version of South African modernity precedes and precludes the violence of the (Western) colonial encounter, positing instead an earlier moment of creolized entanglement – between subsequently colonized groups – as a means to interrogate mythologies of authenticity haunting the formation of the nation.<sup>179</sup>

As mentioned above, part of the 'problem' of reading *Chaka* lies with Mofolo's own adept reading of the entangled relationship between colonial anthropology and national politics

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<sup>177</sup> Sarah Nuttall writes that, "South African studies has, for a long time, been over-determined by the reality of apartheid – as if, in the historical trajectory of that country, apartheid was inevitable, in terms of both its origins and its consequences; as if everything led to it and that everything flows as a consequence of it" ("City Forms and Writing the 'Now' in South Africa," 732). This is the hegemonic narrative in both apartheid discourse as well as post-apartheid historiographical criticism: that whether supportive of colonialism or critical of it, there is the implicit predication that the modernity of the South African nation traces a genealogy of encounter between Western and non-Western peoples.

<sup>178</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 26.

<sup>179</sup> I am also obviously taking my cue here from Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih's other edited volume, *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). In following Glissant the authors point to the always already creolized nature of culture as definitive of transnationalism. They write: "If we posit, after Glissant, Amin, and Amselle, that creolization, and mixture are the a priori conditions of culture, we can further evince minor expressivity as even more necessarily mixed and transnational. By nature of their marginality within the nation-state and by their experience of migration and various forms of (neo-)colonialism, they had to fall upon cultural resources outside the dominant ones...that pretend to singularity and authenticity" (*Minor Transnationalism*, 9).

(both anti- and colonial) in Africa, and his reaching back to the pre-colonial archive to resuscitate a figure who refuses to signify ethnographical clarity. Consequently, while Mofolo is highly invested in an anthropological approach, which gives his novel something of an ethnographic style, the pre-colonial life world he harkens back to is not the predictably homogenous space of autochthonous stability that subsequently becomes a hallmark for much of anti-colonial African literature. Moreover, Mofolo – ethnically Basotho – offers an ethnography of the Zulu nation’s figure of origin that is in turn creolized/creolizing. Throughout the novel the reader is given intricate accounts of Zulu folklore and rituals followed by their Basotho equivalents, resulting in a mixture of the text’s ethnographic life-world and the stylistic means to represent it.

For instance, very early in the text the narrator offers an account of the courtship of Chaka’s parents against the relief of an ethnographical description of traditional courtship customs. The narrator tells of a “choose-a-lover game called *ho kana*” in which young Zulu people declare publicly their affections for one another.<sup>180</sup> We are told how Senzagakhona – Chaka’s father – already a chief, had designs on young girl from another village, Nandi, to be his fourth –possibly fifth – wife and so decided to engage in the young person’s courtship game. Nandi too, we are told, loved Senzagakhona and so happily joined in so that she might declare her affections. In this description that is both plot and tableau (in the ethnographic sense), as the voice of the storyteller and the anthropologist become entangled in Mofolo’s text, a creolized ethnographical register emerges which not only further complicates this love intrigue, between Chaka’s soon-to-be parents, but also will drive much of the dramatic plot:

The *kana* is similar to the *sedia-dia* girls’ dance among the Basotho, but it goes beyond the *sedia-dia* because in one sense the

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<sup>180</sup> Mofolo, *Chaka*, 5.



*kana* resembles *ho iketa* whereby a girl offers herself to a young man for marriage without waiting to be asked.<sup>181</sup>

This distinction becomes central to the later events surrounding the legitimacy of Chaka's birth and his succession to his father's kingship as rumors surface in the novel of how "That day Senzagakhona used strong arguments to persuade Nandi that the two of them should do an ugly deed that was against the law of nature and of man," rather to engage in premarital sex.<sup>182</sup> It is paramount to notice that in embellishing the epic drama of legitimacy surrounding Chaka's birth, Mofolo prefigures the auto-ethnographic style characteristic of much postcolonial writing of the later twentieth century. Only, this is not an account of his own group and the "auto" that is supposed to ethnographically explain while also storytelling becomes curiously entangled somewhere between Zulu and Basotho. These groups' customs remain different in Mofolo's account, but are produced and represented here in relation to one another, close enough to be delivered by one narrative voice. That this is the moment surrounding Chaka's conception, the eventual forger of the Zulu nation, it becomes even more significant that we are given the details surrounding this 'origin' through the 'ethnic' lens of two different groups but in the creolized voice of one narrator.

The entangled ethnographic tableau surrounding Chaka's birth is one example of how southern Africa, rather than an ethnic grid of division and boundaries (the topographical aspiration of apartheid's historical imagination), in Mofolo's account is represented as a space of overlapping custom, collusion, and creolization, which unsettles nationalist narratives of South Africa. South African critics Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael note that, "a concept like creolization, which disturbs or destabilizes notions of fixed identities, would be seen as being at

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

odds with the project of nation building.”<sup>183</sup> Positing a ‘creolization hypothesis’ for South African history allows Mofolo to think otherwise than the racialist vicissitudes of the 1910 moment of unification, thereby articulating a form of anti-colonial national culture not predicated on a politics of sameness. Mofolo writes in a creolized style that produces neither a ‘Zulu’ text, nor ‘Basotho’ one, or even a ‘South African’ one for that matter; the text’s impact rests in its relationality between all these – and other – signifiers. I will subsequently argue that it is Mofolo’s refusal to offer an authenticating narrative of origin, as well as his de-privileging of the colonial encounter (as precipitator of modernity), that earns *Chaka* a preeminent place in the ‘forgotten canon’ of African Literature, and ultimately exposes the biases of our own contemporary critical approaches to the field.

### **South Africa, 1909: A British Dominion, a White Nation**

It was in 1909, with the following words, that the four colonies of the southern African Cape became legally the Union of South Africa:

...the Colonies of the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange River Colony, hereinafter called the Colonies, shall be united in a Legislative Union under one Government under the name of the Union of South Africa. On and after the day appointed by such proclamation the Government and Parliament of the Union shall have full power and authority within the limits of the Colonies, but the King may at any time after the proclamation appoint a governor-general for the Union.

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<sup>183</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michaels, *Senses of Culture*, 6.

Though it would be another year before this legislation was enacted, thereby formalizing the South African nation, the 1909 South Africa Act solidified two foundational and related principles that would govern the political and social life of South Africa for the better part of the twentieth century. The first was the effective racial consolidation of white rule in the country. The unique system of provincial administrations under the dominion of the British Crown, meant that in matters of enfranchisement, the cultural, and ethnic differences between English- and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans could and would be placed aside to present a united racial front against the ‘African,’ ‘Coloured’ and ‘Indian’ peoples of South Africa. Noting the ideological significance of the Union, David Theo Goldberg notes that, despite the residual ethno-philosophical conflicts between British and Afrikaner South Africans, “Race was the cement, uniting whites in a cause invested overwhelmingly in its own welfare, a commons exclusive of the wellbeing of the country’s overriding majority.”<sup>184</sup>

Secondly, because the 1909 South Africa Act determined a two-thirds voting majority rule, Parliamentary representatives from the three Colonies that did not allow a ‘non-European’ franchise could – and shortly after the Act would – overturn the otherwise uniquely progressive enfranchisement of ‘Coloureds’ and ‘Blacks’ in the Cape Colony. The language of unification in the South Africa Act provided a preemptive racial ‘safety valve’ ensuring the further entrenchment of white rule in South Africa. Symbolically the Unification was a British political coup, consolidating the entire southern tip of Africa under the administration of the Crown, even if British cultural hegemony was to be short lived. However, the 1909 South Africa Act was ultimately a racial victory, a political triumph over ‘white difference,’ which further inscribed the

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<sup>184</sup> Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*, 285.

“color-lines”<sup>185</sup> that would continue to structure South African life for most of the twentieth century. Moreover, with the Union of the South African nation, “the way was opened up to the emergent march, the culmination of a century-long trek, if not quite straightforwardly or inevitably, to the apartheid state...[which] had roots deep in the modernizing history of South Africa, if not in Europe’s colonial extension (of) itself.”<sup>186</sup> The rhetorics of ‘union’ must be read with a slight sense of irony, as this unity was officially predicated, from the beginning, on a politics of division.

In the same year (1909) Thomas Mofolo composed what has been called one of the earliest expressions of the novel in Africa, the historical fiction, *Chaka*.<sup>187</sup> Originally composed in Sesotho, when the manuscript for the novel was submitted in 1910 to the missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (P.E.M.S.) for publication it sparked a censorial standoff that lasted 15 years until the novel was finally published in 1925. Though the P.E.M.S. press had published Mofolo’s first two novels, *Chaka* presented the missionaries with a unique set of

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<sup>185</sup> Though W. E. B. du Bois’ reference has been more correctly read as the African American experience, it can certainly be argued that the tangible implementation of geo-political ‘lines of color’ in South Africa outlasted the manifestations of state-sanctioned segregation in the U.S. The point is not to relativize the latter experience of racism, but rather to highlight the ways in which South Africa has been an integral conversant in the twentieth century global dialogue on race and racism. Indeed in his text *The World and Africa*, written nearly forty years later, du Bois articulates the lines of a global experience of racism using South African as comparative referent: “But if there is no Buchenwald in South Africa, the sadistic fury with which the Herrenvolk policemen belabour the non-European victim, guilty or not guilty, is comparable only to the brutality of the S.S. guards...The life of a non-European is very cheap in South Africa, as cheap as the life of a Jew in Nazi Germany...*To us [in South Africa] it is ludicrous that this same South African Herrenvolk should speak abroad of a new beginning, of shaping a new world order, whereas in actuality all they wish is the retention of the present tyranny in South Africa...* (*The World and Africa*, 40; emphasis added).

<sup>186</sup> Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 285.

<sup>187</sup> On the history of *Chaka*, see: M. Keith Booker, “The African Historical Novel” in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Ed., F. Abiola Irele; Albert Gérard, *Four African Literatures; African Language Literatures*, 187 – 196. Daniel P. Kunene, *Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose*.

dilemmas,<sup>188</sup> notably that the latter text was largely “construed...as an apology for pagan superstitions.”<sup>189</sup> If *Chaka* initially presented a crisis for the Christian imagination, I posit that this inability to incorporate the text was actually due to its otherwise unique interrogation of national formation.

Echoing Goldberg above, Bhekizizwe Peterson describes the 1909 Union as “consolidate[ing] the development of South Africa as a society structured on racial dominance and exploitation and typified by various forms of dispossession and disenfranchisement that afflicted Africans in the twentieth century.”<sup>190</sup> The political unification of 1909 that eventually lead to the formalized apartheid regime was ideologically buttressed<sup>191</sup> by an obstinate mythologizing of racial and ethnic separation; a discourse of difference and delineation projected back into the archive of southern Africa. The dispossession Peterson speaks of as structuring South African society was entangled with a discourse searching for racial/ethnic delineation, as well as for origins. Mofolo’s creation of a creolized, pre-colonial African political culture deconstructs the obstacle presented by the 1909 Union characterized by ‘unity through separation’.

Mofolo’s creolized history also places him in relative tension with the later generations of ‘de-colonizing’ African writers, whose returns to histories of stable homogeneity served as

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<sup>188</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of the censorship scandal surrounding the *Chaka* manuscript and its delayed publication, see Albert Gérard’s *Four African Literatures*. Mofolo’s first two novels, *Moeti oa bochabela* (“The Traveller to the East,” 1907) and *Pitseng* (1910) are largely allegorical and, while displaying early instances of Mofolo’s characteristically ethnographical style, are read as somewhat derivative and located within the moral and aesthetic universe of a Christian imaginary. See Isabel Hofmeyer’s *The Portable Bunyan* for the influential role played by *The Pilgrim’s Progress* within the early African literary imagination. Mofolo’s *Traveller* is read as a rewriting of this Christian fable in an African context.

<sup>189</sup> Albert Gérard, *African Language Literatures*, 191.

<sup>190</sup> Bhekizizwe Peterson, “Black writers and the historical novel: 1907–1948” in *Cambridge History of South African Literature*, Attwell and Attridge, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2012.

<sup>191</sup> See Aletta J. Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*. New York: Verso, 1996.

foundational to the field of African literature. Progenitor of the Zulu people and military tyrant of a large portion of southern Africa, Mofolo's Chaka does inaugurate a form of violent unification, but the writer also uses this moment (the *difaqane*) to think creolization back into the pre-colonial political and cultural archive of South Africa. As will be discussed below, if Achebe's aesthetic response to colonial oppression was to imagine an historical integrity to the pre-colonial African polity, Mofolo tries instead to think about the African nation as mixed, entangled, or creolized and with a sense of modernity that precedes the coming of formal colonization. Consequently, *Chaka* un-thinks the segregationist mythologies attendant to the Union of Mofolo's own time, as well as preempting much of the resistance writing of the continent by nearly half a century.

### **Three Approaches to *Chaka*: 'Problems', Refiguring, and (not) Talking about Creolization**

David Attwell has twice returned to Mofolo's *Chaka* and the rhetoric of a 'problem' that haunts the text. Attwell's investigations have centered on the historical context of Mofolo's writing as a way to interrogate both South African nationalism as well as conceptions of modernity. In his book length study of South African literature entitled *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History* (2005), Attwell posits a definition of modernity as follows:

...modernity is the currently governing concept of what it means to be a subject of history. It refers not only to technology and the emergence of an administered and industrialised society, but also to that fluid but powerful system of ideas that we inherit from the

bourgeois revolutions of Europe in the late eighteenth century –  
ideas such as autonomy, personhood, rights and citizenship.<sup>192</sup>

Attwell puts this definition to work in a series of compelling readings that trace a genealogy of the ‘making South African’ of modernity. South African literature, Attwell argues, is constituted by its characteristic “transculturation of modernity” or, in other words, “a continual effort to translate modernity’s promises into their [the post/colonial subjects’] situations and histories...”<sup>193</sup> A compelling and important argument, in which Attwell thinks through Mofolo’s *Chaka* as exemplary, there are two important and related issues with this reading that I argue might be addressed by thinking instead through the paradigm of a South African creolization offered by Mofolo.

Firstly, as might be noted in Attwell’s provisional definition of modernity, it is for him an ideological and temporal construct grounded firmly in Western Europe. Its geographies are structured by the centripetal forces of the (European) Enlightenment; one center and many peripheries to which this ideological commodity was exported, if not readily or equally accessible.<sup>194</sup> John and Jean Comaroff critique such narratives of modernity, noting that, “Euro-American social theory, as writers from the south have often observed...has tended to treat modernity as though it were inseparable from *Aufklärung*, the rise of Enlightenment reason.”<sup>195</sup> Attwell’s is not at all a unique narrative: that modernity comes *from* Europe, and comes *to* other places. However, it is a paradigm that Mofolo’s *Chaka* actually thinks against. Such teleologies of modernity as Attwell’s – often with out meaning to – privilege the colonial encounter as

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<sup>192</sup> David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History* (Athens: Ohio U P, 2005), 4.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> For an argument about the questions surrounding the Enlightenment’s entangled relationship to the colonies, see Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colonies: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 2007.

<sup>195</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, 2.

catalyst for the negotiation of all the forms of subjectivity the critic mentions above: “autonomy, personhood, rights, and citizenship.” In this imaginary, the colonial geographies of the globe appear primarily as *terra nullis*, only to be later mapped (and thus modernized) by the imperial trajectories of various colonial projects. While Attwell positions South Africa within this ubiquitous narrative, stating quite unequivocally that, “In South Africa, modernity is inextricably linked to colonialism,” Mofolo tries to imagine a negotiation of modernity which precedes much of the formal colonization of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and happens almost completely irrespective of white/European antagonists.<sup>196</sup>

Secondly, Mofolo’s transracial or transethnic aesthetic critique of the nation also points to the perennial problem with adaptations of Fernando Ortiz’s concept of “transculturation.” The problem as Attwell points out is that the process does not happen on equal or reciprocal grounding,<sup>197</sup> but rather is usually the product of (colonial) violence. Attwell writes that, “Indeed, my contention would be that it is precisely when the colonial relationship is violent, that transcultural formations are likely to emerge.”<sup>198</sup> Here again lies the bias of a vertical analysis predicated on colonial (read Western vs. Non-Western) encounter and violence, an analysis that never looks to the horizontal relations that preclude the West in genealogies of the modern. Mofolo’s transculturation is not – or is not solely – the result of Western and African aesthetics and epistemes if those are to be neatly defined categories. Attwell terms this transculturation because Mofolo’s aesthetics continue to be viewed as the products solely of an encounter between Western and non-Western, as well as the persistence of a view of the pre-colonial African world as a stable category. Attwell’s “transculturation of modernity” is Mofolo’s

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<sup>196</sup> Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity*, 4.

<sup>197</sup> A problem Attwell rightly notes in Mary Louise Pratt’s appropriation of the term. Attwell notes that, “It needs to be made explicit that nowhere does the theory of transculturation, as defined by Ortiz, suggest that it occurs in an equal or reciprocal exchange of cultures” (*Rewriting Modernity*, 20).

<sup>198</sup> Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity*, 20.



creolization of history. To use Glissant's phrase again, an "African poetics" that thinks otherwise than the categorical structures of nation (or literary canon) building.

Mofolo writes outside of this Eurocentric narrative of modernity, articulating a South African aesthetics of creolization in the text's reproduction of *izibongo*, praise poems that laud the life events and deeds of a particular hero or leader. Less "transculturation," as Attwell terms it, and more creolization, Mofolo's collection, transcription, and textual inclusion of these *izibongo* do not, I argue, represent an act of "translation," at least not in the sense of finding a southern African referent in a European original. Mofolo's aesthetic is more of a "horizontal" and thus "minor" form of transnational literary production of a South African modernity.<sup>199</sup> In looking horizontally, or rather, within African referents for interrogating the modernity of the South African nation, Mofolo stages what Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe write of as "a profound reinterrogation of African in general as a sign in modern formations of knowledge."<sup>200</sup> One such *isibongo* within the *Chaka* text entitled "USHAKA" (By Chakijana Son of Msenteli), describes Chaka as:

The Calf that climbed upon a house at Ntombazi's place/ And they  
thought he was portending evil whereas they were the/ones who  
were portending evil./ Elephant which, on turning its head,  
devoured the men. Elephant which trumpeted while yet at  
miThonjaneni./ Heaven that thundered and ate up the shield of the  
maPhela/ So that the women left the sprouting crops while still

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<sup>199</sup> Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*, 11.

<sup>200</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 1.

short/ And left their seeds in the deserted villages;/ And expectant  
women were forced to give birth.<sup>201</sup>

In narrating various event of the *difaqane* the poem does, in fact, locate Attwell's "subjects of history;" both the eponymous epic hero, Chaka, as well as those who were affected by his reign of unprecedented violence.<sup>202</sup> For instance, the poem's "women" who, while nameless, are ascribed a certain psychology of choice in negotiating the geopolitical tectonics of the *difaqane*: the women's abandonment of the "sprouting crops" and "their seeds in the deserted villages" also marks historical time, if only by the cataclysmic disruption of its cyclical motion symbolized here by the agricultural. Moreover, these "expectant women [who] were forced to give birth" do so to a generation of untimely and unplaced subjects of history, un-homed (both geographically, temporally, and even ethnically) citizens caught in the crucible of a modernizing South Africa.

Chaka too is a subject symbolized here through nature's encroachment upon the human: "The Calf that climbed upon a house;" "Elephant which...devoured the men;" "Heaven that thundered..."<sup>203</sup> Perhaps this offers a reading where modernity does not subscribe to the common progressivist (Eurocentric?) narrative of industrial/technological triumph over nature. At the very least this *isibongo* chronicles a form of African subjectivity produced in relation to a particular kind of modernity, and relationally amongst Africans. The subjects who do emerge from this praise poem, do so into a history of upheaval, migration, and a shifting of the moral and epistemological pillars of what has preceded them; questions of critical import that continue to attend the identity of a modern South Africa.

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<sup>201</sup> Mofolo, *Chaka*, 120.

<sup>202</sup> Atwell, *Rewriting Modernity*, 4.

<sup>203</sup> Mofolo, *Chaka*, 120.

Additionally, these *izibongo* must be seen for their relationship to political structures. Kwame Ayivor discusses how Mofolo is able to infuse equivocation into the voice of the “traditional court historian or the *imbongi* [the singer of *izibongo*].”<sup>204</sup> Ayivor’s poignant example is the praise name given to Chaka at his birth, that of both “a male child” and “an ox for the vultures,” in which the critic notes that,

The narrative voice that celebrates Chaka’s image is obviously the traditional voice of the *imbongi*, while the mysterious narrative voice which describes him as ‘an ox for the vultures’ is the embryonic neotraditional narrative voice that will eventually transform him into an ‘inverted epic hero.’ The virtuosity of Mofolo’s style lies in the fact that this enigmatic phrase can pass easily for a harmless praise name.<sup>205</sup>

However, Ayivor is too reductive when he concludes that, “This amalgam of narrative voices challenges the collective African traditional view...”<sup>206</sup> This is primarily, because I hesitate to search out the definitional boundaries of such a thing as “the collective African ...view,” but also because Mofolo is not simply “challenging” a historical view. Rather, Mofolo is critiquing, in order to put to use, the (hi)story of Chaka. The equivocal praise poem complicates the narrative making of national or group collectives. The *imbongi*, the voice of the nation, is made in Mofolo’s characterization, to both laud and critique the collective; the *imbongi* speaks from both inside and outside the nation. Thus the history offered by Mofolo’s chronicler is the narrative of creolization of the national group. Nor is it simply that Mofolo’s text entangles a (Western)

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<sup>204</sup> Kwame Ayivor, “Thomas Mopoku Mofolo’s ‘Inverted Epic Hero’: A Reading of Mofolo’s ‘Chaka’ as an African Epic Folktale,” *Research in African Literatures* 28.1 (1997): 49-77.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

historical romance with African oral epic (a feat in and of itself, which Ayivor describes in detail), but that Mofolo succeeds in troubling each genre – and their epistemological foundations – as narrative productions of national formation. What is at stake here for Mofolo in this moment is the practice of narrative making in its relation to the nation.

Further, the inclusion of *izibongi* – reproduced in Mofolo’s text in their original isiZulu language, and collected as part of the author’s ‘field research’ on the “customs of the Zulus,”<sup>207</sup> signals a complicated act of anthropology that in turn gives insight into the Mofolo’s project of creolizing the South African nation. Again, Mofolo ethnically Basotho, traveled through KwaZulu collecting ethnographic information, stories, fables, and military customs of the amaZulu, the textual result of which is the novel *Chaka*. Unable to fully praise the image of Chaka, whose terror was still very much alive in the Basotho collective imagination, Mofolo tempers this trauma with an allegory of Christian moral peril. But likewise unable to disregard the persistent power of Chaka’s image, Mofolo thinks South African history in relation to this figure. In doing so Mofolo articulates an example of what John and Jean Comaroff call “Afromodernity,” a style of representation – a poetics even, to refer us back to Glissant – which address the concern:

...that modernity in the south is not adequately understood as a derivative or a *doppelganger*, a callow copy or a counterfeit, of the Euro-American “original.” To the contrary, it demands to be apprehended and addressed in its own right. Modernity in Africa ...has a deep history – is a hydra-headed, polymorphous, mutating ensemble of signs and practices in terms of which people across the continent have long made their lives...partly with others of the

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<sup>207</sup> Daniel P. Kunene, “Introduction” in Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka*, ix.

same hemisphere, partly intra-continentially, partly in localized enclaves.<sup>208</sup>

Mofolo makes a two-pronged intervention in the representative practices of and on Africa: that Africa before the advent of the European was not the stagnant racial and historical backwater of the European imagination, from Herodotus to Hegel, and instead is productive of a discourse of its own entangled worldliness; and secondly, that this same arrival of the West (both in person and in discourse) did not mark the genesis of modernity for Africa, but rather Africa offers not only its own genealogies of modernity but also its own theoretical interpretations.

In doing so, Mofolo presents us with an early South African example of what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih term a “creolized system of knowledge.”<sup>209</sup> In a strange rapprochement between Zulu and Sotho, Mofolo composes a text that is both marked by its ethnicity (its place as ‘complicated’ fountainhead of Sesotho literature was discussed in the last chapter), and resists the marking, operating outside a national taxonomy of racial/ethnic identity. Mofolo’s use of an aesthetic style that complicates national identities and their narratives is resonant with Lionnet’s notion that, “Epistemologies too have become creolized, and the conceptual clarity favored by Cartesian or Enlightenment philosophy has long given way to the increasing *opacity*<sup>210</sup> of the world.”<sup>211</sup> Part of the problem of reading *Chaka* has been the critical persistence of this notion of “clarity.” How is it possible to read the praise poems of Chaka, written in isiZulu, spoken by a person of Zulu origin, but transcribed by a Basotho writer-cum-ethnographer, whose project walks a line between literary Christian moralism, African oral epic,

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<sup>208</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, 7.

<sup>209</sup> Lionnet and Shih, *Creolization of Theory*, 3.

<sup>210</sup> See also Glissant’s *Poetics of Relations*, especially the chapter titled “For Opacity,” 189 -194.

<sup>211</sup> Françoise Lionnet, “Continents and Archipelagoes: From *E Pluribus Unum* to Creolized Solidarities” *PMLA* 123.5 (2008): 1509.

and the politics of a nation formed in the crucible of racial segregation, if not by putting to work in some way the notion of opacity?

Mofolo succeeds in creating a Chaka that is both progenitor of the Zulu nation, embodiment of the national origin moment, as well figure of complex relations – mostly amongst strangers, foreigners, etc. who exist outside of and in opposition to the founding or maintenance of national affinities. Chaka’s childhood, of castigation, illegitimacy and exile, are followed in adulthood by relations with others who are outsiders in many ways. In Mofolo’s account there is a direct correlation between Chaka’s ascension to unprecedented power and his choice to follow the traditional medicinal potions of Isanusi, a seer or diviner.<sup>212</sup> Though much has been made of the Faustian parable of Isanusi as a Mephistophelian figure who Mofolo imagines as a Christian critique against traditional African cosmologies and practices, it is important to look at the Isanusi character for his relationality to Chaka and the creation of the Zulu nation. After the confusion surrounding the allegorical nature of Isanusi’s name is settled, Chaka demands to know where this mysterious man has come from. Isanusi’s response is meant to make ‘clear’ his foreignness: “The doctor...pointed up to the sky, and said: *Ngivela kude le!* (‘I come from far away yonder!’).”<sup>213</sup> Chaka, still confused, says, “It seems to me that you are pointing to the sky! ...Do you come from the clouds?”<sup>214</sup> Isanusi’s answer is both vague and unequivocal:

No, by pointing upwards I am simply estimating for you the  
distance to the place from which I have come, because, if I pointed

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<sup>212</sup> Mofolo creates a clever pun in this character: “Isanusi” in isiZulu means diviner, but it also this character’s name. Chaka and Isanusi have a frustrating exchange where Chaka exclaims, “But ‘Isanusi’ is not your name, it simply describes what you are, whereas what I am asking is your name.” To which he is given the reply, “You speak the truth, but *I* am Isanusi both by name and by deed” (*Chaka*, 45). Mofolo’s Isanusi represents a mixture of traditional healers, blending the traits of both the *sangoma* (the diviner) and the *inyanga* (the healer who works with medicinal herbs).

<sup>213</sup> Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka*, 39.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

at those mountains, even if I were to say, far away on the other side  
of them, you would fail to understand the distance which I have  
travelled.<sup>215</sup>

In misunderstanding Isanusi to be a celestial being, Chaka compounds the scrutiny over this figure's role as inhuman, an evil spirit or sorcerer, but Isanusi's speech very much grounds him, even if that grounding is further complicating. Though Isanusi comes from a great distance, he not only seems to know all the intrigues of the royal family in which Chaka is ensnared, but he also speaks isiZulu, using the correct superlative for ascribing distance between the place of speaking and the place of reference: "*kude le.*" While you cannot reference a point another further away than this in isiZulu – except, perhaps, "the clouds" – Isanusi, intimates himself with both the culture and politics of Chaka's life-world and particularly with the would-be Zulu nation. He clearly marks himself as an outsider, but one whose foreign knowledge will ensure Chaka ascends to his father's contested throne. Isanusi, coming to Chaka from outside, indeed beyond the boundaries of even the text's world, becomes the answer to Chaka's eventual consolidation of the Zulu nation. We even get some of Chaka's interiority at this moment: "he saw clearly that his father's kingship was now his...as long as he was with this man."<sup>216</sup> Even in the Christian-moral-parable reading of Isanusi, his instrumental role in bringing Chaka to power and thus in the creation of the Zulu nation, means that his extreme foreignness can be read as a force of relation and creolization within this creation.

Equally marked as foreign are Isanusi's aides, those who in their service to Chaka assure his constant safety and eventual leadership. One day as Chaka was bathing in his customary

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 40.

river, as he came onto the bank, he encounters Isanusi's aides, Malunga and Ndlebe, who were "very different in appearance."<sup>217</sup> Chaka describes them further:

...he found that they were a different kind of people whom he was seeing for the first time in his entire life, that is to say, a different race of people...Chaka realized...he [Malunga] was certainly not a man from Bokone; he saw that he came from nations living far away, at the very ends of the earth, nations of powerful giants...<sup>218</sup>

Despite their extremely accentuated foreignness, Isanusi's servants are to be Chaka's counselors in both war and peace times. As Malunga explains, "Ndlebe will be your ears and will hear all the news for you; I will be your arm and will fight for you... During peacetime... *I shall stay by your side and discuss all your plans with you...*"<sup>219</sup> Mofolo is at pains, in the creation of these fictional characters surrounding Chaka and driving the narrative towards its climax, to underline the creolized origins of the Zulu nation's formation. Whether Mofolo meant this mysterious tripartite – Isanusi, Malunga, and Ndlebe – as a critique of 'African traditional religious' beliefs or as Shakespearean allegorical characters (both entirely possible given Mofolo's mission education), the point is that all three of these characters, who prove themselves to be integral and instrumental to Chaka's consolidation of Zulu national identity, are distinctly marked as coming from outside the national boundaries of Chaka's otherwise 'Zulu' world.

As a writer and in the process of constructing this text, Mofolo simultaneously models an alternative subject of modern South Africa. A "relational" citizen other than the singularly ethnic or racial body marked out by the nascent South African government, Mofolo himself is a subject who looks to history as a place to find oneself in between and amongst categories of

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 59.



knowledge and identity. What is the identity of such a relational subject of history? And what can be made of his narrative? Lionnet offers a line of critique out of this trap of clarity when approaching such a text as *Chaka*:

...opacity is a creolized totality that contains difference without subsuming it to the same; it is a becoming that always exceeds formal categorization while pointing to new forms of racialization and new solidarities that underscore a powerful “alternative to fragmentation” (Broadbelt),<sup>220</sup> *a transcolonial or minor form of transnationalism*.<sup>221</sup>

Indeed, Mofolo offers another narrative practice of the becoming modern of the South African subject, who in turn is a “transcolonial and transnational” figure resistant to categorization; not because of a preternatural quality of resistance, but because of an adept putting to work of the potential of these categories in their relation.

It might be pointed out that to critique the formation of the South African nation, Mofolo could have, perhaps with greater ease, delivered a historical romance centering on Moshoeshoe. A contemporary of Chaka’s and ruler of Mofolo’s own Basotho, Moshoeshoe is renowned for an early political model of cultural, racial and religious acceptance. I argue that while such a hypothetical fiction – one that would have easily fulfilled expectations of racial/ethnic fidelity and authenticity – would have found Mofolo a more comfortable home among the ranks of Africa’s literary canon, had it been written. However, what Mofolo did produce in *Chaka* is productively read along a more uncomfortable and complicating axis of a “poetics [and racial politics] of relation” as an “obscure” text that reorients notions of modernity as they relate to

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<sup>220</sup> Broadbelt, Winnifred M., “The Archipelagic Regimes: An Alternative to Fragmentation for the Islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire” (LLM thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984).

<sup>221</sup> Lionnet, “Continents and Archipelagos,” 1509.

Africa. For Mofolo, the Basotho, his ethnic group, are still ‘an other’s other’, doubly minoritized within the symbolic ethnic economy of national histories in South Africa, especially vis-à-vis a colossal and consolidating figure such as Chaka. To attempt to understand this situation of compounded subalternity, for Mofolo, is not to confront the encounter between Basotho and European but, rather, to take stock of the legacies of minor entanglements constitutive of the (modern) racial topography of South Africa.

Scholar of Marxism and postcolonial studies Neil Lazarus has also twice returned to Mofolo’s *Chaka*, using the novel as a fulcrum for refiguring. As part of a popular revival of the novel in the mid-1980’s occasioned by Daniel P. Kunene’s English translation, Lazarus notes how *Chaka* is “an extraordinary and enigmatic work of literature” that also presents critics with a “problem.”<sup>222</sup> The problem, as Lazarus describes it, lies with the novel’s “simultaneity” – or its ‘equivocation.’” In other words, its inability in “managing to synthesise conflicting ideologies,” a failure “that comes so close to achieving this synthesis as to reveal...some of the central contours of its temporal and political situation.”<sup>223</sup> Lazarus is quick to note that, “it is precisely *because of*, rather than *despite*, its failure to unify contradictions that *Chaka* is such a significant work.”<sup>224</sup>

In a Marxian gesture, Lazarus notes that, “*Chaka* is a work stretched on the rack of South African history. Its ‘equivocation’ is an expression of its concrete situation, representing its author’s attempt to order his world.”<sup>225</sup> Indeed, Mofolo would not be able to transcend the sociopolitical vicissitudes of his historical moment, or the racialist forces governing South African life (officially at least) for the remainder of the twentieth century. What he could do, it

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<sup>222</sup> Neil Lazarus, “The Logic of Equivocation in Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka*,” *English in Africa* 13.1 (1986): 41.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*; emphasis in original.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

seems, is to give form to a certain kind of aesthetics, which would in turn make a political gesture against the encroaching colonial ordering episteme of the Union. It was a gesture not of delineation of ethnicities and (racial, or national) narratives, but quite to the contrary, a historical ‘sampling,’ a remix of the past that would be both recognizable and displacing to an (South) African audience. Similar to Lionnet’s reading of “opacity” above, Lazarus recommends that we not look for clarity in Mofolo’s work, that it is a “novel that confounds common sense” speaking as it does equivocally.<sup>226</sup>

While Lazarus argues that it is our inability to read Mofolo’s “more complex truth” that registers a “problem of criticism, having little to do with the text of Mofolo’s novel itself,” I believe that *Chaka* – and our critical approach to it – hinges upon the way in which the text is read as “representing its author’s attempt to order his world.”<sup>227</sup> If *Chaka* poses a recuperation in response to the reductive taxonomies of the colonial episteme, then what is recuperated is a history of differences, encounters between these differences, even their entanglements, but rarely a reconciliation.<sup>228</sup> Mofolo opens the novel with a cartographical perspective, an aerial entrance into a diegetic frame that eventually proves to be an entanglement of various identities and epistemologies:

South Africa is a large headland situated between two oceans, one to the east and one to the west.<sup>229</sup> The nations that inhabit it are

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> See Sarah Nuttall’s use of “entanglement” in the eponymously titled edition: “Entanglement is a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies human foldedness.” (Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 1).

<sup>229</sup> Perhaps it will be noted that in Sarah Nuttall’s above quoted assessment it was a very similar ascription of southern African geography – “its tri-centric location between the Indian and Atlantic worlds as well as the land mass of the African interior” – that was predisposing of creolization.

numerous and greatly varied in custom and language. Yet they easily divide themselves into three large groups: the nations settled along the western Seaboard are of a yellow complexion. They are the San and the Khoi. The ones in the centre are the Batswana and the Basotho. Those to the east are the Bakone or the Matebele. The boundaries between them are prominent and visible; they are the boundaries created by God, not by man... These nations are markedly distinct from each other, so much so that a person travelling from the west to the east is immediately conscious of coming into a different country and among a strange people when he arrives among the Sotho nations in the centre, and likewise when he descends towards the Matebele nations over there beyond the Maloti mountains.<sup>230</sup>

We must be attentive not only to the voice(s) of this passage, but the potential audience(s) constituted by this mapping. Upon first glance this passage would seem to re-inscribe the lines of racial and ethnic difference as essential to the topography of South Africa. But perhaps if we bare in mind both the persona of this passage – the traveller moving “from east to west,” as well as the complex relations between the writer of the passage, as well as the place and its audience, then perhaps a more complex cartography emerges.

The cartographical trope is important here for two reasons: Firstly, as it must be remembered that this was written in Sesotho, this telescopic narrative frame is something of an allegory of discovery, of encountering and mapping the southern tip of Africa; an action that the Portuguese and other Europeans had been repeating since at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century. But so too had

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<sup>230</sup> Mofolo, *Chaka*, 1.

myriad waves of continental African migrations occasioned the ‘discovery’ of what is now South Africa. The point is that Mofolo stages an ‘African discovery’ of southern Africa, in which the traveller (who is ostensibly from South Africa in the first place, and initially at least a reader of Sesotho) never encounters familiarity but, rather, his/her movements generate perpetual difference. Each transversal of a geographical barrier witnesses, “nations [that] are markedly distinct”, “a different country” or “strange people.”<sup>231</sup> A strange and estranging opening to a text about nation and national histories in/of South Africa, Mofolo paces his novel with a caution about both what this place is and who resides in it.<sup>232</sup> The caution is perhaps directed at both the colonial episteme which for more than five hundred years made geographical and racial narrative assumptions about this space, as well the colonized subject – the African subject – who likewise is confronted with the difference(s) of South Africa.

This cartographic frame presents a dialogue with Lazarus’ earlier claim that, “Its [*Chaka*] ‘equivocation’ is an expression of its concrete situation, representing its author’s attempt *to order his world*.”<sup>233</sup> I would for the most part agree: that an ordering of this kind, of historical and geographical ordering (in the form of a historical novel) of southern Africa, and in response to a compounded series of marginalizations (South Africa within Empire; Basotho within South African racial order), necessitates the imagining of something of a ‘non-ordered’ order, an entanglement that is productively left unresolved. The cartographic trope’s second feature is Mofolo’s attempt to make the South African soil answer for historical and geographical

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Mofolo’s ‘differencing’ of South Africa is resonant with Glissant distinctions between “circular nomadism” and “arrowlike nomadism” (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 19). “Circular nomadism” Glissant writes is a form of “errantry” which “silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national identities that yesterday were still triumphant.” Moreover, this errant “search for the Other” is a “poetics...the tale of relation.” In contrast, “arrowlike nomadism” is “discovery or conquest” or “an expansion of territory” (18-19). Mofolo’s “discovery” of South Africa stages a form of circular nomadism at the heart of which is the search for the Other, “detours that lead away from anything totalitarian” (Ibid., 18).

<sup>233</sup> Neil Lazarus, “Equivocation in *Chaka*,” 43; emphasis mine.

narratives attributed to its ex-centric location. But what Mofolo achieves is not a voice that speaks from the space of South Africa in an authenticating (or unifying/unified) way. Yet, this is precisely how Lazarus later treats this moment in Mofolo's text. In question is a paragraph immediately following the above-quoted from *Chaka*, which describes in a beautiful entanglement of nature and deductive reasoning the land of the Bokone:

The greater portion of the land of the Bokone, which lies between the Maloti and the sea, is covered by forest. Besides, the crops there are never bitten by frost, for there are only light frosts because of the nearness of the sea. It is a land of lush greenness, and of extremely rich pasturage. Its soil is dark, and that means that it produces much food; its indigenous grass is the luxuriant *seboku*; its water lies in the marshes, and that means that its cattle grow very fat. There are numerous rivers, and that means that rain is plentiful. It is a land of dense mists which often clear only after the sun has risen high, and that means that there are no drought since the moisture takes long to dry up.<sup>234</sup>

Lazarus locates this passage as an expression of “the postcolonial unconscious” and the “psychodynamics of ...land-based experience.”<sup>235</sup> Lazarus writes that with regard to the above passage from Mofolo:

Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* is exemplary, inasmuch as it does not simply set the scene and place the plot into motion, but serves to introduce us to a whole symbolic economy – or ‘structure of

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<sup>234</sup> Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka*, 1-2.

<sup>235</sup> Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2011), 57.

feeling' ... Mofolo's narrative opens onto a world... *but it gives us in addition the means to understand how this world is experienced, and how meaning and value are produced in it.*<sup>236</sup>

In other words, in the "ordering of his world" Mofolo has, in Lazarus's estimation, produced a representation of land-based experience which is constitutive of the collective consciousness, an ontology rooted in the geography of the space. This is Mofolo's entry into a politics of representation subsequently formative of the postcolonial production of culture, as a resistant form of re-interpretation of (formerly colonial) space.

It is already noteworthy that Mofolo accomplishes such a monumental epistemological refiguring characteristic of later postcolonial writing so early on. As Lazarus notes further, "The burden assumed by the author [Mofolo]...is to 'ground' his readers in the novel's *mise-en-scène*, thereby making possible for these readers (ourselves) to appreciate the full human implications of his story."<sup>237</sup> In other words, Lazarus's project of excavating means that in mining the soils of the post/colony we plumb the postcolonial psyche; the soil is made to bear collective (South African? Postcolonial?) meaning. If Lazarus initially saw the productive potential of Mofolo's "equivocation," as a sign of its aesthetic resistance to being "stretched on the rack of South African history," then as postcolonialism felt a millenarian insecurity about its domain of critique in the last decade, Lazarus attempts to shore up the collective consciousness of postcoloniality vis-à-vis Mofolo's work.

But what is perhaps even more noteworthy is that Mofolo is actually creating an order of things that further complicates spaces and the meanings they are made to bear. Again it must be remembered that in many ways, Mofolo is writing about a foreign space. Thus the "burden

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.; emphasis mine.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 58.

assumed by the author” is to make strangers (readers) feel an intimacy – through apprehending the logic of the geography – to a place that is equally foreign to the writer himself. Mofolo’s literary panorama of South Africa finds focus through the ‘clarity’ of further deductive reasoning (“and that means...”), telescoping finally into an excavation of a soil that is home neither to the writer nor the reader, and yet predicated on a logical intimacy with that space. If this is an example of an author “ordering his world,” then strangely it is another (life-)world that Mofolo gives order to; and not in a colonizing way but, rather, as a way to relate to that other. Rather than painting in idyllic fashion an uncomplicated tableau of South Africa, Mofolo articulates an eco-logical sense of the landscape that forces the recognition of relations. In this way the ‘logical’ of this southern African ecological system is not necessarily a clearly defined rationality in the Western, Cartesian sense; it is an ecology that registers relations across boundaries. Mofolo, writing in Basotho, makes sense of his world through the logic of an eco-system otherwise foreign to him, a “different country” located “over there beyond the Maloti mountains.”<sup>238</sup>

A potentially very progressive articulation of South African citizenship made in the moment of a ‘post-colonial’ union that ultimately proved to be neo-colonial at best, and in reality racist and totalitarian at its worst. Mofolo makes a case for what Glissant calls an “ecological vision of Relation” whereby belonging is based on “the relational interdependence of all lands.”<sup>239</sup> While I would temper Mofolo’s eco-logical lens for not necessarily taking into its purview a sense of global citizenry as Glissant does, I would argue what Mofolo is reaching for here is a creolized notion of identity, whereby the “logical” in an ecology of belonging is not predicated on ethnic authenticity, which in turn is not able to map onto a specific geography. If

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<sup>238</sup> Mofolo, *Chaka*, 1.

<sup>239</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 146.



“meaning” is given to this space – or rather, the space is made to produce a meaning, then we must ask, whose meaning? If there is a “logic” to the landscape of this text, whom does that logic operate for? If Mofolo has made it clear that we have crossed a boundary in entering into the life-world of this text (a boundary utilized by various governing bodies of South Africa – both apartheid and previously – to denote radical difference) then the intimacy we are made to feel with the ‘logic’ of the land here is that much more of a creolizing, and thus a subversive, representational act. Thus, a Basotho – and writing in that language – Mofolo can “make sense” of what is otherwise seen as a Zulu space. Rather than offering coherence, as Lazarus reads into the “postcolonial unconscious,” Mofolo’s is an eco-logical which breaks down the logical, the rational, the ordering, the governing; reaches across the lines of the racial/ethnic order to find meaning on the other side. Mofolo’s eco-logical governing order is a critique of the order of governance that divides space and the relations between these spaces.

We find in Mofolo’s “ordering” that things are not so very ordered – despite, or because of – the incessant language to the contrary. As well, we find that the categorical messiness *is* the political gesture; that as a South African in 1909, an ordering of one’s world, and a placing of that world geographically and historically requires an ordering of those worlds as relationally connected. Finally, it is in Mofolo’s acts of ordering and relating that lay Lazarus’s diagnosis of a “problem.” It is a problem, I am arguing that is better addressed by reading for the creolizing potential of the work, as this will not only see the work as preemptively engaging with the racialist discourses and orders of its day, but reading the work as articulating a South Africa form of creolization discourse perhaps offers a way out of the critical cul-de-sac of a “problem” surrounding the text.

Simon Gikandi comes closest to articulating the creolized nature of Thomas Mofolo's text, by focusing on a generic critique of post/colonial fiction, which in turn serves as fulcrum for undoing the categorical impulse still persistent within Eurocentric critiques. Gikandi traces a genealogy of postcolonial fiction in which early colonial writers who, in seeking to "deconstruct the mimetic contract as one of the operating signatures of colonial governance," produced works whose sampling of generic categories present critics with a "problem" of literary historicism.<sup>240</sup> The contour of literary historiography, as Gikandi maps it, is full of the blind spots of generic distinction; these blind spot continue to mark the metropole – colony relationship because of their persistence in structuring critical approaches to postcolonial fiction. The "problem" as Gikandi sees it, is obviously not with the works themselves, but rather with the persistence of Western categories of literary criticism; generic markers onto which we, as critics, map aesthetic periodization as a proxy narrative for (European) modernity. Rather, Gikandi posits Thomas Mofolo's work as exemplary for displaying a generic pragmatism that "pioneered African writing."<sup>241</sup> Gikandi argues that Mofolo and others amongst an early group of African writers, "In their literary ideologies and formal preferences...did not consider romance, realism, and modernism separate categories. They were all different ways for thinking about time, place and identity and thus functioned as the conjunctive sides of the same mimetic project."<sup>242</sup>

In what follows Gikandi makes an argument for a loosening of the categorical reigns governing our approaches to post/colonial fiction and questions of genre as a way to reorient the flow of power within the field of "postcolonial theory." This shift in flow exposes the limits of a line of critique "crucial to the identity of postcolonial theory [developed] under the sign of poststructuralism [and] at odds with existing traditions of writing in the colonial world,

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<sup>240</sup> Gikandi, "Realism, Romance," 312.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

especially during the period of decolonization.”<sup>243</sup> Deconstructing the master narrative of western literary periodization, Gikandi notes that many of these early African writers “did not have access to these paradigms [the dyadic debate surrounding literary realism and modernism] in a formalized sense” and thus Mofolo, for instance, saw romance not only as a way out of the rigidity of these generic distinctions, but also as a way to articulate a new “politics of writing.”<sup>244</sup>

If, as Gikandi argues, the history of the colonial relationship can be mapped through an asymmetrical global economy of forms, then what Mofolo presents to us is not so much a negotiation of a Western norm. *Chaka* is neither a “transculturation” or translation, nor a plumbing of the colonial space to uncover a cohesive post/colonial unconscious, but rather, as we have seen, a creolization of both modernity and of a post/colonial imaginary. In terms of genre criticism, Gikandi’s argument is no doubt provocative;<sup>245</sup> literary romance for Mofolo was a space outside of an otherwise colonially circumscribed set of aesthetic registers for “imagin[ing] new subjectivities in old communal histories and beyond the normative logic of colonial modernity.”<sup>246</sup> However, I argue that what Gikandi offers is one more example – in this instance, genre – of how Mofolo employs a methodological mixing in order to make *Chaka* articulate a discourse on creolization. Without giving words to it, Gikandi explains how Mofolo employs creolization as a way out of the dilemma seemingly inherent to the re-vivification of the Chaka figure. The paradox as Gikandi lays it out is that in “wanting to rescue a heroic African narrative of history and social life from colonial historiography...Mofolo’s mode of realism threatened

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 309-10.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>245</sup> Gikandi notes that, “These writers are important to a reconception of realism because they did not work with the realism/modernism dyad; rather, they sought to inscribe the space of the nation and its subjects by using even older forms of literary representation, most notably romance, or by drawing on the allegorical narratives they had mastered at Christian missions” (Ibid., 313).

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 321.

colonial interests.”<sup>247</sup> Yet, for reasons mentioned above, “Mofolo could probably not represent Chaka and the foundational myth of the Zulu nation as model to be adored and emulated.”<sup>248</sup> Mofolo’s resolution in Gikandi’s words is the development of an “early postcolonial style” characterized here by a self-liberation from “any mimetic mandate” and an intervention “in the colonial library and its accounts of Africa.”<sup>249</sup> The result is a not only a subversive text, but also a methodological approach – again a “politics of writing” – embodied here by Mofolo, both articulated under the sign of creolization. Thus, an investigation of the “early postcolonial style” exemplified by Thomas Mofolo and other early African writers, is best approached from, not from the traditional generic economies of literary historicism, or even from a more postcolonial angle of decentering metropolitan norms through process of translation, but rather by an attentiveness to the ways in which this early style was characterized by ongoing process of mixture, a creolization of ideals and aesthetic techniques, as well as knowledges and representational systems between colonized peoples. If, as Gikandi argues, returning to Mofolo posits a genealogy outside of the norm of colonial modernity, then I would argue that this ‘starting’ point is a creolized one, denying its own originariness while continually offering an outside to the norms of Western modernity.

**“A national culture is not a folktale”: Achebe, Canonicity and the Invention of African Culture**

In the recent *Cambridge Companion to the African Novel* (2009), Dan Izevbaye’s contributing chapter chronicles the relationship between “Chinua Achebe and the African

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 324.

novel.”<sup>250</sup> Izevbaye is unequivocal in his estimation that “Chinua Achebe achieved canonization with his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, and... has retained his top ranking in the African literary canon” while continuing to influence<sup>251</sup> the larger field.<sup>252</sup> *Things Fall Apart* (1958) consistently figures as the embodiment of a historical moment of cultural resistance – through the appropriation and creation of aesthetic forms – entangled with the political/economic decolonization of Africa. In his first novel, Achebe works against the Western colonial episteme’s categorical narrative of Africa and its inhabitants. Franz Fanon writes that, “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.”<sup>253</sup> By returning to the pre-colonial African past, Achebe’s “inaugural gesture”<sup>254</sup> imagines a historical world of Africa, inhabited by clusters of coherent cultural logics, previously undisturbed until the coming of the colonial machine.<sup>255</sup>

I do not dispute the monumental impact Achebe’s work had – and continues to have – on both the imagination of the decolonizing world as well as the English language in general. Indeed, Achebe is one of those few African writers whose writing literary criticism has deemed ‘transcendental,’ perhaps ‘universal,’ enough to lose the categorical descriptor, “African.”<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> See, “Chinua Achebe and the African Novel” in *Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*.

<sup>251</sup> Izevbaye describes many contemporary African writers as “inheritors” of an Achebean tradition. The figures of African literature in general are often referred to as ‘progeny’ of Achebe. Just one example is this year’s Mail and Guardian Literary Festival subtitled “Achebe’s Children: Africa’s Suspended Revolutions”

<sup>252</sup> Izevbaye, “Chinua Achebe” in Irele, *Cambridge Companion*, 31.

<sup>253</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 210.

<sup>254</sup> Coundouriotis writes: “Every gesture to inaugurate anew is profoundly revisionist... the inaugural gesture creates the opportunity to reinvent the authentically African and cast pall of inauthenticity on the writers that preceded them.

<sup>255</sup> Coundouriotis, *Claiming History*, 1.

<sup>256</sup> Perhaps only J. M. Coetzee’s work received such universalizing treatment, though for perhaps different reasons. I would contend that while Achebe’s work often comes to hold a place in English literature’s otherwise rigid taxonomy sometimes simply as ‘writing’ (as opposed to ‘African writing’), it

While I don't want to take issue with the canonicity of Achebe's first novel, I do want to point out that the persistent marking of it as the "inaugural moment" of African fiction has meant that what obtains is a certain view of Africa in the Western imagination. Achebe's rendering of the Igbo life-world, its past, its traditions, has become so ingrained through the institutionalization<sup>257</sup> of the work as to become an allegory of decolonization; a historically determined parable of anti-colonial resistance written in the moment of national transition. Gikandi writes that,

...when I said that Achebe had invented African literature, I was thinking about something *more than the existence of his novels as the Ur-texts of our literary tradition*; what I had in mind then was the tremendous influence his works have had on the institutions of pedagogy and interpretation and the role his fictions have come to play in *the making and unmaking of African worlds*.<sup>258</sup>

As Gikandi notes, the canonical quality of *Things Fall Apart* rests less on the literariness of Achebe's work, and more in the text's image of Africa and its relation to the world. The novel unfolds along a simple narrative arc in which "things" were once together and then dis-integrated, but under this arc is implied a cosmology of Africa in the world. The persistence of the work is certainly in part because "Achebe's auto-ethnography aims at affirming the contemporaneity of native cultures with those of West."<sup>259</sup> Indeed, because the work retains such canonicity, its vision of Africa has created certain blind spots to narratives that do not conform to its canonical representations of both Africa and its relationship to modernity.

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retains a certain place holder often only implied as *the* piece of African literature; the "inaugural gesture" in Coundouriotis's critique.

<sup>257</sup> See Gikandi's work, "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture" for a description of the impact on intellectual institutions, pedagogy, and the "common cultural project" of a decolonizing Africa.

<sup>258</sup> Simon Gikandi, "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture," *Research in African Literatures* 32:2 (2001): 6; emphasis mine.

<sup>259</sup> Coundouriotis, *Claiming History*, 38.

Even in praising Achebe, Gikandi is critically aware of some of the questions raised by the author's monumental status. He asks precisely, "what is it about his [Achebe] novels that enabled them to play their unprecedented role as the mediators of the African experience and their depository of a certain idea of Africa?"<sup>260</sup> Gikandi answers his own question with a statement that is no less true for all its hyperbole: "Achebe is the person who invented African culture as it is now circulated within the institutions of interpretation."<sup>261</sup> The important distinction here is that, aside from an otherwise brilliantly adept reading of a historical moment, Achebe's fame is also somewhat symptomatic of institutional desire,<sup>262</sup> or an epistemological orientation to Africa and its 'Otherness.' Izevbaye's contribution to the *Cambridge Companion* is an example of this institutional need for a certain narrative of Africa's relationality to the world; a need Achebe continues to satisfy in many ways. Of the importance of historicity to the work and its continued reception, Izevbaye writes that Achebe's "Africa was an Africa in transition and...[his] fictions recreate two worlds in conflict: They represent the twilight of an old world at the same time as they anticipate the new."<sup>263</sup> We may recognize that familiar narrative of modernity to which Attwell above adhered. Izevbaye schematic drawing of history is representative of the pernicious idea of Africa, its 'traditional' past and its advent into 'modernity,' which Achebe so masterfully created.

However, Izevbaye's approach is also part of what V. Y. Mudimbe refers to as the "grand dichotomy;" that structuring paradigm of the globe that not only delineates Africa and its discourses from the modern, but actually uses the former as symbolic relief to define (to add

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<sup>260</sup> Gikandi, "Chinua Achebe," 7.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ato Quayson rightly notes that criticism of *Things Fall Apart* is "symptomatic of the evaluation of African literature in general" (Ato Quayson, "Realism, Criticism, and the Disguises of Both: A Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with an Evaluation of the Criticism Relating to It," *Research in African Literatures* 25:4 (1994): 118).

<sup>263</sup> Izevbaye, "Chinua Achebe" in Irele, *Cambridge Companion*, 35.

definition to) to the latter.<sup>264</sup> Of criticism on Africa, Mudimbe “affirms that, rather than analyzing the complexity of African discourses, most of our textbooks and monographs are still essentially preoccupied with this dichotomy and its signs.”<sup>265</sup> The dichotomy, as Mudimbe frames it is predictably an asymmetrical relationship, which creates blind spots to the reading of African literature as both its own discourse, and part of a global discursive exchange. Through no fault of the author’s, I argue that part of the reason for Achebe’s endurance has been his adept structuring of an Africa that has been persistently approached through this paradigmatic dichotomy.

Mudimbe writes of African literature that, “critics and specialists... seem more interested in this literature not for what it is as a discourse and what, in the variety of its events and signification, it could mean in a larger context of other local and regional discourses, but *rather for its significance as a mirror of something else*, say for instance, of Africa’s political struggle, of processes of acculturation, or of human rights objectives.”<sup>266</sup> Africa, even in works of recuperative literature such as Achebe’s, is coopted in the critical (Western) imagination to do the work of re-presentation, of “mirroring” the discourses of another narrative; as we’ve seen applied in the cases of modernity, postcoloniality, etc. with Mofolo.

For instance, compare how Achebe elicits (especially for Western readers) a sense of wonder or romance – albeit mingled with a somewhat masochistic guilt – through the writer’s adept auto-ethnographic representation of the Igbo life-world that opens *Things Fall Apart*. The novel opens *in media res* with both a physical description of its protagonist, Okonkwo, which clearly marks the character as the embodiment of this group’s cultural logic, as well as a imparting a sense of historical density to this ontological clarity:

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<sup>264</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1994), 180.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 177; emphasis added.



That was many years ago, twenty or more, and during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan. He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily, and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their houses could hear his breath. When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had had no patience with his father.<sup>267</sup>

The scene bears significance not solely for its unique appropriation of literary realism,<sup>268</sup> but also for the novel's "production"<sup>269</sup> of cultural and racial cohesion vis-à-vis an (colonial) other.<sup>270</sup>

Drawing attention to the critical reflex to read realism,<sup>271</sup> in the context of African literature,

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<sup>267</sup> Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 4.

<sup>268</sup> See Ato Quayson, "Realism, Criticism, and the Disguises of Both: A Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with an Evaluation of the Criticism Relating to It," *Research in African Literatures* 25.4 (1994): 117-136

<sup>269</sup> The question of realism is an integral one in the context of African literature precisely because of the entangled relationship with anthropological, representationalist discourses. Quayson writes that, "In order that African novels, be they realist or counter-realist, are not rapidly incorporated into an anthropological-representationalist reading of African reality, it is important to regard them as symbolic discourses that continually restructure a variety of subtexts: cultural, political, historical... It is then fruitful to regard the African novel as only partially reflecting a "reality" beyond itself" (Ibid., 123). In this way Quayson prefigures Gikandi's later argument (2012) about the problem of literary genre – and especially realism – in the post/colonial context.

<sup>270</sup> Ato Quayson, "Realism, Criticism," 123.

<sup>271</sup> For a comprehensive critique of realism in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* see Ato Quayson's "Realism, Criticism." Quayson argues that Achebe's construction of women and "the feminine" in Achebe's work is a critical fulcrum for deconstructing not only what is read as realism in the work, but also for the perennially 'colonial' approaches to African literature in general.

under the sign of “authenticity,” critics such as Quayson and Gikandi, have highlighted the ways in which texts such as Achebe’s do not merely reflect an anthropological reality, but, rather, produce an image of African life within a larger “cultural matrix.” What I draw attention to here is less the imbricated nature of African realisms to the anthropological imaginary, but rather the images (of both the African world, and of Africa within the world) which Achebe conjures as part of what Quayson calls “*re/structurations* of the culture within a general mythopoeic practice.”<sup>272</sup>

Moreover, scenes such as this construct the novel’s narrative of modernity, one that is based on the collusion of two radically – and racially – different life-worlds. Okonkwo’s presence is proud, awe-inspiring, and his prowess is compared to an element of nature, “like a bush-fire.” Indeed, even his breathing becomes part of the night’s sounds that make up the world of this novel. Achebe gives us a glimpse into a system, a cultural/ethnic organism. Narratively, this cohesion forms the dramatic relief for the implosion of this life world, catalyzed by the coming of colonial elements at the novel’s end. This dramatic difference highlights two major interventions of Achebe’s literature: the first is to articulate a critique of colonialism that moved beyond the economic and instead drew attention to the corrosive effect of colonization upon the cultural logics of subjugated peoples. The second is to construct a postcolonial narrative of modernity based upon this collusion of two opposing logics; polarity and the meeting of pure integral entities continue to define encounter within the postcolonial paradigm. By the end of Okonkwo’s fight to maintain the centrifugal forces that have held Umuofia together for generations, the harsh realities of modernity present themselves as decisive breaks from the governing principles of this cultural group, breaks occasioned by colonial intervention. As the

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 123.

novel closes, a group of elder clansman debates their radically new place in this (now) colonized world:

We who are here this morning have remained true to our fathers, but our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland. If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansman. But we must do it. Our fathers never dreamed of such a thing, they never killed their brother. But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our father would never have done.<sup>273</sup>

By being given access into the ontology of Umuofia's cultural foundations, we are made to understand the tragedy of this rupture. And the tragedy we understand reverberates all the louder because of the realistic description of cohesion given to the Igbo people early on in this tale. It is by now a canonical narrative structure of postcolonial modernity.

If Achebe's intervention is the historical imagining of a cohesive pre-colonial African life-world as the *mise-en-scène* of a drama where "things fall apart" in direct response to colonialism, Mofolo's novel is set against a less delineated tableau of the pre-colonial African world. Indeed, nineteenth century southern Africa in Mofolo's imaging is not an ethnically and culturally integrated (read: authentic) space, as already in Chaka's time we see the striations of political turmoil and imperial (Chaka, the Zulu Emperor) oppression. Not only that, but if a sense of entanglement with the world is a sign of modernity, then in Mofolo's rendering it is hardly colonialism which is the harbinger of the modern. Harry Garuba writes that, "race as produced by modernity is about the making of the world and the making of individual subjects in the

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<sup>273</sup> Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 203.

world.”<sup>274</sup> Though Garuba is speaking of the colonial encounter, I would argue that *Chaka* is an interesting reversal where, in thinking about the making of the world and the individual subject in that world (Africa in Mofolo’s instance), Mofolo is actually representing a unique articulation on racial identity. Writing on the cusp of a modernity of racial categorization and discipline – both integral functions of nation formation – in South Africa, Mofolo excavates a pre-colonial moment where these epistemological divisions were not only more fluid, but it is their fluidity which is focused upon in order to interrogate ‘racial’ imaginary of the nation.

Mofolo writes both difference and mixture back into the South African archive, where it had always been, but was increasingly being erased by the ideological mythology of colonial regimes. In doing so, Mofolo gestures towards a South African modernity that has to do with a certain conception of difference (racial?) and its collusion. Rather than Achebe’s autochthonous clarity for the *mise-en-scène* of a critique of colonial apocalypse, Mofolo writes southern Africa as the *mise-en-abyme* of pre-colonial creolization. Not only is Mofolo’s southern Africa caught in the midst of myriad trajectories of flows, most importantly, it is not colonization that proves the “point of entanglement” for this narrative of modernity.

Denying an imagined moment of originary racial purity as an ideological relief against which to paint the crimes of colonization, Mofolo instead displaces this racially Edenic fantasy to outside the diegetic boundaries of the novel itself. The action of *Chaka* is subsequent to an imagined pre-colonial Acadian peace, relegated to the “the olden days when the people were still settled upon the land. The nations were living in peace, each one in its own original territory where it had been from the day that Nkulunkulu, the Great-Great One, caused the people to emerge from a bed of reeds.”<sup>275</sup> Racialized geography, that is the imaginary clarity of a

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<sup>274</sup> Harry Garuba, “Race in Africa: Four Epigraphs and a Commentary,” *PMLA* 123.5 (2008): 1642.

<sup>275</sup> Mofolo, *Chaka*, 4.

relationship between the land and a (racial, ethnic, or cultural) group, is a thing of pre-history, indeed linked to the time of creation mythology. If Mofolo's writing is auto-ethnographic then it conforms more to what Jean-Loup Amselle terms "*logiques métisses*"<sup>276</sup> than to the more hegemonic "ethnographical reason."<sup>277</sup> Mudimbe describes Amselle's *logiques*:

This reason, instead of distinguishing and separating, would bear witness to the 'indistinction' or *original syncretism* of elements in a social totality and thus at least solve the dilemma opposing "the universality of human rights" and "cultural relativism," a dilemma which, in terms of political values, actualizes a tension and opposition between universality as totalitarianism and cultural relativism as an expression of democracy.<sup>278</sup>

In this sense, Mofolo's creolization of both the "auto" and the "ethnography" of African literary practice prefigures critiques of an increasingly totalitarian South African state, one which based its own racist hegemony on an idealized structure of rigid distinction within the social totality.

Likewise, the novel's sense of modernity is dependent less on a climatic clash between civilizations neatly defined along racial lines, and more a function of always already entangled and creolizing identifications. Achebe's post/colonial modernity measures itself in the distance between the disintegration of one integral reality and the imposition of another. Postcoloniality, as a discourse of modernity, is predicated on the fiction, buttressed here by Achebe's incisive realism, of an originary moment of encounter that acts as a threshold to modernity; before is the

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<sup>276</sup> Jean-Loup Amselle, *Mestizo Logics: Anthropology of Identity in Africa and Elsewhere*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

<sup>277</sup> Mudimbe writes that "ethnological reason...always extracts elements from their context, aestheticizes them, and then uses their supposed differences for classifying types of political, economic, or religious ensembles" (*The Idea of Africa*, 52).

<sup>278</sup> Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, 53.

clarity of indigenous cultural logics and tradition, and after is postcolonialism's familiar and persistent trajectory of mimeticism, hybridity, and globalization. Mofolo, on the other hand, gives us a picture of southern Africa on the brink of intense colonization that looks neither very integrated nor unmarked by histories of migratory flows, experiences of difference, and ultimately creolization. I would recall the opening scenes of *Chaka* where in "South Africa [that] large headland situated between two oceans, one to the east and one to the west," the reader is introduced to a "traveler."<sup>279</sup> Mofolo's narrator instructs us that the "nations" of this headland "are markedly distinct from each other, so much so that a person travelling from the west to the east is immediately conscious of having come into a different country and among strange people when he arrives among the Sotho nations in the centre, and likewise when he descends towards the Matebele nations over there beyond the Maloti mountains."<sup>280</sup> Mofolo's painting of a tableau of difference finds the reader – following in the footsteps of this "traveler" – perpetually confronted with the uncanny nature of South Africa. Difference (even to itself) seems to be the very nature of the this place, caught between the flows of transoceanic worlds, "the one to the east and the one to the west." But more than that, Mofolo's cartographic perspective gives us a sense of South Africa in the world. We come to it as a traveler from the outside, and remain perpetually occluded from any ontological clarity governing this life-world. A sense of modernity, or rather a sense of this place and its place in the world, comes not from a narrative of authenticity, or guilt (i.e. not from identification), but rather from dis-identification and relation.

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<sup>279</sup> Mofolo, *Chaka*, 1.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion:

### The Anthropologist and the Storyteller: Untimely Narratives

In it [storytelling] was combined the lore of faraway places, such as a much-traveled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to the natives of a place.

– Walter Benjamin

Achille Mbembe, in his piece “African Modes of Self-Writing,” displaces the paradigm of essentialism animating criticism of and on Africa by writing:

Against the arguments of critics who have equated identity with race and geography, I show how current African imaginations of the self are born out of disparate but often intersecting practices, the goal of which is not only to settle factual and moral disputes about the world but also to open the way for *self-styling*. By emphasizing historical contingency and the process of subject formation my aim is to reinterpret subjectivity as time.<sup>281</sup>

Mbembe garners a sense of identity untethered to the categories of either place or epistemology. Moreover, if such a category as “South African geography” is involved in the production of various racial identities, then it is so only so far as the space is also always entangled in the historical exigencies of the moment. Mbembe’s “*Self-Styling*” is a mode of storytelling that frees the subject from the restrictions of place, race, and even of aesthetic form in the articulation of identity.

Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* is an example of this self-styling, one that employs processes of creolization as a means to interrogate the categorical violence of national formation. Mofolo’s

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<sup>281</sup> Achille Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing,” *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002): 242.

self-styling forces the reader to abandon assumptions about both racial/ethnic memory and solidarities as well as about what kind of text is best suited for such upheavals of identification. Writing on the cusp of negotiations over how the ‘modern’ South African nation would be formed, Mofolo uniquely positions himself vis-à-vis this process by creating a form of writing that is transgressive of both formal and racial – one might even say epistemological – boundaries, and continues to stand askance to both national genealogies as well as literary canons. Mofolo is explicit about the nature of his peripatetic self-styling, a style that mirrors the steps of the itinerant “traveler” – both storyteller and an anthropologist – we meet in the first pages of Mofolo’s text:

I believe that errors of this kind are very many in the book *Chaka*;  
but I am not concerned about them because *I am not writing  
history, I am writing a tale*, or should I rather say I am writing  
what actually happened, but to which a great deal has been added,  
and from which a great deal has been removed, so that much has  
been left out, and much has been written that did not actually  
happen, with the aim solely of fulfilling my purpose in writing this  
book.<sup>282</sup>

Mofolo’s description of his work reveals a savvy assessment of his historical moment and the chosen ‘voices’ his text speaks through in order to articulate a version of African subjectivity that registers the multiple and often contradictory valences of the otherwise hemmed in African voice. Through a textual creolization of these registers, Mofolo gives amplitude to an African voice that is at once object and subject of the anthropological imagination; writing both one of the first modern African novels, but doing so through a mode of storytelling that evokes the epic

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<sup>282</sup> Mofolo in Kunene, “Introduction,” *Chaka*, xv; emphasis mine.



form. Mofolo's "tale" pushes against history, especially histories of racial and national consolidation. Mofolo's storyteller crosses boundaries and is allowed to speak from everywhere and nowhere at once.

In this way Mofolo conjures Walter Benjamin's "storyteller," who speaks both from another time and another place. Benjamin's storyteller "in his living immediacy is by no means a present force. He has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant."<sup>283</sup> The storyteller, as Mofolo demonstrates, both makes a comment on the past, and in doing so *is* a comment on both the past and the present moment. Mofolo's "tale" speaks of and from another historical moment, offering an un/timely critique of the vicissitudes of the South African nation. A historical ethnography produced from the author's fieldwork, which is also "not writing history," Mofolo's *Chaka* forces its reader out of the comfort of the known; categories of knowledge, narratives of identity, all become entangled in Mofolo's telling, destabilizing the category of the modern by speaking from both inside and outside of it. Mofolo's creolized voice, because it is difficult to locate, has meant that his text continues to tell a tale that is outside, of both the canon of African literature as well as the institutional approaches of the field. Mofolo's un-timeliness continues to haunt his text.

Mofolo articulates a particular form of creolization that may indeed be referred to as "relational," being particularly grounded in the historical realities shaping the political and racial terrain of Southern Africa. Barnor Hesse argues that there is a certain reading of "creolization [that] requires us to attend to relationality, temporality, and simultaneity as forming the horizon of the discrepant formation of cross-cultural colonial entanglements."<sup>284</sup> A rereading of *Chaka*

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<sup>283</sup> "The Storyteller" in *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 83.

<sup>284</sup> "Symptomatically Black: A Creolization of the Political" in *The Creolization of Theory*, eds., Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Duke UP, 2011), 37 – 61.

allows for a discussion of not only another political model<sup>285</sup> – of creolization – for South Africa (one which both precedes and in many ways outpaces the “Rainbow Nation” multiculturalism of the post-apartheid era) but also a different paradigm for imagining and writing the racial histories of the African nation. Mofolo charts a course through southern African history that leads to historical instances where categorical thinking is anathema to the political and cultural exigencies at hand. Rather, Mofolo shows how processes of creolization at the level of language, politics, race, and even aesthetic form serve as models for interrogating moments of national formation. *Chaka* succeeds in creating a model of creolization as a paradigm of critique to the hegemony of national mythologies of separation.

The perennial “problem” of reading *Chaka* is our problem of approach to African Literature as a field. The novel unsettles narratives of where and when things are ‘supposed’ to be in relation to both Africa and its place within a Western narrative of modernity. It rethinks the notion of origin for a modern South African nation, as well as what was imagined to have existed before. *Chaka* neither re-inscribes the lines of modernity as running solely between the West and non-West, nor does it allow us any nostalgic imaginings of the pre-colonial past. Whether the return to African history is out of a patronizing trusteeship or an anti-colonial succor in re-presenting a national culture, Mofolo shows us that our expectations of the African past have more to do with imaginative constructions than historical realities. African culture, Mofolo tells us, was not uncivilized or even un-modern before the formal experience of colonization. But nor did it rest in the pristine, unchanged and homogenous halls of ethnographic time. Mofolo returns to the Chaka story in order to demonstrate that pre-colonial political models indeed have bearing

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<sup>285</sup> For a discussion of creolization as a political model to which this article is deeply indebted, see Françoise Lionnet’s “Continents and Archipelagoes: From *E Pluribus Unum* to Creolized Solidarities,” *PMLA* 123.5 (2008): 1503-1515. As well as Lionnet’s earlier work, “Créolité in the Indian Ocean: Two Models of Cultural Diversity,” *Yale French Studies* 82 (1993): 101-112.

on the 'modern' African nation-state, as well as to show that these models were borne of their own moments of entanglement, their own clashes with the creolizing forces of mixture and modernity. Returning to Glissant's epigraph that opened this piece, in Mofolo's African past, we do not find "uncontaminated survival" but rather the becoming of a place imbricated in "the tangled nature of lived experience."

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Apartheid's Transnational Other: Remembering Slavery and Rethinking Race across the Atlantic**

Whether or not one believes that the geography of freedom is mapped on the quilts, one cannot help but be moved by them... It does not matter if the codes did or did not contain specific instructions to be followed to the letter for specific escapes, and if they did not conceal actual signposts marking actual routes. It should be enough... that these wonderful patterns, designs, stitches and knots were at one time used as celebration of escapes, or even as records of stories of escape. They were a source of inspiration for future escapes. After all memory is what you make of it. Whether there is historical evidence or not that the likes of Abednego and Nicodemus used the quilts to escape from slavery is not important. What matters is that their descendants believe they did, and therefore they did. We all construct our past as we go along. – Zakes Mda

In this chapter I want to argue that South African author Zakes Mda's 2007 novel *Cion*<sup>286</sup> offers a post-apartheid perspective on a post-bellum and supposedly post-racial America, which charts an alternate Black Atlantic cartography. Mda's black Atlantic asks us to think about transoceanic connections linking different spaces across this body of water that are not necessarily determined by the legacy of transatlantic slavery, and yet still offer a way for thinking about how race is remembered and performed in the Atlantic world. *Cion* also forces us to consider two different, yet entangled, narratives of modernity. The first has to do with American exceptionalism and the global rise to power of the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. I argue that Mda's novel works to expose two key contradictions within this American modernity narrative: the most obvious is that while the seeds had been sown for the globalization of American pop-culture by at least the 1950's, the 'product' being exported – the American dream narrative – is recognized in Mda's novel to be a sham for many minoritized populations within the United States. Populations who now some fifty years later remain isolated

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<sup>286</sup> Zakes Mda, *Cion*. New York: Picador, 2007.

both geographically and ideologically from these fantasies; that indeed the dream itself is built upon the systematic disenfranchisement of these large groups. Mda points, if only implicitly, to a second contradiction of the American exceptionalism narrative, which is that while the United States packaged and sold the idea of itself as the beacon of global modernity, this modernity was largely a racial one. In other words, racist and segregationist practices were inimical to the twentieth century version of modernity exported by the United States. Moreover, in Mda's transatlantic imaginary he highlights the fact that it is precisely the racialist aspects of an American modernity that South Africa found instrumental to its own imaginings of itself as a modernizing nation.

The second narrative of modernity that Mda contends with here is the equally exceptionalist discourse of South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century, from national unification in 1910 to the declaration of a Republic in 1961. South African nationalist discourse, articulated most vehemently by Hendrik Verwoerd and the National Party in its development of the apartheid platform, espoused a view of a unique and racialist modernity emanating from the southern tip of Africa. However, Mda's transatlantic imaginary begs for a comparison between these two exceptionalist narratives of racial modernity. In this chapter I argue for a comparison that would see not simply the similarities and differences between them, but indeed a shared history of dialogue between the two spaces spanning at least the length of the twentieth century. Ultimately, if the development of early apartheid discourse was influenced by the more established Jim Crow segregationist legislation of the southern United States, prompting South African policy to call for more intense racial segregation within its own national model, then Mda's novel is even more provocative for staging a twenty-first century South African protagonist whose views on race, aesthetics and politics mark a discourse of

creolization, or cultural, racial and aesthetic mixture, as an outlet for American racial woes. Simply put, Mda re-interrogates the American racial archive, writing what Yogita Goyal calls a “neo-slave narrative,”<sup>287</sup> in order to find instances of racial, cultural as well as aesthetic creolization. Mda’s protagonist from his earlier novel *Ways of Dying*,<sup>288</sup> Toloki, articulates a theory – and practice – of creolization as a mode that moves beyond the binaries of tradition versus modernity, while also allowing for a recombination of memory and history as registers for articulating racial identity. Significant here is that creolization – as a mode for articulating modernity – comes from an African perspective. While the historical material comes from the American past, it is the “itinerant mourner” and artist Toloki – and by extension the South African author – who offer a theory of creolization as fulcrum of modernity to part of the African diaspora in the United States.

It must first be noted how the relational trajectories that *Cion* charts across the Atlantic are not the typical – or diasporic – ones, as in the largely Northern Hemispheric flows, from Europe to the Caribbean to the United States, mapped in Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*. Rather, Mda forces his (American) reader to engage with not only a history of racial oppression in the United States, but does so from a post-apartheid South African perspective. From apartheid in South Africa to slavery and subsequently Jim Crow segregation in the American South, Mda recalls a largely eclipsed history of influence and exchange regarding ideas of race and racial governance emanating from the United States in the first half of the twentieth century and circulating across the Atlantic. While much racial discourse in the United States is haunted by questions of memory and erasure surrounding transatlantic slavery and the middle passage, Mda writes in the genre of the “neo-slave narrative” from a South African perspective in order to

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<sup>287</sup> Yogita Goyal, “The Pull of the Ancestors: Slavery, Apartheid, and Memory in Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying* and *Cion*,” *Research in African Literatures* 42.2 (2011): 147-169.

<sup>288</sup> Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying*. New York: Picador, 1995.

gesture to a specific history of exchange between South Africa and the Southern United States as a means of articulating black Atlantic identities. In other words, the novel uncovers another playing out of the question of race and modernity in the twentieth century occurring across a more southerly axis. Mda's narrative not only implicates America for its role in exporting a distinctly racist modernity across the Atlantic world, but also situates South Africa's current place as source of a political, racial, and aesthetic, theory of creolization – or mixture – and thus innovative relief to the persistence pains of America's segregationist history.

I argue that Mda's new axis of triangulation across the Atlantic is a different genealogy of modernity in the Atlantic world, one which sees Africa as not only an active player in the making and articulation of an Atlantic modernity, but as giving voice to a nuanced theorization of cultural and political identity in the form of a creolized aesthetics. If the initial 'lessons' learned by South African policy makers in their development of pre-apartheid discourse from Jim Crow legislation in the southern United States was that America had moved too late on the racial front, then apartheid was viewed as a means of pre-emptive action to securing a future of separate development. South Africans who advocated for segregation (and later apartheid) could not deny that they saw the segregationist efforts of the southern United States as valiant, but most were in agreement that assimilation had already spread too rampantly amongst their neighbors across the Atlantic. According to many South African perspectives, the United States would have to contend with the specters of cultural assimilation and racial mixture, but that in South Africa it was not too late to follow the example – if partially a negative one – and consolidate the cause for greater ethnic and racial delineation. Embedded within Mda's post-apartheid, neo-slave narrative of America is a history of race across the Atlantic reorienting our notions of how race ideas travel, and how discourses on racial governance interact with one

another. Moreover, Mda's narrative also functions as an historical imperative – made imminently clear during the performances around Nelson Mandela's recent death in 2013: that to participate in the globally-circulated, post-1994 racial harmony of South African "Rainbow Nation(-alism)" without critical awareness of influence and complicity with the development of South African apartheid belies a historical irresponsibility.

I argue that Mda's *Cion* stages a dialogue, one where two "Souths" – South Africa and the American South – speak to one another and give a critical voice to an under-acknowledged history of transatlantic discourse on ideas of race and racial governance. Mda's fictional South African critique, of an America still struggling with the cultural and political vicissitudes of slavery, gestures towards a history of exchange between the two countries<sup>289</sup> that in many ways is representative of a more global dialogue on racial segregation during the first half of the twentieth century – of which both southern (U.S.) segregation and apartheid are seminal examples. However, I argue that Mda's work forces us to think about the direction of flow of racial discourse across the Atlantic. Whereas a post-reconstruction United States initially provided a model – especially in terms of the dovetailing issues of industrial modernization<sup>290</sup> and racial segregation – for the early development of the South African nation, Mda offers a critique of twenty-first century American race discourse still mired in notions of essentialism, racial purity and the seemingly unproductive nostalgia of memory from the perspective of a sojourning South African protagonist. While there is much evidence linking the influence of early twentieth century America race policies – most notably Jim Crow segregation – on the

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<sup>289</sup> The transnational comparison of these two nations is critically important precisely for the ways in which the nationalist rhetorics of each have defined the respective country according to a paradigm of both isolationism and exceptionalism.

<sup>290</sup> For instance see: Mona Domosh's "Selling Civilization: Toward a Cultural Analysis of America's Economic Empire in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29.4 (December 2004): 453-467.



development of South Africa's own discourse of proto-apartheid segregation laws, there is very little in the way of critical discussion of this problematic influence, not to mention one that provincializes and critiques American racial politics in the way Mda imagines.

### **Which Black Atlantic? : Africa and the 'Blind spots' of Transoceanic Modernity**

In his path breaking work *The Black Atlantic* Paul Gilroy notes that, W. E. B. Du Bois's early

analysis was so deeply rooted in the post-slave history of the new world that it became difficult for [his] understanding of modernity to incorporate contemporary Africa. Africa emerged instead as a mythic counterpart to modernity in the Americas – a moral symbol transmitted by exquisite objects seen fleetingly in the African collection at Fisk University but largely disappearing from Du Bois's account, leaving an empty, aching space between local and global manifestations of racial justice.<sup>291</sup>

To this, Gilroy poses the concept of diaspora “and its logic of unity and differentiation” against the equation within New World black identity of Africa as the productive space of black nationalisms. Diaspora, as a counterpoint, Gilroy argues, allows precisely for a “global perspective” on racism and its local effects; hence his reliance on the concept of “outer-national” in this and other volumes. Gilroy notes that the figure of Africa within the “irreducible plurality of new world black styles,” is inevitably essentialized as a space, imagined as homogenous, unified and, consequently, productive of a “black nationalism.”<sup>292</sup> While these nationalist

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<sup>291</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 114.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

projections onto Africa within the diasporic imaginary have been “extremely important in the conduct of black political culture in the age of imperial power,” my argument begs for figurations of Africa that are not necessarily predetermined by the conflation of either race or nation with an idea of the continent.<sup>293</sup> Moreover, Mda’s novel, as will be seen below, produces a comparison between two spaces – South Africa and the American South – that is not predicated upon the traditional routes of diaspora, and thereby also troubles that concept and its attendant cartographies.

As with the previous chapter’s argument about Thomas Mofolo, I ask whether we are able to find genealogies of the African cultural and racial imaginary that are both anti-colonial and anti-racialist, while also articulating discourses on racial identity which are not necessarily national(ist) platforms for black unity. Neither Mofolo, nor Mda attempt to map a diasporic identity in the traditional sense of a global black identity that is informed by the historical instance of transatlantic slavery. Nor does either writer make Africa to perform the mythical role of racial and geographical unifier. In the case of Mofolo, as was argued above, the ‘national’ moment of ‘origin’ is neither of these things. Rather, the moment of national becoming is recast as a history of entanglement and mixture, seen through creolizing paradigms of obscurity.

Indeed, for Mofolo it seems to be the idea of obscurity in the African archive (rather than racial, ethnic, national clarity or delineation) that provides the grounds for any notion of unity. Likewise with Mda, diaspora as a cultural/racial concept is not the shibboleth to modernity if this paradigm continues to rely on mystical notions of African origins and racial homelands as succor for black American identitarian woes; especially if these myths are founded on a racial theology where memory is made sacred at the expense of historical realities. Rather, Mda’s prescription comes from an African protagonist, Toloki, who finds himself relentlessly essentialized because

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

of his supposed origins by his American antagonists. Toloki's answer to his American interlocutors, who seem eager to claim his Africanness, is to articulate a theory of creolization as a theoretical and practical platform for existing outside of racial categorization.

In his later piece entitled "Roots and Routes: Black Identity as an Outernational Project" Gilroy writes that, "Theories of Black identity in the modern world have been regularly implicated in the struggle to stretch and amend modernity so that it could accommodate the hopes of slaves and their descendants, postcolonial people and other marginalized groups."<sup>294</sup> By thinking through *both* the imagined and historical relations between post-apartheid South Africa and post-slavery America, Mda is able to put forward a notion of black Atlantic aesthetics that does not find itself immobilized by the potential quagmires of memory so characteristic of postcolonial (and post-slavery) discourses on identity. Mda highlights the pitfalls of racial nostalgia while also pushing towards an articulation of modernity that is not a "stretch[ing]" or "amend[ing]" as Gilroy prescribes, but originates through the relations between Africa and the world. Moreover, it is precisely through the South African protagonist Toloki, now in the United States, that Mda articulates a unique black Atlantic identity, while also pointing to the overdetermination of transatlantic slavery in Gilroy's earlier concept of diaspora.

Ultimately, this chapter argues that Mda accomplishes two related conceptual shifts: the first, is the fairly obvious – though perhaps taken for granted – call to recognize that not all forms of African diasporic relations are predicated on a relationship to transatlantic slavery. Secondly, that creolization is not an exclusively diasporic concept and, rather, is seen in Mda's work as coming from an African perspective. Put the other way around, Africa, in Mda configuration, is not the exclusive source of nationalism or of racial unity as in earlier

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<sup>294</sup> "Roots and Routes: Black Identity as an Outernational Project" in *Racial and Ethnic Identity: Psychological Development and Creative Expression*, Eds., Herbert W. Harris, Howard C. Blue and Ezra E. H. Griffith (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17.

configurations of African diasporic mappings. This latter shift is of paramount importance to the overall argument I am making here about how Mda is part of a South African literature that re-imagines Africa as a space of dynamic mixture, both presently and historically. Not the racially stagnant backwater of the Western anthropological imagination, nor the imaginary, homogenous racial homeland of many diasporic thinkers, Mda imagines Africa as a space of creolization, and thereby re-writes an African narrative of modernity.

As I argue above regarding Thomas Mofolo's early attempts at conceiving of an "Afro-modernity" that is neither a "transculturation" nor a "re-writing" of a European version, likewise Mda imagines a southern crossing of the Atlantic that presents a unique expression of African modernity in the Atlantic world. This is significant not only for the fact that South Africa – as has been mentioned above – is frequently displaced from postcolonial discourses of identity and memory in black Atlantic configurations in favor of places historically linked to experiences of transatlantic slavery. But also because in doing so, *Cion* offers an entirely different cartography and means of exchange across this space; a transatlantic connection based on both the aesthetic imagination and an overlooked history of influences between the U.S. and South Africa. In other words, if modernity in the early twentieth century was articulated across the Atlantic along racialist lines, prescribing greater racial policing in the building of national models, then Mda imagines an Atlantic modernity in the twenty-first century that is based on experiences of entanglement and mixture, and ultimately an African creolization theory of identity.

What Mda is trying to articulate here, from the perspective of a post-apartheid figure such as Toloki, who in many ways is the embodiment of outer-national marginalization, is a version of Gilroy's "counter-culture of modernity;" yet it is an African – as opposed to a purely diasporic – articulation of modernity. In *Cion*, South Africa's racial history comes to bear meaning for an

American population who is seen in the novel as still struggling to find an idiom through which to articulate a sense of both racial identity and modernity. Mda meets these anxieties with a discourse on creolization articulated through the figure of the protagonist, Toloki, and his notions of art and aesthetic form. Toloki, originally a rural transplant to the urban centers and township of South Africa, finds in his new American home in rural, southern Ohio a space both marginalized and yet vibrant with materials and practices of creolization. From the local tradition of quilt making to the haunting sycamores of this town, locally known as “ghost trees,” Toloki culls from American traditions and landscapes a theory of creolization, which seeks to reconcile the ideological impasses surrounding question of racial identity and artistic practice.

In no way does Mda posit that South Africa is more advanced down the road of racial reconciliation; the author is far too critical for such a positivist reading, especially given his earlier *Ways of Dying* in which Toloki again is a figure made to carry much of the burden of what it means not to fit into the rainbow of a new South African nation. In *Cion*, America’s racial woes, according to Mda, are equally a problem of aesthetics, if by aesthetics it is understood that these are the most productive tools for arranging narratives – whether they be historical or memorial – of identity. Ultimately, *Cion* tells us that what is needed is both more of the historical as well as greater aesthetic innovation. Most important to this model is a sense of the entangled intimacy of traditions and history; that to articulate either a sense of (national) belonging or modernity, is to engage in a process of cultural and aesthetic and creolization.

## Thinking from the 'Post': Post-apartheid, Postcolonial, Post-racial and Articulating Modernity

Through the interrogation of a shared history of segregation across the Atlantic, it is evident that both South Africa and the American South fit uncomfortably within the rubrics of postcolonial narratives. While the two spaces are rarely compared, and both nations have long histories of exceptionalist discourses, the U.S. and South Africa might provide a critical common ground for exposing many of the historical blind spots of postcolonialism, especially for America's role in producing and exporting a racial modernity to the colonial world. As Mahmood Mamdani states, "Inserted in the history of colonialism, America appears less as exceptional and more as a pioneer in the history and technology of settler colonialism. All the defining institutions of settler colonialism were produced as so many technologies of native control in North America." In other words, as he continues, "The American 'reservation' became the South African 'reserve.'"<sup>295</sup>

However, by staging a relation between the two nations, I argue that Mda disrupts the critical purview of postcolonialism, pushing the boundaries of not only what constitutes the postcolonial, but also the nature of comparisons – what and where can be compared - within postcolonial studies. In doing so, *Cion* maps an Atlantic world full of the possibilities of what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have termed "minor transnational"<sup>296</sup> relations. Lionnet and Shih define minor transnationalism as "a space of exchange and participation where processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without the necessary mediation by the center."<sup>297</sup> While postcolonial studies in general is still

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<sup>295</sup> "Settler Colonialism: Then and Now," 10th Edward Said Memorial Lecture, Princeton University, Thursday, December 6, 2012.

<sup>296</sup> Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

haunted by the specter of this mediating center, where disparate colonial peripheries must be translated through the normative metropole, Mda's work "takes a horizontal approach that brings postcolonial minor cultural formations across national boundaries into productive comparison."<sup>298</sup> In doing so, Mda allows for an alternate genealogy of race and racial discourse within the Atlantic world. He does this by mapping a minor transnational world spanning the Atlantic, and one based on a shared history of segregation that is neither *a priori* a site of resistance, nor does it adhere to the more traditional axes of exchange across the Atlantic.

In *Cion*, it is largely through Mda's imagining of space, as sites of displacement or alienation, which forms a common ground for relation. In other words, as we come to see throughout the novel, characters and the spaces they inhabit exist largely outside the homogenizing narratives of nation. It is from a post-apartheid South African understanding of racial oppression that we come to understand better the global impact of America's race policies over the twentieth century, as well as the residual forms of economic and social segregation that still make up America's racial topography. Moreover, Mda offers us a different cartography for thinking about diasporic relationships across the Atlantic, connections that are not necessarily determined by the historical routes of slavery, and yet are still able to address this particular historical violence.

*Cion* is, in many ways, a departure from the author's previous three decades of work, in that it is the first piece – of his numerous plays and novels – not set in southern Africa. Rather, it takes place in the small, rural village of Kilvert, Ohio and focuses on Toloki, an eclectic South African protagonist from Mda's first novel *Ways of Dying*, which is set during the country's transition from apartheid to democracy. We first meet Toloki in *Ways of Dying* as the self-proclaimed creator of the tradition of "Professional Mourning" (indeed he is, at least initially,

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 11.

particularly concerned that he is the originator of this practice). Toloki travels around an unnamed South African city and its surrounding townships practicing his quite unique style of mourning over the increasingly numerous graves of those killed by political violence.

In fact, the transition of Toloki, from supposed creator of “professional mourning” in *Ways of Dying* to the fashioner of “itinerant mourning” in *Cion*, registers a larger shift in the relationship between national identity and aesthetics, or cultural production, a shift precipitated by increasing globalization. Kerry Bystrom argues that it precisely Toloki’s evolution towards “itinerant mourning” that is “key to ...mapping out new areas of transnational connection between the US and South Africa, and exploring the openings for social transformation that appear as forms of politics and works of art move across localities within the broader context of twenty-first century globalization.”<sup>299</sup> In other words, in Toloki’s earlier manifestation his over-preoccupation with the ‘origins’ of professional mourning belie Mda’s attempt to give imaginative form to a national(izing) moment within South Africa. Mourning becomes both a proxy for narrating the political violence characteristic of the transitional moment between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, but also a symbolic way of defining the temporal and ideological division between those two moments. Both *Ways of Dying* and Toloki are deeply South African; they are an attempt to imagine ways in which South Africa comes to terms with itself as it moved away from the racial and social, and creative, oppression of the apartheid era; hence, Toloki’s slightly naïve preoccupation with “origins” in this earlier text. What Bystrom rightly notes is that Toloki’s shift to itinerancy in his practice, which leads him to the small Ohio town of Kilvert, registers a shift towards imagining South Africa – and its narratives of national becoming – from a global/globalizing perspective. Mda has forced us to reintegrate the South

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<sup>299</sup> Kerry Bystrom, “South Africa, the USA, and the Globalization of Truth and Reconciliation: Itinerant Mourning in Zakes Mda’s *Cion*,” *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 10.4 (2009): 397-417.



African nation and its history of apartheid within a more ‘worlded’ narrative, an imaginary inclusive of slavery, colonialism, and racial governance across the globe.

I argue that the early Toloki would be an uncomplicated example of what Achille Mbembe has called African “self-styling”<sup>300</sup> were it not for Toloki’s adamant apolitical stances in *Ways of Dying*. Indeed, in a country racked by endemic violence during the transitions of the mid-1990’s, Toloki’s professional mourning, both its stylistic elements and its ideology, remain largely abstract. His sacred mourner’s outfit is actually pilfered from a party costume shop, while his ascetic lifestyle comes from a hazy orientalist mélange of the supposed practices of “Indian sadhus” and other mystics. Even the mourning itself is predicated on a dogmatic refusal of content; Toloki’s mourning takes the form of incomprehensible grunts and wails signifying nothing other than an obstinate solemnity for the act of mourning itself. However, condemnations of Mda for his creation of what has been repeatedly read as a politically abstinent protagonist in Toloki the professional mourner take a somewhat narrow view of the poetics of resistance and transition.

Grant Farred’s reading of *Ways of Dying* displays just such a narrow view of politics, witnessed in his refusal to see Mda’s work as precipitous of a shift in the both the political as well as the aesthetic register of the recently transitioned South Africa. Farred writes that *Ways of Dying* “lacks the radical, transformative vision of the earlier mode,” that is, of the radical resistance aesthetics of the 1980’s *imbongi* praise-poets, and that instead, “Mda’s work is given to taking the idiosyncratic view of politics as spectacle not as vehicle of social transformation...”<sup>301</sup> Farred is representative of much of the response surrounding *Ways of*

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<sup>300</sup> Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing,” 242.

<sup>301</sup> Grant Farred, “Mourning the Postapartheid State Already? The Poetics of Loss in Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 46.1 (Spring 2000): 184.

*Dying*, both laudatory and critical, which noted that Mda's work indeed signaled a shift in the political and artistic landscape of the country.

While many critics such as Farred lamented the loss of an artistic topography delineated by the moral Manichaeism of the apartheid era, Mda writes that, "life under apartheid defined for itself the binaries of good and evil – black and white in a figurative and a racial sense, without any shades of grey, *or without the ambiguities that are essential to any expression that is not formulaic.*"<sup>302</sup> Instead of nurturing a nostalgia for the moral certitude of a radical aesthetics, Mda praises post-apartheid artists for whom "the demise of apartheid has freed their imaginations to the extent that now they are able to address any other conflicts that beset society. And sometimes they address no issues at all and create...for entertainment's sake. That is part of the freedom of creativity in South Africa."<sup>303</sup> Mda's writing is significant because it registers an important and ideological – not only aesthetic – move towards the 'post' of a post-apartheid imagination; when artistic production is not governed by the strictures of a ubiquitous apartheid discourse, nor is the artist restricted to solely South African repertoire of referents.

In other words, with *Ways of Dying*, Mda begins to articulate a South African sense of itself as a place in the world, not overdetermined by an ontology of apartheid. But, rather, free to explore, sample and mix creatively with the world. For example if Toloki's fantasies about the imagined influences on his profession coming from "Indian sadhus" and "monks living in mountain monasteries" belies an Orientalist exoticism, it also registers Toloki's beginning to adopt a more global purview in his quest for identity and existence. Toloki also displays a nascent aptitude to mix multiple – even if sometimes imagined – cultural registers and imaginaries, from outside South Africa, in order to negotiate the transitional, post-apartheid

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<sup>302</sup> Zakes Mda, "Creativity After Apartheid," lecture at The Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

landscape. It is this aesthetic and ideological practice of creolization he perfects subsequently in *Cion*. Ultimately, I argue that Mda's shifting away from the aesthetic and moral binaries of the apartheid era, also registers an (re)opening of the South African imagination to practices and processes of mixture and creolization in the articulation of post/apartheid South African identity.

### **Out of Place: 'Minor' Culture and the (Creolized) Politics of Space**

However, if Toloki is the politically naïve professional mourner of *Ways of Dying*, when we meet him again over a decade later in *Cion*, he has gained a social and political savvy employed both to ingratiate himself into this small, rural American community, as well as to form a running commentary on American society. As *Cion* opens, after a night of Halloween antics in Athens Ohio, Toloki quickly finds himself an adoptive member of the Quigley family who reside in Kilvert, a small town on the rural outskirts of Athens. The town is characterized by the floods that periodically isolate it from surrounding villages as well as its unique population who the Quigleys describe as the "WIN people" because of their heritage of "the White blood, the Indian blood, and the Negro blood."<sup>304</sup> The town of Kilvert also functions as the geographical holder of a unique racial configuration: As Obed explains to Toloki: people "don't move from here...the darn place pulls them back...It's where our race of people was molded" (22). Subsequently, we get the history of this molding as part of the parallel unfolding of two narratives of this text: one the contemporary life of the Quigley family struggling to come to meaningful terms with the memories and traditions linked to this heritage and the other a historical narrative of two runaway slaves who escape the slave breeding farms of Virginia for southern Ohio. Though the Quigley family is proud of this mixed heritage, the individual members feel differently about the material implications of it. Obed, the rambunctious Quigley

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<sup>304</sup> Zakes Mda, *Cion*, 66; parenthetical quotations to follow.

son, laments, “Yeah, we don’t belong nowhere. White people hate us because we ain’t white enough. Black people hate us too. They call us high-yella.... They are jealous of our complexion” (Ibid.).

Meanwhile his mother Ruth proclaims that, “We’re everybody. One day the whole world will look like us.” Ruth’s visions of her creolized people of the future quickly intrigues Toloki, even while he must defend himself against the family’s essentializing of his own African heritage. Though the Quigley’s are consciously proud of what they see as a unique racial blend – what Ruth calls “Heinz 57...cause there’s a little bit of everything in there” – they seem to offer less than nuanced views on African identities. Toloki is often didactic as he responds to these cultural and racial homogenizations. Upon their first meeting at a Halloween celebration in Athens, Toloki meets the curious Obed Quigley, who thinks the stranger has “one heck of an accent” (14). Toloki informs him that he is from South Africa. To which Obed further queries, “You have this sort of thing [Halloween] in Africa...?” We sense both an irony and a pedantry in Toloki’s response: “In South Africa, you mean? Africa is not a country. It is not a village. It is a continent with many countries and hundreds of cities and villages and cultures” (Ibid.). Toloki, the once socially inept, and politically and culturally naïve vagrant commands something of a more nuanced stance on African identity here vis-à-vis his American interlocutors.

As Toloki ingratiates himself into the Quigley family, becoming familiar with their idiosyncratic and often offensive stances on politics and culture, he inwardly professes modesty about his position, asking himself, “Who am I to right American wrongs?” However, it is worse with Ruth, the mother of the Quigley family: “How come you don’t look like Africans?” Ruth demands. “You’re yella.” Toloki feels compelled to inform her politely that, “Africans come in all colors of humanity, ma’am.” To which Ruth can only reply, “I’ll be damned” (27). Toloki

proceeds to attempt a subtle historicizing of the racial and ethnic demographics of southern Africa: “I try to explain to her that there are strong possibilities that my ancestry is a Khoikhoi one, which is the case for many Southern Sotho and Nguni people in South Africa. I am aware that I may be speaking gibberish...At least I have offered an explanation. ‘I’ll be damned’,’ is Ruth’s only response” (Ibid.).

Not only does Mda offer a contemporary post-apartheid perspective on race that is fairly progressive, but by disrupting the trope of Africa as the imagined repository of racial purity, for members of the diaspora, Mda ends up gesturing towards a transnational relation between two minor populations who fit awkwardly into the racial economies of their respective nations. The South African descendants of the Khoikhoi – described as too yellow to be African and the WIN people of Kilvert – delineated by their “high-yella” complexions and “belonging nowhere” are figured through a tenuous relation of shared marginalization from the hegemony of national racial identities, a quality attributed to their mixed or creolized heritages, whether or not characters such as Ruth initially admit it.

Kilvert itself is a small “village” separated from the college town of Athens Ohio by the perennial flooding of the Hocking River as well as by the visual displays of its structural and economic marginalization. As Toloki follows Obed “deeper into the village” he finds himself “among mostly run-down houses strewn with scrap metal, muddy gardens, broken-down vehicles and rusty trailers” (24). While Toloki settles in to his new environs, finding beauty in Kilvert, its residents and their practices, we see how Mda is able to masterfully re-tool the detritus of the American dream into subjects of literary beauty. Mda’s creation of the town of Kilvert and its inhabitants continues the author’s “commitment to territory,” a phrase Rita Barnard employs from Es’kia Mphahlele. Though she notes, Mda’s imagining of space is “not in

the stylistic and generic sense” in which it is earlier deployed as part of an apartheid resistance aesthetics which has been read as (over-)determined by the “tyranny of place.”<sup>305</sup> Indeed, while still intensely loyal to the particularities of his novelistic and dramatic settings, Mda places his characters into milieus that are structured less by the Manichean binaries of apartheid-era (or colonial for that matter) imaginaries, where the “ghetto atmosphere” signified solely a space of resistance.

Though she is speaking of his earlier works, Barnard’s description of Mda’s more nuanced imagining of space in the American village of Kilvert blurs the neatly drawn line of apartheid and American segregationist spatiality, drawing a political chiaroscuro across the American and, by extension, South African racial topographies. Barnard writes that, “Both in his fiction and in his academic writing, Mda places impoverished and marginal communities at center stage and emphasizes the importance of a kind of *territorial micropolitics* to grassroots emancipation.”<sup>306</sup> Barnard’s treatment of Mda echoes Simon Gikandi’s notion that, “colonial spaces play a function akin to local societies on the periphery of the modern state.”<sup>307</sup>

In *Cion*, Kilvert is defined – quite literally – by the periodic floods that isolate the town from its surrounding environs. When Toloki and Obed share a cab towards the Quigley’s home in Kilvert, after a night of Halloween revelry in Athens, they find themselves “stopped by an expanse of water...The river has spewed onto the road and the surrounding fields and the whole place has become a lake” (*Cion*, 21). While the two wait for the river to recede in order to cross, “Obed tells [Toloki] about the floods. They happen quite often and villages like Stewart, Kilvert and Cutler *are cut off from the rest of the world*” (Ibid.; emphasis mine). Of course this

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<sup>305</sup> Rita Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 148.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>307</sup> Simon Gikandi, “Africa, Disapora, and the Discourses of Modernity,” *Research in African Literatures* 27.4 (1996): 4.

geographical isolation is symbolic of the structural and economical marginality of a space such as Kilvert, a village of people excluded from both the economical prosperity as well as the racial narrative of America. Toloki learns that the “Floods are very unpredictable here;” ostensibly because not only the town’s remote setting, but also the many factors attendant upon this remoteness, the presumable affordability of land in such a place as well as the structural alienation likely to persist vis-à-vis state maintenance of infrastructure (Ibid.). Toloki notes how many of the roads surrounding Kilvert are made of gravel – rather than paved – and “quite bumpy” (23). The substandard roads, subject to periodic but unpredictable flooding, though seemingly not an issue for Kilvert residents Obed and Nathan, mark a difference for Toloki from roads in South Africa where “such potholes” as he encountered surrounding Athens, “would have been the subject of a national news story” (24). Meanwhile Kilvert’s isolation begins to resemble the structural and symbolic isolation of the township and informal settlement in post/apartheid South Africa.

The flooding of Kilvert’s roads also marks the village as a symbolically marginal space, accessible only through the performance of local knowledges and the utilization of certain technologies. Numerous other drivers wait on the side of the road for the flood waters to recede, and the cab driver who has brought Obed and Toloki all this way from Athens decides to deposit the two passengers and return to the city. However the two are encouraged by the arrival of Nathan, another local, friend to Obed and potential suitor to the Quigley daughter, Orpah. Nathan offers to drive the two across the flooded river in his “heavy but unloaded truck” (22). Obed must reassure the stranger Toloki that not only is Nathan an “excellent driver,” but also that, “His truck...is safe in this sort of situation because it has a diesel engine” (Ibid.). Obed explains that even if water contacts the diesel engine it won’t stall the engine, “because there ain’t no ignition

to short out.” This however does little to calm Toloki who holds his breath as the “truck is sinking in the water” (Ibid.).

The three are eventually transported across the flood by Nathan’s intimate knowledge of these roads, as he “seems to find his way on a road that is completely under water by instinct” (Ibid.). As the “monster truck” or “monster machine” (as Toloki refers to it) finds solid pavement on the other side, Obed and Nathan laugh boisterously at their feat, while Toloki exclaims that, “I am trying to bring my lungs back to settle at their appointed place in my body” (Ibid.).

Kilvert’s flooded roads become spaces in which local knowledges, of both place and appropriate technologies, negotiate the transgression of boundaries delineating Kilvert as marginal in the first place. In other words Kilvert might seem isolated from the outside or to an outsider, but its local residents display an adeptness – to the point of nonchalance – in their abilities to move between this marginal space and the “rest of the world” from which it is often cut off.

Moreover, it is Kilvert’s isolation due to the periodic flooding of the Hocking River that prompts a conversation between Toloki and Obed regarding Kilvert’s peculiar hold on its inhabitants. Confronted with the fickleness of the situation as they wait for the river to subside, Toloki demands, “Why can’t the people move to better places?...What keeps them here?” (21). A deceptively simple question, the answers to Toloki’s query, which are revealed over the course of the novel, are summed up initially by Obed’s unequivocal response: “It’s the pull of the ancestors” (Ibid.). This geographical pull demonstrates Mda’s masterful treatment of place running the breadth of his literary and dramatic oeuvre. Kilvert, echoing the township and informal settlements of Mda’s earlier novels, is a space both rooted in the history of its inhabitants and their unique racial heritage, but equally routed in a sense of its own worldliness. Indeed, it is precisely the small village’s particular racial makeup (a creolized one) that produces



not only a global perspective but also a vision of its own role in the production of modernity. In other words, this marginal space – precisely because of the specific texture of its marginality, is directly caught up in the production of a global futurity.

Toloki is initially surprised by hearing of “an American talk of ancestors,” thinking that “ancestor veneration was our [Africans] sole preserve,” and so Obed continues to expound upon this “pull of the ancestors” (Ibid.). He explains that “We don’t move from here... Even those who leave to work in Columbus or Chicago, they come back all the time because the darn place pulls them back. You know why? *It’s where our race of people was molded*” (22; emphasis mine). If Kilvert is the locale of an origin story for a particular group who claim a heritage intimately entangled with the space itself, then – as we saw in the *Chaka* example of the preceding chapter – this too is a narrative based on creolization as an originary moment. The racial community of Kilvert, a creolized group alternately referred to as “the WIN people” (for the White, Indian, and Negro heritage) and as “Heinz 57,” seems to be conscious of its unique rootedness to the history of Kilvert as a marginal and outside space, linked in Mda’s narrative to the historical Tabler Town, a stop on the Underground Railroad whose proximity to the slaving territories of West Virginia produced a vibrant and dangerous mixture of run-away slaves, bounty hunters, traders, fugitives, as well as those from across the American racial spectrum. Tabler Town, as Kilvert, is described as a place where a community of “Africans, all former slaves, intermarried with the Native Americans and with the Irish immigrants who had also received sanctuary in Tabler Town. A new race of people was founded” (122). The history of Kilvert, its origins, is a story of a marginalized racial sanctuary where creolization forms the basis of a different national landscape outside the hegemony of American racial dichotomies, between Black and White, Northern and Southern states, immigrants and natives, etc.

A border town on the edge of two radically different economic and ideological versions of America, Tabler Town/Kilvert fit awkwardly into American narratives of modernity in the world. As Ruth explains to Toloki, “We don’t belong to nobody. Our race of people is different from any race of people that ever lived on earth” (31). Ruth displays a sense of attachment to the uniqueness of Kilvert and its inhabitants, a sentiment which might tend towards a certain kind of provincialism. However, while Ruth can certainly be accused of a nearly debilitating nostalgia<sup>308</sup> for the past, she also locates Kilvert’s creolization as an index of its modernity. While voicing her refrain about the economic depravity of Kilvert, Ruth notes that “There’s one darn thing they ain’t gonna take from us...our heritage...We’re everybody. One day the whole world will look like us” (59). Ruth articulates a mixture of local rootedness to Kilvert as the origin – a creolized one – of “her people,” while also displaying a sense of the worldliness embodied in this space by its residents.

Creolization, according to Ruth, is the face of the future. Much like the township and informal settlement milieu of Mda’s earlier fiction, this rural American town, holds some key to a modernity not currently part of the hegemonic national narrative. As Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall write of the African urban space, the Afropolis, “Worldliness...has to do not only with the capacity to generate one’s own cultural forms, institutions, and lifeways, but also with the ability to foreground, translate, fragment, and disrupt realities and imaginaries originating elsewhere, and in the process place these forms and processes *in the service of one’s own making*.”<sup>309</sup> Hence, in Kilvert “Generations of mothers teach their children to be proud of their

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<sup>308</sup> See Yogita Goyal’s piece here regarding the questions of nostalgia, tradition and memory. Goyal’s argument is that, “rather than mystifying tradition and rejecting modernity...Mda offers a subtle rendering of the idea of tradition, an ambiguous force as capable of halting progress as it is of nurturing the future” (“The Pull of the Ancestors: Slavery, Apartheid, and Memory”).

<sup>309</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. eds., Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 1; emphasis mine.

origins” precisely because their origins are written under the signs of multiplicity (*Cion*, 59). In other words creolization is not antithetical to a positive discourse on origins and heritage.

Mbembe and Nuttall’s claim also means that tradition – in this case the quilt making of Ruth and other Kilvert residents, discussed below – can also be a productive if enigmatic force in the articulation of modernity.

Mda’s aesthetic relationship to geographical space in his novels moves the writer out of worn apartheid era tropes of the “ghetto” drama. He does this by maintaining what Es’kia Mphahlele calls “a commitment to territory,” while not subscribing to what may be, somewhat clumsily, called the ‘ghettoization of the ghetto.’ Mda not only foregrounds marginal places – those tropological spaces traditionally read as the *mise-en-scène* symptomatic of apartheid structural oppression – but in Mda’s work, the ghetto in particular, or the space of marginalization in general, is the prism through which to view the global. The urban informal settlement in South Africa, the rural American town, the mountain village in Lesotho; Mda’s marginal locales figure as both outside the dominant, or national space while also being productive of their own theoretical and aesthetic modes for approaching global questions of racial and socio-economic exclusion.

In Mda’s fiction, marginality is imminently entangled with forces of creolization. Places, such as Kilvert, outside of the hegemonic – and homogenous – nation space, serve not only as foils to normative nation models of community, but also figure as globally circuited spaces productive of what I argue are creolized cultural, political and aesthetics modes. Simply put, the space of creolization is the space from which to view the global and by, extension to think beyond the nation. If, as Barnard argues, Mda is representative of a re-location of post-apartheid culture, then we must ask in what ways this is true in light of *Cion*’s explicitly horizontal move

to the United States. It must be noted that this is not simply a geographical relocation of the post-apartheid imaginary – though this itself is a major paradigmatic shift towards seeing not just the post-1994 moment of reconciliatory multiculturalism as a globally shared one. Rather, Mda’s *Cion* looks deeper into a genealogy of apartheid, its inception and development that can be seen equally for its global constituency. In other words if the world can participate in the celebration of post-apartheid multiculturalism, then it must also admit complicity in the construction and maintenance of the earlier apartheid moment.

Kilvert begins to look very much like Mda’s earlier novelistic settings, lending the American space a strangely post-apartheid quality. It comes to very much resemble the socioeconomic, structural exclusions of the South African township, even more so as a backdrop for the staging of all sorts –even contradictory forms – of cultural politics. Both Kilvert and the nameless townships of Toloki’s earlier haunts (in *Ways of Dying*) function as minor spaces troubling the narratives of their respective nation spaces; post-apartheid South Africa in the case of the townships in *Ways of Dying* and ‘post-racial’ America as seen through the complicating lens of rural Kilvert. Kilvert functions not only as a foil to the positivism of multiple American fantasy narratives, but as a space where the effluvia of the American dream trickle down to become the material for a minor remix of the local and the global, the nation and the “village;” where competing narratives of identity become entangled in a discourse of creolized identity formation. As Ruth says of the future, “everyone [will] look like the Kilvert people. *Her people are the harbingers of a new human race*” (*Cion*, 223; emphasis mine).

### **“The question of the century:” Racial modernity, Racial Futures, and Racial Homelands**

In 1915 Maurice S. Evans, a prominent South African commentator on racial and political issues and noted liberal, published *Blacks and Whites in Southern States: A Study of the Race Problem in the United States from a South African Point of View*,<sup>310</sup> a work based on the author’s extensive travels through the American South, and chronicling both the history of racial politics in the U.S. as well as a sociological look at contemporary dynamics, grievances of the black population, and prescriptions for a racial modernity. Evans believed that the pinnacle of the racial modernity embodied by southern segregation would be reached across the Atlantic in the newly formed nation of South Africa. Evans articulates a unique – especially considering that it is potentially the first of its kind – foundation for his comparison: that the U.S. and the Union of South Africa share similar racial fates. Moreover, Evans relates that both nations are involved in formulations of modernity he believes are predicated upon the governance of relations between races. As will be discussed below, Evans is explicit in his racial prophecies for South Africa, articulating a futurity based on increased racial segregation and essentially furthering the project of the southern United States.

Evans definitely sees himself as a pioneer of sorts, charting a new relationship across the Atlantic, stating that, “As far as my knowledge goes no South African has gone through the South with a view to the [racial] question, certainly no South African has written upon it.”<sup>311</sup> Indeed this claim may be well founded. In fact, Evans prefaces his own uniqueness by noting that, “So far as I know only two men intimately acquainted by personal experience and residence in other countries in which black and white come together, have visited the Southern States and

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<sup>310</sup> Maurice Evans, *Black and White in Southern States: A Study of the Race Problem in the United States from a South African Point of View*. London, New York: Longmans, Green & co., 1915 (henceforth, *Black and White*).

<sup>311</sup> Evans, *Black and White*, vi.

written their experience thereon.”<sup>312</sup> Evans names Sir H. H. Johnston, who was apparently familiar with “many parts of Africa” as well as W. P. Livingstone, author of “Black Jamaica” and who Evans praises repeatedly in his own volume. However, Evans feels his own study to be marked by the poignancy of a supposed special relationship between South Africa and the Southern U.S., a set of racial relations Evans feels marks the two exceptional spaces. Evans justifies the basis of his comparison while also relating two budding exceptionalist national discourses, claiming that, “The Union of South Africa is the country in which the [race] problem is most nearly like what it is in the Southern States.”<sup>313</sup>

Though he does not mention W. E. B. Du Bois by name in this section, there is a distinct echo of the black intellectual in Evans’s characterization of the twentieth century in the latter’s opening chapter title, “The Question of the Century.” However, we should not be fooled, even by Evans’s adoption of Du Bois’s own phrase that, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the colour line.”<sup>314</sup> It is telling to note that Evans does not credit nor even quote Du Bois in what amounts to a blatant plagiarism. While Evans does perhaps feel the sentiment to be true, predicting the playing out of the next 85 years according to “*the* problem of the colour line”, it becomes painfully clear that for Du Bois and for Evans neither the problem itself nor the solutions to it are the same ones.<sup>315</sup> Rather than Du Bois’s notions of a hybridized or doubled

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., v.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., v-vi.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., v.

<sup>315</sup> All this becomes explicit later in Evans’s volume in a section entitled “Two Schools” where he compares the racial ideologies embedded in the practices of both Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Tuskegee, for Evans provided an educational and socially pragmatic model of separate development through the validation and training of ‘race knowledge’. Race education was something thought to be key to the further formation of separate development plans in South Africa Evans and others. There is a formidable literature in this area of race relations and educational plans. See for instance: *A South African Pilgrimage* (1977) as well as *The History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day*(1927), both by Edgar Brookes. Also, see *The Education of the South African Native* (1931), C. T. Loram. Loram’s works remain important for their insight into the South African liberal imagination and

consciousness as the basis of a twentieth century sense of modernity, Evans version of modernity was to be increased segregation. Indeed, Evans was also an open proponent of the Tuskegee model of Booker T. Washington, which was based on a program of targeted education determined by cultural and racial factors. In fact, many segregationists and white supremacists unfortunately appropriated Tuskegee as an educational and social model thought to further instill an ideology of separation between the racial, and hence social, spheres. Louis R. Harlan notes that:

Tuskegee also found approval among such diverse types as E. D. Morel, who had led the exposure of exploitation and inhumanity in the Congo, and Maurice S. Evans, a South African spokesman for white supremacy...Evans...saw in Tuskegee the model of an education not designed exclusively for whites, but designed specifically for ‘a race of peasants living by and on the land’...For nearly opposite reasons Morel and Evans both feared de-Africanization and saw in the Tuskegee ethos a model for African race pride that would preserve traditions and keep Africans in a separate sphere of activity.<sup>316</sup>

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how it conceived of the entanglement between education and race policy in the early twentieth century. For more specific studies of the impact of Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee model on South Africa, see *Booker T. Washington: Volume 2: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*. (1986), by Louis R. Harlan. Also, Paul B. Rich, “The Appeals of Tuskegee: James Henderson, Lovedale, and the Fortunes of South African Liberalism, 1906-1930” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 20.2 1987 271-292.

<sup>316</sup> Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: Volume 2: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901 – 1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 276.

This notion of separate education based on racial identity would later become a hallmark of apartheid separate development policy, at least partially due to early champions of the model such as Evans, C. T. Loram, Edgar Brookes, and others.

If Evans's conception of the problem animating the twentieth century was fundamentally different from Du Bois, his framing of the question of race relations was no less global in scope than Du Bois's own conception laid out in *The World and Africa*. Under the heading of "The Question of the Century," Evans begins his study of *Black and White* with a characteristically prophetic and portentous mapping of what he viewed as a shifting global order:

Many signs and portents are in the air showing that among the many questions calling for solution, which are brought to the front by the rapidly changing *conception of the world*, that of the relations of the races hitherto regarded as civilized with those we have been accustomed to consider backward, will be the world-wide and important one.<sup>317</sup>

Evans positions South Africa and the (southern) U.S. at the vanguard of a modernity which, according to him, would only be properly manifested through the correct management of the world's races, bifurcated very generally here into "civilized" and "backward" camps. Evans's opening begs a few questions, especially regarding what this "rapidly changing conception of the world" actually looked like, and what were the forces behind it. Moreover, why at this moment are South Africa and the U.S. seen as uniquely positioned spaces from which to theorize a potential answer to the world's racial relations problem?

A simple economic history answer would be that the U.S. and, especially, South Africa had experienced staggering increases in industrialization from around the late 1870's until the

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<sup>317</sup>Evans, *Black and White*, 1; emphasis mine.



further industrial boom precipitated by WWI. Both latecomers in some ways to explosive industrial growth of the early nineteenth century as seen in Europe, both nations had also experienced tectonic shifts in populations because of this industrial growth. The massive shift from rural to urban centers, as well as the formal end of slavery in the United States, and South African immigration policies meant to supply labor to a burgeoning mineral mining sector, meant that Evans saw a unique connection between the two countries, poised at a related crossroads of historical circumstance, and able to provide theoretical common ground for thinking about this “question of the century.” Du Bois also notes similar factors in drawing his own version of the “color line” though it will be shown how radically different the proposed answers for approaching this delineation were between the former and Evans.

On some level Evans is working towards an early idea on the relationship between globalization and race (and racial governance), noting that it is only due to “rapid intercommunication, the increase of travel and expansion of commerce, with the tremendous material interests involved,” that this problem of the race line becomes pressingly clear. That South Africa and the southern U.S. are his axial points for this theory of racial globalization, makes Evans’s study not only unique for its geographical purview but also provides a comparison not based solely on economics or political systems, or even shared histories of settlement. Rather South Africa and the United States resonate with one another based on a shared notion of race; not only how race was experienced in both countries, but an increasingly shared sense of approach to the question of racial relations as a foundation for national modernity.

In other words, I argue that Evans is able to see something of South Africa in the southern United States because they were part of a shared racial imaginary. Moreover, this

imaginary produces a commonality of effects. As David Goldberg writes, “the *labor of race* is the work for which the category and its assumptions are employed to effect and rationalize social arrangements of power and exploitation, violence and expropriation.”<sup>318</sup> What Evans is able to recognize are the common racial foundations of both countries, core principles forming the racial horizon of each. While South Africa and the U.S. diverged in their application of these foundations, and it will be seen below how this continues to shape a critique of incommensurability, Evans’s transatlantic journey finds the author still in very recognizable climes. Goldberg locates this function of race thinking represented here by Evans. Goldberg writes succinctly: “Race was turned into a foundational code. But with all its foundations (conceptual and material) it had to be cemented in place.”<sup>319</sup> Many critics continue to focus primarily on this “cement” (which must necessarily vary contextually) at the expense of seeing a (more global?) racial foundation.

Evans first notes the commonality of “climate and conditions” shared by the South and South Africa. He maps a geographical disposition towards, “European family life,” and “a democratic theory of government;” a theory Evans notes however, “stops at members of the dominant race.”<sup>320</sup> The resonances across a century to Hegel’s “Geographical Basis” for *The Philosophy of History*<sup>321</sup> are perhaps readily apparent. However, Evans is also quick to note that, “Both South Africa and the United States are in reality not democracies, but oligarchies, and the practical discrepancy between theory and practice is one of the intricacies of the problem.”<sup>322</sup> The fusion of these two theories of government in both South Africa and the U.S. seems to give

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<sup>318</sup> Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 4.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Evans, *Black and White*, 3.

<sup>321</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel, “The Geographical Basis of History” in *The Philosophy of History*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991.

<sup>322</sup> Evans, *Black and White*, 4.

us some insight into how ideologies of race move, both within a given nation and between nations. The point here, one that Jeffrey A. Winters and Benjamin Paige have made clear, is that democracy and oligarchy are not mutually exclusive political modes, and rather that they can and do exist in relative functional harmony within nation-state models. In other words an ostensible democracy can function according to the principles of oligarchical rule with regards to “*certain limited but crucial policy issues* at the same time that many other important issues are governed through pluralistic competition or even populist democracy.”<sup>323</sup> In other words, in the case of South Africa and the United States otherwise open democratic systems can function as oligarchical fortresses when it comes to the preservation and protection of racial identity.

What Winters and Page help to make clear vis-à-vis a study such as Evans’s is that the basis for comparison of racial relations both in the U.S. and South Africa is not purely a political analysis. Rather the common ground rests in the way in which race as a governing concept in each context moves through political imaginaries, molding them as it does. If so, then what Evans tries to ascribe is a certain commonality in sentiment, a shared racial-political imaginary between South Africa and the U.S. at the start of the twentieth century, and one that is manifested in the particular ways in which both nations morph and mold their otherwise democratic institutions towards (racialist) oligarchy in order to address their respective racial dynamics. Evans speaks of a quite intangible and yet readily recognizable sentiment experienced by the South African visitor – presumably a white visitor – to the Southern U.S.:

Notwithstanding the markedly different experiences through which each country has gone since European settlement first began the visitor from South Africa to the Southern States sees much that is

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<sup>323</sup> Jeffrey A. Winters and Benjamin I. Page, “Oligarchy in the United States,” *Perspectives in Politics* 7.4 (2009): 731.

familiar. Every now and then some experience brings vividly to his mind the country he left...It was one of the pleasures of my visit to find, so far away, how often the very conditions I had left were reproduced before my eyes, the thousands of miles melted away, *and Africa was before me.*<sup>324</sup>

Evans conjures quite a transnational image/imaginary here between these two spaces, the U.S. “melt[ing] away” and Africa suddenly appearing on the horizon. The image serves as a teleology of sorts for Evans’s vision of a racial modernity for the twentieth century, one in which it becomes clear that the U.S. has largely failed on the racial relations front, leaving open the way for South Africa to articulate a platform of racial governance that, according to Evans, will push towards an increasingly segregated future.

To be sure, there are differences between South Africa and the southern U.S., and naming them both oligarchies means that one is talking about an economic elite in the case of both countries and a racial minority elite in the other. In fact, George Fredrickson, in his groundbreaking study, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, notes that, “Despite some superficial similarities...the differences between Jim Crow and “native segregation” or “separate development” are too great, in terms of both underlying structures and patterns of historical development, to sustain an elaborate comparison based on analogy.”<sup>325</sup> For Fredrickson, southern-style segregation differs from proto-apartheid separate development along cultural lines. Southern blacks, Fredrickson claims, were “despite all the discrimination and *de facto* or *de jure* segregation and disenfranchisement, much more integrated into the white-dominated society and culture than most Africans have ever been in South

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<sup>324</sup> Evans, *Black and White*, 4; emphasis mine.

<sup>325</sup> George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 289.

Africa...It [Jim Crow segregation]<sup>326</sup> was more of a problem of how to erect a set of barriers to the social and political inclusion of a population group that was by the nineteenth century willing and able to participate in a common society.”<sup>327</sup> There are multiple historical factors which problematize Fredrickson’s claim: the increased urbanization of South African blacks over the twentieth century (which Fredrickson admits only in a footnote), as well as the fact that his study does not have the luxury of a post-apartheid perspective.

However, I argue that this splitting of structural hairs when it comes to systems of racial governance is less productive than seeing each model as part of a discursive whole, part of a larger racialist imaginary that saw itself as the forefront of modernity. Placing the emphasis on the cultural element in the case of southern segregation, as Fredrickson does, eclipses the dangerous importance of race in this configuration. In other words, Jim Crow was not merely a “caste” distinction, and much to the contrary there are myriad examples of the ways in which southern racism and practical segregation was upheld along supposed cultural variances between American blacks and whites. I argue that southern segregation and apartheid derived from a common set of impetuses, drew on a shared core of motives and, indeed, participated in the imagining of similar futures. It is this shared racial(ist) imaginary which Evans taps into in this study, arguing as he does that the southern U.S. had a similar vision of the future as the budding South African nation, one that was increasingly waning in the South during Evans’ time in favor the assimilationist aspirations of the North.

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<sup>326</sup> Fredrickson later makes this explicitly clear: “Southern segregation...was an effort to establish and maintain a rigid caste division between racial groups that were inextricably involved in the same culture, society, economy and legal system. ‘Native segregation,’ on the other hand, was an effort to perpetuate a post-conquest pattern of vertical ethnic pluralism that initially involved major cultural differences, divergent social institutions, and even separate legal codes governing Europeans and Africans” (*White Supremacy*, 252). Again, the argument here relies on ignoring the importance of race as a sort of cypher in a global discourse that could be the language for articulating varying imperatives but was none the less a common imaginary for giving voice to these imperatives.

<sup>327</sup> Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 251.

In the final two brief sections of Evans's study, entitled "The Future" and "For South Africa," there is a shift in the author's tone, from the ethnographic, pastoralist descriptions of life in the South to the terse aphorisms of these final pages, much of which reads like a manifesto on racial governance. Evans prefaces these directives with a hauntingly pessimistic passage that imagines a southern United States, left defeated and yet supposedly sage by the weight of its racial tensions, speaking to a newly formed South Africa: "Too late it may be for the South, but I feel that if some of her best men...could counsel us, they would say that on such lines [segregation, guardianship], and not in the way that was forced upon them by the conquering North, lies our hope for the future in South Africa."<sup>328</sup> A haunting passage in which Evans ventriloquizes a Southern voice laying out a prophecy for the twentieth century, one in which models of statehood must, this voice argues, be based on a nearly-religious devotion racial separation. The assimilatory (both cultural and racial) stance of the North in post-bellum America is seen by Evans as the "principle sin"<sup>329</sup> committed by the U.S., as well as the greatest potentially damning temptation for a budding South Africa.<sup>330</sup> According to this collective Southern voice, if South Africa is to have a future then it will be predicated upon a racial vigilance against assimilation and race mixture.

In the final section, entitled "For South Africa" Evans makes a list of recommendations, or "definite and specific lessons" aimed at a South African audience he assumed to be "practical

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<sup>328</sup> Evans, *Black and White*, 270.

<sup>329</sup> In his characteristic mixture of a racial and a theological imaginary, Evans lists these "principal sins of the white South against the Negro...which must be purged before racial peace can come to the land: (1) Miscegenation, (2) Lynching, (3) Injustice in the Courts, (4) Unfair discrimination in travelling, etc." Again, note the religiosity framing these *sins*. The idea of racial mixture is not simply seen as a social ill – though this is certainly also the case, but as an affront both to God (as a transgression that needs atoning) and as an affront to the nation, both the symbolic body and the geographical nation ("the land").

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

men of affairs.”<sup>331</sup> Noting the title of this section, it is possible to read a splitting of the authorial voice from the traveling commentator-cum-ethnographer Evans, to the imagined Southern white, worn and weary with racial tension, “filled with doubts as to the future, and...tragic experience” speaking across the Atlantic. The message is clear: miscegenation or racial admixture is the doom of a (white) nation. However, the potentially doubled sense of the titular “For” makes this message somewhat more complicated. Is this the “for” indicating a directionality in Evans text, representing the accumulation of his experience? That is, while earlier sections focused on their southern neighbors across the Atlantic, this section is merely information meant ‘for’ South Africa. This would seem to suggest that Evans is still writing from a national perspective, as a South Africa writing home, and offering what he saw to be his experiential wisdom ‘for South Africa.’

However, what if this “for” registers the intended, as in the addressee of some transatlantic letter written from the collective perspective of the South’s “best men” as Evans calls them? Does Evans perform a racial(ist) ventriloquism here? The question is more than merely a structuralist one. For if so, I argue that the voice calling out “for South Africa” represents something even more sinister than Evans’s own nationalism. It is the voice of a transatlantic racism, a call for solidarity beyond national boundaries based on the protection of the white race. Indeed, such calls are not uncommon in various historical, especially colonial, contexts. But I believe what Evans taps into here is slightly more menacing for its otherwise unrelated contexts, the southern U.S. and South Africa. These two spaces have no ostensible reason to communicate with one another *except* in the preservation of a future century of global white rule. As Fredrickson mentions above, structurally and historically, the circumstances of the U.S. and South Africa are so radically different as to be nearly incommensurable for study. And

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 281.

yet, here in Evans text, the author makes the two nations speak to one another in the hushed tones of racial lament and racist futures.

If this voice leaves room for speculation about the framing of the message – whether a South African national perspective or a more global racial imaginary – the propositions based on the experience of the southern U.S. are clear. In this letter channeled through the pen of Evans, the southern experience can be summed up in three main prescriptions it makes for South Africa. The first is the supposed irreducible difference of the races. Evans’s platform for a modern South African rests fundamentally on this vision of a national topography perforated by the lines of racial and ethnic delineation; all other state-level infrastructural needs would be determined by this national logic (one already sees the planting of the formal apartheid seeds here). Evans, the sojourner to the south, is categorical in the racial ‘knowledge’ he feels he has garnered, stating quite bluntly that, “The races are so different that to reduce antagonism and give each its full opportunity for race development, a conscious and reasoned attempt at race separation should be made,” and that, “such separate communities should be under white guidance, assisted by the more advanced of the black race,” his second fundamental point.<sup>332</sup>

This racial delineation is so imperative for Evans, indeed it will come later to form the backbone of Afrikaner nationalism as well as apartheid ideology, that he echoes this sentiment twice in this otherwise condensed section. This has to do with what he sees as perhaps the paramount issue of the entire racialist platform, that in America the “great sin of the white man against the black lay not in slavery, nor in economic exploitation, but in the debouchment of the race by illicit sexual intercourse.”<sup>333</sup> Above and beyond all the ills and violence perpetrated by the practices of slavery, and the systemic disenfranchisement of generations, Evans is

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 281.



unwavering in his claim that violating the sanctity of each races' supposed basic uniqueness amounts to the greatest transgression. A statement such as this is exactly why the claims of someone like Fredrickson above – or even renowned Afrikaner historian Hermann Giliomee who denies the productivity of comparison between apartheid and the racial ideology of Nazism – are at once both right and also too reductive. The material trappings of race, or rather the infrastructural models to which racial ideas are able to attach vary greatly according to the expedients of the moment and the place, but what Evans distills into a quite unmistakable essential fear lurking behind these (political, economic) systems, is recognizable across and within each context.

### **What the Future Looked Like: Arborescent Metaphors and Verwoerd's "Big Idea of Separate Development"**

On May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1957 Hendrik F. Verwoerd, then South African Minister of Native Affairs, delivered a speech entitled "Separate Development: The positive side,"<sup>334</sup> to commemorate the opening of the Transkeian Territorial Authority. Verwoerd's speech marks a number of monumental shifts in the development of both segregationist policies in South Africa, as well as the larger "grand apartheid" vision of a southern Africa nation-state grid of autonomous racial homelands. The speech is an inaugural shift in the life of apartheid towards what apartheid historian David Welsh notes was a "supposedly more 'positive' version, called 'separate development'...introduced in the hope that an increasingly hostile world would accept that preparing 'homelands' (Bantustans) for self-government was analogous to the decolonization

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<sup>334</sup> Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, *Separate Development: the Positive Side*. Pretoria: Information Service, Department of Native Affairs, 1958.

process occurring in Africa.”<sup>335</sup> The address, made to a large number of chiefs and members of the first Territorial Authority of the Transkei, came less than a year before Verwoerd assumed the position of Prime Minister. Equally important was the fact that though the Bantu Authorities Act, an early project of Verwoerd’s policy architecture, was originally passed in 1951 the Transkei Territorial Authority was the first regional “native area” established under this major provision of the apartheid plan. Thus the mapping out of the Transkei Territory represented the first cartographical manifestation of the official apartheid plan; an event of paramount symbolic and political importance in the construction of apartheid’s vision of modernity.

Equally important for our purposes here, the speech also expresses the ideological as well as practical parts of Verwoerd’s version of segregation – “separate development” – articulated here in distinction to many of his predecessors (most notably D.F. Malan and J.G. Strijdom) who advocated for a much more virulent and a raw variety of white racism. Verwoerd’s ‘separate but equal’ platform, symbolized in this speech by the figure of the “fruit bearing tree” of separate development, not only consciously continued to mark a distinction between apartheid segregationist rhetoric and the racism of German National Socialism (a charge continually leveled against the National Party from the 1930’s onwards), it also thereby placed apartheid discourse in line with the segregationist platform of the United States.<sup>336</sup>

The origins of Verwoerd’s affinities for American racial discourse are quite clear. In fact, after completing his studies at Stellenbosch, Verwoerd spent 1926 in Germany and then part of 1927 in the U.S. on a lecture and study tour of American psychology schools and laboratories. An academic first, before his later and more infamous career as apartheid politician, Verwoerd

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<sup>335</sup> Welsh, *The Rise of and Fall of Apartheid*, 52.

<sup>336</sup> See for instance Saul Dubow’s *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa*. Also, Hermann Giliomee’s *The Afrikaners*, and “The Making of the Apartheid Plan, 1929-1948,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29.2 (2003): 373-392. The latter offers a slightly more apologetic version of this relationship. See also, my first chapter for more in depth treatment of this issue.

was Professor of Psychology and then Chair of the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Stellenbosch where he was characterized as a “expert in American social science” as well as a “proponent of American social welfare systems.”<sup>337</sup> It is worth noting here that the American social science scene Verwoerd witnessed was a discourse influenced particularly by Taylorism and the sociology of “scientific management,” which was popular with the American business and political sectors at the time, and complicit in fueling America’s fervor for social engineering during the early twentieth century.<sup>338</sup> Indeed, Verwoerd, the intellectual and political architect of the South African apartheid infrastructure, not only traveled extensively in the United States during his studies as a psychologist, but he openly acknowledged his reliance on American social science and its vision of itself as a progressivist discipline involved in the modern analysis of the U.S. sociological topography.

Nor did the fact that U.S. sociologists seemed to be caught in their own discursive trap of American exceptionalism appear to bother South African intellectuals such as Verwoerd. Much to the contrary, such exceptionalism presented a shared affinity between the two nations who saw themselves uniquely positioned historically with regards to both their experiences of racial collusion and national tectonic shifts towards rapid industrialization during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was especially true in the southern US, where industrialization came later after the civil war, as a shift away from agrarian economies and as part of larger ideological battles fought over post-bellum questions of racial governance as a function of modernization.<sup>339</sup> Roberta Miller, a scholar of Verwoerd’s early, pre-apartheid career notes that,

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<sup>337</sup> Roberta B. Miller, “Science and Society in the Early Career of H.F. Verwoerd,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19.4 (1993): 646.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> See Leigh Anne Duck’s important volume, *The Nation’s Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation and U.S. Nationalism*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006.

Verwoerd viewed South Africa as a modern industrialized country and in his lectures made frequent statistical comparisons of South Africa to both Britain and the US...But like other South African social scientists he compared SA most often with the US, which like SA ...had a mixed black and white population. In this respect, Verwoerd was also consistent with many South Africans [such as] Lord Hailey in 1935, who noted in his private diary...that ‘South Africa regards itself as USA in the making’<sup>340</sup>

Returning to Verwoerd’s “Separate Development” speech, it is evident that in order to convey “the positive side” of separate development – or apartheid – to his audience, Verwoerd relies quite heavily on the metaphor of a fruit-bearing tree. In fact the official pamphlet in which the speech is transcribed and published by the Information Service of the Department of Native Affairs, is adorned with nothing but the drawing of an African baobab tree with the bolded words “Separate Development.” Verwoerd’s “tree” metaphor accomplishes a number of tasks in the cultivation of the apartheid rhetorical landscape. Firstly, Verwoerd capitalizes on a long tradition in the Western episteme of imagining belonging and genealogical descent through the “arborescent”<sup>341</sup> imagery of trees, roots, branches,<sup>342</sup> etc. Moreover, the ‘agro-nationalism’ of Verwoerd’s vision of planting the southern African landscape with individual and unique trees (i.e. national/racial groups) is a powerful visual symbol for the particular valences apartheid would initially take under Verwoerd’s tenure as Minister of Native Affairs and then as Prime

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<sup>340</sup> Roberta Miller, “Science and Society,” 646.

<sup>341</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 18.

<sup>342</sup> Deleuze and Guattari note how “It is odd how the tree has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought, from botany to biology and anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, ontology, all of philosophy....: the root foundation, *Grund, racine, fondement*” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 18).

Minister. Indeed, it is the image of the tree in this speech that embodies the larger vision of ‘grand apartheid’ as platform for modernity in South Africa. Even the growth of the tree in Verwoerd’s metaphor symbolically marks the teleology or progress and growth (development) of individual and separate national identities.

I argue that this has many implications not only for how we read the ideas of race and modernity within apartheid discourse, but for seeing the ways in which – as a separatist platform – it also attempted to ‘indigenize’ itself within the South African imaginary. Lastly, in thinking about the history of the tree as a symbol within the western episteme for racial or national identity, I will compare Verwoerd’s ‘tree’ imagery to Mda’s “sycamore trees” in *Cion*. I argue that Mda articulates an ‘eco-modernity’ resonant with and yet altered from Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome. It is Mda’s unique use of trees – as holders of history *and* memory, as well as haunted and haunting muses of artistic creativity, that allows for a recombination or creolization of aesthetic forms as keepers of identity in the context of post-slavery America and greater Atlantic World.

Verwoerd prefaces much of his speech with a sweeping universalistic assumption of how “every man wants to have something which is his own – something which is separately his.”<sup>343</sup> He continues to define the terms of his discourse as it crescendos into a didactic vision of a racial modernity, stating that, “‘Separateness’ means: Something for oneself... The other word refers to what is bigger still, viz. ‘development,’ which means growth.”<sup>344</sup> Not only would the future according to Verwoerd’s apartheid plan unfold along lines separating domains of desire (“wants to have something which is his own”), but also growth could only occur according to this model through the careful cultivation of this separateness. Separate development, Verwoerd claims, “is

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<sup>343</sup> Verwoerd, *Separate Development*, 4.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

a tree, a fruit tree which this Government gave the Bantu of South Africa. It planted the tree, but that tree must be tended in order to grow. If it is looked after well, it will grow and bear fruit.”<sup>345</sup>

South Africa’s racial modernity was envisioned at this moment as a contract between the National Party Government and the various Bantu ethnic communities, groups defined as such by the South African government, mostly through the work done under the umbrella of the Native Affairs Department.<sup>346</sup>

The rhetorical move Verwoerd makes with his tree is multivalent in the sense that in addition to providing a symbolic register in which to express an apartheid view of South African racial modernity, the tree as nation or race group metaphor obviously also tapped into a much longer genealogical root. Verwoerd’s tree metaphor locates apartheid within a western episteme and the imagining of how nations, races and collectives coalesce, function and are thought to thrive. As Deleuze and Guattari note, “Aborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centers of significance and subjectification, central automata like organized memories. In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths.”<sup>347</sup> African subjectivity under apartheid’s arborescent vision would be constituted only vertically through “preestablished paths” of racialized political and cultural hierarchies and dictated from centralized spheres of (white) control.

This also means that the tree, pictured on the pamphlet as the African baobab – an iconic image of the African landscape – is textually colonized by Verwoerd’s use of a western trope for national-racial identity and genealogy. Édouard Glissant defines “Root identity” to be “founded

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> See Chapter One of this study for a fuller discussion of this function of ethnic delineation, its ideological function in the national modernity projects of South African government, both before and during apartheid.

<sup>347</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 16.

in the distant past in a vision, a myth...is ratified by a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of land, [and]...*is preserved by being projected onto other territories.*"<sup>348</sup> Ultimately, Verwoerd's tree of separate development represents a reutilization of the African topography – the baobab tree – in the service of creating a racist aesthetic register for representing the modern South African nation.

### **“Memory is what you make of it”: Ghost Trees and the Creolization of Modernity**

If the tree is a ready image for Verwoerd's notion of separate development and grander idea of apartheid as the highest branch of Western modernity, then Mda's use of sycamore trees as “carriers of memories,” “keepers of secrets,” and the tellers of stories in *Cion* imagines a radically different relationship between race and its representation through aborescent metaphors. The sycamore tree is both holder of racial memory and a space of innovative renewal and remixing of that memory. In *Cion*, the sycamore, or the “ghost tree,” as Kilvert locals often call it, is a “carrier of memories,” a bearer of the violence of slavery and the triumphs – and pitfalls – of escape, as well as a witness to how these collective narratives are memorialized in the present moment. In the haunting chapters of the “neo-slave narrative,” where we learn of the enslavement and eventual escape of two brothers and the tradition of quilt making practiced by their mother in order to aid in their flight, the reader is no longer guided by Toloki's narrative voice. Rather, these chapters are usually told through objects, such as quilts or ghost trees. For instance, this historical narrator, who figures more as a textual medium, tells the reader that, “the story is told by ghost trees; that's why most of it does not unfold before your eyes but is reported in the manner of fireside or bedtime storytelling.”<sup>349</sup> Mda uses the sycamore tree as a mixed and

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<sup>348</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 143.

<sup>349</sup> Mda, *Cion*, 91; (parenthetical quotations to follow in this section).

mixing medium that blurs the lines between writing and oral storytelling. Textually the story comes to us through multiple mediums: as a witnessing bore by the tree themselves; as the stories they pass on and through the narrator, delivered in ritual telling around fire and bedsides.<sup>350</sup>

We are told how during the days of slavery the giant sycamores provided refuge for Nicodemus and his brother Abednego, sons of the “Abyssinian Queen” and slaves on the Fairfields Farms Plantation. Indeed, it is only from the trees that we have their story: “The ghost trees: the one in front of the Abyssinian Queen’s cabin with its wide span of white branches and others that witnessed the whole journey of her two boys, right up to the demise of Nicodemus and the exile of Abednego in Tabler Town” (*Cion*, 91). The sycamore tree is a centrifugal feature in the spatial life of the slaves on and off the plantation, providing refuge of all sorts. Not only is the tree a keeper and a conduit of stories, “providing [the Abyssinian Queen] with enchanting characters when the moon shone on the trunk like a spotlight, shaping out figures in deep contrast of dark and light” (*Ibid.*). The tree also found very practical use in “serv[-ing] as Nicodemus’s hiding place when he wanted to be alone and practice his writing or play his reed flute” (*Ibid.*).

Nicodemus’s place of refuge also becomes the slave community’s site of collective memory and memorialization. When he plays his flute in the hollow of the tree, “Everyone pretended that the ghost tree produced the music” (*Ibid.*). Though they are quite aware that it is Nicodemus seeking solace from the quotidian tasks of their slave lifeworld, the community also

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<sup>350</sup> This is an eco-critical mode of history writing that bares resemblance to a turn within postcolonial writing/studies towards “ecocriticism.” There is a productive comparison to be made here between Mda’s story telling, memory holding sycamores and Michelle Cliff’s locating of the island of Jamaica “During the periods in which history was recorded by indentations of rock and shell” (*Abeng*, New York: Plume, 1995, 3). However, I believe Mda’s point is not merely a historiographical one. Rather, the ecological, in Mda, becomes the site of creolization; of mixing between forms (memory, history, etc.).



knows that the “singing sycamore...harbored in its soul the spirits of little children who once sat under it listening to stories and telling their own...These were the spirits waiting to be reunited with all the children from the tribes of the universe and to regenerate earth...” (Ibid.). If this displays the sycamore’s role in futurity, then the sycamore tree also becomes the site of a mythology, indeed a site that speaks of a cosmos “eons before the world was killed” (Ibid.). Nicodemus’s flute playing in the hollow of the sycamore crescendos into a chorus, the singular notes of his flute became fractured, “as if many flutes were playing,” while the plurality of the slave community is able to coalesce around the object of the sycamore tree and its ‘many’ singing voices. People knew that, “When the trills from Nicodemus’s flute became multiplied...that the voices of the little children had merged with the slurs and staccatos of his flute” (92). While the music of the one flute becomes multiplied, the multiplicity of the slave community comes together to partake in the one song coming from the “singing sycamore;” it is both a space of difference and coalescence.

The sycamore also provides a much more practical refuge “hiding important secrets in its heart” (Ibid). The grotto, or hollow in the trunk, of the sycamore is an important space in the strategy of the slave escape in *Cion*, keeping hidden provision for the journey: “Dried fruit. Knives. Ropes. Tinder. Lots of Tinder. Flint. Pairs of old socks. Rags. Odds and ends of tools and mementos” (Ibid.). A pantry for the potential fleeing slave, the provisions of escape were kept hidden, wrapped in quilts, within the sycamore tree. Because no one knew when the time would come for escape, the sycamore waited, housing the necessary provisions for the road. The sycamore was not only the center of the slave lifeworld on the Fairfield plantation, providing refuge, stories of both the past and the future, but the tree also formed a major landmark on the routes of escape, watching over the two brothers who were forced to make their escape during

the winter. As Nicodemus and Abednego flee Fairfield Farms they come across a giant, ancient sycamore, something of a sentinel figure on their journey. For the “ghost tree knew what the boys did not know, that over the years families of runaways had taken refuge inside its trunk, some even staying for days on end” (104). The sycamore is not only a teller of stories, but houses these tales because it is also an actor in the flight from slavery.

If sycamores trees form part of an ecosystem of slave life, both on and off the plantation, as well as providing spaces of both mythological and practical refuge, then they also function in *Cion* as transhistorical carriers of and catalysts for memory. However, just as the village of Kilvert is a space where race memory is problematized, the sycamore tree is a complicated and complicating medium for the transmission of memory and racial identity. Mda’s sycamore trees do not simply dictate the “many stories” and “secrets” of the past. Rather the telling comes through as an interactive performance that happens across the historical time of the novel, from the slave escapes of the run-away brothers to the Quigley family in the present day. The past, the history of slavery, the escapes from it across the Ohio River, and bustling mix of free life in Tabler Town, are transmitted to the present and to members of the Quigely family by the sycamore tree. This transmission forms the basis for much of the plot surrounding, and for Toloki’s interactions in Kilvert.

The Quigley daughter Orpah immediately intrigues Toloki. A taciturn, complicated, and brooding ‘girl,’ Orpah spends her days and nights locked in her room playing bluegrass music on her sitar and, as Toloki soon discovers, producing beautiful works of art. The nature of these drawings is the source of much controversy in the Quigley household; mostly do to Orpah’s desire to translate the abstract and “stylized” expression into motifs for quilts. It must first be noted that quilting for Ruth Quigley and for many residents in Kilvert, is a time-honored

tradition linking the community to its past and its multiple heritages.<sup>351</sup> Orpah however wishes to create new and innovative design for quilts, which Ruth feels to be sacrilegious to the traditional practice. I will say more on this below, but I want to focus first on the ways in which these design are inspired and created, as this has much to do still with the sycamore tree.

Late each night as the sound of bluegrass drifts from Orpah's sitar through the Quigley house, Toloki finds himself physically aroused nearly to the point of madness. When he takes to hiding behind a bush outside Orpah's room in order to "abuse" himself to cadence of this strange music, he discovers that Mahlon makes frequent nighttime visits to his daughter's room, dressed in odd, period costumes. As Mahlon enters, Toloki is disgusted by the sounds of "Mumbling. Singing. One voice. Two voices. Male and Female. Laughter. Moans. Giggling" (158). What is initially mistaken for incest between Mahlon and Orpah, Toloki comes to find is actually a nocturnal ritual shared between father and daughter, in which Mahlon acts a "medium man" getting "his stories from the ghost trees. He [Mahlon] transmits them to Orpah who then re-creates them" as drawings (266).

The ritual between Mahlon and his children, we are told, dates back to when they were young and their father could not get new books to read to them and so began to create his own tales. Mahlon "did not only tell them. He performed" these stories (267). And when he ran out he would seek inspiration, going back to "the forest to get more stories from the ghost trees...Those that could bear witness to how things used to be. Those that sprouted from the seed that fell from those that saw and remembered. That is how stories became memories" (Ibid.). Mda's

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<sup>351</sup> At the Kilvert Community Center, Toloki learns that the women there do "quilts from other American traditions such as the Wedding Ring, the Pinwheel, the Irish Wheel...and many others" (*Cion*, 158). Quilting in Mda's novel is itself a metaphor of cultural and racial construction and identification, piecing together the multiple heritages that make up the fabric of life in a place like Kilvert. Mda's quilts are not positivist symbols for harmonious multiculturalism, however, as they also map the battle lines between tradition and innovation, history and memory.

sycamores create an ecosystem of memory and aesthetic production, passing on the past through new seeds, but also transmitting these memories to medium men such as Mahlon. We are told how in the early hours before dawn, “the medium man...looks into the hollow hearts of the ghost trees that have hollow hearts. It is in the hearts that secrets are hidden... Therefore they whisper to him... His body soaks in these memories, so that his mouth may retell them later” (239). Mda creates an aesthetics entangled with the geographical surroundings, but is not determined by them. History plays a part in the stories the sycamores tell, but so too does the less rigid function of memory, alongside a series of embodiments of these messages until they finally end up as Orpah’s representations on paper (which she returns back to the sycamore hollow in order to hide them from the censorship of her mother).

The sycamore, through the medium of Mahlon’s nocturnal recitations, is the source of a creolized aesthetics that finds form both in Orpah’s drawings as well as her early forays into quilt making, both practices being thwarted by her mother Ruth. Toloki learns that it is from the memories conveyed through her father from the ghost trees that Orpah fashions first her drawings and then experimental quilt designs. The memories that Orpah receives from the ghost trees make their way eventually into a textile of *bricolage* consisting of “haphazardly appliquéd bits of cloth on top of the revered ancestral patters and... what she claimed were sycamores on some of the pieces, and [Orpah] even went so far as to attach beads and sew collages of found objects on the quilts” (137). While Ruth is adamant that quilt making is a sacred tradition, precisely because she believes the ancestral slave patterns, “the Drunkard’s Path, the North Star, the Monkey Wrench” and others, to be a very literal semiotics of escape. In other words, even though in the story of the escaped slave brothers, Nicodemus and Abednego agree that while the quilts their mother had sewn for them had indeed “inspired them to carry our the escape... The

quilts could not be so specific as to act as a map to freedom...the patterns and colors and designs and ties and stiches of quilts were mnemonic” (118). Ruth’s memorialization of the ancient patterns and designs is melancholic in its repetitive making of the same quilts, despite her inability to sell any of the traditional patterned quilts at the monthly market in town. She is “so steeped in tradition that even poverty will not move her to be innovative in her use of the very traditional designs” (157).

The ghost tree transmissions Orpah receives from Mahlon that in turn nourish her aesthetic production, also provide a liberating sense of creative freedom in the expression of her own identity. While Ruth is an aesthetic “hardliner,” a trait that earns her the nickname “a Taliban in the house,” Orpah rejects tradition in favor of a creolized blend of styles in the representation of “her memories,” as she calls the stories related from the ghost trees. “She will not do slave patterns – or African quilts as they call them here – because...” as Toloki tells us, “she does not need to escape to any place” (156). Orpah claims both a historical subjectivity and an aesthetic stance towards the representation of that identity as she proclaims, “Them slaves did all the escaping for me. I want to invent patterns that tell my own story. Like my music. Nobody’s gonna tell me not to paly bluegrass on a sitar”<sup>352</sup>(Ibid.). We recognize Mda’s own political and aesthetical stances here vis-à-vis his views on the role of the post-apartheid artist, which I have discussed briefly above. More importantly, we also see how the tree as symbolic placeholder for articulations of history, identity and belonging has changed from the apartheid context in which we originally saw it above. The ghost trees that stand hauntingly on the outskirts of Kilvert are reminders of slavery, its aftermath and indeed the persistence of structural

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<sup>352</sup> It should be noted here that Orpah’s music is an eclectic mix of bluegrass music played on a sitar, a creolization of form and medium that Toloki finds physically arousing. As opposed to many apartheid (and myriad colonial) discourses on the degeneracy and infertility of “creoles,” or those of supposed mixed origins, Mda imagines creolization to have a potentially (re)productive power.

oppression in the form of Kilvert's marginality. But Mda's figuring of the trees also allows them to be spaces where memories and histories, traditions and artistic freedoms find productive mixture in the telling of new stories.

Ultimately, the sycamore tree as holder of memories allows for not only an ecological mode of remixing the past, but it is in Toloki's defense of Orpah's creative freedoms that he maps another space for the relation of South Africa and the U.S. I argue that this relationship not only taps into the earlier and largely under-acknowledged history of racist exchange discussed above, but also forms an aesthetic directive away from the racist foundations once bringing these two nations in relation to one another. Mda's sycamores form part of an eco-modernity based not on categorical separations such as those between racial identities, nor on the unproductive distinction between history and memory, or cultural tradition and aesthetic creativity. In the "ghost trees" Mda imagines an aesthetics of creolization, where these modes exist in productive mixture and relation to one another. It is a connection based not on structural comparison of economic, or political or slaving systems, but rather a transatlantic imaginary of the post-racial; not in the positivist sense of having moved beyond the cultural power or socio-economic structures of race (as it is far too often used in post-Obama America). But post-racial in the aesthetic sense that the artist can choose the pasts they represent, sampling and mixing as they go, in order to speak in a new, and creolized language not of hope, or of transcendence, but rather of the freedom from hegemonic discourses such as slavery, or apartheid.

For example, Toloki originally finds Orpah's contraband drawings – the ones transmitted from the ghost trees by Mahlon – in the grotto of a gigantic sycamore outside the Quigely home. Orpah has tried to conceal the design from her mother, who routinely destroys the ones she finds in the house during her suspiciously frequent "spring cleanings." Toloki becomes Orpah's

loudest advocate in the Quigley house after having witnessed in these creations, “some of the most wonderful drawings I have seen in my life” (90). Nor is his appreciation merely personal as Toloki seems to also have some sense of the artistic world, demonstrated by his defense of Orpah’s wish to transform the drawing into quilts: “People out there are already doing wonderful things with quilts. People out there have long transformed the quilt from being mere bedcovering...into works of modern art that make statements about their world today” (140).

Ruth’s traditionalism will have none of this line of argument. So Toloki pleads to let “Orpah be the founder of her own tradition” (Ibid.). He compares this to his own formative transformation into the “Professional Mourner” in South Africa. Even though professional mourning “is not part of the culture of any of the people of my country,” Toloki argues, his cultivation of it has set him on a path of discovery, a “road in search of the tradition of professional mourning” (Ibid.) Moreover, he makes the productive aesthetic and political comparison between the codes embroidered on slave quilts and the “slogans and songs that we chanted and sang during apartheid” (154). Like the mnemonic symbols of the quilts, Toloki says, apartheid songs “didn’t say anything we didn’t know. They didn’t give us new insights about apartheid and how to overcome it. But they gave us courage and a spirit of oneness... They contained folk wisdom. They invigorated memory” (154-5). In response, Ruth however falls back on her characteristic essentialisms of Africa mixed with a sense of exceptionalism of her own heritage. “This ain’t Africa,” Ruth tells Toloki, and “trying to muster as much sarcasm in her tone as she can... “We got our ways of doing things here”” (141).

However, Toloki’s quite nuanced stance on cultural tradition argues that it must be nourished by constant re-invention in order to avoid the stagnant nostalgia portrayed in all of Ruth’s idiosyncratic behaviors. As Yogita Goyal writes, “Orpah’s reinvention of quilting

traditions reads like sacrilege to Ruth precisely because she reads the quilts literally, as objects that *are* history... Ruth's relationship to the quilts is ontological as well as a form of worship: in repeating the act of quilting, she pays her respects to the ancestors and draws her sense of self."<sup>353</sup> Toloki's argument also displays its own form of sacredness however, and this "sacred motivation" is displayed in what Glissant calls a relational "errantry."<sup>354</sup> Toloki's own personal transformation, from "professional mourner" to "itinerant mourner" embodies an ethics and a practice of relating to others, rather than searching for origins. Toloki's itinerancy, like Glissant's errantry allows for a transatlantic aesthetic revealing that, "sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself."<sup>355</sup>

If Mda's aesthetics begs the comparison to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome – especially for the former's implicit rejection of root-based identity formation – it pushes the rhizomorphous model by foregrounding the centrality of the artist in this construction. In *Cion*, Toloki relentlessly bemoans his relationship to his creator, called by the name "the sciolist,"<sup>356</sup> a meta-textual reference to Mda himself. Toloki laments that he has been "abandoned by the sciolist" twice since we last met him in Mda's earlier *Ways of Dying*, once in Durham, United Kingdom, and now in Athens, Ohio (*Cion*, 1). Toloki's opening line to *Cion* is an ironic remark on his authorial maker: "The sciolist has delusions of Godness" (Ibid.). We learn from Toloki that the "Godly madness" of Mda took Toloki out of his home in South Africa and on a journey that plots an alternative transatlantic triangle, ultimately allowing him to pursue a new manifestation of his vocation in itinerant mourning. While it is the writer's callousness that

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<sup>353</sup> Goyal, "The Pull of the Ancestors," 157.

<sup>354</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>356</sup> Sciolist is an archaic word for a person who pretends to be knowledgeable or who flaunts a superficial learning.



leaves Toloki stranded in strange new places, it is, at least initially, the hubris of the author that allows for a practice of relationality.

If the writer can initially be credited with setting this in motion, it is Toloki – the creation – the nomadic artist who embodies an ethics and a practice of relationality. Toloki’s itinerant mourning, much like Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome, “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles.”<sup>357</sup> Toloki’s wanderings are a series of incorporations, of mixings and blendings of his encounters. Mda meta-textually indicts the role of the writer who remains placed, and “Like all Gods lives...life vicariously through his creations” (*Cion*, 312). Toloki, on the other hand remains open to what his oceanic crossings bring to him, accumulating into a practice. Upon leaving South Africa he hopes that, “Perhaps in my wanderings I would meet other professional mourners, learn their methods and incorporate them in to my mourning routine. That would spice it a bit and would imbue it with a new vigor. Yes, I would travel the world in search mourning” (4).

As a creation of the “Godly” writer Mda, Toloki’s character forces us to see how ideas of filiation and belonging are problematized in Mda’s work, again through the (re-)use of an aborescent metaphor. The book’s title, *Cion*, plays on a subtlety in the definition of the word. A popular valence of ‘cion’ as a wealthy heir to a noble family reinforces the notion of genealogy and vertical decent as a governing metaphor of belonging. But the biological use of the term to describe a grafting of a shoot onto another stock in the production of a hybrid provides another way in which to read Mda’s work. Mda’s eco-modernity is both a practice, embodied by Toloki’s creolized aesthetics, and a spatial orientation away from national boundaries and towards an itinerancy that builds upon relations with others. Thus, in this ecological construction,

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<sup>357</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

it is possible to imagine connections between South Africa and the U.S. that both engage with the shared histories of racial oppression in both spaces, but are not overdetermined by these pasts. Rather, histories are put to use, remixed and creolized into a modernity based on relation. By the end of the novel Toloki has decided to be free of his writerly creator, both because of the latter's hubristic delusions, but also because of the potential of the writer to be overdetermined by his space and its past. Together with Orpah, Toloki hopes to "discover how to live in the present. And we'll do so without the aid of the sciolist. We have left him and his rambling narratives in Athens...I need my independence from him" Toloki concludes (*Cion*, 312.)

## CHAPTER 4

### **Framing the Debate on Race: Creolized Histories and Oceanic Futures in Berni Searle's *Colour Me Series***

#### **Apartheid outside South Africa: Geographical Frames, Apartheid Historiography and Creolizations**

In the final chapter of this project, I will look to the visual and performance art work of Cape Town-based artist Berni Searle for the ways in which her works (re)situate the South African nation within broader regional and imperial histories of racial oppression and governance. Searle, through a retooling of the commodities of historical imperial routes, imagines an oceanic and creolized history of race in South Africa. Not only does Searle imagine a 'global' history of apartheid – seen specifically from the vantage point of Indian Ocean Spice Trade routes – but her project also provincializes the racialist regime of South African apartheid as *one* manifestation of racial terror on a broader, regional spectrum of imperial racism. Moreover, this chapter will suggest that Searle's more expansive framing of the visual field, in which she explores the histories of race in South Africa, does much to un-think the hegemony of the apartheid trope for writing the history of South Africa. Through the interaction between spice powders and the female body, Searle frames a critique of apartheid as part of a larger race history of imperial presence across the transoceanic regions surrounding South Africa.

In the *Colour Me* series Searle uses spice powders of a variety of colors – turmeric, cloves, paprika, cayenne pepper, and others – to cover her otherwise-naked body. On the surface, the series registers a subtle engagement with the persistent power of color within epistemologies of race, as well as South Africa's particular valence of "coloured" as a racial category. Searle also engages with South Africa's history as a strategic and often conflict-ridden geography

within the routes of the spice trade. Her visceral visual images, in mapping a cartography of spices over and onto the female South African body, opens up the history of South African apartheid to a transnational, regional frame of investigation. I read spices in Searle's work for the way in which these powders articulate a multivalent and multi-topographical narrative of race and gender in South Africa, a narrative told from the perspective of the Indian Ocean. Searle's use of spices also points to the ways in which apartheid as a system of racialization and racial governance grew out of larger, regional – even global – economies of commodification of 'exotic' objects and peoples. Equally important is the way these spices, while entangling narratives of the rise of global capitalism to racial histories, also becomes an exploration of aesthetics and the uses, and abuses, of color as a semiotic component of the 'language' of race. Searle's use of spice positions South African apartheid as part of the "imperial debris" of the multi-national and regional – if not global – imperial histories of the Spice Trade.<sup>358</sup> In this way, Searle frames post-apartheid interrogations of racial identity as part of what Ann Laura Stoler calls, "deep imperial genealogies of the present."<sup>359</sup> Post-apartheid realities then can be visually represented through the imperial debris of spice, a product of a global economy still circulated across the transoceanic routes surrounding southern Africa.

Searle's telling of the history of apartheid from the Indian Ocean makes two gestures that resonate with the previous chapters. Firstly, I argue that Searle is making an argument about cartographies and how racial discourses interact with various forms of geography. Through the symbolic economy of spices, the Indian Ocean becomes a critical cartographic space allowing for more fluid histories than the continentally based myths of nation foundational to apartheid discourses. Secondly, if apartheid and colonial imaginaries of southern Africa were successively

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<sup>358</sup> *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, Ed., Ann Laura Stoler. Durham: Duke UP, 2013.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

founded upon mythologies of racial origin and purity, than the Indian Ocean's histories of creolization present an apt model of investigation for approaching the South African racial archive as well. A South African race history that is also part of a history of the spice trade in the Indian Ocean, presents the continental carving up of apartheid mapping to a more fluid, oceanic cartography of investigation. The Indian Ocean then becomes a critical perspective, counterpoised and yet entangled with the racial logics of the apartheid era over southern Africa. In staging two different kinds of cartographies, Searle places into productive tension two imaginaries, two topographical models for thinking about the histories race, people, and exchange in this region.

I argue that the Indian Ocean is a critical space for interrogating the nationalist, exceptionalist histories of apartheid, particularly for the ways in which this region is imagined as "the most global of all oceans," and poised as a space from which to un-think<sup>360</sup> the nation-state.<sup>361</sup> This thinking otherwise than the national narrative is a function of the Indian Ocean's histories of diasporic networks that operated outside the satellite of nation-states. In this way, I want to posit, as Paul Gilroy and Sarah Nuttall have done, the term "outer-national" as productive for thinking about the series of exchanges, trajectories of movement and creolizations that make up this oceanic space. I argue that, whereas 'transnationalism' refers to the substantive relations *between* two or more national spaces<sup>362</sup> and especially between metropole

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<sup>360</sup> See, Isabel Hofmeyer, "Universalizing the Indian Ocean," *PMLA* 125.3 (2010).

<sup>361</sup> Françoise Lionnet, "Shipwrecks, Slavery, and the Challenge of Global Comparison: From Fiction to Archive in the Colonial Indian Ocean," *Comparative Literature* 64.4 (2012): 446.

<sup>362</sup> For a comprehensive survey of the history of transnational studies, see Kevin M. Dunn, "A Paradigm of Transnationalism for Migration Studies," *New Zealand Population Review* 31.2 (2005): 15-31. Also, see Portes, A., Guarnizo, L. E. and Landolt, P., "The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22.2 (1999): 217-237. For a more recent repositioning of Transnational studies vis-à-vis Postcolonial Studies, and an interrogation of the persistent dominance of metropole-colony trajectories of study, see Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2005.

and post/colony, “outer-national” can be a regional and multi-focal perspective from which to imagine *other* than the narratives of nations.

In another oceanic context Gilroy writes that, “the history of the black Atlantic...continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people – not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles...provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory.”<sup>363</sup> This cartographical and historiographical shift in perspective only happens, Gilroy continues, “if we contrast the national, nationalistic, and ethnically absolute paradigms of cultural criticism...with those hidden expressions, both residual and emergent, that attempt to be global or *outer-national*.”<sup>364</sup> Gilroy thinks of “outer-national” as a geographical index for the regional or “hemispheric” movements of peoples and cultural constructs. Critiques of racial ideas, as well as their production and dissemination, often perpetuate a comparativist model, and thereby re-inscribe the category of the nation; histories of various racial identities become entangled almost exclusively with narratives of national spaces. In staging her own body, a body narrowly constructed as “coloured” by apartheid logics, as covered by spice powders, Searle engages with Gilroy and Nuttall’s use of the term “outer-national.”

In thinking about how Gilroy’s geographical shift resonates with Searle’s visceral critique of racial categorization, I argue that Searle transforms herself into an aesthetic object, a ‘spiced’ body from which to “reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory.”<sup>365</sup> Searle, like Gilroy, gestures towards a transnational re-territorialization of histories of racialized bodies in South Africa; however, unlike Gilroy, she also shows how national narratives of race consequently also gender these bodies. Searle’s ‘outer-national’ figure

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<sup>363</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*; emphasis mine.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

intervenes into a post-apartheid project of recuperation largely couched in both gendered and nationalist terms. Searle's spice history of apartheid moves any potential sense of recuperation beyond the littoral boundaries of South African national histories of race, giving some aesthetic answer to Stoler's question of "what constitutes the tangibilities of colonial pasts and imperial presence."<sup>366</sup> Searle's spices give voice to a continued "presence" in the post-apartheid present of both apartheid realities, but also of outer-national, imperial histories of exchange, commodification of things and people, and racial terror. Stoler makes the astute observation that, "If imperial debris deposits in the disabled, racialized space of colonial histories past and present, it is gendered as well – in how it is embodied, where it is lodged, and how it is expressed."<sup>367</sup> Searle's naked body, read as a topography of colonial "ruination" through its variegated coverage with spice powders, makes clear Stoler's point that while, "both women and men sustain these injuries...it is women who voice the injuries to which this debris gives rise."<sup>368</sup>

South African novelist and critic Zoë Wicomb writes of the politics of (female) "shame" surrounding coloured identity in South Africa, claiming that, "Miscegenation, the origins of which lie within a discourse of 'race,' concupiscence, and degeneracy, continues to be bound up with shame, a pervasive shame exploited in apartheid's strategy of the naming of a Coloured race, and recurring in the current attempts by coloured to establish brownness as a pure category..."<sup>369</sup> If Searle can be read as engaged in a project of recuperation or a "denial of shame," then her intervention is to make a retrieval of racialized women's identities that do not rely on either the notion of categorical purity or the sanctity of national narrative boundaries.

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<sup>366</sup> Stoler, *Imperial Debris*, 5.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>369</sup> Zoë Wicomb, "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, Eds., Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 92.

Wicomb locates the ‘shame’ of colouredness at both the level of the gaze, “the shame of having our [‘coloured’ female] bodies stared at, but also the shame invested in those (females) who have mated with the colonizers.”<sup>370</sup> In other words, if the presumed ‘purity’ of the racial category of ‘coloured’ betrays the apartheid regime’s investment in a sexual economy based on women’s shame, Searle goes a long way in moving the concept of ‘coloured’ away from this sexual terror towards an outer-national history of creolizations.

Searle’s is an identity project that, while deeply invested in the histories of racial and gendered categorization – as foundational exercises to both South African colonialisms and nationalisms – remains larger than and outside of the scope of the national. In this way, Searle’s installations resonate with Wicomb’s “trac[ing] the construction of colouredness through postmodernism’s reconceptualization of geographical space and of the body.”<sup>371</sup> Searle’s spiced coloration also echoes Wicomb’s claim that, “Not only can the body be thought of metaphorically as a text...but I [Wicomb] wish to consider the actual materiality of black bodies that bear the marked pigmentation of miscegenation, and the way in which that relates to political culture.”<sup>372</sup> By employing the trope of spice as a global commodity of circulation and exchange, Searle also gestures towards the historical construction of racial identity, not only in South Africa, but also across the transoceanic region of southern Africa, as marked by outer-national entanglements and mixtures. Spices, for Searle, are made to be read as a sign of creolization; both integral to and bigger than the national discourse on race within South Africa.

South African critic Sarah Nuttall, likewise, makes a historiographical argument based on reconfiguring South Africa within the histories of its geographical positioning. Nuttall’s definition of “outer-national” as the “geographies of worldliness” calls for an expansion of the

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.



archival horizons for exploring South African racial and cultural identities.<sup>373</sup> Staging just such a historiographical shift, Searle's work with spices opens a space for more regionally expansive race histories of South Africa; narratives that are not confined to the worn archives of Anglo-Boer conflict, or pass laws, or National Party ideologies. Searle's use of spices performs an outer-national and creolized history of apartheid, disentangling the often-dangerous relationship between racial identities and masculinist national narratives. I argue that both the historical and contemporary transnational circuits of the trade in spices, as well as their symbolic economy as elements of mixture, or fusion, make Searle's work speak to a history of race in South Africa that is both transnational and creolized. In other words, spices locate the flow of cultural and racial identity both outside South Africa, but also as a signs invested with multivalent registers. In this way, the concept of outer-national, in its comparative or relational paradigms, does not reify the category of the nation with all the attendant ideas of racial or ethnic purity. Rather, outer-national articulations such as Searle's 'spice cartographies' are mappings that allow for articulations and histories of racial identity outside of national myths and narratives. In Searle's critique of racial categorizations according to color and commodification, apartheid becomes one chapter in a larger and longer story of movement, contact and economy across the oceans of the Southern Hemisphere. Nuttall suggest that this outer-national frame could be productive particularly for South Africa, writing that, "Given its tri-centric location between the Indian and Atlantic worlds as well as the land mass of the African interior, further readings of this space from an outer-national vantage point is likely to reinforce a *creolité* [sic.] hypothesis."<sup>374</sup>

Through an expansion towards an outer-national paradigm, and specifically an oceanic one, Searle employs creolization as a mode of critique to the South African archive of race and

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<sup>373</sup> Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 23.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

gender. As mentioned above, creolization, as Nuttall has argued, can offer a mode of investigation for approaching the mythologies of racial purity and racial origin, and those racial narratives that both animated the apartheid nationalist imagination as well as provided racial ‘reasons’ for the apartheid grid of separation mapped across the South African landscape. I will argue below that Searle’s oceanic map, symbolized through the foregrounding of spices, is also a historiographical gesture, staging what Nuttall calls for in the development of a “new archive” for exploring the history of race<sup>375</sup> in South Africa, an archive of creolization.<sup>376</sup> Searle’s new Indian Ocean archive provincializes apartheid – and its decidedly masculinist racial rubrics of ‘coloured miscegenation’ – as one racialist state manifestation in an otherwise expansive oceanic region equally marked by creolizations, racisms, colonialism, mercantilism and various forms of racial lives attendant upon each of these paradigms.

Searle’s installations force us to recognize that the history of apartheid does not end at the shores of southern Africa. In this way, her “new archive” is presented through Nuttall’s other prescriptive formulation for “new ethnographies.”<sup>377</sup> In Nuttall’s prescription these “new ethnographies” force open the rigid national frames of investigation into the history of race in South Africa. Searle’s new ethnography is both an indictment of the role played by ethnography in the creation of the state apparatus of racial categorization and oppression under apartheid. But it also gestures towards a new ethnographical imaginary, one that is not animated by myths of purity and origins but rather by histories of exchange, entanglement and creolizations that explode beyond the imaginary and literal boundaries of the South African nation. In Searle’s

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<sup>375</sup> Nuttall, along with Cheryl Ann Michaels, makes this claim in their earlier edited work entitled, *Senses of Culture*.

<sup>376</sup> Sarah Nuttall, “City Forms and Writing the Now in South Africa,” 732.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

images, these become the modes or registers for articulating the narratives of race in South Africa.

### **South African Creolizations: Slavery, Opacity and Solidarities**

Though a relatively recent source of debate in South Africa, the mostly academic manifestations of the concept of creolization have been much contested. This debate has, unfortunately, remained predominately centered on questions and histories of coloured identity. Only a handful of scholars have picked up the concept, and mostly from its Caribbean origins, and even less have tried to think about the applicability of this concept outside of particular histories of slavery at the Cape; an institutional blind spot that risks re-inscribing an essentialist quality to creolization. South Africa critic Pumla Dineo Gqola positions creolization discourse as a response to scholarly dissatisfaction with postcolonial paradigms of hybridity within South Africa. She rightly notes that, “Coloured definitions are structured in ways that challenge postcolonial perceptions of cultural hybridity as freeing.”<sup>378</sup> Gqola, along with a host of other critics of coloured identity, have argued that, “when coloured South Africans are historically read as both biologically and culturally hybrid, such framing is conservative since such logics posit the cultural and biological as intertwined” as well as serving racial epistemologies of purity and their discourses of miscegenation.<sup>379</sup> Gqola warns against the dangers of uncomplicated appropriations of postcolonial paradigms of hybridity, a warning that should also serve to alert our investigations to the ways in which paradigms of racial and cultural critique travel with difference.

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<sup>378</sup> Pumla Dineo Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-apartheid South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

However, while Gqola does admit of the importance of creolization for the study of race as “relational,” rather than essentialist, in South Africa, her structuring of the various strains of creolization discourse inadvertently falls back onto a certain essentializing of the work that the term can do in this space. In offering a definition of creolization, Gqola attempts to tie the term inextricably to historical experiences of slavery, thereby instituting a hierarchy of historical suffering as source materials for the construction of contemporary identities. Lauding fellow South African critic Zimitri Erasmus for theorizing “creolity under the very specific conditions of slavery and its ensuing inequalities,” Gqola locates Erasmus<sup>380</sup> as the source of a particular strain of creolization discourse as part of a genealogy coming from the “works of Françoise Verges [sic.] and Eduoard Glissant [sic.] and...schools of thought on creolization emerging from Caribbean studies,” ultimately equating creolization to histories of slavery.<sup>381</sup> In what I would argue is something of a false distinction, Gqola contrasts Erasmus to Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael’s articulation of creolization,<sup>382</sup> which as Gqola views it, “conceptualizes creolity [sic] as any mixing of various strands to result in a hybrid formation which constantly draws attention to itself as dynamic and disruptive.”<sup>383</sup> A quite ungenerous reading that not only ignores Nuttall’s other theorizations of creolization which ground the term in the work of Michel-Rolph Trouillot and others, but also, in insisting on the historical shibboleth of slavery, misses the larger point of Nuttall’s multiple calls for reading the history of South Africa as a history of creolization.

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<sup>380</sup> Even Erasmus is not so dependent on equating slave histories with creolization. She writes that, “creolization refers to cultural formation in contexts of colonialism” and is “distinguished by violent discontinuity, brutal rupture with the past and concerted efforts on the part of colonizers to annihilate the values and civilizations of the dominated. These formations arise from the forced transportation and deportation of people...” (Zimitri Erasmus, “Creolization, Colonial Citizenship(s) and Degeneracy: A Critique of Selected Histories of Sierra Leone and South Africa” *Current Sociology* 59 2011, 640).

<sup>381</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>382</sup> See, Nuttall and Michaels, *Senses of Culture*.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid. 29.

While Gqola argues that “creolisation is part of the memory project for it values the history of enslavement as a constitutive, even if not total, influence on current collective positioning within coloured communities,”<sup>384</sup> I read Nuttall’s emphasis as both deeply historical – a quality she attributes to the geographical positioning of South Africa<sup>385</sup> – as well as a deeply theoretical “register” or “method of reading” necessary for “theorizing the ‘now.’”<sup>386</sup> While remaining attentive to the historical specificities of traumatic violence that inform cultural formations, Nuttall’s unmooring of creolization from the privileged space of slave history places her prescription for a South African historiography of creolization in line with other scholars such as Françoise Lionnet, as well as being more resonant with Glissant’s conception of creolization and “relation” than Gqola admits of. Nuttall’s “registers,” or “methods,” for reading South Africa precipitates a shift towards Lionnet’s claim that “Epistemologies too have been creolized, and the conceptual clarity favored by Cartesian or Enlightenment philosophy has long given way to the increasing *opacity* of the world.”<sup>387</sup> Lionnet’s reading of Glissant’s “opacity,” as a mode or non-universalizing paradigm, seems a more future-oriented potential reading of South African racial identities and relations, than a historical attachment to slavery. In this way I argue for a reading of South African creolization in terms of an ‘opacity’ as “a creolized totality that contains difference without subsuming it to the same; it is a becoming that always exceeds formal categorization while pointing to new forms of racialization and new solidarities that underscore a powerful ‘alternative to fragmentation,’ a transcolonial or minor form of transnationalism.”<sup>388</sup> In this reading, the history of apartheid is not (necessarily) the history of South Africa, and conversely, South African history can be written under other signs, other than

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<sup>384</sup> Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me*, 30.

<sup>385</sup> Nuttall *Entanglement*, 23-24

<sup>386</sup> Nuttall, “City Forms,” 732.

<sup>387</sup> Lionnet, “Continents and Archipelagoes,” 1509.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

the apartheid paradigm. I believe that this opens up the South African archive to more complicated and complicating readings, such as my treatment of Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* in Chapter Two. A creolization mode of reading sees both the potential of the discourse for unmooring racial or ethnic histories from nationalist sentiments and spaces, while also finding problematic places where a figure like Mofolo is seen as both anti-colonial writer and complicit with a missionary presence in South Africa.

By reading Berni Searle's use of spice, and the use of her body in relation to that spice, this chapter also thinks about how racialized and gendered bodies interact with geographical space. I argue that Searle asks what it might mean to think outside of racialist discourses that imagine geographies as productive of human difference. Searle uses spice powder to explode the language of apartheid, and this expansion of apartheid's racial semiotics is also an expansion the 'geographies' of apartheid. This chapter asks whether in focusing on apartheid from an outer-national, regional perspective such as the Indian Ocean, if the persistent historiographical hegemony of 'the apartheid narrative' is dismantled. I suggest that if the master narrative of apartheid is indeed deconstructed then South Africa comes to function less as a token instance of exceptionalism in postcolonial racial discourse and more of an instance of the global phenomenon of race. In other words de-privileging apartheid's tropological significance in South African history, means opening this instance of racial oppression up to the scrutiny of a transnational critique, of the multiple geographical and intellectual currents that have gone into the formation of the apartheid system; not to mention the influence of the global post/apartheid moment, which is beyond the scope of this project.

Using spices to 'colour' herself, Searle makes a critique about both the historiography of apartheid as well as the geographies of this otherwise 'South African' racial program. Doing so,

I argue, is to think of apartheid not as an isolated extreme outlier on the spectrum of racist practices,<sup>389</sup> but rather as a node within a complex nexus of exchange. Indeed, using the coloration of spice powders – commodities that ostensibly have nothing to do with the racist logics of the Nationalist Party – Searle critiques the often short memory of post-apartheid historians. Not only that, but Searle adeptly incorporates the South African female body, often excluded in post apartheid, post-colonial critiques, into a trans-colonial historiography of racialization and violence, which went hand in hand with the transnational flows of colonial economies across the Indian Ocean region. Doing so, Searle goes a long way in shifting the semiotics around ‘coloured,’ from economies of female “shame” and concupiscence, as noted by Wicomb above, and places the South African history of the racialization of women’s bodies within a broader narrative of the rise of global capitalism.

As I have been arguing throughout this study, I am also interested in addressing certain problems that persist in the “way Africa and even the diaspora have been constructed in the [academic] discussion.”<sup>390</sup> Not only have certain northern hemispheric biases persisted<sup>391</sup> in critical imaginings of Africa and its relationship to the Diaspora, but postcolonial studies’ (re-

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<sup>389</sup> A practice common to the rhetoric of postcolonial studies as well as black Atlantic studies and *The Black Atlantic* itself. See for instance Jacques Derrida exchange on “Racism’s Last Word” where he describes apartheid as not only “the archival record of the unnamable” but also, as “racism’s last word” apartheid represents “the essence at its very worst, ...something like a racism par excellence, the most racist of racisms” (Jacques Derrida, “Racism’s Last Word” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 291). Derrida’s politics are shrewdly critical of the international complicity with this so-called “singularity” of apartheid, but I would argue, contra this idea of an aura of discreteness or “singularity”, this ‘last-ness’ which Derrida articulates, that apartheid’s persistence on the world stage implicates far more than the world’s global market system; apartheid’s life span was not lengthened solely by political or economic entanglements with Europe, or America, or Israel. Rather the entanglement was, and remains race. Apartheid lasted so long as it did because it is not an outlier, some inconvenient racist backwater program of segregation, but precisely because it had its roots in a global system of racial ideas carried by transnational flows of peoples, commodities, and discourses.

<sup>390</sup> Judith Byfield, “Rethinking the African Diaspora,” *African Studies Review* 43.1 (2000): 1.

<sup>391</sup> See critiques of Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*. For instance, Laura Chrisman “Journeying to Death: A Critique of Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*,” *Crossings* 2 (1998); Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic,” *African Affairs* 104.414 (2005): 35-68.

)mappings of this diasporic topography often maintain a “vertical analysis” and thereby recreate blind spots around relations between “minor expressive cultures.”<sup>392</sup> It is important to note that these blind spots consequently re-inscribe national discreteness. As Lionnet and Shih argue, it is this “vertical analysis [that is] confined to one nation-state.”<sup>393</sup> Reliance on such nation-state oriented, postcolonial paradigms has, in the case of South Africa, cultivated a certain aura of exceptionalism around the country’s layered colonial past, and certainly with regards to its racial history. Rather than reading for its relationality in the world of postcolonial places, South Africa is too often figured as isolated, the token space of extreme racism. Indeed, this is when it is labeled under the rubrics of ‘postcoloniality’ at all. Very little has been said about South Africa’s position in the (black) Atlantic world and only recently has its importance to the Indian Ocean world begun to emerge in academic discourse.<sup>394</sup> I argue these kinds of gestures would benefit from a historicization of apartheid as a global phenomenon. If apartheid can indeed be read as part of a global discourse on race, then what are the historical antecedents to this worldliness?<sup>395</sup>

Searle’s unique use of spice powders in her works provides some aesthetic answers to these questions. Staging her body as the metaphorical apex of a history of transnational flow, Searle forces us to reconsider both the figure of South Africa as well as the South African figure vis-à-vis their constructions by a regional history. The history of racialization in South Africa, as

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<sup>392</sup> Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*, 11.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> See Isabel Hofmeyer, “Universalizing the Indian Ocean” *PMLA* 125.3, 2010. Also, see Isabel Hofmeyer, Pamela Gupta, M. N. Pearson, eds., *Eyes Across the Water*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010.

<sup>395</sup> See the work of Saree Makdisi: “‘Intellectual Warfare’ and the Question of Palestine” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35.3 (2006): 78-82; “The Architecture of Erasure” *Critical Inquiry* 36.6 (2010): 519-559. I want to note here that Makdisi’s work is not only admirable but it provides exactly that sense I am speaking of here, of the denationalizing, de-privileging of apartheid as a racial program unique or confined to South Africa. What I am arguing here is for a historical justification for Makdisi’s critical gesture. That is to say that though apartheid is often viewed as the unique brain-child of an Afrikaner nationalist movement, a transnational history of its formation is a critique of apartheid in the world of race thinking.



discussed in previous chapters, was founded upon the ‘natural’ and hierarchical division of humanity into distinct, if not biologically than culturally, different races. In South Africa this was further compounded by a theological idealism that mapped a divine ordination onto this notion of biological pluralism. God and Science met in the political crucible of nation and state building under the banner of apartheid. Read in the light of a racial order founded on biological/theological pluralism, Searle use of spice unsettles this historical triumvirate – God, Science/Culture, and Nation – for thinking racial differences, and exposes the socio-economic and cultural constructions of race from a historical standpoint. Searle taps into a more expansive historical archive in order to interrogate a persistent mythologizing of difference. This artistic exposure is not only a deconstructive act, but rather it is the exposure of Seale’s body that stages the vulnerability of the body to discourse, to the viscosity of racial thought. Searle’s is a history of the South African women’s body positioned at the vortex of the global rise of capitalism and corporeal violence.

### **Histories of Spice and Spiced Bodies: The Apartheid Narrative of South African History**

In what follows, I would like to think about spices not simply spices as domestic foodstuffs, but also as globally circulating commodities whose movements chart the geographies of racial identity negotiation. I suggest that Searle’s use of spices in her *Colour Me* series opens up a semiotic space for thinking about the multivalence of these domestic commodities. Already in this description there is something of the tension that Searle stages: that is, in thinking of the foodstuff as a domestic commodity; as that which, in its practical function, resides in the intimate and quotidian places of domestic economy; is consumed for its qualitative characteristics; valued for its role in enhancing food and measured in pinches, dashes and the right amount of ‘heat’.

However, outside of its ordinary presence in the home, spice – like any other commodity – lives and has historically lived another life: a quantitative and worldly existence in which it is desired, hunted, and traded for. The trajectories of this desire map valuation systems that in turn shape large regional and transnational networks of exchange.

I want to read the ways in which spice – as far as it is largely read as an index for the interrogation of race in Searle’s work – creates an “outer-national” framework for exploring questions of racial identity and the traveling of racial discourses. Searle exposes race and race discourse as operating in much the same way as the spice powder described above. That is, race – both discursively and as a lived reality – is experienced as a quotidian phenomenon, linked in specific ways to both local and transnational contextual forces. Nevertheless, I propose that many contemporary race discourses – academic and popular – largely provincial in their focus, privilege the more national tectonics and miss the regional or even global shifting of race ideas. On the other hand, a racial critique of South Africa, detached from the myopic influence of a strictly national paradigm, not only references a “global circulation of racial ideas,” but also undermines the dominance of previously national(-izing) narratives such as the ‘apartheid paradigm,’ ubiquitous in South African historiography.<sup>396</sup>

As a political and racial movement, apartheid is often thought of as a social arrangement specific to the national history of South Africa. In many of its particulars this is indeed the case. However, this exceptionalist thinking positions South Africa as a unique instance of racism, cut off from influencing relationships with other racial logics in circulation. This isolationist paradigm, though certainly *de rigueur* for the Nationalist Party ideologues, has unfortunately persisted in informing –though largely unconsciously – much of post-apartheid historiography. What persists in critiques from both inside and out of South Africa is a certain vestige of

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<sup>396</sup> Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 272.

tokenism; a place where the narrative reads as *the* culmination of racism, to the exclusion of often relational, if not outright conversant – forms of racial discrimination. The persistent paradigm at issue is that, ‘The history of South Africa is the history of apartheid.’ In other words, often, the narrative engine of apartheid drives South African historiography; as if all preceding events, from European contact to Anglo-Boer conflicts were irrevocably destined to culminate in the politicized racial segregation of apartheid. This grand narrative of apartheid is what Sarah Nuttall refers to when she writes that, “South African studies has, for a long time, been over-determined by the reality of apartheid – as if, in the historical trajectory of that country, apartheid was inevitable, in terms of both its origins and its consequences; as if everything led to it and that everything flows as a consequence of it.”<sup>397</sup> Searle’s work opens up this historiographical dead-end by gesturing towards a longer history of racial categorization, racial governance, as well as their attendance upon global commodity circulation, especially within the spice trade, which has historically spanned from Europe to Indonesia. In this racial *longue durée* of the Indian Ocean, the racial logics (from classification to governance) of apartheid appear much less inevitable and much less exceptional.

Searle’s interaction with spice powders stages a geo-historical argument about the positioning of South Africa as an integral apex of transnational flows. This transnational repositioning deconstructs the above isolationist paradigm, and precludes its obverse: Searle’s post-apartheid critique of racial identity through spice powders means that, ‘The history of apartheid is *not solely* the history of South Africa.’ Indeed, as Searle’s work gestures to, apartheid – both as a political ideology as well as a racial episteme – has a transnational, and regional, and, as will be discussed below, an oceanic history. By staging spice powders as an index for the interrogation of racial identities in South Africa, Searle accesses longer and more

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<sup>397</sup> Nuttall, “City Forms,” 732.

expansive histories of the entangled travel of commodities and race across the globe; histories whose heterogeneity subverts the hegemony of apartheid narrative paradigms for telling South African history.<sup>398</sup>

### **The Spiced Body and the Pull of Oceans: Towards an Oceanic Critique of Apartheid**

Searle's use of spice powders in her *Colour Me* series (Figure 1) places these works within the historical trajectories of the spice trade and locates the latter as the larger nexus that frames her performance of South African racial identities. These spice powders, which Searle uses to "dis-color" her body, map an economy of transnational exchange of commodities and people across the Indian Ocean. As such, Searle's work constructs an archive that both complicates the specifically South African inflections of coloured racial identity, as well as de-privileges apartheid historiographical models in the post-apartheid interrogation of these categories. By placing it into a history of exchange, of commodities, ideas and people, across the Indian Ocean, Searle offers a critique of apartheid from outside its own cartographical and epistemological boundaries. As Françoise Vergès writes, "The Indian Ocean is an interesting case because it escapes... the hegemonic legacy of European cartography."<sup>399</sup> Searle approaches post-apartheid racial identity by first provincializing apartheid and its Western epistemological trappings. As Vergès suggests with regards to the Indian Ocean, Searle posits an alternative cartography, a different map in which apartheid is part of a larger geography, and longer history.

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<sup>398</sup> Note, for example, the abundance of this "apartheid paradigm," evident in the following works: Clark (2011); Welsh (2010); Worden (2007). It is important to note that I am not making a specific critique of any one of the above titles for their merits or shortcomings. Rather, I choose these titles only to demonstrate the way in which an "apartheid narrative paradigm" displays a particular hegemony over historical writings about South Africa.

<sup>399</sup> Françoise Vergès, "Writing on Water: Peripheries, Flows, Capital, and Struggles in the Indian Ocean" *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11.1 (2003): 247.

The Indian Ocean as a cartography of critique for apartheid is important precisely because, as Vergès writes, “it [Indian Ocean] constituted the longest cultural continuum in pre-European imperial history.”<sup>400</sup> Moreover, Searle’s utilization of a commodity representative of the Indian Ocean means that her works critique apartheid through the trope of creolization as I have been exploring it thus far. Viewing the history of apartheid from the perspective of the Indian Ocean foregrounds “The heterogeneity of the ocean’s cultures and civilizations [which] led to the creation of *civilisations de frange* (civilizations of the margins, of the fringes), which speak for the enduring (though constantly renewed and reconfigured) processes of creolization.”<sup>401</sup> Searle, by thinking through the new map Vergès offers, draws on a cartography of water and of creolization, and thinks about the legacies of the apartheid system whose racial logics were founded upon the divisive mapping of land. Searle posits a map that simultaneously precedes, is outside of, and entangled with the western cartography of racial imperialism. Likewise, Searle’s spices also gesture towards the “imperial debris” of the spice trade in the Indian Ocean, an economy whose imperial policing, particularly in the Dutch case, constitutes a pre-history (though not an inevitable one) to apartheid’s racist infrastructures in South Africa. The Indian Ocean is both one of the many places of apartheid’s genealogy as well as a space from which a critique of apartheid’s legacy can be articulated.

By noting their impact on the formulation of southern African racial history, Searle’s critique of apartheid from the Indian Ocean also foregrounds, while not privileging, the many – largely erased – histories of slavery. As Vergès writes, “the maps of slave trade and slavery drew the first routes of exchange on the Indian Ocean.”<sup>402</sup> After the proclamation outlawing the enslavement of indigenous tribes in southern Africa, as well as British abolition of slavery across

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 250.

its empire in the early nineteenth century, labor needs were met through the importation of slaves and indentured laborers (“coolies”) from across the Indian Ocean, Madagascar to Malaysia, to India. Searle’s images mark this history as an integral part of mapping the full apartheid and post-apartheid racial spectrum. Lionnet also writes about the possibilities of representation opened up by looking to slave histories in the Indian Ocean. Through an exploration of where slaves exist textually, whether fictionally or as entries into archives, Lionnet argues that such investigation is the “national *devoir de mémoire*” in the case of a fictional slave in Amitov Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land* and the real instance of an archival entry relating to a slave woman who survives briefly on the Mauritian shore after the shipwreck of the *Saint Gérard* in 1744.<sup>403</sup> The shipwreck is the inspiration for Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie*, a novel that Lionnet argues is a watershed moment in the genealogies of Romanticism, Feminism and French Literature more generally, as well as forming a national myth for the island of Mauritius itself.<sup>404</sup> Searle’s looking from the Indian Ocean, gives articulation to otherwise absent narratives of encounter, migration and mixture that form the racial topography of southern Africa as it stands in relation to two major oceanic worlds.

Through a deconstruction of apartheid’s hegemonic grasp on historical frameworks for interrogating race, Searle gestures towards how racial identities, even when considered to be intrinsically linked to the national narrative, can be read as produced by myriad forces operating both in, and beyond, the national space. Searle makes a historiographical and methodological shift toward both Gilroy and Nuttall’s term “outer-national”: a perspective in which national imaginaries appropriate and integrate elements of global semiotics in the grafting of a ‘national’

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<sup>403</sup> Françoise Lionnet, “Shipwrecks, Slavery, and the Challenge of Global Comparison: From Fiction to Archive in the Colonial Indian Ocean,” *Comparative Literature* 64.4 (2012): 451.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*

narrative.<sup>405</sup> This perspectival shift offers new ways of reading for both local inflections as well as the global trajectories of race.



Figure 1. Berni Searle, *Untitled*, from the *Colour Me* series, 1998. Image courtesy of the Artist.

Gilroy's use of "outer-national" is meant to register a geo-cultural phenomenon in which ostensibly disparate places are drawn together through what he terms "diasporic intimacy."<sup>406</sup> Not only do these transnational and transcultural relationships reveal "new topograph[ies] of loyalty and identity," but also by reading for "outer-national" trajectories, "the structures and presuppositions of the nation state [are] left behind because they seem to be outmoded."<sup>407</sup> I believe Gilroy's term is resonant here as it attempts to make both a geographical as well as historiographical critical move. That is, "outer-national" expressions are ones that register

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<sup>405</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16, 17; Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 24.

<sup>406</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

“hemispheric if not global phenomena.”<sup>408</sup> It is in this gesture to de-privilege the geographical hegemony of the nation state that Gilroy articulates his larger historiographical critique, decentering the master-trope of modernity. Furthermore, it is precisely in these newly revealed topographies – regional, hemispheric, and global – that Gilroy locates a “counterculture” as well as a counterhistory of modernity.<sup>409</sup> If race and racism are inextricably entangled with the narratives of modernity grounded in the nation-state, then by extending the critical purview beyond these boundaries, one is confronted not only with new intimacies but also with histories of these counter-hegemonic positions.

For Nuttall, reading outer-national[ly] is a paradigmatic refocusing towards “geograph[ies] of worldliness” which, in turn, precipitates a shift in critical cultural models.<sup>410</sup> For example, in speaking of how creolization might function in South Africa, Nuttall provides a cartographic-like perspective through which to view this space, its histories, and the way in which it finds itself entangled in multiple lived and discursive contexts. I believe Nuttall’s “outer-national vantage point”, mentioned above, complicates how we think about the particularities of landscapes and geographies, as well as how these become entangled with discourses of the body.<sup>411</sup> Gilroy, and Nuttall’s arguments, as well as my reading of Searle’s work in this chapter, propose that this geographic shift – that is, looking at race ‘outer-national[ly]’ – precipitates commensurate shifts in historiographical perspectives and methodologies for looking at apartheid discourses which identify bodies of people and peoples’ bodies as part of a distinctly national historical project. In this way, perhaps we can posit a working towards a different narrative of modernity for South

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>410</sup> Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 23.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 24.



Africa, one not inextricably tied solely to inter-colonial violence, the rise of mineral extraction, and the honing of racially segregationist practices.

To approach the race-gendering of nation from this outer-national perspective means viewing it from the standpoint that ideas of race, processes of racialization, racisms and race discourse are not just globally circulating constructs, but that they are globally *constructed* notions, formed in the crucible of world circulation.<sup>412</sup> This in turn, not only calls attention to the diminishing power of the national category in such analyses but, and perhaps more importantly, goes a long way in deconstructing the fictive impulse within collective imaginaries to forge correlations between national spaces and racial identities. Goldberg comments that,

Racial arrangements and their implications are overwhelmingly considered a response to and product of local arrangements, relations of power and historical legacies. They seem to acquire meaning and take on significance only as a function of the specific contexts contained and constrained by the fabric of life, meaning-making and administrative arrangements indexed to a specific society, a state configuration, at a given place and time.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Though I will discuss in more detail below the visual connections Searle draws to Sarah Bartmann, the nineteenth-century Khoi woman who was captured from her home in the Western Cape, brought first to England and then to France. Bartmann's body became the source for myriad nineteenth century discourses on race and sexuality, being subjected to humiliating display as a specimen whose figure – attributed the condition of steatopygia – after being literally dissected by French anatomist George Cuvier, came to serve as the embodiment of racialized sexuality. Another result of Searle's staging of the 'coloured,' racialized, female body outside of the sway of national historiography is that the history of Bartmann's transnational travels – from South Africa, to England, to France, and only recently and posthumously, back to South Africa – comes to bear meaning on the categories of gender and racial identity not only in South Africa. Bartmann's body not only bears the unfortunate and violent inscriptions of the racist discourses applied to her, but through Searle's caustic gaze, she conjures the figure of Bartmann as body-text that continues to haunt the various national histories through which she traveled.

<sup>413</sup> David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Comparisons, Relational Racisms: Some Thoughts on Method," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32.7 (2009): 1271.

Goldberg attributes the dominance of this methodology to a post-war era rise in area studies that developed a “comparativist frame, resting ... on a presumptive model of geographic discreteness, on incontrovertible and reductive cultural, socio-political and legal uniqueness.”<sup>414</sup> In other words, by re-inscribing the discreteness and sanctity of its instances of comparison, this comparativist model creates methodological blind spots to seeing ways in which race and racism function “relationally.” That is, the comparativist method “fails to account for the interactive relation between repressive racial ideas and exclusionary or humiliating racist practices across place and time, unbounded by the presumptive divides of state boundaries.”<sup>415</sup>

Goldberg further maps race as a relational complex of various discourses, a cartography that precipitates an understanding of race as the result of dynamics between the global and the local. He writes that,

racial ideas and arrangements circulate, cross borders, shore up existing or prompt new ones as they move between established political institutions. Ideas and practices emanating from elsewhere are made local; local practices that appear home-grown more often than not have a genealogy at least in part not simply limited to the local.<sup>416</sup>

In terms of geographic significance, the material Searle uses in her intervention constructs a critical framework that lies beyond the national context of South Africa. Despite this transnational staging of race histories in South Africa, criticism of Searle’s work persistently denies a “genealogy...not simply limited to the local.”<sup>417</sup> Though critics consistently read her as

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 1272.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 1273.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

interventional *within a South African* racial discourse, this bounded scope not only neglects the transnational import of Searle's critique of racialization, it furthers persistent nationalist paradigms for talking about racial identity.

For instance, Liese Van der Watt writes on Searle that:

too often [Searle's] works are insistently read in terms of racial identity, an interpretation certainly invited by titles such as *Discoloured*, *Colour me*, *Colour matters*, *A darker shade of light*, *Off-White* and *Snow White*, but one that also seems to arrest her work in a certain place and time, specifically that of apartheid South Africa where she grew up categorised as "coloured." Here I ... argue that Searle in fact questions the very basis of identity by asserting the self as endlessly fluid, indeterminate and complex, always involved in a never-ending process of becoming. Read this way Searle's art is less about identity politics such as race for instance, than about the lifelong process of coming to terms with the estrangement that is the soul of identity.<sup>418</sup>

While van der Watt's reading proposes a laudable move away from the historiographical master trope of apartheid for interrogating South African identities, Searle's work does more than what the critic suggests. Van der Watt's analysis not only moves Searle's work away from readings of race, racialization, and gender towards a metaphysics of identity, but also gestures towards certain, potentially problematic, universal forms of subjectivity. Rather, I suggest that works such as *Colour Me*, *Discoloured* (1999-2000) and *Snow White* (2001), amongst others, be read

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<sup>418</sup> Liese van der Watt, "Identity's Lack, Identity's Excess: Two Works by Berni Searle and Minnette Vári", in *A Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994-2004: From the Permanent Collection of Iziko South African National Gallery*, ed., Emma Bedford. (Cape Town: Double Story Books, 2004): 127.

not only as inextricably entangled with the problems of race, but that it is precisely this entanglement which offers a more panoramic paradigm, one that exceeds the horizons of South African identity politics.

Indeed, Searle's work necessitates an "outer-national" reading of the ways in which South African geography is, and has historically been, the entangled apex of myriad trajectories of exchange and movement. Even as her reading gestures away from the hegemony of apartheid metanarratives, van der Watt potentially re-inscribes a national paradigm for viewing the racial dimensions of Searle's works. For instance, in van der Watt's reading of Searle's use of spice, the powders become an index of personal identity or subjectivity, read as a cumulative embodiment of various *national* culinary influences. Van der Watt writes,

[t]he spices are a reference to Searle's ancestry with whom she feels a tentative connection primarily through the kind of foods her family eats. Her maternal great-grandfathers came from Mauritius (a cook) and Saudi Arabia, bringing with them distinct culinary traditions. Food, as in many families, becomes a site of communion and continuation with her family.<sup>419</sup>

What van der Watt's reading denies is the how this particular or personal interrogation resonates with the larger and longer history of the spice trade. Race for van der Watt is a family narrative, pictured genealogically, rather than as network of relations, encounters, and creolizations. Not only does van der Watt's reading engage only the local reverberations of what was historically a globally impactful economy, but in its genealogical gestures towards Mauritius and Saudi Arabia, it also inscribes these countries as discrete geographies with uncomplicated and homogenous historical influences. This implies that, for instance, Mauritius could only be

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 124.

presumed to contribute one distinct, recognizably ‘Mauritian’ culinary tradition, rather than pointing to histories of creolization. Searle’s incorporation of spices, and hence of the Indian Ocean more broadly gestures towards another form of textuality for representing racial identities, what Vergès has poetically called the “writing on water, the layers of texts, narratives, and imagined worlds.”<sup>420</sup> This is what I argue is a non-totalizing paradigm for approaching racial and cultural analysis in South Africa.

Despite Searle’s gesture towards another cartography, and with it another register for talking about race and race history in South Africa, van der Watts’ above critique denies much of the expansiveness that Searle’s intervention might otherwise have. Indeed, there is much to be said about the critical import of a woman classified by apartheid as part of the Cape coloured community positioning her body within a spectrum of colors; a brown body re-colored, or discolored by yellows, reds, other browns. There is a subtle re-signification of both the violence and the malleability of color as racial index, an articulation that resonates well beyond the borders of South African racial politics. As Gabeba Baderoon points out, in the *Colour Me* series “the prone body of the artists appears to re-enact all the conventions of availability that slavery and colonialism had designated for bodies such as hers... The covering of yellow, brown, and red powders both hides and outlines her body. All of these tropes – accessible yet covered, veiled yet available – code her body in familiar ways.”<sup>421</sup> In this way Searle both acknowledges the economy of “shame” referred to by Wicomb above, but through a repositioning of the tropes of sexual and racial violence, also exposes the writing of nation(al) narratives on the bodies of women. Searle’s visualization of race incorporates a regional history of race and racialist practices that attend early histories of corporations of commodity exchange from the Atlantic to

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<sup>420</sup> Vergès, “Writing on Water,” 247.

<sup>421</sup> Gabeba Baderoon, “The African Oceans – Tracing the Sea as Memory of Slavery in South African Literature and Culture,” *Research in African Literatures* 40.4 (2009): 101.

the Indian Ocean. However, Searle's work points towards two important registers for approaching the history of race in South Africa, and thus articulating the "now" of this space. As I have argued thus far, the first is 'creolization' as both a historical reality and mode of historical investigation, and the second is the way in which this first mode opens up the racial discourse of South Africa to a larger, outer-national lens of critique.

Searle's work with spices employs these registers, creolization and the outer-national, through a broadening of the frame surrounding what are otherwise written as 'national' histories of race, narratives that have historically violently employed the bodies of women. The foregrounding of spices, and bodies, and spiced bodies, marks Searle's work as employing the trope of mixture, but not simply in the facile, multicultural – or "Rainbow Nation" South African equivalent – way of otherwise reconciled blending, or of 'tolerant' intimacies; Searle's spices are not to be read as the ingredients of a South African 'melting pot.' Rather, I argue that Searle's spiced body, a body narrowly confined within the category of "Coloured" under post/apartheid racial logics, inaugurates a creolization mode of investigation into the South African archive. This mode is resonant with Nuttall's call for new registers in which to write the "now" of South Africa, a call in which she explains that she is less concerned "with the term 'creolisation' as such, than with a way of thinking, a method of reading, *the possibility of a different cartography*."<sup>422</sup> In this way, Searle points towards the Indian Ocean as a space from which to think about the rigid national structure of the apartheid history of South Africa, both because of the very real histories of creolization which characterize this space, but also in order to posit creolization as a mode of reading, as an alternate map, one that exceeds the horizons of the specifically South African (geographical) body.

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<sup>422</sup> Nuttall, "City Forms," 736; emphasis mine.

The ocean, as an absent figure in Searle's work, signified only through the symbolic work of spices, commodities which have flowed with peoples across the shores of South Africa for generations, this Indian Ocean is a different cartography for the history of race in South Africa; a regional history in some ways inextricable from the history of the South African nation. Searle places South Africa within an oceanic frame of exchange, both placing and displacing the importance of apartheid as just another history of racial oppression, violence and resistance in an otherwise long and expansive regional expanse of histories. As Vergès writes, "If we look at the [Indian] ocean as a cultural space, we observe layers on layers of maps of power and resistance, which have created and still create identities, narratives, and territories."<sup>423</sup> Just as spices are an integral part of many South African cuisines and, yet, also from elsewhere – associated with the far away or the exotic – the ocean for Searle is a space that exists both outside South Africa and as integral to and entangled with the history of South Africa; both outside and part of. "African Oceans" as Baderoon frames it, over which float the spices that color Searle's body, becomes a productive space for the interrogation of South African national histories.

Isabel Hofmeyer's *PMLA* piece entitled "Universalizing the Indian Ocean," makes the important argument, that the histories of "old diasporas" in the Indian Ocean are critical historical sites which trouble the rigidity of nation-state discourses and their attendant historiographical models.<sup>424</sup> In a section provocatively entitled "Without the State: Rethinking the Nation through the Indian Ocean," Hofmeyer writes that one important vector within Indian Ocean studies, "informs current debates on transnationalism – namely, the notion that the early modern Indian Ocean world supported transregional trade without the state," and that it is possible to imagine "the cosmopolitanism of the older diasporic networks... [as] a counterpoint to

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<sup>423</sup> Vergès, "Writing on Water," 250.

<sup>424</sup> Isabel Hofmeyer, "Universalizing the Indian Ocean," *PMLA* 125.3 (2010): 722.

the narrowness of the modern nation-state system.”<sup>425</sup> If we read the use of spices in Searle’s work in light of this “different cartography” perhaps it is possible to see the way in which Searle has made apartheid part of larger history of transregional exchanges, a perspective that challenges the ethnographical imaginary of national perspectives. This challenge comes from the fact that, as Hofmeyer point out, “at every turn, the Indian Ocean complicates binaries, moving us...toward a historically deep archive of competing universalisms.”<sup>426</sup>

As Fernando Ribeiro notes, “Historically the Indian Ocean is actually a much broader expanse than is usually meant by the term...it is actually an Afroasian sea, starting in Japan and ending at the Cape of Good Hope, where it blends into the Atlantic.”<sup>427</sup> This expansive mapping resonates with Lionnet’s claim that, “The Indian Ocean has always been the most ‘global’ of all the oceans.”<sup>428</sup> If Searle’s ocean of spices is a radically different cartography than the continental racial grid of the apartheid-era South African nation-state then it is a map marked by histories of creolization rather than myths of racial purity and origin. It is also a map that in this way, is a-national, or perhaps in its histories of pre-national exchange offers a post-national horizon for racial identification. This slippage over the relationship between the concept of the nation-state and the regional history of the Indian Ocean, is why I have decided to land on the notion of this space as an “outer-national” view point, a geographical mode or register of interrogation; shifting and constantly mobile the Indian Ocean can be read as a dialectical<sup>429</sup> space.

However, while Hofmeyer’s critique of the region’s nation-based histories is fundamentally important, I agree with Lionnet’s proposition that much of the work of un-

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 723.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 722.

<sup>427</sup> Quoted in Baderoon, “The African Oceans,” 96.

<sup>428</sup> Lionnet, “Shipwrecks, Slavery, and the Challenge of Global Comparison,” 446.

<sup>429</sup> See Kamau Brathwaite’s work on “Tidialectics”; Also, see Jenny Sharpe’s “The Middle Passages of Black Migration,” *Atlantic Studies* 6.1 (2009): 97-112; Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “Tidialectics: Charting the Space/Time of Caribbean Waters,” *Span* 47 (1998): 18-38.



thinking the nation from an Indian Ocean perspective is done through histories of creolization. While Lionnet lauds Hofmeyer's gestures, quoting the South African critic's approach to "the Indian Ocean [as] a privileged vantage point from which to track... what some are calling a 'post-America,'" she points out a critical lack in scholarly treatments of the Indian Ocean, which attempt to theorize cosmopolitanism from this space while remaining silent to its characteristic processes of creolization. Lionnet notes that,

Her [Hofmeyer] method, which is not uncommon among scholars and theorists of cosmopolitanism, is symptomatic of a tendency to avoid discussions of creolization and its normative theoretical models or empirical variations (e.g. *métissage, mestizaje*, hybridity) and thus to ignore its *conceptual applicability outside fields such as linguistics and anthropology...*<sup>430</sup>

I agree with Lionnet that to take up the Indian Ocean as an archive of cosmopolitanism without attending to the way in which this oceanic space is structured by multidirectional and "minor transnational" encounters and creolizations is to miss the convergence between cosmopolitanism and the lives of creole subjects. It also misses an opportunity to discuss the ways in which creolization was both a structuring reality attendant upon the routes of the spice and slave trades marking South Africa's shores, and a 'mode' or 'register' for opening the South African archive to new histories of contact, new solidarities, through this expanded "conceptual applicability."

Searle's works, both the "Untitled" piece from *Colour Me* (Figure 1) and "Traces" (Figure 3), speak to a post/apartheid racial history of/from an Indian Ocean perspective, looking

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<sup>430</sup> Françoise Lionnet, "Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives? Globalized Oceans and Insular Identities," *Profession* 1 (2011): 24; emphasis added.

back from the ocean itself. These works point to the way in which South Africa has been part of larger transoceanic map, stretching from, at least India, across the Cape and to the Americas. An oceanic mapping of South Africa places it within a world, or global cartography, while the aesthetic, symbolic economy of Searle's coloring spices relocate apartheid along this more expansive geographical and historical spectrum. Returning to Figure 1, the viewer is confronted with both the realities of a body violently framed by technologies of color (read, 'race') as well as the histories of movement, exchange and creolization, which simultaneously undo the otherwise static violence of racial categorization. These histories of motion are also registered through the signification of the spice powders that have traveled across this ocean space.

As a signifier of apartheid's racial 'technology,' the category of 'Coloured' presents some complicated slippages within the lexicon of the South Africa state. The 1950 Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, a cornerstone of the Apartheid legal infrastructure, defines the three main racial groups of the Union through a series of taciturn negations. For instance, Section One of the Act reads, "A 'coloured person' means a person who is not a white person or a native" and a "'white person' means a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person." Defined in opposition to both ends of the racial spectrum, "Coloured" as a racial, cultural and political category fell outside the economy of what Erasmus calls the "politicization of indigeneity in Africa."<sup>431</sup> Erasmus notes further the historical and political bind of the "Coloured" category within the racial imaginary of South Africa. Erasmus writes that,

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<sup>431</sup> Zimitri Erasmus, "Creolization, Colonial Citizenship(s) and Degeneracy: A Critique of Selected Histories of Sierra Leone and South Africa," *Current Sociology* 59.5 (2011): 636.

At the Cape, the discourses of ‘miscegenation’ positioned those born of these extra-marital encounters higher up in the racial hierarchy, in relation to ‘natives’, because of their imagined biological and cultural approximation to ‘European-ness,’ and yet lower down (in relation to both ‘natives’ and ‘Europeans’ because of their associations with ‘racial impurity’” and because “they were considered *not* ancestrally indigenous.<sup>432</sup>

The slippages in definition seem to be historical ones. If “Coloured” represented a categorical anxiety to the apartheid racial imagination, then the anxiety seems to register an inability to integrate persons classified as “Coloured” within a distinct historical narrative. Denied full access to “European-ness” and all the cultural associations of the Western historical orbit and simultaneously written out of narratives of “ancestral indigene[ity]” grounding ‘native’ populations within South Africa, the ‘problem’ of “Coloured” is an historical one. Searle’s figure, heavy with the symbolic weight of a history of racialization, but also looking back at us from an oceanic vantage point replete with historical creolizations, lends historicity to the “Coloured” category. However, it is not a ‘grounded’ narrative of indigeneity or authenticity, but rather an outer-national history of oceanic movement and mixture. Rather than originary moments or myth, in Searle’s history – much like Mofolo’s treatment of Chaka discussed in the second chapter – looking back is to see entangled pasts.

This historical perspective is another reason why Lionnet’s insistence on the aspect of creolization is so important. Just as South African apartheid is relegated from its exceptional status through this broader oceanic mapping, creolization as a mode of interrogating the South African archive exposes the persistent mythologies of purity and origin within post/apartheid

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 647.

race discourse. An oceanic and creolization frame for the narrative of apartheid offers a history outside of national mythologies. This seems to be the importance of both the geographies of the ocean and the concept of creolization that Lionnet is intent upon. Creolized pasts and ocean histories offer a paradigmatic shift called for in Nuttall's prescription for a "new archive" of race in South Africa. Lionnet notes that,

As new geonarratives of globalization and universalism begin to cast longer shadows on some of the smallest and most diverse human environments of the planet, great attention to the specificities of creolization can help clarify what is at stake and yet remains hidden in the new "terraqueous" politics of place and space in what historians are now calling "the new thalassology" that is reconfiguring global studies in terms of maritime histories.<sup>433</sup>

It is this "new thalassology," an epistemology of the sea that I argue Searle brings to a discussion of race in South Africa. Without explicitly representing the ocean, Searle's images symbolically register narratives of oceanic travel, displacement, encounter and mixture that build up a frame of global oceanic reference within which her critiques of South African racial histories come to bear meaning. As Gqola has noted, Searle's "spices make allusions to processes of displacement and dispersal, and the naming of "Red, Yellow, Brown: Face to Face" *suggests multiple connections with various diasporas of colonised and/or enslaved peoples globally.*<sup>434</sup> The narratives of Indian Ocean movement, both voluntary and violent, provide a frame through which to read the history of the division of land and peoples in southern Africa.

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<sup>433</sup> Lionnet, "Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives," 39.

<sup>434</sup> Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me*, 193; emphasis mine.

It is this ‘sea thinking’ that many South African critics have recently tried to give voice to. Zimitri Erasmus, in an article tracing different African forms of creolization (both at the Cape and in Sierra Leone) as racial and cultural modes historically entangled with colonial regimes’ “politicization of indigeneity in Africa.”<sup>435</sup> In an extremely informative tracing of the history of the terms, and the corresponding historical realities of “creolization,” “creole,” “Krio,” and “Coloured,” especially as part of a larger investigation into formulations of citizenship under colonial rule, Erasmus focuses on the processes of creolization as opposed to colonial models of “ethnological thinking.”<sup>436</sup> Despite the laudable amount of research into these histories, which I argue might otherwise constitute their own archive for theorizing African forms of creolization as a discursive mode to read against the histories of post/colonial nations, Erasmus tends to rely too heavily on Caribbean articulations of creolization as ‘models’ for thinking about these African contexts. However, while noting the importance of Kamua Brathwaite’s “tidalectics” and “seametrics” Erasmus muses, though only in a footnote, that her neologism “sea-maginaries” could invigorate the more static uses of creolization.<sup>437</sup> I think there is a lot of potential in this term, “sea-maginaries,” otherwise left to the obscurity of the footnote. “Sea-maginaries” could be geographies full of productive “new archives” of slavery, of commerce, and of globalization and migration of various forms, all of which could broaden the lens of inquiry into the story of race in South Africa. But these seascapes, in mapping South Africa into another historical paradigm, could also be the space from which to imagine another future, a different imagining of race and racial identities not attendant to ‘histories’ – or mythologies – of landed-ness. Erasmus’s “sea-maginaries” points to the ways in which South African scholars are attempting to

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<sup>435</sup> Erasmus, “Creolization, Colonial Citizenship(s) and Degeneracy,” 636.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Erasmus, “Creolization, Colonial Citizenship(s) and Degeneracy,” 650; endnote number 16.

narrate and conceptualize, through ‘sea thinking’, the histories and futures of race in South Africa.

Gabeba Baderoon has also written on oceans, both the Atlantic and the Indian, as holders of a largely hidden slave imaginary of South Africa, a “subversive archive” she argues resides in “the theme of the two oceans [Atlantic and Indian] in South African literature, art and the practices of Malay food.”<sup>438</sup> Baderoon argues that in these subterfuge practices and representational tropes lay “an alternative modernity” articulated by enslaved peoples and their descendants in South Africa.<sup>439</sup> In this turn away from land(ed) perspectives to what she calls a “view of the sea” Baderoon cites Isabel Hofmeyer who writes that, because “the Atlantic seaboard [is] the site for the emergence of capitalist modernity as a transnational system...the Indian Ocean [is] the site par excellence of ‘alternative modernities.’”<sup>440</sup> Baderoon argues, against an aesthetic history of painterly representations of South Africa as a sprawling panorama extending inland from the Cape, that “If we turn to face the water” a southern African oceanic perspective presents modernities located in and across these waters, and “generated among enslaved and enserfed people in South Africa through...a ‘two-ocean consciousness.’”<sup>441</sup>

If Baderoon prescribes turning to face the ocean, many of Searle’s works present a face looking back at us, the viewer on land, *from* the ocean. We can read her spiced body as an ‘oceanic body’ heavily, and even violently, burdened by the histories of this space, staring fiercely back at the land and the landed looker on. Searle stages another subjectivity here which, in Baderoon’s “two-ocean consciousness” conception, is larger than the geography of South Africa; the peninsular Cape comes to feel small, both historically and geographically, when

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<sup>438</sup> Baderoon, “The African Oceans – Tracing the Sea as Memory,” 89.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Isabel Hofmeyer quoted in Baderoon, “The African Oceans,” 91.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 91.

caught in Searle's complicated and indicting stare from beneath the spices of an ocean history. Just as Gqola writes of "food-space as memory landscape" the history of South Africa might be more productively framed by the 'trans-oceanic.'<sup>442</sup> Ultimately, the ocean for Baderoon, as for Searle, is both the water "of the middle passage, but also of cosmology, memory, and desire, tracked in the movement, language, and culture of enslaved and dominated people."<sup>443</sup> As Gqola writes with regards to Searle's work and food communities in South Africa,

Food histories for Cape Malay/Capetonian Muslim societies connect with the history that the famous spice route was also the slave route; that processes of cuisine differentiation for the European colonial project were linked with the brutal transportation of people from the same places... Thus, the blending of turmeric, garlic or cumin into Dutch/English colonial society, or the absorption of piri-piri and allied peppers into Portuguese (and later Dutch/English) colonial cuisine went hand in hand with the enslavement of Asians And Africans.<sup>444</sup>

In this way, the ocean and spices, while presenting a critical perspective outside the history of the South African nation, does so through symbolically referencing violent histories of enslavement and forced migration housed in these oceanic archives. As Baderoon notes elsewhere, "the sea is an ambiguous theme."<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me*, 167.

<sup>443</sup> Baderoon, "The African Oceans," 91.

<sup>444</sup> Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me*, 168.

<sup>445</sup> Baderoon, "The African Oceans," 93.

## **Outside of National Languages of Race: Searle's Ethnography with/out Bodies**

Searle, in her titular provocation to “Colour Me,” also subverts the actual language of the apartheid national discourse. The imperative tense of this series’ title takes on the taxonomical lexicon of apartheid racial categories without, I argue, falling into the trap of nostalgia common to such cultural and racial appropriations. Just as the figure of the ocean is not an uncomplicated signifier in this imaginary of the sea, nor is coloured a straightforward appropriation for Searle. Coloured, with its entangled legacy within the racial rubrics of the apartheid system, certainly does not lack in violence, as is seen from the interaction between the coloring spice and the artist’s body in Figure 1. In this untitled still from the *Colour me* series, Searle has lain motionless against a white background while the powder of cayenne pepper has fallen from above, leaving her body alternately covered and exposed and creating a corporeal topography that speaks to the history of racial categorization, the commodification of humans and labor, and state oppression both in South Africa and across the southern Atlantic and Indian Oceans. For the still photograph, Searle shifts her head to the side and brings the viewer into her implicating gaze. To do so she has opened her eyes, which seem to speak from the pain of lying beneath this, at least symbolically, restrictive powder. Note the bursting capillaries at the edges of her eyes, the result of the spice’s contact. As viewers, we imagine the pain, the burning, and the welling tears behind these otherwise fierce eyes. Since, her mouth remains covered by this powdery topography, it is the eyes that ‘speak’ in this piece. The artist’s mouth remains silenced, while the eyes articulate the titular call to “colour me.” As the bloodshot continues to spread in lightening-like streaks across her eyes, they remain motionless, locked in a defiant stare with the now complicit viewer. If this is an appropriation of “Coloured” than it also exposes the problems and the violence associated with such retrievals, rather than staging an uncomplicated nostalgia.



Likewise spices are not an unambiguous trope for deconstructing apartheid myths, as Baderoon's reading of *Colour Me* suggests that, "the brutal reality of slavery is subsumed under the luxury and aesthetics of spice."<sup>446</sup>

I now move to consider the *Snow White* video installation which was commissioned by Forum for African Arts for the exhibition *Authentic/Ex-centric* during the 49<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2001 (Figure 2). In the opening scene, the artist's naked body is set against a dark background. The work is shot on dual cameras; one positioned facing the artist, the other looking down from directly above. In the initial moments of the video, the viewer struggles to find discreteness: overhead lighting gives the body some definitional relief, but the stage – the frame to the act – is indistinct; it seems to perpetuate beyond the artist into infinity. Thus, what might be read as the *mise-en-scène* of this performance takes on aspects of what might more appropriately be termed a *mise-en-abîme* – read in the etymological sense of the word, which places the object into an infinite space. This prompts several questions, such as: what is the framing logic of this body? How is it to be read? What does it signify if there is no given framing logic? Suddenly a white powder, which the viewer might recognize as flour, begins to fall down from above (beyond view), collecting on and around the artist's body. She kneels passively as this white powder rains down on and over her body, until it has collected atop her head and created a circle around her on the floor. A frame of reference suddenly emerges, whereby viewers can attempt to make sense of what is happening. This frame of reference provides viewers with a fleeting sense of narrative comfort; the mollification of a *mise-en-scène*, an aesthetic relief through which to make sense and judgments.

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<sup>446</sup> Baderoon, "The African Oceans," 94.

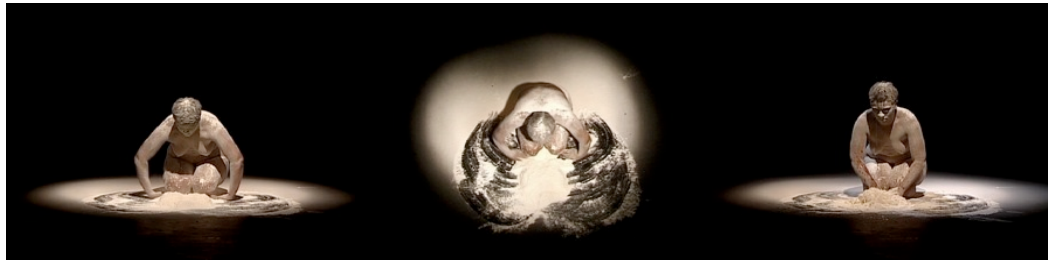


Figure 2. Berni Searle, video stills from *Snow White* installation, 2001, dimensions variable.

bernisearle.com. Images courtesy of the Artist.

However, just as quickly, one might feel pangs of guilt at finding solace in a diegetic frame that structures the symbolic narrative of European colonization and the erasure of indigenous peoples. Borrowing from Jane Blocker, van der Watt notes that Searle's works perform certain "aesthetics of disappearance."<sup>447</sup> Interrogating the elements involved in this *disappearing act*, I contend that this "aesthetics of disappearance" is actually a politics of the *present* (in both the physical and temporal sense). That is, the relief, or that which provides contrast to the variously appeared or disappeared aesthetic object, is a political frame of the present. The viewer is implicated in a drama of judgment – how he/she reacts in the *present* moment of viewing to the framing element of the flour, or rather, how he/she reads and makes judgment on his/her moral associations – is a result of what is *present*, ultimately determining the various ethical and political interpretations of the performance. The viewer is forced to come to terms with the racial present based on an aesthetics created by the presence of a women's body white-washed by powder.

This awkward space, where the meaning of the work is alternately made or unmade, is dependent on the flour itself: the flour is both the element of the frame in which meaning is made, as well as sign, or material, within that frame. Like the spices of the *Colour Me* series, the flour operates as object of the domestic, local space – an object of the quotidian and the ritualistic – as well as the extra-ordinary and the global; that which has come from outside. Indeed in terms of staging, the flour is both element within the diegetic frame as well as the very material of that frame itself; both inside and outside of the signification of the performance.

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<sup>447</sup> Liese van der Watt, "Identity's Lack, Identity's Excess," 126.

While we, the viewer, make judgments and sense, the artist collects the flour around her and makes bread. Read in racial terms, the whiteness of the flour, like the color of the spice, resonates (again with attention to the oscillation between structures, between body and discourse, between frame and symbol, between national and global) in ways that include both phenotypic variations and phenomenological realities experienced locally, as well as the epistemologies of race and classification that have historically interred themselves globally following the expansion of economic flows across the geographies of southern Africa, from the Atlantic to the Indian Oceans; a transoceanic frame.

Searle's *Traces*, also from the *Colour me* series (Figure 3), productively stages these negotiations between the material and immaterial and between the present and the absent. The work is presented as two series of photographic installations, which hang in rows. In the series hanging at the back of the installation, Searle's body is present, masked by a heap of spice powders that have accumulated over her. In the set of print hanging nearest to the viewer, the body is removed; its trace is discernable only through the accumulated powders that form an uncanny topographical outline of the absent body. Underneath each print is an image of a weighing scale carrying an amount of spice. In the more distant set of prints, the viewer is confronted with the intense materiality of race as it has been violently applied to bodies, while in the front series, he/she is forced to make sense of these racial discourses without the particularities that might be offered by the image of a body. While Rory Bester notes that there is an ethnographic resonance in *Traces*, there are potentially multiple statements on ethnography made in this work.<sup>448</sup> I believe the set of prints hanging in front begs the question of what ethnography *without* a body looks like; a haunting of the very discourse of ethnography itself perhaps?

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<sup>448</sup> Rory Bester, "Floating free", in *Berni Searle, Standard Bank Young Artist Award Catalogue*, 2003.

Searle's absent body, presented to us by the outline of spice, is an indictment against discourses on identity construction whose processes remain irrespective of the bodies they frame. As Gqola asks, "How does a Blackwoman represent the embodiment of diaspora artistically, given the histories of 'grotesque' spectacle and 'exotic' Oriental that attach to dominant historic representations of African and Asian bodies in creative and epistemic regimes which support diasporisation."<sup>449</sup> In the space between a body presented for viewing, for inspection, and the potential horrors implied in the missing body, there is the one constant, the scale at the bottom of the image. The figure of measurement, of commodity trafficking and (ev-)valuator of exchanges and equivalences speaks the language of race for bodies that are silenced. Yet, the silent, absent body reverberates across this space forcing the viewer to witness the violence of its absence.

Gqola, along with others, has noted that the case of Sarah Bartmann, pejoratively known as the 'Hottentot Venus,' is emblematic of the ways in which "The entry...of Khoi people generally, into historiography was through their corporeality."<sup>450</sup> Gqola's observation forces us to recognize that colonialist, racist discourses were founded upon the (dis-)figuring of, particularly women's, 'native' bodies. Gqola asks, "If the general hegemonic status of Black bodies has been spectacle...what happens when the most famously embodied Black subject is imagined creatively in ways that do not foreground her corporeality?"<sup>451</sup> In other words, how to represent Bartmann and other women of color whose bodies have been made to perform as fulcrums upon which racist and nationalist narratives have rested? Indeed, Gqola asks specifically, "Given the near total absence of information about her [Bartmann] person, (how

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<sup>449</sup> Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me*, 193.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

then) is she representable. And what available tropes are there for this representation in ways unlike those systems that mythologise her?”<sup>452</sup>

Offering a potential example of “(not) representing Bartmann,” Gqola notes that Zoë Wicomb’s *David Story* (2001)<sup>453</sup> offers a meditation on the complexities of (un)belonging that attend to the category of coloured as well as to the historical figure of Bartmann. In the novel, the protagonist David’s refusal to imagine a homogenous, or coherent colourness, is located precisely around the figures of both Bartmann and Krotoä, the earliest recorded indigenous translator between the Khoi and the Dutch. Rather than figures of racial originariness or the social and scientific classificatory stasis to which each figure was subjected, in Wicomb’s novel both these figures are written under the sign of opacity. David’s story – which is also not his own, mediated through a scribe or amanuensis – insists on a beginning that is not an origin. While David is adamant that *his* story begins with these two women more than a century before him, neither Bartmann nor Krotoä are figures imagined by David to embody totality or, as Gqola notes, “stability.”<sup>454</sup> Despite David’s insistence on their inclusion, and much to his scribe’s frustration at the anachronism, “David’s recognition of Sarah Bartmann as important is neither about the ‘recovery’ of indigeneity nor the celebration of ‘colourness.’”<sup>455</sup> Perhaps this is a ‘retrieval’ that in many ways comes to function similarly to Thomas Mofolo’s imagining of Chaka.

Similarly, Searle’s figure does not instantiate a politics of reclamation, nor of a politics of appropriation in the context of a national racial classification. Rather Searle’s imperative implodes the historical language of the racialist apartheid nation. Her call to “colour me” (!) is at

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>453</sup> Zoë Wicomb, *David’s Story*. New York: Feminist Press CUNY, 2001.

<sup>454</sup> Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me*, 73.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 75.

once a historical account of the postures of availability colonialism forced upon women; postures of sexual violence that produced offspring the colonial episteme initially attempted to capture with discourses of degeneration and miscegenation, and were later to be totalized under the apartheid signifier “coloured.” But Searle’s titular imperative is also a provocation that exceeds the narrative of the apartheid nation. Responding to the ways in which racialist narratives of belonging were projected onto the body, and especially onto the bodies of women as the supposed carriers of degeneration, Searle’s spiced body offers another narrative of women as both victims and agents of/within a regional oceanic history of the rise of global capitalism. In doing so, Searle gestures towards the global histories of the way in which national(ist) discourses of race and gender have become entangled around the bodies of women. Searle’s “Traces” responds aesthetically to Anne McClintock’s critique that, “All nationalisms are gendered; all are invented; and all are dangerous...in the sense that they represent relations to political power and to the technologies of violence.”<sup>456</sup>

If the (racial) bodies of women have been made to be the silent/silenced receptacles of origin myths, whether racial or national, or both, then Searle’s figure both gives historical voice to these silences, while also debunking the supposed connection between race and nation so frequently supported by/on the bodies of women. Moreover, if Searle’s images evoke the histories of enslavement and epistemic and physical violence encapsulated in the figure of Sarah Bartmann, then the “tropes” Searle uses to (not) represent this figure – especially the absent body in the spiced outline of “Traces” – unshackles this figure in many ways from the narratives of national and racial origin to which she has been historically subjected. Searle’s absent body both conjures the un-knowability of Bartmann, while gesturing towards this figure through the outline

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<sup>456</sup> Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race and Nationalism” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Eds., Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 89.

of spices implicates the very epistemes of valuation and economies of exchange through which Bartmann's body was objectified. Again, in Searle's figuring the spices, in offering form to Bartmann's absent form, give her a historical subjectivity outside the narratives of conquest of the Khoi peoples; a narrative foundational to the creation of many South African myths of national becoming.

Wicomb has also argued elsewhere that as "an icon of postcoloniality, Baartman's case can be seen as one of several initiatives towards reconstructing a national cultural past."<sup>457</sup> Even her posthumous return to South Africa, from Musée de l'homme in Paris, was couched in calls of a national (and often even more narrowly as an ethnic) recuperation, a repatriation, that the "violated body should be covered with native soil, given a decent Christian burial in her own country, specifically in the western Cape where she originates..."<sup>458</sup> While Wicomb notes that, "the project of recovery is propelled by the ignominy of sexualized display before the imperial eye," the discourses around the repatriation of Bartmann's body also reinforces the fact that postcolonial and post-apartheid memory projects were deeply nationalist, and equally invested in the recuperation of female indigeneity.<sup>459</sup>

Perhaps Searle articulates a new language for speaking about race, one that gestures towards silenced histories, and missing geographies erased from the map of South African racial debates. The topographies of spice surrounding the artist's body cause the latter to signify a geographical figure, and in doing so Searle's work offers a way to read for both the geographies of pain specific to the racial oppression of apartheid as well as how this specific racial regime fits into the larger, regional and even global geography of racialism. In this way, *Traces* stages what Nuttall calls "new ethnographies," or "new tools of analysis" for deconstructing the apartheid

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<sup>457</sup> Wicomb, "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa," 91.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.



master narrative blanketing South African histories of race. Searle’s new ethnography forces us to make sense of race, to ‘weigh’ race, with out the weight of the racialized body; what is evaluated in this type of ethnography is ethnography itself and its history in the making of race.



Figure 3. Berni Searle, *Traces* from the *Colour Me* series, 1999, bernisearle.com. Image courtesy of the Artist.

In the rear set of prints, the critique is clearer: economies of race – which themselves have been fueled by ethnographic knowledge production – in South Africa have produced systems of valuation according to coloration. However, the ‘ethnography of the trace’ presented by the prints in front, represents materiality in another way: as suggestion – again as both an “aesthetics of disappearance” and as a politics of the present, or the conspicuously *not present*.<sup>460</sup> Notice the way in which the spice seems to have penetrated the outline of the body, particularly near the shoulder – implying an in-corporation, a trace left on the inside (Figure 4, detail). This

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<sup>460</sup> Liese van der Watt, “Identity’s Lack, Identity’s Excess,” 126.

work is, arguably, about the unmistakable materiality of the discourse itself. Unlike other works in the series, this first set, without the artist's body, is all frame. While the back series comments on how bodies have been measured by the scales of racism's economies, the front series presents a direct indictment against the logic of race, the very epistemological conditions in which valuations of people can be made; the latter being more of a global critique than a specifically South African one. Taken together both sets that make up "Traces" are a visual refrain, echoing Stoler's claim that, "Over and over again, it is women who seem to loudly attest. Gender may inflect how ruination is embodied and who bears the debris."<sup>461</sup> Indeed, Searle's installation points towards the particular inflections of both *how* the living remnants of colonial debris are borne and *who* bears them. Searle's body, figured as a topography of "ruination" bears witness to the living presence of apartheid racisms in the post-apartheid present, while also being the collection site for the imperial debris of spices, which continue to circulate across the transoceanic littoral of South Africa. Not only is Searle's figure an "embodied ruin," one which attests to the fact that, "specific sorts of people [were/are] abandoned by specific state policies and historical acts...of racialized...empire," but her spiced female figure also foregrounds the particular racialist grammar of apartheid and other colonial nation projects, which relied on the figure of women to buttress their racialist ontologies.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Laura Ann Stoler, *Imperial Debris*, 17.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



Figure 4. Berni Searle, detail from *Traces* in the *Colour Me* series, 1999. bernisearle.com. Image courtesy of the Artist.

### **Spice Archives**

Searle's works suggest that spices and their interaction with the body operate as an archive of racial identity in South African. In doing so, Searle answers another of Nuttall's calls for, in addition to "new ethnographies," the need of "new archives." Indeed, the 'spiced body' and 'spiced archive' together function along a similar dialectical divide that Achille Mbembe proposes is inherent to the archive. On the one hand, Mbembe explains that the archive is the building, the housing, or domestic(-ated) space of historical knowledge.<sup>463</sup> However, the archive is also the document, the record of what has, or what might be imagined, to have happened. It is both the monument and the material that composes that monument. One is meant

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<sup>463</sup> Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits", in *Refiguring the Archive*, edited by Carolyn Hamilton, V. Harris, M. Pickover, G. Reid, R. Saleh & J. Taylor. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 19.

to recognize the structure as cohesive, as a totality. Just as with memorials and monuments that variegate the historical topography of a nation, the statue or the archive (the building) imposes an aesthetic and semiotic wholeness onto the fragmented narratives that are bound up in the bronze or concrete. This architectural integration is meant to structure one's apprehension of the documents collected inside. The aesthetics of architectural comprehensiveness suggest a temporal wholeness in constructing the narrative of nations. On the other hand, Mbembe observes that the "status" of the archive "is also an imaginary one:"

[n]o archive can be the depository of the entire history of a society, of all that has happened in that society. Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order, one after another, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end. A montage of fragments thus creates an illusion of totality and continuity. ... just like the architectural process, the time woven together by the archive is the product of a composition.<sup>464</sup>

Searle's work prompts the viewer to consider the status of the body in similar ways to Mbembe's archive – in other words, to consider its status as "imaginary." In contrast to conceptions of the body as a cohesive unit, Searle stages the body as fundamentally fragmentary, giving image to the multivalent narratives, or fragments of stories, carried on and in each body. This deconstruction of the body's fictive wholeness reveals the crucible of local, transnational, and regional forces by which bodily images are formed. In each frame of the *Untitled* prints from the *Colour Me* series (Figure 5), Searle's body is rendered un-whole by the variegated coverage

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 21.

of spice powders. See also, “Girl” from the *Colour Me* series (Figure 6). The alternate coverage and exposure of skin creates a newly revealed topography, only rendered visible by bridging the narrative gap between the body and the spice. As with the ‘architecture-archive’ that holds the ‘document-archive,’ the viewer can make sense of the spiced body only in that space where this image creates a new, imaginary narrative wholeness; the space between where the body exists and how the spice came to it. The multiple frames, as well as the varied spices each with distinct coloration, makes it clear that any sense of wholeness garnered from this visual experience comes from what Mbembe terms “craft[ed] links.”<sup>465</sup> The viewer is thus prompted to make sense of Searle’s body only in relation to the multiple colors and types of spices – a perception that is compounded by the fact that these powders come from equally varied places. This level of viewer implication is certainly echoed by both the coverage of Searle’s mouth by the spice (Figure 1), and the titular imperative to “colour me.”



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<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 21.

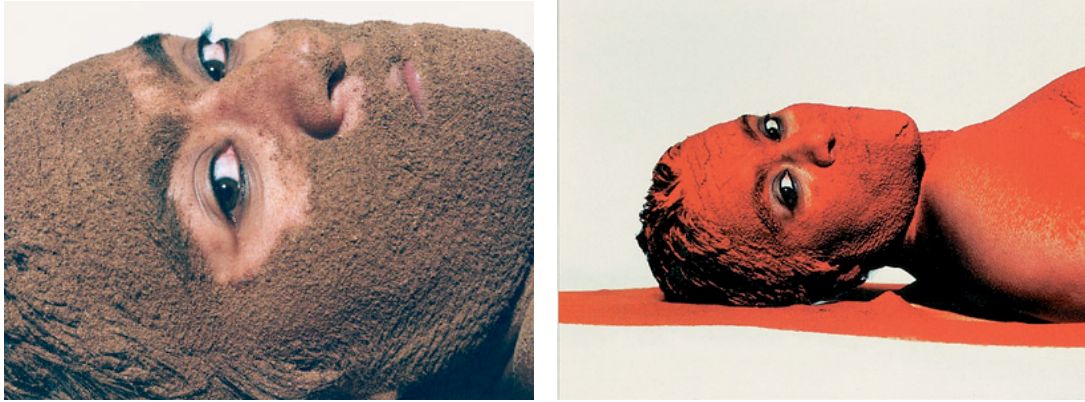


Figure 5. Berni Searle, *Untitled* from the *Colour Me* series, 1998. [bernisearle.com](http://bernisearle.com). Image courtesy of the Artist.

By staging spices as an archive for histories of racialization, Searle places the contemporary South African body beyond the sole purview of apartheid's historiographical hegemony. However, Searle does not privilege the spice trade as a cohesive historical paradigm. As another of Searle's more recent titles (*Looking back*, 2008) suggests, "looking back" precipitates a kaleidoscopic vision of history, one in which constructing clarity in the present requires acts of narrative construction and contrivance. Searle's works act as reminders not to privilege one historiographical trope in this narrative act. The national imagination provides historical, narrative (and fictional) wholeness; in much the same way as the bricks and mortar housing the documents of the archive imposes (fictional or symbolic) wholeness on the historical fragments they protect. What Searle accomplishes is not merely the deconstruction of the apartheid archive as a coherent master narrative; she also exposes the global historical economies which authored/authorized the very space of possibility for the apartheid system.

Another, productive way to think about Searle's work as an interrogation of archives, is through Michel Foucault's use of the term "archive" to articulate a system of enunciability.

Foucault conceptualizes the archive as neither “the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person ... nor ... the institution that is responsible for their preservation.”<sup>466</sup> Foucault imagines the relational travel of discourses, accumulating to form a “system of statements.”<sup>467</sup> This discursive system, Foucault continues, means that statements (textual and visual) have “appeared by virtue of a whole set of relations that are peculiar to the discursive level;” indeed, “instead of being adventitious figures grafted as it were, in a rather haphazard way, on to silent processes, they are born in accordance with specific regularities.”<sup>468</sup> In this sense, the spices Searle uses are an archive of transnational trafficking; an economy that transmitted and cultivated ideas on race, culture, history, and the categorization of peoples according to race and/or gender. Searle’s spices, not inherent or indigenous – but rather, to use Foucault’s term “adventitious” – are indexes to epistemes and geographies that have authorized various articulations of power, oppression, categorization, and racisms – a discourse of which apartheid is a particular South African inflection. Again, Goldberg notes that,

[t]he local may provide a particular timbre and colour to the ideas’ reference or application, their sound and style. It gives *voice* to racial expression and racist arrangement in specific ways. But, while the accent may be unique, as too the semantic content and even the syntax, their influences and implications most often are not.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Archive and the Historical *a priori*” in *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) 128, 129.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 128, 129.

<sup>469</sup> Goldberg, “Racial Comparisons, Relational Racisms,” 1273.

Thus, Searle's work does indeed "look back" to the global attenuations of a historical system of race/racialization, while also exploring the particular inflections of its South African articulation, and in this way tells a different tale of race in this space.



Figure 6. "Girl" from *Colour Me*. 1998. Berni Searle. Image courtesy of the Artist.

In this discussion of archives and discourse, I am not de-privileging the importance of materiality in Searle's works. The viewer cannot deny that he/she is seeing a woman's body; a woman classified as "coloured" under apartheid racialist logics. However, in my view, Searle's works un-write apartheid as the penultimate sign, both epistemic and geographical, under which the semiotics of post-apartheid identity must be given significance. Apartheid, with its pseudo-scientific mythology of racial origins and discreteness, is seen as part of a discursive history that has not only global reverberations, but, indeed, was founded in the very crisscrossing of transnational exchange across its landmass of southern Africa, but also from the Atlantic to the



Indian Ocean. Searle prompts viewers to look to Foucault's "system of enunciation," that authorizing episteme within which the South Africa's articulation of race and racism under apartheid was formulated.

Searle's work thus offers an interrogation of the global positioning of South Africa *vis-à-vis* the histories of the spice trade as well as the unique inflections of claiming a 'coloured identity' in South Africa. However, as I have shown, the scope of her work is more expansive than this strictly national interrogation. The body of criticism that surrounds her work tends to focus solely on its racial and gender resonances within a South African context, and thereby reinscribes a hegemonic apartheid historiography. By extension, I have argued that Searle's work is an intervention into race and gender studies that thinks beyond the national (while not erasing the latter). In these works, the local development, application, experience of race is always involved in a dialogic production between local and transnational forces. By using spices as subject matter of her work, Searle succeeds in opening up the South African fields of both race theory as well as aesthetic practices. In other words, Searle's works, and particularly the *Colour Me* series, stages the productive potential of an aesthetics that does not plumb the depths of a strictly national genealogy in search of a contemporary critique of race. Instead, Searle's work explodes the semiotic and historiographical horizons of such inquiries, registering the myriad southern hemispheric experiences of the spice trade just as relevant for articulating race histories of South Africa as, say, the origins of National Party ascension in the first half of the twentieth-century. In doing so, Searle makes a significant contribution towards moving South African visual imagination of race and gender identity in a post-apartheid context beyond that very designate – that is, beyond the spatial and historical constrictions of a post-apartheid South

African context and into the realm of more transnational and global histories of relation and exchange.

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