One’s Place: Privilege and Responsibility in (Post-)Apartheid White Writing

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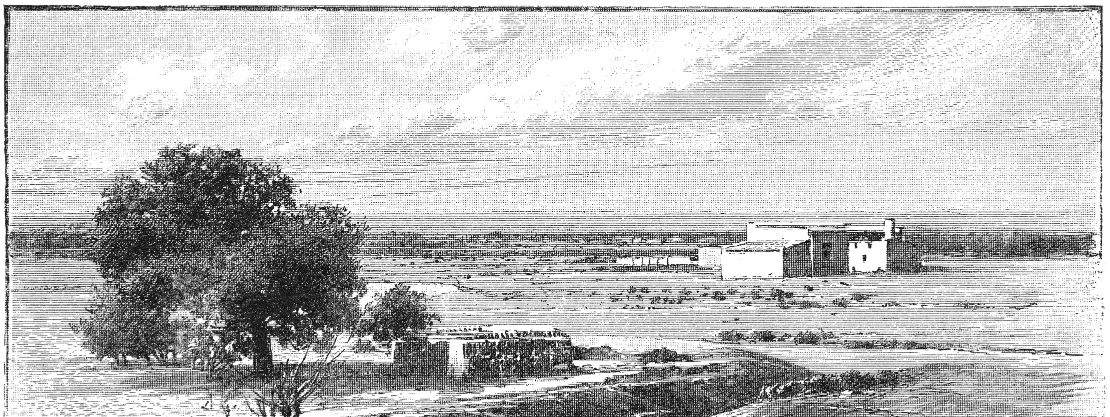

Eine Burenfarm in Transvaal.

One's Place

Privilege and Responsibility in (Post-)Apartheid White Writing

Hester Zijlstra

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MA Thesis Media Studies - Cultural Analysis: Literature and Theory

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Wood engraving of a boer farm in South Africa, 1899

Daar is ‘n spook in die huis.

The house is haunted.

– André Brink

He has an air of proud reserve, or perhaps it’s disdain,

seeming somehow to be looking down on the white pair,

even though he’s half submerged in the ground.

– Damon Galgut

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Abstract

The era of Western colonialism and slavery has ended, but racism and discrimination still exist and the privileged position that White people still have in Western society makes it difficult for people of colour to trust them, no matter these White people's often good intentions. Similarly, but also in a more visibly extreme way, the struggle against racism in South Africa did not end with the abolition of Apartheid. Scholars think differently about what the appropriate response would be of White South Africans to their dark history. Should they withdraw in silence and humility? Alternatively, should they play an active role in the future of the country? And how? From her position as a White Dutch woman, Zijlstra has explored the issues of race, identity and progressive change in South African literature. For South African authors, silence was never an option, but they were nonetheless aware of their ambiguous position. With the analysis of three novels from such authors, this thesis aims to contribute to a nuanced view on both the controversy around the position of well-intentioned White people in a position of privilege, and their possibilities to take responsibility.

The theorists who inform the analysis are Michael Rothberg (2019) with his concept of the implicated subject, Melissa Steyn (2001) with her research on the fragmentation of White identity in South Africa after Apartheid, Shannon Sullivan (2006) with her theory on unconscious racial habits, and Zoë Wicomb (2018) with her critical eye on myths of traditional culture and identity, as well as on the responsibility of literary authors. The first chapter deals with how Nadine Gordimer problematized the White privileged position in her novel *Burger's Daughter* (1979). The chapter considers the importance of both growing awareness about a position of implication and finding new ways of solidarity. The second chapter argues how André Brink's novel *The Rights of Desire* (2000) can be read as to stress the importance for White people to keep making themselves heard, even from a dubious position. In the academic world, deconstruction and self-reflection come forward as two important pillars. Where the novel fails to be deconstructive on one level, it is more successful on another. In the third chapter, the novel *The Promise* (2021) by Damon Galgut is argued to confirm that White privilege will inevitably be sustained by White attempts to do good. However, when it is not an option to withdraw in silence, one can use White privilege against itself.

The considerations about responsibility in the three novels all come down to the conclusion that contemplation is needed on White people's "proper" place in Black people's struggle for equality as well as reflection on how much space Black people are granted in stories and on a parallel level in the real world. The novels stress the importance of reflection and presence of White people, instead of silence. These conclusions offer an encouragement to keep openly contemplating the role of White people on the path to full racial equality.

Keywords: White privilege, place, responsibility, Apartheid, deconstruction

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Introduction

1. WHITE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

In recent years, debates about White privilege and racism have become highly topical. People of colour increasingly find support for their stress on the importance of understanding how histories of slavery and colonialism have shaped the world and still impact the present. For example, the transnational movement Black Lives Matter caused quite a stir, not only in the United States where the movement is originated, but also in other parts of the world, as in the Netherlands from where I am writing this thesis.

Diversity and inclusiveness are now high on the agenda in many areas of Dutch society. It is noticeable that in advertisements for clothing, a wider variety of skin colours are being represented. In job vacancies, a question that might now be encountered is how a future employee can contribute to more diversity in the company. Higher education institutions have installed diversity commissions with the objective to make everyone feel accepted. However, not all of these well-intended attempts to take responsibility in forming a more equal society prove to be effective, or even serve a genuine goal.

A concept like "diversity" appears to be an improvement over the strategy to simply ignore colour and force the idea of everyone as equals (which fails to acknowledge existing cultural and socio-economic differences). However, scholar Sara Ahmed interviewed several diversity workers in higher education who testify that this seemingly better concept can provide an illusion of "happy diversity" behind which inequalities can persist (Ahmed 70-73). In that case, diversity as an initial means to take responsibility for injustice results in positive advertising of a notion that the issues are already solved. (There are also people who believe the issues were never even there. Social and cultural anthropologist Gloria Wekker, in her book *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (2016), argues that a persistent denial of racism in the Netherlands helps to maintain White privilege.) On the contrary, society is still far from a resolution to racism and inequality.

Furthermore, the privileged position that White people still have makes it difficult for people of colour to trust them. They often do not appreciate it when White people speak on their behalf. For example, the choice for a White presenter for a racism debate on Dutch television in 2020 caused much controversy. Jort Kelder was said to have made racist statements himself and would lack the knowledge required for such an important topic, as was outlined in the overview of responds in *NRC* (Takken). Another example is that of Marieke Lucas Rijneveld who received a lot of criticism when he accepted the assignment to make a Dutch translation of the inauguration poem for president Biden that was written by Amanda Gorman, an American Black poet and activist who writes about issues of race and marginalization. Unlike Kelder, Rijneveld had experience with being part of a marginalised group, as member of the LGBTQ+ community, but he was criticised in spite of that. Eventually he decided to withdraw and leave the translation to someone of colour.

At first view, it can only be a positive development that many White attempts to do good are now held under a magnifying glass and that people beware of how White privilege is maintained. However, a news report by NOS confirms that there are also sounds in the media and in politics that “woke” is becoming too extreme and that it restricts freedom of speech (Bhageloe). Whether that last statement has any legal ground or not, it should be noted that with hate mails to diversity officers on universities and aggressive posts on social media (“Medewerker diversiteit”), the opposition to woke has also embodied extremism.

Following the desire to leave the polarised discussion behind, I would like to reflect a little on the issue from my own experience as a university student. I am Dutch, White, and have highly educated parents. Therefore, one can reasonably say that I come from a privileged background. But I never thought of myself as always having lived in a completely White bubble. The elementary school I went to was very mixed and I can even recall teachings about transatlantic slavery, classes I now understand to be very rare and mostly inexistent. Nonetheless, the Master Cultural Analysis: Literature and Theory opened my eyes further to such histories and injustices that, in all honesty, I previously did not give much thought. I furthermore found it to be enriching that CALT is an international master to which students from all over the world can participate.

However, amongst the international mix of people I also noticed a development about which I am dubious. I found some White students from privileged backgrounds were afraid to speak about certain topics when there were also students present with a background in countries with oppressive regimes or a history as European colony. They were afraid of saying the wrong thing, because they cannot know what it is like to be in that position. No matter how well intentioned these White students were, they did not trust their own thoughts. Of course, I did not want to say the wrong thing too, but I also felt a bit defiant. I do not think it to be a healthy basis for a conversation if part of the group decides against contributing. I hope this thesis will help me to better understand why it is certain people’s opinion that someone White can never do or say anything “right” with regard to the topics of racism and discrimination. But I also want to consider how one might go around this and what new strategies could be applied by White people to bring the discussion further and be able to add something of meaning to the recently strongly revived struggle for equality.

In this thesis, South Africa will serve as a case study because developments in this country can be especially instructive in the search for a better understanding of both the ambiguous role of well-intentioned White people and their possibilities to positively contribute to a more equal world. One reason for this is that South Africa's history of injustice is still part of living memory. In the Netherlands, for example someone like me might easily overlook how the history of slavery is still working through in the present. In South Africa the implications of slavery and segregation are still very palpable, even in the more comfortable everyday lives of people who are both White and privileged. In this thesis, I intend to focus on White literary authors in South Africa in order to learn from their representations of what it means to take responsibility as a White person.

Indeed, White South African writers of anti-apartheid literature played a very important role in the creation of a climate where change in the country became possible. As scholars Eep Francken and Luc Renders outline in their book *Skrywers in die Strydperk* (which is Afrikaans for "writers on the battlefield"), one part of South African literature, the Afrikaans literature, developed from supporting the Afrikaner nationalist views which resulted in Apartheid, to undermining them. This brings me to another reason to focus on South Africa. The sense has grown that well-intentioned White people in a privileged position are not being helpful with their contributions to the debate and to literature about racism, but White authors in South Africa simply had no other choice but to write about Apartheid. This regime influenced all aspects of life in the country. There was simply no space left for expression of more individual emotions and experiences. "The conscience of the writer urged him to use his pen in the stride for a democratic, non-racist South Africa" (Francken and Renders 172, my translation). This social commitment is still present in contemporary South African literature. Damon Galgut, of whom a novel will be discussed in this thesis, describes it as a curse all writers in South Africa feel. They are all expected to pay attention to their history, also because the struggle for equality has not yet finished (interview in *Trouw,* 3 Dec. 2022).

As a result, White South African writers have been forced to reflect on how their attempts to take responsibility would be effective and to reconcile themselves with the privileges they themselves benefited from during the segregated times. What insides rose from this? What can we learn from them? Drawing from their novels, this thesis aims to contribute to a nuanced outlook on the possibilities and difficulties for White people to take responsibility.

2. A HISTORY OF ANTI-APARTHEID LITERATURE

I can in no way do justice to the long and complicated history of South Africa and the role of literature in this introduction, but I will provide the background information necessary for readers to understand my argument in the coming chapters. Next to Francken and Renders' overview of South African literature, I base myself on the book *A History of South Africa* by historian Leonard Thompson of which a revised and updated version has been published in 2014. His exploration of South Africa's history focuses primarily on the experiences of Black people. I also draw from Melissa Steyn's outline of South African history in *"Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To Be": White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (2001). Steyn spends a chapter on what characterizes the Apartheid version of Whiteness.

In 1652 the Dutch East India Company founded a refreshment station at the Cape of Good hope. Since the British took over the Cape Colony from the Dutch in 1795, White identity in this area has been shared by these two major groups from Europe, who were most of the time at odds with each other. White farmers, primarily from Dutch descent, who called themselves "Afrikanders" (in other words: people of Africa), dissociated themselves from European control and moved into the interior. They saw themselves as the legitimate occupants of the country, which Steyn explains to be "a belief that has remained central to White identity in South Africa" (Steyn 28). Afrikaner Christian nationalism sprung from them, especially after the exodus of Afrikaners in 1836, known as the Great Trek (32). They felt wronged by the British whom they regarded as imperialists who did not treat the Afrikaners with respect (26). They were also grieved because the British would not protect them enough from Black Africans who were threatening the frontiers (32). The British-Dutch conflict would result in two so called Boer Wars.

Initially, it was the tradition of Afrikaans literature to show not only solidarity with Afrikaners but even leadership in their lives of struggle (Francken and Renders 39). After the Dutch and British made peace and the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, Afrikaans literature was still expected to confirm and support a strong Afrikaner identity and ideology. J.M. Coetzee, in his non-fictional work *White Writing,* observes that in the period 1920-40, the Afrikaans so called *plaasroman,* or farm novel, almost exclusively concerned itself with romanticising Afrikaner farm life of honest and hard labour, as opposed to a decadent capitalist (and in their view British) existence in the city, and produced literature in the tradition of the pastoral (Coetzee 4-5, 63, 79). In 1948 the National Party won the elections, stood up for the rights of Afrikaners and installed a regime of strict racial segregation. However, in the years to follow, opposition would rise not only from without but also from within.

During the early 1960s, the literary movement called "Die Sestigers" started to challenge the Afrikaner nationalist government and their Apartheid policy with texts written in Afrikaans. André Brink, another author by whom a later, post-apartheid novel will be analysed in this thesis, was one of the key figures of this movement. Together with Breyten Breytenbach he inspired many other writers. In 1975 the Afrikaanse Skyrwersgilde was founded as a reaction to the strict censorship laws in the country. The members of the gild talked a lot about the role of the author in the Apartheid society. After that, several meetings were organized with a delegation of the ANC, the African National Congress, a political party and liberation movement that would later win the first democratic elections in 1994 and install Nelson Mandela as president.

Of course it was far from the only contributing factor, but Francken and Renders state that the plea of Afrikaans writers to build bridges with the other ethnic groups paved the way for radical new insights and led to “a climate in which political change came to be seen as a necessity” (171, my translation). This did not mean the position of the White South African writer was free of controversy.

There was another movement that started to develop in the late 1960s, the Black Consciousness Movement, formed by a generation of young Black radicals in South Africa who wanted to restore a sense of pride in Black people and encouraged them to dissociate themselves from White dissidents of Apartheid (Powell 226). They mistrusted all White people, even the ones who were against the regime. This does not need to come as a surprise, considering what a regime of White people did to them. It is important to have a sense of what the system of segregation and strict division in space in the Apartheid-era looked like. A spearhead of the Apartheid regime entailed the numerous removals of Black people from their homes that the government effected under the Group Areas Act (1950). This spearhead and its implications are clearly outlined by Thompson in his book on pages 191-195. Many areas that had previously been the home of what the Apartheid regime called (and capitalized as such) Coloured and Black communities were zoned for White people only. The government decided where people were allowed to live and work, and what “place” they were allowed in society. First eight, but eventually ten so called “homelands” were created where Black South Africans could be sent off to. People were obliged to move to the homelands where they would fit ethnically, even if they were born and bred somewhere else. Black people whose labour could be used in White urban areas were assigned to townships near these areas. “Driven by economic exploitation”, in the words of South African-Scottish literary critic Zoë Wicomb, this policy: “produced and hierarchized [geographical space] during the apartheid era” (Wicomb ch. 9). As a consequence of the many removals, the homelands and townships were vastly overpopulated. Living conditions for Black people were bad. They earned lower wages than White people, unemployment was very high, and they consequently experienced high levels of poverty, undernutrition, and disease.

The authors of whom a novel will be analysed in this thesis lived on the safe and more comfortable side of this society. Nadine Gordimer, André Brink, and Damon Galgut were all brought up in the privileged environments of White South Africa. The youth of two of them was even entrenched in Afrikaner nationalist views under the Apartheid regime. As they grew into adulthood, their outlook on society has changed. My interest goes out to them because they are/were themselves aware of their privileged and therefore untrustworthy position, and attempt(ed) to take some form of responsibility in the fight for justice anyway.

3. THEORETICAL FRAME

In the late 20th century, the notion of what it means to be White and privileged had achieved serious scholarly attention in various academic disciplines. Since then, research in this field, which is now referred to as Whiteness Studies, has continued to evolve. Initially, it problematized the normative invisibility of Whiteness and sought to expose it, as Steyn outlines in her book (xxvi-xxvii). Since then, there have also grown several nuanced and dissenting noises in the field (xxix-xxxi). It would be paralyzing for White people who seek other subject positions if Whiteness is seen as an equivalent to racism. Whiteness would have to be placed in its context and not regarded as the same at any place and time (xxx). Another point of criticism is that Whiteness Studies would take up space and resources that could otherwise be used for other, non-white and non-western centric fields of research.

In essence, the evolution of the study of Whiteness and the effort made by scholars to be of meaning in the decolonization process of the academy, can all be considered as part of a large and ongoing search for effective ways for White people with colonial ancestors to take responsibility for the impact that a history of domination still has in the present. In this thesis, I intend to look at White South African literature through the theoretical frame of four scholars whose research has been meaningful in this search. The first is literary critic and memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg. In his book *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (2019), he developed a concept that nuances the rigidness in terms like complicity and guilt which fail to do justice to the complicated and contradictory ways in which people can be entangled in injustice. He defines the concept of the “implicated subject” as follows: “Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes” (1). Rothberg sees it as an urgent political task to confront how people are implicated in and still benefiting from systems of racial hierarchy and histories of injustice and to find new forms of solidarity.

The second scholar is the already mentioned South African Sociologist Melissa Steyn. In her book “*Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used To Be”* (2001), she first outlines the development through history of the master narrative of Whiteness. This narrative legitimized Europe’s mandate on several newly discovered worlds, like Africa. After the abolition of Apartheid, White South Africans were forced to reinterpret their identity. Steyn categorized the various ways in which they since then made sense of themselves in five narratives, the last of which shows signs of honest grief and a will to develop a new subjectivity in dialogue with the coloured, Black and Indian population of South Africa.

The third scholar I intend to base my analysis on is Shannon Sullivan, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Women’s Studies, who wrote the personal and self-searching book *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (2006). Her theorizing of habits of White privilege shows resemblance with Rothberg’s concept of the implicated subject. Sullivan might say that we are all implicated subjects, that is to say, implicated in the constitution of the environing world which in turn constitutes the habits by which we engage with the world. She writes: “To understand white privilege as unconscious habit is to understand it as the product of a transactional relationship between psyche, body, and world” (186). What Sullivan’s insights can add to Rothberg and Steyn’s is an answer to why it is so difficult for people to challenge and end their implication. This has to do with the unconscious nature of habits. Sullivan’s theorizing is informed by the work of sociologist and historian W. E. B. Du Bois, (who was an important Black leader of protest in the United States when the mostly southern states had their own apartheid-like policies). Du Bois combined Freudian ideas of the unconscious, repression, and resistance to change (Sullivan 22) with a pragmatist understanding of habits as “the style by which an organism engages with its world” (23). If ending one’s “style” of implication is not possible, Sullivan proposes a strategy to work with it.

The fourth scholar, novelist and literary critic Zoë Wicomb (2018), provides this thesis with the necessary view from within the coloured community of South Africa. The theorists outlined above were the most appropriate for the line of investigation that I chose for this thesis, because they are looking for how to ethically establish themselves as White scholars in research concerning themes of race and inequality. This does not alter the fact that my choice of theorists contributes to White centrality in literary criticism. I include Wicomb, not to absolve myself, for that is not really possible, (as the insights that arise from the discussion will also show). Nonetheless, Zoë Wicomb adds a valuable and nuancing vision. Her own background as someone the Apartheid regime described as “mixed-race” and “Coloured”, has led her to not only fiercely reject the hierarchization and differentiation performed by that regime, but also to be critical about the strive for circumscribed coloured identities (Wicomb ch. 7) and ossification of culture when certain myths about a new free South Africa are likely to contribute to one discourse which is seen as truth and mask the heterogeneity of the country (ch. 1).

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In the following chapters, I will contextualize the research of Rothberg, Steyn, Sullivan and Wicomb within three novels of South African White authors who have protested against or otherwise artistically commented on Apartheid and racism in South Africa, in order to see what aspects of the theories can be recognized in the novels, but also what the novels refute or can add. The chapters are shaped as separate but related essays, each dealing with a different novel and its distinctive, implicit or explicit, messages on responsibility and the problematic White position. I will discuss the novels in the order of when they are published, starting with *Burger's Daughter* (1979) by Nadine Gordimer, followed by *The Rights of Desire* (2000) by André Brink, and ending with *The Promise* (2021) by Damon Galgut. With each next chapter I will increasingly relate the novels to each other. When relevant, I will be using Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Fourth Edition, 2017) to point out the different narrative strategies that play a part in the novels' portrayal of Whiteness. The choice for one or more narrating voices and choices in who is focalizing when are especially consequential for how White characters in *Burger's Daughter* and *The Promise* are presented to the reader.

The core research question for this thesis is:

How do the different rhetorical and narrative strategies of the novels give shape to these novels' White characters' (and authors') positions and political stance in relation to colonial history and (post)apartheid? More specific: *What does taking responsibility look like in the different novels?*

In order to answer this core question, several sub questions will be dealt with in the three essays. What representations of dealing with Whiteness are given? What are the coping strategies of the characters in relation to the difficult question of what “their place” might be as White people in a changing South Africa? Do they want to take responsibility or do they flee from it? To what extent can we also reflect on how the authors themselves try or not try to take responsibility, in their own life or in the way they have written their novels?

In the title of this thesis, “One’s Place”, several themes concerning place are being brought together. From the early years of the colonization of Southern Africa and long after that, White nationalist South Africans saw themselves as masters of space. However, the abolition of Apartheid, as a matter of speech, has eventually “put” these self-proclaimed people of Africa “in their place.” Since then, their legitimate place in the country is contested. In a similar way, be it not entirely comparable, the role of White people in the struggle for equality in countries like the Netherlands is contested. A scholar who has also conducted research of the theme place, and of the different possible meanings of the phrase “knowing one’s place” in South African literature, is Rita Barnard. For her book *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (2006), she has studied literature by prominent authors, published between 1948 and 2000. The difference with my thesis is that I narrow my analyses down to place in relation to the concepts of implication, responsibility, Whiteness, and habits of racial privilege. Furthermore, I bring the discussion to the present by also analyzing a novel from 2021. Taking responsibility in this day and age might mean to drastically revise one’s place. I am interested in how that is reflected upon in the novels.

The approximate 20 years between the publication of each chosen novel is not merely coincidence. I cannot presume to be able to give an historically complete overview of South

African literature dealing with issues of racism through time, but I did consciously choose to analyse novels from different periods because I want to explore what insights novels written both during and after the Apartheid-era can bring.

5. THESIS OUTLINE

In chapter one, an analysis will be given of Nadine Gordimer's novel *Burger's Daughter* from 1979. Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014) spoke and wrote in English and grew up before the installment of the Apartheid Regime. As she grew older and studied in Johannesburg, she came to realise how the Black population was being harmed. Most of her novels deal with political and racial issues, especially with the Apartheid regime. In *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the inside* (1986) literary scholar Stephen Clingman gives an admiring account of how her novels provide a history from the inside. However, next to Clingman's praise and notwithstanding that Nadine Gordimer is one of South Africa's most acclaimed English writers (she won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991), she has also been criticized for practicing her politics from a White and Privileged position.

In the chapter, I will argue that *Burger's Daughter* can teach us something about White people's place in the struggle against racism today, even though it is situated more than 40 years ago in a country where, different from our recent situation, racism and discrimination were overt government policy. The novel stresses the importance of awareness about how people can be entangled in injustice, without advocating a complete withdrawal of White people from the struggle for justice. It reflects Gordimer's own search for a way to oppose the Apartheid regime in reconciliation with the Black separatism advocated by the Black Consciousness Movement.

Rothberg provides the theoretical framework and vocabulary with which to interpret the story of the main character Rosa Burger about how to combine personal development with collective responsibility. The chapter concludes with how Rosa, drawn as she is to the comforts of White privilege, but also plagued by feelings of guilt and shame, eventually negotiates her position as a White South African living in the Apartheid-era.

Chapter two builds on the insights that were gained in chapter one and starts, in a more extended introduction as compared to the other chapters, with giving an overview of the dispute amongst various scholars about what would be the appropriate response of White South Africans today to their dark history. Deconstruction and reflection come forward as two important pillars. According to Zoë Wicomb, cultural renewal needs to be a process of constant criticism and assessment. Subsequently, the chapter explores what it means to deconstruct Whiteness and to what extent André Brink's *The Rights of Desire* (2000) applies such a deconstruction.

As was previously mentioned, André Brink (1935-2015) was part of the literary anti-apartheid movement "Die Sestigers". His Afrikaans family, however, was loyal to the Nationalist Party that in 1948 established Apartheid (Prono). *The Rights of Desire* is about a White man who comes to realise the importance of his engagement in the future of South Africa during the turbulent and violent times after Apartheid's demise. The socio-economic state in which the Mandela presidency inherited the country in 1994 was deeply problematic. By that time, the gap between rich and poor was one of the greatest in the world and primarily reflected the gap between races (Thompson 266). Meanwhile, all races had come in possession of modern weapons, resulting South African society to be "exceptionally violent" (267). Lynn Berat, who wrote an additional chapter for Thompson's *A History of South Africa*, tells that "[b]y the time Mbeki left office, South Africa … was on its way to becoming the most unequal society on earth" (303). A World Bank report that was released on March 9 2022 shows that today it is ("New World Bank Report"). Such little has come of the promises of the Rainbow Nation.

Francken and Renders assert that, in *The Rights of Desire,* violence is seen as a catalyzer for change in a "positive" way. Everyone is needed to make a difference and Whites cannot escape their moral obligations (271). In chapter two, I argue that the main character of the novel does not show the type of White self-reflection that Steyn deems essential in a deconstruction of Whiteness. However, Brink's own attempt to deconstruct Whiteness in the construct of the novel as a whole proves to be more successful. For Brink, it was important that literary authors would stand up against Apartheid and would keep making themselves heard after its abolition. Wicomb on the other hand, asks if there is a case for representational arts as literature at all in a society still marked by exclusion and misery? Similar to Gayatri Spivak, who asks whether the subaltern can speak, Wicomb questions the significance of intellectual and reflective literature for the homeless and illiterate.

In chapter three, an analysis of contemporary author Damon Galgut's novel *The Promise* (2021), through the lense of Sullivan's theory on racial habits, will clarify why, even thirty years away from the Apartheid-era, such little progress has been made in self-reflection of White people about their privileged position. *The Promise*, for which Galgut (1963-) won the Booker Prize in 2021, has become much more political than his earlier novels. He situated the story in the area where he grew up during the years of strictly organised racial segregation. In an interview with Belgian newspaper *De Tijd* (29 december 2021), he calls Pretoria during Apartheid "a nasty place" and "the center of the machine, the brain of the system" (my translation). The novel tells of a Black housekeeper, Salome, who is promised a house by the White family she serves. Galgut purposely chose to write from the point of view of a cast of characters who are predominantly White and privileged and who show little interest in a woman like Salome. In chapter three, I argue that with the omission of Black perspectives from the story, and by simultaneously provoking a sense of uneasiness about this in readers, Galgut does exactly what Sullivan pleas for: he uses White privilege against itself. First, the chapter explores how Galgut addresses the issue of habits of White privilege on a meta-level with a particular style of narrating. This is followed by an analysis of how unconscious racial habits cause two major White characters in the story, the siblings Anton and Amor, to postpone doing real justice to (formerly) repressed people, hereby maintaining White privilege.

In the concluding chapter I come with a number of different strategies to take or flee from responsibility that the novels either propose of problematize. I will relate the novels’ and theorists’ insights to each other and come with a statement about what to take from this as a society.

1. Implication and Solidarity in Nadine Gordimer's ***Burger's Daughter***

In this thesis, different ways of dealing with Whiteness and responsibility are being investigated. If well-intentioned White people are not able to make themselves fully trustworthy in their endeavors to offer help and support to Black people, then it becomes necessary that they organize their help in a different way, from a different angle. In this respect, *Burger's Daughter* is a useful novel to analyze because both in the novel and in the author Nadine Gordimer's (1923-2014) own life, there is discussion about and a search for what this different and "right" way should be. In other words: there is a search for White people's proper place in the struggle for equality.

Burger's Daughter spans a period from 1974 to 1977 and tells the story of the young (White) woman Rosa Burger, whose life and identity, to her displeasure, are shaped by the anti-apartheid activism of her parents. After the death of her father in prison (we learn that Rosa's mother also died in prison, when Rosa was fourteen), she respectively lives with her friend Conrad, spends time in Europe, and eventually finds her way back to South Africa again. Next to Rosa Burger's individual struggle to find her own role and identity apart from her parents' activism, the novel displays the debate about whether White activism to help Black people is actually just and effective. Considerations in this debate also influence Rosa's individual journey. She is a White and privileged young woman in South Africa whose future as an activist seems to be laid out for her, but as will be explained later in this chapter, she questions what meaning she can have in the struggle against Apartheid from a position of implication in its injustice.

When this research project explores the notion of implication in injustice, the analysis relies on Michael Rothberg's concept of the "implicated subject", which he developed in his book *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (2019). Rothberg wants to go beyond the victim/perpetrator-binary and argues how important it is to confront the much more complicated and contradictory ways in which people can be entangled in historical and present-day injustices (2). Rosa Burger, in Gordimer's novel, might not be a direct agent of harm against Black people, but she benefits from her White skin colour in the Apartheid regime. It is worth looking at how she eventually negotiates her position as a White person in South Africa, because it can teach us something about White people's place in the struggle against racism today.

The first section of this chapter will elaborate on the controversy around author Nadine Gordimer because she had a White and privileged background. The second section will explore how *Burger's Daughter* already points out the dubious position of the well-intentioned but privileged White person which is such an important topic in debates about racism today. An analysis will be given of a discussion that Rosa witnesses between two characters in the novel, someone White and someone Black. Their arguments will be linked to Rothberg's conceptualization of the implicated subject. The third section will contain an analysis of the ambivalence within the character Rosa, who tries to find her own identity and is drawn to the comfort of White privilege, but at the same time struggles to find the right answer to her implication in injustice against Black people in South Africa. In the fourth section, will be shown how the novel proposes a way to challenge one's implication and find a new type of solidarity that is reconcilable with Black separatism. Rosa eventually moves from cynism and escape behaviour to an attempt to take responsibility.

1. "AMBIVALENCE, ERROR, AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES"

Michael Rothberg hopes that his investigation of the implicated subject might lead to new ways of thinking about solidarity (Rothberg 12). Gordimer too, both in her novel *Burger's Daughter* and in her own life, sought a new kind of solidarity, one that could be reconciled with Black separatism. Nevertheless, as was already briefly mentioned in the introduction, Gordimer has also been criticized.

For example, Ronald Suresh Roberts' critique on Gordimer's politics, which he wrote in his biography of her, *No Cold Kitchen* (2005), has everything to do with her privileged position as an Anglo-South African. He states: "Gordimer's voice occupied a space made vacant by the same racism that she deplored. In that sense she was indeed part of the intellectual economy of apartheid era liberalism – of those who remained free to deplore apartheid while the native was silenced" (623). What Roberts says here can be interpreted as that the context of Apartheid in a way facilitated Gordimer's career. He also points out the unfairness of her ability to oppose Apartheid from a position of relative freedom because she was White.

Scholar Edward Powell, in his article about Black Consciousness, White solidarity and the novels of Gordimer, explains how she actually sympathized with a lot of the critique on well-intentioned White people. Most importantly, she sympathized with the Black Consciousness Movement (Powell 227). Gordimer understood their critique that White liberals wanted to assimilate and accept Black people into "an already established norm and code of behavior set up by and maintained by whites" without asking Black people's consent (Biko cited and paraphrased by Powell 229-230)). Therefore, she advocated a new way for White people to oppose Apartheid. In essence, the goal of White South Africans had to be to fight Apartheid on behalf of themselves, to liberate themselves from a dehumanizing regime, instead of "securing a place in "the new" South Africa and regaining black solidarity"

(Powell 227). In other words: she was looking for a way to take responsibility and stand up against Apartheid without presuming to take or adopt the lead in Black people's struggle or expecting them to follow and cooperate.

Both the criticism on Gordimer's politics and the path that Rosa Burger walks in the novel show how, to use Rothberg's formulation of this process, "the movement from implication to solidarity does not follow a direct path; it often involves ambivalence, error, and unintended consequences" (201). Edward Powell also sees this sort of ambivalences in Gordimer's work. Gordimer might have been in favour of Black separatism, but, in the view of Powell, she has nonetheless written novels, like *Burger's Daughter*, in which non-racialism seems to be idealized (231). However, Powell's statement about *Burger's Daughter* does not inspire universal agreement. A different reading of the novel is possible, one in which the reader can see honest acknowledgement of the errors and unintended consequences of White privileged people's behavior, and an attempt to challenge implication in injustice and find a new way of solidarity.

2. WELL-INTENTIONED BUT PRIVILIGED

The debate about the justice, appropriateness and effectiveness of the help of White people is most clearly and literally displayed in a chapter halfway through the novel. Rosa Burger attends a gathering in the slums where mostly Black people are having a discussion about whether Blacks should work together with Whites or not (Gordimer 144-170). One of the attendants, a Black university student named Duma Dhladhla, argues that White people should withdraw from the struggle against Apartheid because Black people will only be successful if they organize their revolution themselves and identify with Blackness. Dhladhla states: "All collaboration with whites has always ended in exploitation of blacks" … "He doesn't live black, what does he know what a black man needs? He's only going to *tell* him"

(159). In his words we can read the often expressed distrust of Black people in White people's intentions.

Gordimer pays attention to different points of view in the debate. A white journalist, Orde Greer, questions the idea of one unified Black community (157). He defends White people, like communists, who "believe in what you want. … But they see black consciousness as racialism that sidetracks and undermines the struggle" (164). Dhladhla is not convinced by the existence of what he calls "a few good whites" (164) and states: "Whites don't credit us with the intelligence to know what we want! We don't need their *solutions"* (163). His charged political commentary can be seen as to represent the viewpoints of the Black Consciousness Movement.

The Black Consciousness Movement, from now on referred to as the BCM, originated in the split of the South African Student Organization (SASO) from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in 1968. SASO only admitted Black members. Other ideas behind the concept "Black Consciousness" (like how black people should dissociate themselves from White dissidents of Apartheid) developed over the next couple of years (Powell 228-229). The statements of Dhladhla in Gordimer's novel are very similar to statements of the BCM's leading figure Steve Biko, who was a prominent activist against the Apartheid regime and, under suspicious circumstances, eventually lost his life in Pretoria Central Prison. In the *SASO Newsletter*, Biko also spoke about how White people thought of separatism as immoral and racialist which for Biko showed that these White people "refused to credit us with any intelligence to know what we want" (Biko quoted by Powell 229). The BCM was deeply inspired by the work *Black Skin, White Masks* by philosopher Frantz Fanon, who also asserted the importance of Black pride and a "psychologically liberated self" for colonized to find total liberation (Fanon paraphrased by Ranuga 184). It is important to bear in mind that the BCM's encouragement to grow Black consciousness was meant for all the oppressed people in the racist system and that the term *black* did not refer to skin colour per se (Ranuga 187). Later in this essay, we will see how the BCM viewpoints keep playing an important role in the novel and in Rosa Burger’s journey.

With the broad attention to these different viewpoints, not in the least those of the Black Consciousness Movement, Gordimer’s novel from 1979 already shows an awareness of the significant complexities in questions about guilt, complicity, implication and responsibility that Michael Rothberg has theorized in 2019. A key factor in Orde Greer’s and Duma Dhladhla’s antagonism is their ongoing disagreement about *who* is guilty of *what* (and in what degree) and *who,* due to this guilt, is or is not able to take responsibility in an effective way. Dhladhla sees even the well-intentioned White people as guilty of things they do not seem to intend or recognize to have done. Several concepts that Rothberg has used to build his own concept of the implicated subject, deal with this notion of guilt over injustices that someone has not personally committed. Hannah Arendt for example speaks of “the “intrusion of criminality into the public realm” (Rothberg 46). In Rothberg’s words, this means that “Whoever participates in public life at all, regardless of party membership or membership in the elite formations of the regime, is implicated in one way or another in the deeds of the regime as a whole” (46). Indeed, in South Africa, mostly White people were implicated in this way. They largely benefited from the regime of domination, even if they did not choose this regime or were against it.

Rosa is mostly a listener in the conversations at the gathering. In a narrational comment, she brings in the perspective of her activist parents, who resisted the idea that all White people were the same and evenly unreliable. A “ruling class” would contribute to racist behaviors, not a white skin or the simple fact that one is South African (Gordimer 161). Still, it is not easy to rule out all implication even with activists, such as Rosa’s parents. Guilt and complicity might not be the right words and that is why the concept of the implicated subject is so useful here. The Burgers are wealthy people, living in a big house with a pool. They do benefit from the regime and their Whiteness makes their struggle against Apartheid less challenging than the struggle of the people who are actually oppressed (although, Rosa's parents do end up in prison and die). Furthermore, Black figures feel patronized by White assistance such as theirs. Therefore, White activism can be seen as both supportive and divisive.

3. DRAWN TO THE COMFORT OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

Up to this point, attention has been paid to the literal debates about the position of White people in South Africa in the novel. Now, it is interesting to analyse the main character's personal journey, one that is deeply intertwined with these same debates and with politics.

It becomes clear in the first part of the novel that, while Rosa's parents were alive, her own life had always been in service of their activism against Apartheid. This has caused her to not being truly able to develop as an individual with her own identity. She was not just Rosa, she was Burger's daughter, the daughter of a famous revolutionary. Furthermore, Rosa and her family were seen as: "totally united in and dedicated to the struggle" (Gordimer 12), as we can read in one of the chapters with a third-person perspective. Informed by Mieke Bal's theory of narrative, it is interesting to look a bit deeper at the narrative situation here. Bal logically notes that a narrative does not produce real human beings, but it does produce *character-effects* (105). The information about a character that reaches the reader can come from different angles: the character itself, other characters, and/or a narrator (117-119). This, together with Bal's notion of *focalization* as the perspective, or point of view on matters (133), makes for an interesting angle from which to analyse the narrative situation in *Burger's Daughter.* In this novel, different narrators do not only determine the way readers come by their information about the character Rosa, but also gives shape to how Rosa comes by her information about herself.

At first glance, there is more than one narrator and Rosa Burger herself is only one of them. The novel starts outside the prison where Rosa’s mother is held, like this, in third-person: “Among the group of people waiting … was a school girl in a brown and yellow uniform …” (Gordimer 9). The schoolgirl is Rosa. A few pages later the perspective and narrator changes. The group of people becomes a collective narrator: “*Among us was a girl of thirteen or fourteen, a schoolgirl still in her gym …”* (12). On the next page, there is a switch to a first-person narrator, Rosa, with only this sentence on a further blank page: “*When they saw me outside the prison, what did they see?”* (13). The repetition of the exact same situation, the words “among the group” and “among us”, and the fact that Rosa refers to other people seeing her at that moment might imply that Rosa herself has written down or collected all the third-person narrations in the novel as a part of her search for identity. Furthermore, she refers to the third-person narrations in a first-person part where she remarks how unreal they feel to her, “concocted” as she calls it (14). The way other people see her does not correspond with the little sense she has of herself. It is as if she sees through the construct of her own character-effect in other people’s focalization of her.

Rosa’s struggle to become an individual is important because it shows the dilemma between a person’s need to care for herself and the demand of a collective (a society, a country, a family) to take responsibility and help others. Especially when trying to combat White privilege, this dilemma is relevant because when White people want to help Black people, they have to give up things in their life they are probably reluctant to part from. In the novel, we read how, as a child, Rosa sometimes spent time at her aunt and uncle’s farm and actually enjoyed the ordered life of Apartheid: “All this ordered life surrounded, coated, swaddled Rosa; the order of Saturday, the order of family hierarchy, the order of black people out in the street and white people in the shade of the hotel stoep. It's flow contained her …" (61). She acknowledges how people living their ordinary lives can be implicated in injustice when she talks about "that condition of a healthy ordinary life, other people's suffering" (73), but she starts her sentence with the consideration that it might be a "sickness" to not be able to ignore this suffering, which would mean the activism of her parents is abnormal. These comments will probably not add to the reader's sympathy for Rosa, but meanwhile they add to the novel's depth and honesty. Gordimer does not shy away from showing the bad character traits or missteps in life of someone who eventually wishes to do good. (By the end of the novel, Rosa is full of regret about her accountability in Black people's suffering.) With this, Gordimer shows an acknowledgement of how all people can be tempted to close their eyes to the injustice of White privilege, because it can make people's lives so comfortable.

In her book *Revealing Whiteness,* Shannon Sullivan speaks of White privilege as unconscious habit (186). She describes how White privilege functions best when it operates as if nonexistent, and that it actively thwarts attempts to become conscious of it (187). It must be argued that in the context of South Africa under Apartheid, it was simply impossible to overlook White privilege, because it was so ubiquitous in public life. Furthermore, the White Europeans that colonized South Africa had felt the need to emphasize a White identity to have a stronger position as minority, as Zoë Wicomb rightly notices in her essay about the rehabilitation of Whiteness (1997-1998). "The white minority in South Africa … unashamedly celebrated and claimed privileges on the basis of their whiteness" (ch. 9). In this context, a sense of normalness did not cause Whiteness to be overlooked as a category. However, this ubiquity of White privilege in Apartheid-South Africa is exactly what could, also at that time and place, make White privilege invisible, as will be reflected upon below.

Black and White people lived strictly separate lives and Rosa describes how, on her way to Fat's place, where the meeting and discussions about Black Consciousness outlined in the previous section take place, she has a renewed awareness of this physical divide: "hundreds of years of possession and decision, which lay even between … that house where the revolution was planned, and the 'place' of those millions who have been dispossessed and for whom others have made all the decisions. From the car I saw it again as I had once ceased to see the too familiar" (Gordimer 149). Apparently, even in a society of legalized White supremacy, White privilege can dwell in the unconscious. However, corresponding with the words of Shannon Sullivan that what is unconscious is not "necessarily and completely inaccessible to consciousness" (7), Rosa becomes aware of not having been able to see the "too familiar" anymore.

Rosa's renewed awareness of the physical divide between Black and White is the first important example of how, throughout the novel, Rosa's awareness grows about how she and other well-intentioned White people are implicated in the oppressive regime. In the passage above, she acknowledges the divide between activists like her parents and Black people, even though they are joined together in the same struggle. "That house" of which she speaks was the center of her parents' activism. "Places" are what, according to Rosa, people in generally called the houses of Black people, instead of "homes" (149). The Burger family organized gatherings and barbecues with likeminded people around the pool. This pool is clearly an indicator of their wealth and privilege. The passage above shows Rosa's awareness of the unfairness in how people like her and her parents can plan a revolution from a safe and wealthy home, while Black people, being put in their "place", have much less means to start with and decisions are always being made for them. Rosa hears similar concerns being expressed at the gathering, mainly by Dhladhla, and they correspond to the views of the Black Consciousness Movement.

In addition to this growing awareness about implication, a women's gathering at the house of Flora Donaldson (one of Rosa's parents' acquaintances), with both White and Black people, makes Rosa doubt the use and meaning of White people's actions to help Black people. Flora's meeting contrasts with the gathering at Fat's place. At Flora's, White and Black people try to unite, but Rosa remarks how the meeting fails "no matter how much Flora protests the common possession of vaginas, wombs and breasts, the bearing of children and awful compulsive love of them" (Gordimer 204). Flora tries to create a nonracial environment with her gathering, but her attempt excludes topics that might actually matter for Black women, who hesitate to speak and sit on the back seats "out of old habit of finding themselves allotted secondary status" (202). Existing differences in power are not being addressed in the meeting.

A strategy of colourblindness can be recognized in Flora's attempt to unify Black and White women. This strategy entails the attempt to make race invisible and focus on people instead of colour (Sullivan 191). Even though this strategy comes from good intentions, Sullivan argues that it fuels and is fueled by White privileged habits, because when people of colour are asked to aspire to become race-free in an environment in which White is the norm, they are actually asked to become White[1] (191). Sullivan also points out that from a desire to keep the peace and avoid confrontation, the strategy of colourblindness especially appeals to White middle-class women, who wish to fight White domination while at the same time avoiding difficult topics (191). This is recognizable in the novel. Rosa observes Flora's meeting with a critical eye.

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[1] Frantz Fanon makes a strong point in his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), about how Black people are indoctrinated with the notion of blackness as relating to wrongness and villainess, and with the idea that they should become White to save themselves (in which they never succeed, because they are always kept inferior). See chapter 6 of Fanon's book for a more extended elaboration on this issue.

On her way home from the gathering, Rosa turns even more cynical about White people’s position. While driving, she stumbles upon a donkey cart. A mother and child are sitting on the cart and a very aggressive father is beating the donkey with a whip (Gordimer 207-210). She does not stop him and drives on because “the horrible drunk was black, poor and brutalized. If somebody’s going to be brought to account, I am accountable for him, to him, as he is for the donkey” (210). As a person of White privilege, she sees herself as accountable for the suffering of this Black man. It would be hypocritical to stop and judge the man for hitting his donkey.

Shortly after this incident, Rosa travels to Europe. Based on the analysis of the passages examined above, it can be argued that when Rosa leaves South-Africa, she flees from the hopelessness of the struggle which she sees illustrated in the great physical divide between Black and White people and in gatherings like Flora Donaldson’s, as well as from her own dubious role in the struggle and her hypocritical self (which, to use the terminology of Rothberg, we could call her *implicated self*). In a way, she flees from all responsibility. In the paragraphs below will be explained how her struggle culminates in the discovery that a life without social responsibility is an illusion. There is no running away from it. She faces her role as an implicated subject, implicated in Black people’s suffering. Eventually this leads to a new negotiation of her place as a White person in South Africa.

4. WHITE LIKE ANYONE ELSE, BUT STILL TRYING

Back at “that house” with the pool, Rosa had a little Black foster brother, Baasie. When Rosa is narrating in the novel, she often refers to the swimming lessons her father Lionel gave them in the pool. “… dog-paddling to him with my black brother Baasie, the two of us reaching for him as a place where no fear, hurt or pain existed” (Gordimer 115). Her father represents safety, a kind of lifeboat for her and Baasie. She had lost sight of Baasie for years, but at a political event in London, she sees him again and shortly after, she speaks with him on the phone. She discovers how different her own warm memories are from the way Baasie looks back on his upbringing at the Burger's house. He is angry that she does not know his real name Zwelinzima which means "suffering land" (318). He is angry that the Burger's made themselves look so righteous by letting a little black kid "right into the house" while pushing him "off back to his mud huts and tin shanties" when they had no time for him anymore (320). "Your little boss-kid that was one of the family couldn't make much use of the lessons, there was no private swimming-pool the places I stayed" (321). Again, there is this use of the word "places" and the distinction with the wealthy home with the pool.

Furthermore, the views of the Black Consciousness Movement can be recognized in Baasie's words. He speaks about "the whites who were going to smash the government and let another lot of whites tell us how to run our country" (320). It also makes him angry that Lionel Burger is put on a pedestal, while there are dozens of Black fathers who died in prison that no one talks about (320). "Whatever you whites touch, it's a take-over" (321). Most importantly, he too criticizes the idea of non-racialism and then directly starts to attack Rosa: "why do you think you should be different from all the other whites who've been shitting on us ever since they came?" (322). After this conversation, Rosa throws up, overcome with shame (323). She finds herself harshly confronted with her privileged position and implication in the suffering of a little brother with whom she thought she had a loving relationship. This touches her personally and emotionally. It is the climax of her journey into awareness of the fact that she might indeed not be so different at all from other more malicious Whites, even though she grew up among anti-apartheid activists.

Rothberg calls it "one of the most urgent political tasks for our time" to confront the way people/we are implicated in "a system of racial hierarchy that we enable and a history of aborted justice that we benefit from in manifold ways" (10). He sees it as our "responsibility to reflect on and act against” such forms of implication (10). The challenge Rosa faces on her return to South Africa is to find a way to make amends, negotiate her own position, and take responsibility for her own implication in the system.

When Rosa begins her renewed life in South Africa after her return from Europe, she says: “I’m living like anyone else” and “no one can defect” (Gordimer 332). A repetition of the words “like anyone else” indicates Rosa’s awareness of the fact that she indeed cannot pretend to be different from other White people, and cannot be completely unimplicated. However, even while she remains like any other privileged person, the question how to end suffering is still on her mind: “How to end suffering. …. Like anyone else, I do what I can. I am teaching them to walk again, at Baragwanath Hospital. They put one foot before the other” (332). At this hospital in Soweto, Rosa tends to children that have been wounded by the police during the Soweto uprising (342). During this uprising in 1976, Black school children, inspired by the ideology of Black Consciousness, demonstrated against being taught in Afrikaans, which for them was the language of the oppressor (Thompson 212). Rosa in a way reconciles herself with her privileged position here. She is like all the other Whites, “like anyone else”, but she still does what she can to help the people of South Africa. With this, the novel proposes a way to challenge or act against one’s implication, even though one is not able to do it “right”, not able to completely shed off one’s Whiteness. The choice for a job at the hospital makes Rosa less implicated than when she would work at a commercial company, feeding the Apartheid economy. Furthermore, she does not turn her back on South Africa anymore and chooses to play some role in the country, acknowledging her part in a collective responsibility, even though she cannot make that role a perfectly just one.

Next to Rosa’s attempt to act against her implication, by the end of the novel, there is another, more symbolic expression of negotiating one’s place as a White person in South Africa. This expression can be linked to another concept that Rothberg develops, “long-distance solidarity": "solidarity premised on difference rather than logics of sameness and identification" (Rothberg 12). In October 1977, Rosa is detained without charges, like many other people who are suspected to be critical of the government and who might be involved in dealings of the ANC. Even though it is not clearly described in the novel whether such accusations would be true or whether the government only suspects Rosa because of her late parent's activism, she ends up in prison, together with Clare Terblange, Marisa Kgosana and other coloured, Indian and African women. They send each other messages and sing songs together (Gordimer 354-355). Rosa makes a Christmas card for people outside. On the card she draws herself, Marisa, Clare and an Indian associate on it as carol singers. The prison guards do not recognize these people so they see no harm in it, but the people who will receive the card will recognize them and will understand they are in touch with each other (356). The fact that Rosa ends up in prison can be read as a type of long-distance solidarity. It deprives Rosa of all her privileges and brings her on equal footing with Black people. Nevertheless, she and several coloured people are in different prison cells: together, but apart. Symbolically, this can be read as a solidarity based on difference and not on being one united nonracial community.

5. CONCLUSION

Burger's Daughter can be read as an account of the search for an ethical way to challenge one's own implication in other people's suffering with acknowledgement of the errors and unintended consequences that inevitably come with challenging racism and White privilege and with reinventing solidarity. While certain White people might mean well, they are often unaware of how their help obliges Black people to follow a path where White is still the norm (like Flora Donaldson does), and of how their activism is felt to be patronizing (like the activism of Rosa's parents).

Rosa Burger most often has a role as spectator in this novel. She stands as an observer of other people’s descriptions, their interpretations of her own identity, and of other people’s organized gatherings and utterances in debates about South Africa’s future. During most of the novel, she is rather fleeing responsibility of herself and of her implication in Apartheid instead of finding herself or taking action. The temptations of a comfortable life of White privilege are lurking and Rosa’s thoughts both dwell on confusion over her parent’s devotedness to tend to other people’s suffering, and a disgust of her own accountability in that suffering.

The phone call with Baasie represents a turning point in Rosa’s journey. It catalyzes her decision to return to South Africa, where she reconciles herself with her privileged position and chooses to not let the controversy that surrounds that position stand in the way anymore of endeavors to help end suffering in South Africa. In the end, Rosa has not appropriated Blackness or striven for complete unity between Black and White. Neither did she presume White leadership in a Black struggle for equality. She has focused on her own position within the regime.

As said in the introduction to this thesis, the controversy around well-intentioned White people’s position is very topical today. The novel shows that responsibility cannot be outrun, and should not be outrun even if the efforts to take responsibility are bound to have unintended consequences like reinforcing White privilege. Nevertheless, the novel foregrounds awareness of the White person’s problematic position. In the next chapter, a novel will be analyzed which foregrounds the importance of involving oneself in the future of South Africa as a White person.

2. Deconstruction of Whiteness in André Brink's ***The Rights of Desire***

The end of Apartheid meant the loss of privileges and moral authority for much of the White community within South Africa. As a consequence, the meaning of Whiteness and White identity in the country has been changing. Melissa Steyn, in her book *"Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To Be"* (2001), calls this process "one of the most profound collective psychological adjustments happening in the contemporary world" (Steyn xxi). An on-going conversation in contemporary South Africa has concerned the question of whether White people should still be allowed to take part in political and public debates about the future of the country. André Brink's novel *The Rights of Desire* (2000), which will be examined in this chapter, takes a clear stand in this debate. It conveys the message that all stories should be told, from different perspectives, and even the unreliable accounts should be faced and worked with to prevent things from falling into oblivion. However, further analysis shows that the novel does not completely live up to its own message.

The Rights of Desire was published during a period of sustained increase of crime in South Africa, as was earlier mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. The high crime rate was one of the most important reasons for many South Africans, Black as well as White, to emigrate to other countries (Berat 343), which would of course automatically mean a retreat from involvement in rebuilding the country. The middle-aged main character of *The Rights of Desire,* Ruben Olivier, does not want to emigrate but wants to stay in his old haunted house, where he is only accompanied by his housekeeper, his lodger and a ghost from the colonial past. It seems though, as if after the abolition of Apartheid, his role in the country is played out.

Before diving further into the novel, it is important to have a sense of the most important viewpoints in the dispute amongst critics and scholars about what would be the appropriate response of White South Africans to their dark history. President Mandela, in his pursuit of a united nation, did not want to exclude or silence the group of Afrikaners that produced Apartheid’s agents and architects. He wanted to include them and acknowledge their place in South Africa (Thompson 274). However, the much disputed Truth and Reconciliation Commission, installed during his time in office, did not manage to lay the foundations for racial reconciliation in the country. In fact, Thompson confirms that in the short run, the TRC accentuated racial divisions in South Africa (278). Furthermore, we have seen in the previous chapter that even the position of the well-intentioned White people is problematic in working together with Black people towards a more just system.

Because of this, Samantha Vice, in her article “How Do I live In This Strange Place?”, even advocates a political and public silence of White people and writes “One would remain silent to prevent one’s whitely perspective from causing further distortion in the political and public contexts, where whiteness is most problematic and charged” (337). Vice argues that White South Africans’ best moral response to their history of injustice and unavoidable privilege is to accept shame as the appropriate emotion and to turn one’s attention to the self with silence and humility (338). This statement might also apply to White authors of literature because literature can be, and in South Africa often is, highly politically charged.

There have been several responses to Vice’s article by other scholars who often disagreed with her. In the article “How Do I Write in This Strange Place”, Jordan Stier recognizes how White literary writing can be vulnerable to falling back into White centrality.

Meanwhile, he wishes White writers will "continue contributing to the country's body of post-apartheid literature, because the absence of white writing in the South African literary landscape would be detrimental to a project of deconstructing whiteness that is essential to the formation of any ideal, interracial South African future" (Stier 70-71). He is therefore not an advocate of silence, but of deconstruction.

Stier mentions another scholar, Howard Winant, who would categorize Vice's viewpoints under the term "new abolitionism": "a white racial project focused on eradicating whiteness in individuals and society, because of the understanding that it is a "strictly negative category" (Winant 106). To abolish Whiteness would mean to apply a strategy of colourblindness like Flora Donaldson applies at her women's gathering in *Burger's Daughter,* analysed in chapter 1. Winant argues that eradicating the concept of race in such a way is undesirable and impossible (Winant 107). It is useful to contemplate a little longer on why abolishing Whiteness would lead to colourblindness, because this abolishing does not seem to mean a denial of the existence of cultural and socio-economic differences between ethnicities and social groups. It is rather a collective rejection of the legacies of White supremacy, which is different from denial or forgetting. A more progressive type of colourblindness could mean to stop using labels in order to free people of this legacy.

The South African-Scottish literary critic Zoë Wicomb, herself a woman of colour and someone who surely would want us to never forget how differentiation and hierarchization have caused so much damage to people, is of the opinion that especially because of this legacy, people should always keep questioning labels, (as Andrew van der Vlies observes in Wicomb's fiction in the introduction to a collection of her essays in *Race, Nation, Translation* (2018)). At present, labels are often purposefully deployed to acknowledge certain people as a social group with a particular history. This can also be seen in this thesis, for which the choice has been made to capitalize the words Black and White (White is capitalized to prevent the notion of White as the norm). In one of Wicomb's essays, she observes that the concept of race, (however probably no biological notion of it anymore), is often reused in the struggle against the oppressive forces of such racial categories: "Race has the double-edged function of playing primary roles both in oppression and in the fostering of nationhood that aims to overthrow oppression" (ch. 2). This can also be recognized in the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement, although Black consciousness is about much more than just identity.

Wicomb does not necessarily disapprove of such developments (she even implies in an interview that she might have stayed in South Africa as an adolescent in 1970, if she had known earlier that the BCM would soon gain ground (Wicomb part III)), but remains critical. Even with the label Griqua for people of mixed-race at the Cape (her own assumed background), she would urge caution (Vlies, "Introduction"). Her arguments in the essay "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa" (ch. 7) support the idea that labeling often goes hand in hand with creating myths about purity and belonging which do not correspond with material reality.

The good intentions behind Wicomb's caution with regard to labels do not have the same White normative side-effect as the intentions of Flora Donaldson. The concept of colourblindness should maybe be rewritten in such a way that both blindness to the legacies of history *and* defining people on the base of colour, purity, or where they belong are no part of it anymore. This idea corresponds to Wicomb's assertion that it is of importance to not approach cultural renewal as a simple switch from old to new, but to let it be "a continuous process of assessment and criticism" (Wicomb ch. 1). In the essay "Tracing the Path from National to Official Culture", she explains how, in the changed political climate in 1991, many agents involved in the cultural renewal of South Africa tried to build a strong profile of the "traditional" culture that was suppressed and shamed by European colonizers, but with this they might have been repeating the European assumption that indigenous people in Africa "exist in an eternal present" that allowed anthropologists to "codify and classify their customs and manners in a way that fixed them in time" (Wicomb ch. 1). Wicomb argues that when the concepts of culture, custom and tradition are conflated, this in a way freezes the notion of culture. Yet all the while, South African society is much more heterogeneous than that, especially within the group of people of colour.

She goes on to point to the threat of a "shift from a national culture, an imaginary entity that fires our will to be free, into an official culture that is an ossification, an attempt to fix certain forms, to authorize and validate them as *the* desirable, correct forms" (Wicomb ch. 1). She adds: "the cycle will repeat itself: the official culture can only lead to a new culture of resistance as the unofficial voices struggle to be heard" (ch. 1). Wicomb continues "even in the case of an emergent order, a palimpsestic map already exists and institutions stand at the ready to install their sacred cows. Cultural renewal demands that we study the map, … and check its relation to the democratic principle" (ch. 1). To bring the discussion back to the new attitudes aspired for by White people, such a palimpsestic map also lies beneath the endeavors of White people who try to help build the new South Africa.

These White endeavors are of equal importance in the country's cultural renewal. Winant preceded Stier by advocating a "deconstruction" of Whiteness, which involves "rethinking and changing ideas about white identity and reorienting the practices consequent upon these ideas" (Winant 107). Winant's use of the term deconstruction fits well with the type of deconstruction which is known as an analytic procedure developed by Jacques Derrida. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Derrida's notion of deconstruction is defined as follows: ""A deconstruction" involves inversion and reinscription of a traditional philosophical opposition. … To invert the binary pair, one shows how the belated second term is actually indispensable and constitutively prior to the primary term" (23). White/Black is a strong binary in Western thinking in which White is superior to Black. To deconstruct Whiteness would mean to undermine its assumed purity and superiority, which is very different from eradicating Whiteness all together. This is in line with what Wicomb asserts to be of importance in cultural renewal. Deconstruction allows one to keep "studying the map" on which the narrative of Whiteness came into being, to find cultural renewal without disregarding the past. Not only can this deconstruction be enacted while analyzing texts, but texts itself, in this case novels, can perform a deconstruction of Whiteness. Stier states that in White South African literature this "deconstruction depends on writing in a rigorously self-reflexive way in order to be beneficial, rather than detrimental" (Stier 71). The question is: is *The Rights of Desire* rigorous enough? The analysis of this novel can provide a valuable addition in considerations about what deconstruction of Whiteness exactly would look like, because it shows successes as well as pitfalls in such deconstructive endeavors.

The first of the subsequent sections of this chapter will briefly provide more background information about André Brink and his view on whether or not White people in South Africa should withdraw in silence. In the second section will be explained how, in correspondence with Brink's view, *The Rights of Desire* stresses the importance of telling and listening to stories in White people's attempts to take responsibility. In the third and fourth section, placing the novel next to Melissa Steyn's research on post-apartheid narratives of Whiteness will show that, although *The Rights of Desire* attempts to give readers an example to live up to in the body of a main character who decides to drastically change his attitude towards the voice of the "other", the novel in fact fails to demonstrate a real deconstruction of White identity. The fifth and last section will end with a positive note, considering that while the main character Ruben might still avoid a clear deconstruction of his own White identity, André Brink himself more successfully attempts to deconstruct and hybridize White South

African literature. However, questions about the place of literature in a society with such severe inequality remain relevant.

1. EVERY ATTEMPT A FAILURE, BUT NO SURVIVAL WITHOUT ATTEMPTS

The Rights of Desire's author André Brink was White and had an Afrikaner background, but nonetheless involved himself a lot in public debates. As said in the introduction to this thesis, in the sixties he was part of the literary movement "Die Sestigers". Authors that were part of this movement used the Afrikaans language to write literature which opposed Apartheid. Brink was also an editor, critic, essayist and professor. After the abolition of Apartheid, he kept writing about the new situation in South Africa. He saw possibilities in postmodernism for South African writers engaging in the history of Apartheid, because with a sense of history as a story to be endlessly reshaped and retold, a text without fixed meaning, authors would be able to encourage readers to be critical and act (Brink, "Interrogating Silence" 17-19). Based on Brink's ideas, it becomes clear that he could never have agreed with the abolition of Whiteness through enforced silence. This is also supported by the way Brink addresses Wyschogrod's and other critics assertion that artists should refrain from confronting certain territories of experience, like the Holocaust, because art would take "the sting out of suffering" and "demean" the Holocaust (Wyschogrod cited by Brink (19-20). Brink opposes this by saying:

> If at least a large measure of what makes us human is vested in language (however imperfect, treacherous, or tentative that language may be) then nothing could possibly be excluded a priori from the endeavours of language. Every attempt may indeed be a different kind of failure, but our humanity survives only by virtue of the attempts. (Brink, "Interrogating Silence" 20)

These words can also be seen as an encouragement for White people to keep speaking and keep "attempting" to find new ways of expression and relating to "the other", because attempts that might fail are all human kind has.

2. STORIES AND RESPONSBILITY

In correspondence with Brink's views, *The Rights of Desire* portrays storytelling as an important way to take responsibility, but again, like with Rothberg's intended move from implication to solidarity, not one without pitfalls and errors. Ruben Olivier, the main character, developed a profound love for literature since, when he was still a child, his father accidentally left him one day at a little town library and he had all the time to read. The "rhythms and cadences" of language "cast a spell" over him and he understood that, like magic, such beautiful words "made even the Bible sound true" (Brink, *Rights of Desire* 31). Without remarking how that could also be dangerous, he does show awareness of language's and word's limits in capturing truth. The novel consists of his notes, which, like his notes in the margins of books, he makes in the hope that later on he might discover meaning in them that at first eluded him (32). However, with time, the notes become cryptic. Instead of providing a direct connection with reality "words do interpose themselves between the world and us; they make us realise how, literally, 'out of touch' we are with the real. It is both their appeal and the despair they bring with them. They leave perhaps a dent on memory, but ultimately a secret remains a secret" (114). He speaks of both the appeal and despair, beauty and estrangement caused by words. Instead of rejecting them because of these paradoxes, he stays hopeful and keeps making his notes.

We can assume that this love for literature and the hopeful attitude towards words and language in the novel of this White author would not fit very well with Vice's standpoint that White people should become silent and withdraw from public debates. However, the novel also attaches great importance to *listening* to the stories of *others.* The most important story of someone other than the White characters in the novel, is the one about the ghost Antje of Bengal. She was an enslaved woman, brought to the Cape in 1696, who is said to be still haunting Papenboom, the grounds where Ruben now lives. "Antje of Bengal [is] gliding through the empty rooms, always just beyond the reach of sight" (23). Ruben's lodger, Tessa stresses the importance of people believing in Antje, even if they cannot see her. "Otherwise her whole life would have been in vain" (206). A parallel can be drawn here between stories and ghosts. They are both in a way "untrue" or multi interpretable. You cannot really see them, you cannot really grasp them, they cannot really grasp memory or truth. Still, you need to believe in ghosts, says Tessa, as you need to listen to stories. If you do not try, everything has been for nothing. For Tessa, the same can be said about the importance of believing in hope and potential for the troubled country South Africa. "If *we* don't make it work …" (206). People have to start somewhere. This could be linked to the White man who, even from his dubious position, should still try to help build the new South Africa, even if he can never do it "right", like stories can never catch truth.

The most important sentence in the novel might be: "Even if the account is not reliable – or perhaps *especially* if it is not reliable? – it compels one to face it" (229). Ruben speaks about his notemaking here, but added to Tessa's remarks about having to believe in Antje, this can be seen as a wider message about how people need to keep telling the stories of injustice in South Africa, even when real empathy fails or when the stories are altered and manipulated. Stories and words never unveil all the secrets but still you need to work with them and face them. In *The Rights of Desire,* telling and listening to stories are seen as a condition for taking responsibility.

3. DESIRING TO MASTER AND KNOWINGLY FAILING

André Brink has clearly chosen not to become silent after the end of Apartheid. Did he, however, write a deconstructive novel that complies with de rigorous self-reflexivity that Stier demands of White writing in order to be beneficial for the formation of an interracial South African future? Placing the novel next to Melissa Steyn's research on post-apartheid narratives of Whiteness can provide clarity on this. Steyn distilled the following five post-apartheid narratives from the answers White South Africans gave to a questionnaire about their identity and meaning in the "new" South Africa: 1. "Still Colonial after All These Years"; 2. "This Shouldn't Happen to A White"; 3. "Don't Think White, It's All Right"; 4. "A Whiter Shade of White"; 5. "Under African Skies (or White, but not Quite)". Steyn has used these names to categorize the reactions of White South Africans which vary from adhering to the old master narrative of Whiteness, expressing a sense of belonging in South Africa, denial of involvement in racism, but also deep regret and a wish for change. While it is not necessary for the scope of this chapter to go into detail about all of the narratives, particularly the second and fifth narrative are interesting to place next to Ruben's character development in *The Rights of Desire,* because they show how Ruben develops from relating to the old master narrative into believing in a more self-reflexive and maybe even reparative one that Stier and Winant would applaud.

The White South Africans who are constructing and are being constructed by the second narrative, "This Shouldn't Happen to a White", have an unshakeable faith in White superiority and worry and complain about "the inversion of the fortunes of Whiteness" since the democratic elections (Steyn 69-70). Likewise, Ruben feels indignant about losing his beloved job at the library as a result of an employment equity provision that resulted in his replacement with someone who is Black, although he does not necessarily feel superior. He writes: "I was so treacherously dumped by the library that had been my sanctuary from the upheavals outside" (Brink, *Rights of Desire* 32). He calls it: solving "the wrong with another wrong" (103). In accompaniment to these complaints, Ruben also presents subtle signs of an older master narrative of Whiteness and superiority which will be explained below.

Ruben attaches a colonial notion of exploring and mastering worlds to his "journeys" through the literature he so loves: "To read, to think, to trace the words back to their origins real or presumed, to invent; to dare to imagine. And then to reread, a new Columbus let loose on endless worlds beyond unnamed seas" (32). Ruben compares reading with being an explorer, a kind of Columbus of the world of knowledge and books. This shows how he associates the voyages of discovery of the past, which often led to conquest and bloody genocides, with something positive.

However, Ruben explicitly mentions a "new" Columbus, as if he wishes to alter the methods of earlier voyages of discovery. In his new way, there is room for constantly changing interpretations of endless worlds where meanings are not binding. Ruben's acknowledgement of the limits of words to capture a truth already showed that he knows that, however appealing, words fail to master reality. This all corresponds with Brink's predilection for the postmodern notion of the world as an endlessly reshaped story which undermines the idea that the White and "civilized" should and are even capable of mastering newly discovered "primitive" worlds.

Nevertheless, the novels that Ruben worships are very Eurocentric. At his point in the novel, he has not yet taken a step towards listening to the world's real variety of stories and perspectives. Furthermore, Ruben has more unconscious biases towards Black people as he may seem at first glance. He simply assumes that Magrieta's main concern has always been the wellbeing of his family instead of her own (64). It is as if for him that is the natural way of things: Black servants serving White people.

4. DECONSTRUCTION AND SELF-REFLECTION

It could be argued, apart from a view similarities, that Ruben does not actively contribute to the construction of any narrative that Steyn outlines about White identity in South Africa after Apartheid. Instead, he withdraws into his house, his books and his notes. Would that be the proper, silent moral response that Vice intends? It most likely would not, because any emotion like guilt, regret or shame which Vice deems appropriate emotions for White South Africans to feel, remains missing in Ruben, yet.

He does think of himself as a good person. About Apartheid he says "it was high time things changed" and he wants to believe it is possible to achieve a moral world (Brink, *Rights of Desire* 103). He has always helped his housekeeper Magrieta to have a place to live, for example when she was banished from District Six in Cape Town as a consequence of the removals effected by the Apartheid regime. However, he has no sense of social responsibility to help achieve morality in the country as a whole. For the fact that he chose not to vote at the democratic elections of '94 he makes the excuse that he thought it tedious to wait in line (261-262). He is mostly preoccupied with his own desires, especially with his love for the young lodger Tessa. She is the main reason why he is staying in South Africa.

However, it is in fact Tessa who inspires Ruben to be more social. She has a significantly bigger sense of collective responsibility than Ruben. She says: "It's no use thinking of "this country" as if it was some great abstraction, Ruben. It's all of us. If *we* don't make it work" (206). According to the Nigerian scholar Isidore Diala, Tessa enables Ruben to "rediscover a vital aspect of his humanity — not merely sensual pleasure but indeed love, the need for community, the possibility of renewal" (62). She also feels the burden of guilt about the past in South Africa more than Ruben. "This whole guilt thing … We're all fucked up in this country aren't we?" (Brink, *Rights of Desire* 86). To some extent, Ruben can relate to such thoughts, for example when he describes all the horrors Magrieta has to face in her life and places them next to his own worries about a leaking tap and a squeaking gate (142). In frustration he notes: "how could I ever reach out from my world to touch hers?" (142). However, he does not only deem it impossible to touch her world, but also quite undesirable. Ruben's friend McFarlane was murdered in their neighbourhood prior to the start of the novel's timeline and now suspicious people visit the house. Ruben notes: "My own space was shrinking, retracting from its early easy frontiers" (142). Coming closer to this violent world which he describes to be Magrieta's, he finds his previously easy and comfortable life to be under threat.

By the end of the novel, Ruben finds himself directly confronted with the violent reality of South Africa which results in an epiphany. He and Tessa go outside for a walk and are harassed by a group of men. Tessa is almost raped but she shouts and eventually people come to their aid (295). Ruben had not been able to do anything to help her because some of the men were holding him. Afterwards, he asks himself: "How many other voices have there been shouting for help throughout my life, shout for me to help" (299), referring to his late wife Riana, Magrieta, his murdered friend Johnny McFarlane, and Antje of Bengal. Tessa's cries for help have unleashed a strong sense of guilt within him and he claims: "If Tessa had been raped, I would have been to blame" (300). After this event, Ruben's thoughts begin to correspond much more closely with the most deconstructive version of the last narrative "Under African Skies (or White, but not Quite), which Steyn calls: "Hybridization, That's The Name of The Game".

The people who tell the Hybridization tale show an awareness of their implication in the suffering of the "other" (Steyn 134) along with a deep sense of responsibility and committed personal engagement in dealing with the issues around race (127). In a dialogic approach, its deconstruction of the master narrative of Whiteness is co-authored with the "other" (147). This awareness of implication and personal responsibility clearly applies to Ruben. He writes: “All those cries for help from a clamouring world. While I chose not to listen. I couldn’t bear to get involved. … And by turning a deaf ear I help create the very space in which the world can sink into the morass. The mindset that makes atrocity possible” (Brink 299-300). He is not only being self-reflexive on how passive he has always been which makes him co-responsible for the situation in South Africa, but also really intends to change and involve himself more with the outside world from now on: “There is the world outside which requires me and strangely concerns me” (306). He decides the ghost Antje of Bengal will help him face what needs to be faced, honouring something Tessa has taught him: “perhaps we need our ghosts as much as they need us” (250). “Ghosts” are to be understood here as the Black and coloured part of the population of the country, along with their ancestors and stories from the past. This new intention of Ruben corresponds with the narrative’s dialogic approach and co-authorship of the “other”. He now realises that coming closer to Magrieta’s world, the world of the “other”, is not just placing his world under threat, but is necessary to build a new world and stop the violence that is tormenting the country.

However, there are certain aspects that Steyn deems essential to the deconstruction of Whiteness that are still missing in Ruben’s new attitude. According to Steyn, the tasks of deconstructing one’s own Whiteness that are so important in the Hybridization narrative are: “Recognizing the fears, uncovering the drive to power, acknowledging and dealing with the guilt, grieving for lost opportunities and one’s own damaged humanity, learning to engage seriously with the life world of the “other,” taking responsibility for developing a new subjectivity” (141-142). Ruben fulfills some of these components, but he never explicitly reflects on Whiteness nor does he speak of wanting to develop a new subjectivity. Neither does he reflect on the drive to power while, according to Steyn, “power is what lay at the heart of constructing whiteness in the first place, then issues of power are central to deconstructing it” (142). In effect, Brink shows us how a man discovers his responsibility, without explicitly naming what he is responsible for and how this situation has come into existence. The Hybridization narrative insists on personal honesty about the past, without which "it is impossible to build future relationships with integrity and trust", as Steyn crucially notes (134). Ruben does not say anything about how his good life during Apartheid was made possible by the suffering of Black people or about what this has to do with racial categories. In effect, Ruben contributes to another type of colourblindness.

5. HYBRIDIZATION AND STORIES RETOLD

Where Ruben still avoids confrontation with regard to his White identity and privileged position, the author of the novel André Brink makes a more concrete attempt to hybridize White South African literature. On the one hand, it would be easy to state that *The Rights of Desire* is still a very one-sided, White centered novel, completely told from the perspective of a White middle-aged man. On the other hand, Brink wants to inform the new South African literature after Apartheid with the magical realism of Africa, especially with the easy intercourse between the living and the dead which is part of several African oral traditions (Brink, "Interrogating Silence" 25-26). This corresponds with the Hybridization narrator's pursuit to "receive from Africa and from what is African, and to take this Africanness into previously "pure white " identity (Steyn 145). It should be noted that this does not mean to appropriate Blackness or to try to become Black, which is strived for in another subversion of Steyn's last found narrative, namely the one called "I Don't Wanna Be White No More". In the Hybridization narrative, taking in Africanness is one of the ways in which the master narrative of Whitness can be deconstructed, without trying to shed off Whiteness completely. The latter would be a form of self-negation to alleviate feelings of guilt that might accompany being White (Steyn 121), while, as earlier noted, the Hybridization tale is about acknowledgement of one’s own damaged humanity and learning to engage with the life world of the “other”.

Brink was inspired by the notion in African indigenous cultures that one is never alone but always surrounded by spirits (Brink, “Interrogating Silence” 25). He incorporated this notion into his novel by giving a significant role to the ghost Antje of Bengal. Brink both sends the reader the message that people should listen to their ghosts (previously unseen, unrecognized or repressed people or stories) and has himself implemented a repressed culture into his novel.

It is important to ask to what extent someone is capable of objectively engaging in the life world of the other. The seminal Indian scholar and literary theorist Gayatri Spivak deems this impossible. There is always the risk of silencing the other. In her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak”, Spivak calls this “epistemic violence”, lending the term form Michel Foucault (Spivak 2001-2002). Even if Brink intends to contribute to the creation of some sort of eclectic discourse with his novel, he might still not be able to represent the “magical” culture of South Africa the way it really is. On the other hand, Afrikaners are, and have been since a very long time now, part of the South African population. They are shaped by the life circumstances in South Africa, as well as by the indigenous population (so is their language). Their reality differs from a European scholar who, from a distance, analyses and makes assumptions about Black Africans. Afrikaners cannot escape the urgency of building an epistemic relationship with indigenous people. The challenge stays to not let this relationship turn into epistemic “violence”.

There is one other aspect to Antje of Bengal’s role in the novel that deserves attention. Brink used the different versions of her story to show the workings of the postmodern text which is “never read 'in its own right' but as a myriad of intertextual relationships, specifically with established discourse(s)” (Brink, “Interrogating Silence” 22). In his essay

"Interrogating Silence", Brink writes that when various accounts of the same event are read in their complex interaction, "the reader is prompted to compare, and to choose" (22). Likewise, in *The Rights of Desire* several accounts of Antje's story are given, broadly the one that Ruben has found in historiographical sources (Brink, *Rights of Desire* 40-49) and Antje's "own" account of what happened, interpreted by Magrieta and Tessa during their moments of contact with the ghost (94-98, 249-250). The core of the story remains the same: when she arrived at the Cape; when she joined the household of Willem and Susara Mostert in Papenboom, where Ruben now lives; and so forth. Willem and Antje had an affair and while Susara laid sick in bed, Willem and Antje had sex in the same room. They eventually got rid of Susara by poisoning her. Only Antje finds herself prosecuted for the murder, sentenced to death and Willem walks free. There is no historical record of Antje's view on the events and when Ruben uses his sources to tell her story, he only describes what Willem Mostert did and wanted. This demonstrates how the historiographical sources are informed and influenced by a dominant patriarchal discourse of Whiteness. Tessa duly notes: "I guess all those historians were men? … It's supposed to be Antje's story, but she hardly features in it" (51). Antje's own, by Magrieta and Tessa interpreted version of the story is much more complicated.

In their version, Antje was the one who wanted to have sex with Willem in his bedroom while his wife was there. After Willem casted her aside, she forced herself on another slave, presumably because her heart was broken. She wanted to be prosecuted for the death of Susara and compelled the other slave to testify against her. This version of the story, however tragic, offers Antje more agency than either pure historical record or the limited interpretation offered by Ruben. She was not completely at the mercy of Willem. In their relationship she made demands and she herself influenced the outcome of her trial.

Not only is the purity of Whiteness in *The Rights of Desire* undermined by taking in Africanness and stressing the importance of engaging in the life world of the "other", but the dominant patriarchal discourse of Whiteness is also deconstructed by showing with different versions of the same tale that there is never one truth and that people should critically reflect on the dominant ideology of their time.

Brink's attempt to inform his literature with the magical realism of Africa, and to build it from several discourses, still mainly consists of words. So does Ruben's well-meaning resolution to see through how his mindset made atrocity possible. These textual reflections or, to use Van der Vlies' words, "symbolic overhaul" (Vlies, "Introduction"), is at this point not yet translated to effective change in the material reality, a "reality of exclusion in hunger, homelessness, and illiteracy" (Wicomb ch. 2). That last phrase was uttered by Wicomb in an essay from 1991, which she ends with a set of questions about what role literature can actually have in solving people's structural problems. She does not only refer to literature by White people, but to all literature. "The question is surely what to do about those real voices that intrude upon us as we sit down to write: how to continue the activity of writing that is disturbed by the beggars beating at our doors for food: how not to think of writing in this context as a shameful activity that does little or nothing about redistributing cultural and linguistic capital" (ch. 2). In essence, similar to Spivak, Wicomb is contemplating whether the subaltern can speak when she asks: "What place could the dispossessed decently occupy in our schemes of representation?" and "Is there a case at all for giving writing a central position in our culture?" (ch. 2). She does not have answers, but poses the questions anyway. Questions that might stay relevant for a long time.

6. CONCLUSION

An important message of the novel *The Rights of Desire* is that all stories should be told, from different perspectives, and even the unreliable accounts should be faced and worked with to prevent things from falling into oblivion and prevent a dark history from repeating itself. Even when stories or ghosts from the past are intangible and cannot really grasp memory or truth, it remains crucial to invest in them with your time and attention and hold on to a certain hope and potential for the future. Storytelling as well as story *hearing*, then, are important ways to take responsibility. By conveying this message, *The Rights of Desire* corresponds with the opinion that Whites should not become silent, but should reflect and deconstruct. Silencing oneself or trying to shed off Whiteness will only prevent people from facing the tensions that surround these topics, tensions that are in fact so important to face.

Brink sees potential in postmodernism and intertextuality for South African White writers dealing with the history of Apartheid. However, certain aspects that Steyn deems essential to the deconstruction of Whiteness are still absent in the development of Brink's main character Ruben. The author himself attempted to hybridize White South African literature with this novel by informing it with the magical realism of Africa, especially its notion that the spirits of the dead always still surround us. In the novel, ghosts are understood to be unseen, unrecognized or repressed people and stories, to which people should listen more. Their perspectives on the events of the past help to critically reflect on the recent dominant discourse and ideology. However, as Zoë Wicomb asserts in some of her most important essays, questions concerning the representation of the marginalized in literature remain relevant, as do questions about what influence literature can have on ongoing inequality in material reality.

The Rights of Desire clearly expresses optimism about the future of South Africa and the role of the White South African in building this future. The grown will to give more room to repressed voices is of course a positive development, although the attempt to give a voice to what Spivak calls the subaltern stays problematic. It might not come as a surprise that, in a more recently published novel about South Africa, written by Damon Galgut, there is disillusionment. Approximately twenty years after the publication of *The Rights of Desire* with its expression of hope*,* the ghosts and stories of the “formerly” repressed are still not adequately being listened to. This novel, which is deliberately given the ironic title *The Promise,* addresses the problem of the repression of voices by discomfortingly adhering to it.

3. Habits of White Privilege in Damon Galgut's ***The Promise***

> Amor fixates on the pale shapes of her [aunt's] hands, moving on the steering wheel. If she can keep focused on the hands, the shape of them, with their short, blunt fingers, she will not have to listen to what the mouth above the hands is saying, and then it will not be true. The only thing that is true is the hands, and me looking at the hands. (Galgut 6)

This is one of the first scenes in Damon Galgut's novel *The Promise* (2021). Amor is sitting next to her aunt in the car and tries to pretend her mother is not really dead by focusing on something else, her aunt's hands. Immediately, the reader is introduced to the most important themes of the novel: invisibility and selective storytelling. Similar to the way in which Amor thinks that ignoring the fact of her mother's death can somehow undo it, a significant number of White people in South Africa seems to think that if they do not listen to Black people or pretend they just do not exist, their voice does not matter and there is no real suffering.

While André Brink's novel *The Rights of Desire* approached the future of South Africa with hope, *The Promise* is a story of disillusionment. Galgut reminds readers repeatedly of the fact that voices of Black people in South Africa are still not being listened to, even though Apartheid has been abolished. Drawing from Shannon Sullivan's concept of racial habits in *Revealing Whiteness* (2006) and Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2017), this chapter will provide an exploration of how the novel takes its stand on different levels. The analysis will support the claim that the novel consciously uses suppression of Black voices as a means to address it, as a means to use it against itself. This objective corresponds with Sullivan’s proposed way out of the impasse caused by inescapable whiteliness.

Ideas about the means to take responsibility from the scholars who were mentioned in the previous chapters differ. However, they all recognize the ambivalences, errors and unintended consequences in the attempts made by White people. So does Shannon Sullivan, but additionally, Sullivan’s ideas help to clarify *why* it is so difficult to create a space in which to offer direct help to Black people in their struggle for equality; *why* the errors and ambivalences in White people’s endeavours actually occur. They do so because of the existence of unconscious habits of White privilege and the resistance of these habits to conscious reflection. *The Promise* by Galgut can be seen as to illustrate the workings of Sullivan’s concept.

The novel tells of the Swart family and their home farm in South Africa. On her deathbed, Rachel Swart, the mother of the family, lets her husband promise that they will give the Lombard’s house, a house on their property, to the housekeeper Salome. Amor, the youngest daughter, hears this promise and makes it her mission to see its fulfillment through. All the while her brother Anton is busier with himself and with the power “promised” to him as a White male. The novel spans forty years and is therefore set in both an Apartheid and post-apartheid context.

The novel consists of four parts with approximately 10 years in between each part. The central event in each part is a funeral. First, the mother Rachel Swart’s funeral, then father’s funeral, then daughter Astrid’s and the last funeral is that of son Anton. Daughter Amor is the last one left, a middle-aged woman by then. Only when the others have deceased, she manages to really give the Lombard’s house to Salome (or not, this stays a bit unclear).

The first section of this chapter reflects on how Galgut's main objective in writing *The Promise* relates to Sullivan's concepts and proposed solution to the fact that White people never seem to be able to do things right in the struggle against racism. The second and third section will explore how Galgut addresses the issue of habits of White privilege on a meta-level with a particular style of narrating. The narrator has purposefully selected Black perspectives out of the story to provoke a sense of uneasiness about it in readers, hereby using White privilege against itself. The fourth and fifth section give an analysis of two main characters, respectively Amor Swart and Anton Swart, to show how Galgut's restriction to mostly White characters helps to demonstrate how unconscious racial habits can cause people to not act and to postpone doing real justice to formerly repressed people, hereby maintaining White privilege. Additionally, Anton's storyline demonstrates how resistance against self-reflection on racial habits might eventually backfire. In effect, the reader is shown that what is suppressed into the unconscious has a way of catching up with people.

1. TO BOTHER READERS WITH SILENCE

Sullivan speaks of an overall trend in the world of decreasing conscious White supremacy as opposed to increasing relatively unconscious White privilege (190). In the present, most countries have outlawed racial discrimination but in an "atmosphere of alleged colorblindness" (Sullivan 5) racism and White domination can continue in silence, unrecognized but far from gone. Furthermore, habits of White privilege, as Sullivan states, strongly resist the conscious recognition of racism (5). They thrive most when they are unseen. Habits' resistance to conscious reflection makes it all the more important to pay attention to them. Without doing so, asserts Sullivan, antiracist struggle will ultimately fail (22). Stier quotes Paul Taylor who wrote that: "racial privilege allows the whitely individual to "leav[e] their perspectives and practices unexcavated and unmarked, and [to ignore] the perspectival nature of their perspectives” (2004: 230), giving whiteliness a cyclical inescapabilty” (Taylor cited by Stier 58). Thus, it seems impossible for White people to not taint every attempt to do good with their preference for White perspectives and White needs. If this is indeed inescapable, Sullivan proposes that people should *use* White privilege against itself. They can become race traitors by using their racial privilege to combat racism (Sullivan 160-161). This reminds of Brink’s assertion that was mentioned in chapter 2, that people have to use language, however imperfect and treacherous, because they are so entrenched in it, and that humanity can only survive by virtue of attempts with the risk of failing.

Galgut makes such an attempt. One of the main claims of this chapter is that Damon Galgut, with his novel *The Promise,* does exactly what Sullivan proposes. Lately, with the rise of *woke*, there is a demand for more diversity in both literature and film. Despite these pressures, Galgut purposely chose to write a novel from the point of view of a cast of characters who are predominantly White and privileged. In a television interview, Galgut explains how he chose to focus on the White psyche of South Africa, because he considers it to be a significant problem for the South African society that White South Africans do not imaginatively engage enough with the inner lives of their fellow Black citizens (*Brommer op zee*, 6 Nov. 2022). He wanted “the silence in the heart of South African white life to become a kind of literary silence too”, and hopes that readers are bothered by it.

This “[b]lindess to the colour black” has actually been a literary tradition in the Afrikaner *plaasroman*, because the honest farm labour that legitimized the Afrikaners’ claim to the land had in literature better not be seen to be performed by Black servants, as Coetzee confirms in his *White Writing* (5). Galgut shows, with his variant on this literary genre and epos of an Afrikaner family, that this blindness still exists in South African society. He addresses the issue by actually adhering to it. In that way he does what Sullivan pleas for in her book: using White privilege against itself. The analysis below will show how he does this.

2. PERSPECTIVAL NARRATION EXPOSED

The narration form in *The Promise* closely resembles a narration form that Mieke Bal outlines as a common feature of 19th century literatures, such as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Balzac and Dickens (19), except for some meaningful deviations. In her book *Narratology*, Bal explains how to distinguish text, story, and fabula as three different layers in a novel (5). Broadly speaking, the text refers to the medium itself and the story refers to how the logically and chronologically related events of the so called fabula are organized and inflected with a certain vision and perspective. In the story, focalizers play an important role as "the agents of perceptions and interpretation" (10). In the text, the narrator is important. The traditional form in older literature about which Bal speaks often has an external narrator who is non-perceptible, but who nonetheless focalizes and additionally embeds one or more character-bound focalizers. Bal writes that this form of narrating often "serves to state a truth claim" (19). Knowing this, it is striking that Galgut has chosen this form for *The Promise* to actually defy truth.

The narrator in *The Promise* is external, often non-perceptible, and acts like a witness who often presents the reader with their view on matters. It is akin to an all-knowing opinionated cinematic eye that moves around to different places and characters. On pages 33-35 for example, the narrator moves itself through the family's house at night, switching from room to room and from character to character, entering the dreams and thoughts of the family members who are gathered at the house for mother Swart's funeral. Galgut frequently uses what Bal refers to as "free indirect speech", a type of mixture between narrator's text and actor's text, in which the personal language situation of a character crosses with that of the narrator (Bal 47). This way, the narrator very directly crawls under the skin of the characters, with no quotation marks to announce it. For example, when father Swart has feelings of guilt in his sleep, there is a rapid switch from third-person to first-person: "His heart is wrung like an old rag. I'm sorry, I'm sorry" (Galgut 33). What makes this narrative situation different from a more conventional narration style are the rapid, midparagraph and sometimes even midsentence changes in perspective. Galgut has used this playful way of switching between focalizers all throughout the novel. Hereby, the by Mieke Bal distinguished layers of text, story and fabula become purposefully intermingled. The intermingling of layers does not conceal the presence of the narrator, but on the contrary, emphasizes it. The narration style requires an active reading attitude which can make the reader more aware of the fact that the novel consists entirely of the narrator's voice, uttering a tale which is coloured by the narrator's vision. Where Ruben in *The Rights of Desire* quite literally explains how words cannot be trusted, Galgut forces his readers to experience it.

Furthermore, the narrator repeatedly reminds the reader of his presence and admits he does not know everything and sometimes simply guesses or makes something up. When the family members return from Mrs. Swart's funeral, the narrator is unsure about where in the house the father Manie and his eldest child have a conversation. He sums up several possible locations before he says: "It doesn't matter. The following exchange takes place between Manie and his eldest child, somewhere" (80). Shortly prior to this, the narrator made up a prayer Salome might have said during mother Swart's funeral. The narrator admits: "Perhaps she doesn't pray in these words, or in any words at all" (79). This is later followed by: "Or perhaps she prays for other things, because prayers are secret in the end" (79-80). Of course, one can never know what she prays for without asking and that is exactly what most if not all of the White characters in the novel will never do, which will become clear in the analysis in the section below.

Even the narrator does not know what Salome really thinks, and without this recognition that even an omniscient narrator is not really omniscient, coloured narratives about marginalized people easily become considered as truth which gives the narrators of these narratives immense power over these people. The narrator in *The Promise* bends the story to his will and gives his own interpretation or expectation of events, but does it openly, in order to let the reader become aware of the perspectival nature of the narrator's telling.

3. SELECTIVE STORYTELLING ON PURPOSE

This analysis now turns towards what is possibly the most important aspect of stories that this novel addresses, an aspect which dangerously adds up to words' and language's untrustworthiness: selection. Regularly, and in varying degrees of subtlety, the narrator makes comments about the invisibility of certain characters, because White South Africa avoids paying attention to them. The most striking is the invisibility of the Black housekeeper Salome, for whom Amor specially instructs herself (and the narrator indirectly instructs the reader) to: "Pause a moment to observe … She was with Ma when she died, right there next to the bed, though nobody seems to see her, she is apparently invisible. And whatever Salome feels is invisible too" (18). This is not the only moment in which the narrator addresses the reader with an instruction or even with accusations. When Amor and her aunt Marina arrive at Marina's house at the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes the house and the garden and speaks of a "diorama of white South Africa, … Where you, perhaps, also grew up. Where all of it began" (6). The "you" probably refers to all the White South African readers who happen to be reading this novel. The words "where all of it began" sound somewhat ominous, as if the narrator is referring to the reader's personal history of ignorance and evasion of Black people against the background of South Africa under Apartheid. A few pages further on, the narrator begins to describe the "voices" in the townships to which we should be willing to listen. The narrator again speaks to a “you” and urges them (urges the reader, but maybe also the characters in this particular scene in the novel) to listen and hereby allow the voices a place in the story: “Shhh, you’ll hear them, if you pay attention, if you will only listen” (10). It is meaningful that right after this call to listen, Ockie, Amor’s uncle, turns off the car radio because he is “not in the mood for political speeches, much nicer to look at the view” (10). In any case, he clearly is *not* making an attempt to listen to what bothers the majority of people in the country, something the reader will now not fail to notice.

Surprisingly, the narrator himself is very selective in what he tells and with what “voices” he presents the various stories to the reader. The novel scarcely gives the perspective of Black people. This means that the housekeeper Salome, even though the novel revolves around her and around the question of whether she will receive her house, is mostly either the object of someone else’s focalization or, as said, she is invisible. It is not until the very last pages of the novel that something can be read about Salome’s back story and the tiny village where she comes from. The narrator passes on the guilt of not having mentioned any of this before to the reader: “it’s because you have not asked, you didn’t care to know” (285). Again, the reader is addressed directly, and confronted with his or her own disinterest in Salome’s story.

While the narrator in the examples above seems to be critical about people’s carelessness concerning “other”, marginalized voices, on pages 203-204 it notably takes a very different stand when annoyed by a homeless man: “Why is he obscuring our view, this unwashed, raggedy man, … how did he waste our time with his stories?” (203-204). This time, the reader is even instructed to “[p]ay him no further mind” (204). The ambivalence of the narrator can be argued to be another instrument to provoke an active reading attitude. It challenges readers to be more critical about invisibility, selection and interpretation in storytelling. Just as importantly, it helps to demonstrate how these aspects can cause marginalized groups not to be heard (to be selected out), misinterpreted and even demonized, not only in stories, but in the country as a whole. Despite the fact that Galgut, once again, is an author who by symbolic overhaul reflects on racial and social categories, Galgut's narrator draws the attention to "the beggars beating at our doors" that Wicomb speaks of (ch. 2). Literature might not be able to reach all the discriminated, nor the illiterate, but it can reach other people in society that play a role in the suppression of voices. Growing an awareness in these people remains important for building a more equal interracial society.

In this novel, the failure in making room for marginalized voices is actually what the novel addresses by doing it on purpose and provoking a sense of uneasiness about it in readers. Sullivan claims that White privilege thrives when it seems nonexistent and Galgut has tried to make that invisible process visible. An important and available reading is that by appearing to be White- and racially specific, the novel creates a space to combat White solipsism. After all, change in racial habits cannot be achieved without diving into them and very carefully scrutinizing them. In that way he does what Sullivan pleas for: using White privilege against itself.

4. A PROMISE UN-KEPT

The following sections of this chapter will serve to show how Galgut's restriction to mostly White characters and focalizers helps to demonstrate how unconscious racial habits can cause people to "not act" and postpone doing real justice to formerly repressed people, hereby maintaining White privilege. Since the novel, with all its shifts in perspectives, has an extremely rich palette of characters, this analysis will be limited to two of them: Amor Swart, the youngest daughter of the family, who comes closest to being the main character of the novel because the story begins and ends with her; and Anton Swart, her brother and counterpart.

Amor has a strong connection to Salome. Not only do they have a strong bond because Amor is practically raised by Salome, they also share the experience of being treated as unremarkable and invisible. Amor is also "used to being treated as a blur, a smudge at the edge of everybody's vision" (65). Unlike Salome, Amor is seen to evolve significantly during the course of the novel. From a weird little girl who was once struck by lightning on a hilltop near the house, she becomes a beautiful and strong woman who leaves her family to respectively live in England and in Durban. Here she works in a hospital, just as Rosa Burger in *Burger's Daughter*.

Amor eventually gives up her inheritance of the whole family farm. Hereby, *The Promise* is probably the most recently published novel that gives a critical revision of the traditional Afrikaner *plaasroman*. Traditionally, the Afrikaner farm used to stay in the family for generations, but with Amor's deviant behaviour *The Promise* breaks with the "the isolationist romance of the return to the family farm" (Coetzee 6). Additionally, Amor increases her own invisibility in the "White world." Prior to almost all of the funerals in the novel, her family has difficulty to reach her because her phone number has changed. The only one who she consistently leaves with her phone number is Salome. For her Amor is always available.

However, Amor drags her feet on the fulfillment of the promise to Salome until it is met with the least resistance. That promise was to arrange for the Lombard property, which is practically Salome's home, to be fully transferred to Salome. Every time Amor returns to the farm, the subject of the house comes up and Amor pleas Salome's case with Anton. But to protect herself from too much responsibility, she convinces herself that there is no rush in attending to the question of Salome's house. She makes remarks like: "she knows she must, one day she will have to answer, but why should one day be today?" (113). Later, on page 159, it seems she has come to some sort of arrangement with Anton and she completely relaxes, "feeling happy for the first time since she touched down. Salome will get her house" (159). This is more wishful thinking rather than it being in any way clear that Salome will really get her house because Anton has in fact been rather vague about it. Amor prefers to ignore that she really needs to make more of an effort. This could be interpreted as laziness or complacency, traits she can permit herself due to her privileged position as a White South African. Even though she has decided to side with Salome and show solidarity by seeking solitude and deliberate invisibility, away from the White and privileged environment that is her family, she still is not able to consciously reflect on what holds her from doing everything she can to help Salome. This corresponds with Sullivan's statement that: "Even though logical arguments about race might lead a person to consciously decide to endorse non-racist ideas, such a decision does not necessarily have much, if any, impact on his or her unconscious habits" (Sullivan 22). At this point, Amor's behaviour works as an example of how, as Sullivan claims, White privilege actively thwarts conscious reflection. Built-in protection mechanisms make her feel like she is doing enough for Salome and prevent her from doing more self-reflection about her own racial habits, which gives White privilege the opportunity to endure.

Only at the end of the novel, when Amor is a middle-aged woman and the other family members, including Anton, are deceased, Amor takes concrete steps to ensure the promise to Salome will be fulfilled. However, the scene in which Amor delivers the title deed to Salome is written as a fantasy: "though it's too soon for [Amor] to have it, let's say that she does, let's say the lawyer drew up the document this morning and gave it to her, so there it is, right in front of your eyes, she has the paper in her hand" (282). She has not, though. Or has she? We as readers are left guessing. As a result, a confusion permeates the end of the novel. Once again, this is a way to provoke an active reading attitude. In the meeting with Salome, the document keeps being referred to as an "un-paper" and "piece of paper, which she can't yet possibly have in her possession” (284). This clearly means that the promise to Salome is still just that: a promise. In a similar way, there is a promise in the air in South Africa that all social groups and ethnicities would gain wealth and equality. The ending of the novel can be read as a metaphor for the current situation in South Africa, because the issue of inequality in South Africa remains unresolved to date.

However, the novel does not only condemn Amor’s actions, but also elicits sympathy for this woman who tries to live responsibly. From a passage on page 220 can be deduced that Amor struggles with how to act in the world: “The problem, she thinks, the problem is that I have never learned to live properly. Things have always been too little or too much, the world sits heavily on me” (220). She cannot find efficiency in her engagement with the world of which she feels the heavy weight. Apparently, she needs her protection mechanisms. She has had to find a lightness in herself while doing what she thinks is right (220), or else it would never feel enough, perhaps because it indeed never is, and never can be. It weighs in her favor that she rejects all her inherited money and intends to give it to Salome near the end of the novel. Again, though, we do not read how Salome actually receives the money. This too, remains a promise.

5. THE OPPRESSOR HAUNTED BY THE OPPRESSED

The thwarting of conscious reflection on White privilege is even more clear in the behaviour of the character Anton. Anton is a seminal example of a White privileged promising male. On page 63 he thinks about his privileges and opportunities in life, but with hesitation: “Anton the firstborn, the only son. He is anointed, to what he doesn’t know, but the future is his” (63). When his thoughts continue they start to show signs of a feeling of guilt: “But a tiny sourness at the back of his throat seems always to have been there, … There is a lie at the heart of everything and I have just discovered it in myself” (63). Hereby, he does show some signs of awareness of his implication in injustice, but this awareness is met with strong resistance.

This resistance is apparent in the disdainful way in which Anton thinks about the relationship between Salome and Amor. His behaviour demonstrates how he looks down on people who have a sense of justice, to prevent himself from being confronted with his own unjust behavior. In the third part of the novel, he talks about how Salome and Amor are "plotting revolution" and about how Amor wants to help all the weak, "the weaker the better, feels she has to make up for all historical wrongs, and there's some unholy alliance between those two, God knows what" (213-214). When Anton is not speaking about Amor with disdain, he evades any moment when he could speak or think about her at all, because she is the person who confronts him the most with his privileged position. During a therapy session, a few pages before his comment on Salome and Amor's "unholy alliance", he suddenly realizes he never mentioned her to his therapist, until now, when she is coming home for the funeral of their sister Astrid. The narrator reflects that Anton might never have mentioned Amor because he just does not care, but also hints to the reader that it is because he in fact cares a great deal (205). Then the narrator adds the meaningful words: "Odd that, how certain blindnesses are revealing" (205). Anton's disdainful attitude towards Amor and his evasion of speaking and even thinking about her, reveal what an influential factor she actually is in his life. Read within the wider theme of invisibility in the novel, this sentence about how blindnesses can be revealing must also be applied to the big role Black people play in White people's lives in South Africa. This is especially true when White people try to shut Black people out. Something you consistently try to push away and try to be blind to, paradoxically plays a huge part in your life. Even to be written out of a narrative, marginalized people have to be noticed first.

6. CONCLUSION

While certain critics plea for more Black voices in the world of literature, Galgut chose to situate his novel in a White-centered reality on purpose. His goal was to address White solipsism in South Africa. With his novel, he is in fact performing a deconstruction of Whiteness. Certain White South Africans might have suppressed thoughts about their implication so much that they assume they are living the life they are entitled to without harming any Black people in the process. Galgut lays bare that this same implication and these same Black people, in spite of the suppression, actually play a gigantic part in the lives of these White South Africans. This is probably why Galgut has given the main White family in this novel the surname Swart, which is the Afrikaans word for Black. This could almost be seen as the author’s way of teasing his own characters, haunting them with what they cannot escape, the flipside of their inherited privilege.

The novel paradoxically shows how the oppressed also have power over their oppressors. Eventually, the flipside of Anton’s racial habits is so significant that it catches up with him. The promise of his White privilege is never fulfilled. He never finishes the novel that he planned to write, and never becomes the person he believed he was promised to be (245), which has in large part to do with the changing tide in South Africa after the abolition of Apartheid. He has turned out a failure and eventually commits suicide. It could be argued that his attempts to suppress his own conscience eventually backfired.

This analysis clears the way for a perspective on a future which Sullivan might not expect to unfold. Instead of the continuing increase of relatively unconscious White privilege, what if that which is suppressed (feelings of guilt pushed to the unconscious; Black people pushed to the margins or completely out of sight) irrevocably hits back? Like a balloon that keeps coming to the surface, no matter how hard it is pushed under water, the consequences of action in the past and present will always re-emerge.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of three novels from White South African authors, this thesis has explored different representations of White people's notion of responsibility against the background of South Africa before and after the abolition of the Apartheid regime. The discussion of the novels, through the theoretical frame of scholars who engage with theories of implication, Whiteness and White privilege, has allowed for a better understanding of the literary author's views on both difficulties as well as possibilities for White people to take responsibility in an effective way. This concluding chapter will begin with a summary of the relevant theories, followed by a description of the novels' provided insights and interconnections. Lastly, a recommendation will be given on follow up research.

1. AWARENESS AND SUPPRESSION

The theorists who have inspired and fuelled the analysis of this thesis are Michael Rothberg, Melissa Steyn, Shannon Sullivan, and Zoë Wicomb. Their work complements each other and can be placed in dialogue with other scholars in the field of literature and Whiteness studies as has been done in this thesis with Samantha Vice, Jordan Stier, Howard Winant, and Gayatri Spivak. The position of the implicated subject as conceptualized by Michael Rothberg can be recognized in all the novels. The concept nuances the rigidness in terms like complicity and guilt, helps to think beyond the victim/perpetrator-binary, and hereby allows for less paralysing considerations about well-intentioned White people who are not willingly hurting Black people, but who are nonetheless implicated in violent histories and present-day injustices. Rothberg sees is it as our responsibility to confront and act against such implication and to find new ways of thinking about solidarity. As will be outlined later in this conclusion, the novels show different strategies of doing so. Just as importantly, they also let the reader become witness to strategies that allow individuals to flee from this responsibility, as well as demonstrations of why it is so difficult for Black people to trust the seemingly good intentions of certain White people.

It is useful to reiterate the eloquent way in which Rothberg addresses the issue: "the movement from implication to solidarity does not follow a direct path; it often involves ambivalence, error, and unintended consequences" (201). This is something all the theorists in the sources used are aware of. Samantha Vice even sees it as a reason for White people to become politically and publicly silent, which Jordan Stier and Howard Winant on the other hand find irresponsible. For a needed *deconstruction* of Whiteness, the latter believe it necessary that White people self-reflect en rethink White identity, instead of eradicating Whiteness all together. Colourblindness would be unhelpful in the formation of an interracial society. However, Zoë Wicomb reminds us that it is important to remember the inherent dangers in the use of labels for "racial" categories. The deconstruction proposed by Stier and Winant allows one to remember the past while at the same time striving for cultural renewal.

Melissa Steyn has recognized a fruitful deconstructive attitude in one of the narratives that she distilled from her research on the fragmented sense of White identity in South Africa after Apartheid. She has called this narrative "Hybridization, That's the Name of The Game" and it is a subcategory of the narrative "Under African Skies (or White, but not Quite)". The people who follow this narrative do not deny responsibility. Nor do they withdraw themselves or try to shed their Whiteness. Instead, they are aware of their implication in injustice and committed to personal change and growth in order to deconstruct the master narrative of Whiteness in co-authorship with other ethnicities and social groups in South Africa.

In this description of the deconstructive narrative, just as in Rothberg's theory of implication and in Winant's and Stier's demand for self-reflection, one objective should be noted in particular: *awareness*. This objective is also clear in Wicomb's argument that cultural renewal should include continuous assessment and criticism of the agents and forums involved in the transition from old to new. This is also a pertinent insight with regard to the organizations that now pride themselves on diversity while the already existing palimpsestic map, on which society intends to build a more equal world, also includes opposing interests which go against real equality and tackling racism (see my earlier reference to Sara Ahmed in the introduction). In a world in which most countries have outlawed racial discrimination but in which there is also an increase of unconscious, "silent" White privilege and domination, awareness proves to be a highly complicated goal to achieve. Shannon Sullivan's theorizing of unconscious racial habits helps to clarify this point. Habits of White privilege thrive most when they are unseen, she says. Therefore, they resist conscious reflection on them.

2. THE ACT OF RESPONSIBILITY

The same emphasis on the importance of awareness can be found in the novels that were the analytical focus of this project. One of the arguments that will be made in this final statement is that considerations about responsibility in the three novels all come down to the conclusion that contemplation is needed on White people's "proper" place in Black people's struggle for equality as well as reflection on how much space Black people are granted in stories and on a parallel level in the real world, in this case in the country South Africa. At the core of this thesis was a core research question: *What does taking responsibility look like in the different novels*? It is now clear, as was already expected in the introduction, that a red thread through the novels and consequentially through this thesis has been the exploration of a specific form of taking responsibility: *making room* for the "other" and allowing this "other" their *space*.

All the previous chapters have in fact considered the different ways in which this does or does not happen in the novels. *The Promise* is quite literally about the question whether a Black housekeeper will receive the home and thereby the space that she is owed. The Lombard's house and the country South Africa mirror each other with the realities of occupancy and dispossession that Salome is confronted with. Salome does not belong anywhere. She shows significant similarities with Magrieta in *The Rights of Desire* who finds herself in the same predicament. In the sixties, Magrieta's house in District Six is demolished. For long periods of time she lives at Ruben's house or with friends and family. She utters: "All my life I been waiting for that place of my own" (Brink 141). She too does not belong anywhere.

The reader can see this reflection on the theme of space/place also in less literal, more abstract ways in the novels, in how much space is allowed to certain people's agency and point of view in stories. Think back to Tessa's remark in *The Rights of Desire* about the historiographical sources on the history of the ghost Antje of Bengal: "It is her story, but she hardly features in it" (Brink 51). Think also about all the people that are denied a voice in the *The Promise,* in order to mirror how voices are denied in real life.

Another important space to consider is that which White characters in the novels inhabit in the Black struggle against injustice. Rosa Burger eventually pulls back a little. She does not claim as much space in the rebellion as her parents did, because she has come to realize that her privileged position does not legitimize her to do so. She does however choose a certain place for herself in South Africa. She has most importantly contemplated her place, which can be seen as a way of taking responsibility in itself.

Lastly, a metaphor of "one's place" is reflected in all three novels in the shape of a White family's home and the question of whether to stay or to leave. In *Burger's Daughter*, Rosa leaves her family's home with private pool shortly after her father has died. In *The Rights of Desire,* Ruben refuses to leave his haunted house. In *The Promise,* Amor eventually gives up her family farm, the kind of farm that used to stay in the family for generations and represented a claim to the land and idyllic lifestyle that masked the realities of oppression.

The importance of the contemplation of place comes forward in all the novels. As long as White people avoid to question if the space they inhabit is gained fairly and if it should in fact be them who call all the shots, as long as they do not develop awareness on these topics, the Black people in the novels have a hard time belonging anywhere and are all in fact homeless. Homeless as well as speechless, as Spivak would say. The final conclusion of this thesis however, is not simply that the novels show that White people should withdraw to give Black people more space and opportunities in life. As important as that may be, the novels, especially *The Rights of Desire* and *The Promise,* rather stress the importance of reflection and, paradoxically, presence. White people cannot reflect on their "proper" place without taking up some space. They do not need to disappear, they need to change.

The insights in the novels on different strategies to take responsibility while being present, which all have their advantages and disadvantages, can be divided in the following categories: White activism; changing one's environment; storytelling and –hearing; deconstruction of Whiteness; and using White privilege against itself. Their implications as conveyed or demonstrated in the novels will be summarized on the following pages.

White Activism

In Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* is shown that attempts to do the right thing often unconsciously help maintain White privilege. By advocates of the Black Consciousness Movement, White activism like that of the Burger family is felt as a way in which White people "take over" the struggle, as if Black people are not intelligent enough to fight for themselves. Additionally, Flora Donaldson's colourblind attitude in the seemingly non-racial gatherings at her house rather move away from taking real responsibility than towards it.

To Change the Environment

It seems obvious that changing one's environment can be an effective strategy to challenge one's position of implication and White privilege. By literally leaving the space one inhabits, a person might be able to change their role in society. However, a comparison of Gordimer's and Galgut's novel shines new light on this.

Rosa Burger in *Burger's Daughter* and Amor Swart in *The Promise* are both young women who leave their environment, break with their family, and try to figure out who they are without their family. A significant difference is that Rosa tries to find who she is away from political activism as opposed to Amor whose act of leaving a White privileged and racist environment can be seen as a politically informed deed. In short, Rosa flees from collective responsibility, while Amor attempts to take responsibility and challenge her implication in a world that privileges White people. Amor rejects all inheritance of her family: her money, and eventually not only the Lombard's house but the whole farm.

Rosa and Amor eventually follow similar paths. When both characters take on jobs in a hospital, they attempt to become a source of positive meaning for their Black fellow citizens. However, Rosa explicitly reflects on her White identity and place and Amor does this barely. When Rosa is confronted with her implication in the suffering of her foster brother, with whom she thought she had a loving relationship, this touches her personally and emotionally. It catalyses her decision to return to South Africa. There she comes to understand that, in spite of her friendship with Black people, she is not special or different from any other less engaged White people in a position of privilege ("like anyone else" (Gordimer 332)). When she ends up in prison, she finds herself on equal footing with coloured, Black and Indian women, who are all denied their space in the country. The fact that they are in different prison cells, together, but apart, indicates a symbolic long-distance solidarity. This mirrors a key concept from Rothberg and one that could inspire new attitudes in White people in the struggle for equality today.

Amor on the other hand never experiences such a hard and emotional confrontation. Placing the theory of Sullivan next to Amor's story has shown how Amor's built-in protection mechanisms prevent her from being more self-reflective on her White privileged habits. White privilege appears to have all the opportunity to endure when promises of Whites to Blacks keep being unfulfilled. With this difference between Rosa and Amor in mind, it should be argued that changing one's environment has little impact on one's privileged position without an awareness of this position. It can also be argued that Galgut has problematized Amor's position slightly more thorough, by showing a person's inability to grow full awareness.

Hearing, Listening, and Telling Stories

In both *The Rights of Desire* and *The Promise* there is reflection on storytelling. In *The Rights of Desire,* telling and listening to stories are seen as a condition for taking responsibility. Ghosts and stories are paralleled as being both intangible and without a hold on graspable truths, traits which should not be seen as to diminish the importance of listening to them. This might also apply to Spivak's concern that the subaltern is silenced by Western intellectuals' attempts to understand them. This risk should not prevent intellectuals from engaging with "the other".

The Rights of Desire ends on quite an optimistic tone. There is hope for the country if people are willing to invest time and take responsibility, most importantly by listening. *The Promise* on the other hand, shows disillusionment. The novel shows how twenty years after the publication of *The Rights of Desire,* Black voices are still not adequately being heard. The predominantly White characters of the novel do not show any interest in the inner world of Black people in South Africa. The reader is confronted with this, as well as with their own assumed disinterest.

Whether they are optimistic or disillusioning, both of the novels clearly stress the importance of stories. The way people tell them and reflect on them will ultimately determine how effective they can be as a means to take responsibility.

Deconstruction of Whiteness

Winant, Stier and Steyn all stress the importance of a deconstruction of Whiteness, which can indeed play an important role in telling stories in a responsible way. Steyn has provided a set of elements for such a deconstruction by which this thesis has evaluated to what extent deconstruction is performed in *The Rights of Desire*. Even though it seems to have been the premise of the novel to be open to a variety of stories from different viewpoints, and to reflect and deconstruct, the main character Ruben does not explicitly reflect on how White identity relates to racism or power issues. However, that is exactly the type of reflection that Steyn deems essential in a deconstructive narrative of Whiteness. Nonetheless, deconstruction is present to some extent in the way Brink has implemented elements of indigenous African culture in the novel (the presence of an interfering ghost), hereby undermining White purity, and in the postmodern way in which the novel presents a multiplicity of stories and perspectives on the life of the ghost Antje of Bengal.

The deconstruction performed in *The Promise* proves to be more potent. Galgut does not lead his main characters, Anton and Amor, to an "enlightenment" that analysis can prove to be not so enlightened after all. He rather lays bare their failures in achieving awareness. The novel demonstrates the workings of unconscious blockages in people that prevent them from doing what is right. "Promise" appears to be a kind of synonym to "responsibility" and Galgut shows how a promise made is repeatedly broken.

Most important in the evaluation of deconstruction, the novel can be seen as an account of how something you try to push away paradoxically plays a huge and influential part in your life. This results in a clear reverse of binaries which defines the workings of deconstruction as explained by Derrida. It takes effort to oppress the majority of a country's population. In such a situation, ironically, White people's lives can become determined by the Black people of whom they actually try to eradicate all agency and influence. Similarly, Black people's presence is extremely palpable in the novel, even though Galgut has refrained himself from giving them a voice.

Using White privilege against itself

Using White privilege against itself is a way of taking responsibility recommended by Sullivan. In this thesis has been argued that Galgut's novel *The Promise* is doing exactly that. The narrator brings the selectiveness of his storytelling and the suppression of Black voices under attention and in the conscious awareness of the reader. The novel creates numerous shifts in the point of view and voice. However, the voice least heard is that of Salome, the housekeeper. That choice is reflective of the author's intent to address the invisibility of Black people and their needs, and thematises the power of a White and privileged group of voices. The effect is that Galgut has written a White-centric novel on purpose, to address how White-centered people still are in South Africa. This will not help to solve the issues in material reality immediately, but maybe this is something that cannot be expected of literature. The change of people's thought patterns is a slow but nonetheless important process.

3. AN OPEN CONVERSATION

The research report for this thesis has developed into what could be characterized as a thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure. The first chapter dealt mostly with how Gordimer problematized the White privileged position and with the importance of growing awareness about this and consequentially pulling back or choosing a different position to act from. In the second chapter I argued how Brink's novel can be read as to stress the importance for White people to keep making themselves heard, even from a dubious position. In the third, I examined a novel that intends to unite these objectives. White privilege will inevitably be sustained by White attempts to do good. However, when it is not an option to withdraw from new developments and public debate, one can still try to use White privilege against itself, as Galgut has done with *The Promise*.

No matter what strategy is chosen, there is no way around that racial power and space/place are deeply connected. Both the discussed authors and the characters in their novels make choices to deny other's their space, pull back in order to not taint new developments with their White-centred perspectives, or, as was surprisingly the case with Galgut, to claim large amounts of space precisely as a means to address and problematize it. What we as a society can take from the insights in these novels, as based on my analysis, is an encouragement to keep openly contemplating the role of White people on the path to full racial equality. When people are well-intentioned, they are allowed to make mistakes, as long as these mistakes will be reflected upon later. The analysis of the novels demonstrates the difficulties inherent in the process of self-reflection. It does not yet always encompass enough of the dark histories of colonialism and its implications in the present, as was the case with Ruben. That makes it all the more important to keep the conversation open. There are still steps to be taken here, but they cannot be taken in silence. A novel like *The Promise* shows that taking up space as a White person might not be such a bad thing if it is used to hold a confrontational mirror to White people. Disappearing out of shame is impossible, change does not have to be.

There is another interesting concept related to this topic that has not been covered by the scope of this thesis: empathy. My argument about the long-distance solidarity in *Burger's Daughter*, which allows Rosa Burger to be on equal footing with people of colour without either "becoming" them or assuming a role as their leader, comes close, but there is more to consider in this direction. Other literary scholars who are interested in this might explore not only literature that tries to break out of the impasse that exists when White people are expected to withdraw in silence, but also literature that contemplates the possibilities and probably more important the *impossibilities* of showing real empathy to the "other". Is it even legitimate for a White author to write from the perspective of people of colour, to speak with their voice? Can they really know how someone of colour feels?

As a researcher and scholar, I would argue that it is unwise to let the limits of empathy be another argument to demand White people to withdraw. It might however be very interesting if a novel by a privileged author, about characters from a marginalized background, would implement insights on these limits of empathy, just as Galgut presented readers with a captivating story, while at the same time making readers aware of the selectiveness of stories and what danger that causes to marginalized people. Again: withdrawing, refraining, becoming silent is not the answer. A better answer starts with reflection and deconstruction.

I have written this thesis from my perspective as a Dutch White woman. In academic writing, scholars are still often expected to write in third person to make their dissertations formal, professional and convincing in tone. Apart from the introduction, I have not referred to myself in the previous chapters, but it should be clear that it was me who was providing the report of the analysis, and not some transcendent omniscient narrator. Any claim to truth is unreliable. Galgut has played with this in his prose. Now is the time for more scholars to do the same.

4. DONKERMAAN

I want to end this thesis with a comment on *The Rights of Desire's* Afrikaans title, which is *Donkermaan.* In English this translates to "obscure moon". I prefer this title because it provides a metaphor for the situation people of colour find themselves in. Ruben describes the ghost Antje of Bengal as "an obscure moon illuminating our darkness from somewhere very far away, very long ago" (51). Even though this moon is obscure, it still shines a light, just as the Black people who are suppressed in *The Promise* are of significant influence on the White people who try to omit them. This obscure moon does furthermore shine light to "our darkness", which comprises of humanity's flaws and evil, and can do that from not even that far away or long ago, can do that today. The hope that comes with the realisation that that which is suppressed still shines from its obscured place and that suppression might backfire, also comes with a task: to not let it come this far, or to not let it go further, because we are probably already there. South Africa might be a separate case because it has a history of extreme violence and one of the biggest gaps between rich and poor in the world, but were the South Africa of today to be a fictional invention, it could serve perfectly as a magnified allegory for so many other countries with poverty, riots, criminality, police violence, and growing polarisation. The hope is, for everyone's sake, that we can stay ahead of catastrophic extremes and learn to see in advance what we both consciously and unconsciously try to ignore.

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