Negative Spaces: (Re-)Imagining Race and Blackness in Post-2000 South African Urban Narratives.

By

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Abstract

This study seeks to establish how black identity can be understood through post-2000 black authored South African city narratives. What motivates this inquiry is the understanding that black identity has been defined through negative perceptions since colonialism. The end of colonialism and apartheid marked a turning point in the South Africa history and literature as black people, began to re-define their identities. The study argues that, from colonialism and apartheid eras to the post-colonial period, blackness still poses as a negative space as it is consciously or unconsciously established around similar negative images that were formulated by the colonialists. My study is interested in inquiring whether, with the demise of apartheid, urban narratives have moved beyond colonial perspectives of representing black identity. As such, my focus is on how these black authored urban narratives present black urban dwellers and the city spaces that they occupy. The relations between black dwellers in urban spaces form a crucial point of departure considering how the meaning as it was constructed during apartheid has been sidelined to pave way for multiple meanings of that identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The study analyses blackness and South African cities as negative spaces that share consanguinity on the backdrop of murders, corruption, robberies, drug and alcohol abuse, and patriarchal oppression among others. Through such representations, the study argues that these spaces have become more precarious than during apartheid and the survival of most black people is not always guaranteed. Therefore, the study engages blackness through post-apartheid urban ambiguities, un-inhabitable city spaces, struggles to attain black entitlement within a country that is still defined by racism, urban negations and toxic masculinities that are constantly performed by post-apartheid young people.

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Key Words:

Blackness

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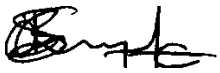
Toxic Masculinities,

Negative Spaces.

Declaration

I declare that this research is my own unaided work. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of Doctor of Philosophy English at the Free State. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.



Bright Sinyonde

Dedications

This study is dedicated to my lovely wife Saneliso Sinyonde. May God bless her.

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Contents

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

For a long time, the term blackness has been conceptualised in both white colonial and black contemporary narratives as identifying people of black skin. The similar but derogatory term is Negro, which in the 1798 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is "a name given to a variety of species, who are entirely black, and are found in the Torrid zone, especially in that part of Africa which lies within the tropics". This pejorative reference has its origins in eighteenth century white colonial discourses that viewed black skin as the exterior reflection of "the internal inferior characteristics (such as character or mental ability)" (Hrabovskỳ 2013: 67). Such condescension of people of black skin based on physical appearances have not only pathologized black people but also created permanence of negative, racial colonial stereotypes. By objectifying and setting black subjects within patronising subjectivities, the slavery and colonial enterprise made objects of black identity and subjects to colonial whiteness with implausible assumptions that black people were "consecrated by God" (Hrabovskỳ 2013: 66) to be slaves of white people. Consequently, the "Orient" as explained in Said's "Orientalism," was colonially formulated into a subject that the "Occident" (coloniser) had to deal with "by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (Said 1979: 3). This was done through the might of the gun, the "one-arm banditry" as Walter Rodney (1972) puts it, and other subtle forms of conquest like education and religion. Since that colonial moment of madness as referred to by Clingman (1991: 231), the studies on race relations and racism have constantly assumed a lower status for blackness. This is noted by Curry and Utley (2016: 263) when they argue; "[m]ost people think of Blackness and how we study Blackness as a negative endeavour [… as it is] always associated with oppression, pathology, [and] suffering." Hence, the researcher's curiosity on how black authored novels shape an understanding of blackness in post-apartheid urban spaces. As such, the study grapples with urban perspectives of novels such as Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eats Dog* (2004), Songeziwe Mahlangu's *Penumbra* (2013), Perfect Hlongwane's *Jozi* (2013), Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* (2006) and Angela Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* (2014). These narratives are fitting in my analysis of post-2000 blackness for many reasons. One of these reasons is that they emerge in post-2000 and within a wave of interest by black authors' to write about the South African city since the end of apartheid. As such, the perspectives of these writers offer appropriate platforms to analyse

black identity that emerges through the experiences of black people who have occupied inner cities since the end of apartheid.

In an interview that was conducted by Utley on the topic *Humanizing Blackness,* Curry offers a meaning of blackness that transcends colonial patronizing perspectives. He shades positive light around the meaning of blackness by perceiving it on an equal status with whiteness. His perspective takes negritude to a higher level and is set on a vibrant argument that refutes colonial condescending viewpoints of black identity. However, something in Curry's argument lacks conviction and resists what it claims. Against the understanding that blackness is a negative space, Curry cited in Utley (2016: 263) argues that:

> [t]here's another way that we could look at Blackness as an alternate version of the human being. Like a human being that's made within history, that really stands within the courage and enduring of slavery, suffering, and poverty—an evolved kind of humanity that's of the world and not something that stands outside of it. We usually associate humanity with whiteness, reason, virtue, and all of these things that we haven't really realized in the world. With Blackness you get that quality of the human that is found within triumph, struggle, and resistance. Resistance is a human quality that Black people possess because they're human, but there is something else about Black humanity that is unique, that comes about because of slavery, Jim Crow, rape, castration. These types of things are peculiar to Black people, and because of that, their humanity, as it interacts with the world, has created this unique thing that we now think of in terms of Blackness.

The understanding given to blackness above, seems to be equivocal in that on the one hand, it attempts to resist the tendency to entrench blackness within colonial patronizing conceptualisations and, on the other, its contestation is underestimated by its refusal to part with such conceptualisations. By defining blackness as an epitome of resistance especially of the patronizing past, yet failing to detach it from the negative conceptualisations that are fixed within historical moments of slavery, suffering and poverty, Curry, I argue, falters in his attempts to imaginatively elevate blackness into a recognisable positive space. Elsewhere, Baldwin (1998: 722-3) suggest that:

> [h]istory …is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by its many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.

From Baldwin's argument, it is crucial to note that one is capable of realising their history. However, detaching themselves from what it entails is to some extent, mythical. This is not to resist the notion that any historical moment of a given group of people is crucial when

rethinking their identities. Yet, when that group of people is continuously defined in relation to their past negative historical moments, then that definition ceases to capture a positive thought about their identity. Curry's argument might be innovative but one realises that even after the "abolition of Slavery, end of colonialism and apartheid, 'Blackness' has never been defined in terms of itself or as positive but rather as a label that carries with it, all the characteristics of slavery, colonialism, racism or as the opposite of white" (Ohlsen 2013: 30). Curry's new thoughts that support the claim that blackness ought to be viewed in a different and positive light; a cudgel that the black authored urban narratives that are analysed in this study carry in a bid to offer a different view of blackness and black bodies. Murder, corruption, poverty, social divisions, and inequalities have been weaved to formulate major thematic concerns of these urban narratives in ways that countermand Curry's argument and its quest for a positive delineation of blackness. A reading of these urban black authored narratives reveals "[t]he new South African city [as] still a space where nightmarish divisions may be witnessed and where the fear of crime delimits dreams of truly public space". (Nuttall 2004: 741). McNulty argues that narratives such as *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* depict "[t]he city, and in particular the inner-city, [as having] moved in the popular consciousness from a modernist vision of man's progress to a site of degradation and crime" (2005: 3). Therefore, this study's view of blackness as a negative space, partly taps anthropological perspectives that span some centuries back and are still embedded in contemporary literary representational structures of indigenous urban societies.

While colonial and apartheid notions of blackness have established it at the lower strata in the human species, its meaning has not remained static. The transition of the South African literary scene from colonial/apartheid perspectives to new post-apartheid perceptions informs this assumed shift. Commenting on transformations in urban spaces Popke and Ballard (2004: 99) posit that "[t]he rapid transformation of urban areas over the past decade has dissolved [apartheid formulated] boundaries, and thus the spatial divisions by which identity and alterity were historically managed in South Africa have been dislocated". Popke and Ballard's argument is, to some extent, grounded in historical truth because, with the exception of Orania, black people occupied former whites-only designated spaces immediately after the demise of Apartheid. On analysing the new perspective on South African literature, Boehmer in Attridge and Jolly (1998: 43) also claims, "South African fiction is in transition". It is, therefore, my considered argument that blackness is still in the process of shifting from the apartheid colonial/apartheid perspectives that negated it.

Grappling with post-colonial identity shifts, Ngara (2011: 4) posits that "[t]he postcolonial period has ushered in alternative perspectives on identity, alternatives which challenge the hegemony, for instance, of previously dominant discourses such as colonialism (apartheid) and nationalism (the struggle for national self-determination)". This observation is crucial to note. It fosters a need to consider the new and alternative perspectives in the construction of blackness in selected urban narratives. For instance, xenophobia, afrophobia and urban ambiguities foster new and alternative ways to study and define blackness. The historical point of transition in South African literature, according to Frenkel and McKenzie (2010) is a continuum to "post-transitional South African literature". Post-transitional South African literature "suggest[s] something of the character of [a] new wave of writing, which is often unfettered to the past in the way that much apartheid writing was" (2). Notably, the apartheid urban short stories that where published through *Drum Magazine* introduced resistance literature that formulated a "new wave of writing" during that period. The post-apartheid ushered a "new wave of writing" that contrasts with that of the apartheid period. It is hardly a resistance literature. This apparent momentary dearth of resistance stems from the fact that the new literature tackles post-apartheid social issues and relations within black communities. This shifting of the post-apartheid literary writings from the past representational perspectives of blackness demand robust engagement and hard-edged criticism as it points to an ever-changing meaning of blackness. It is, therefore, crucial to draw the reader's attention to Hall's (1990: 226) argument:

> [i]dentity is not a fixed essence, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark, it is not once-and-for all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final absolute Return.

For Hall, identity is ever changing and a function of cultural relativism. My study draws on Hall's argument because uniquely contrasting cultural backgrounds define the black communities presented in selected narratives. Thus, to offer a single meaning of black identity across divergent black communities is to construct a limited understanding of it. More so, given that the city, which elsewhere in Bones (1998), is described as the mouth of a crocodile that swallows everything that comes its way, is a cosmopolitan space and place. It brings together characters of different nationalities, backgrounds and cultural traditions. Urban spaces are ambiguous. As such, they foster an ambiguous meaning of blackness.

Similarly, scholarly perspectives around blackness introduce various dimensions that seem to run back and forth within the colonial representational embodiments. According to Ohlsen (2013: 29), "[b]lackness to date remains put to new kinds of work over and over again, taking on more or less reshaped forms that cannot be separated from the descriptions and definitions constructed through eighteenth century western art". The eighteenth century western colonial art constructed distinct racial margins between white and black identities. As such, these two identities became discrete spaces that were to be perceived through binaries of superiority/inferiority, civilised/uncivilised, religious/pagan, and literate/illiterate. The dominance of white colonial writers in the eighteenth-century art ensured the internalisation of blackness as the other of colonial whiteness. This othering entrenched either recognition or non-recognition of blackness. The absence of blackness in these discourses can arguably be twofold; the first being the lack of any trace of black identity in these representations and, the second entails a flood of negative images around it. Taylor's (1992: 25) conception of the politics of recognition points to the recognition and absence of blackness as a determining factor of identity. He argues that "misrecognition" and "non-recognition" constitute the negative perspectives that demean a particular identity. The flood of eighteenth-century artistic negative images around the definitions of black people and the continued reflection of such perceptions in some contemporary white authored urban narratives, typically and simultaneously represent the discourse of recognition and non-recognition that reinforces blackness as a negative space.

This study analyses the representation of blacks who are classified as Africans (Bantu) in South Africa and the spaces they occupy in cities in post-apartheid South Africa. The place and space occupied by black people in South Africa are replete with controversies and contradictions that problematize blackness and black identity. The apartheid era defined and categorised Coloured, Indian, Chinese and African ethnicities as black. The effects of this definition are glaring in contemporary South Africa through the problematique of unbalanced distribution of economic benefits. The Azanian People's Organisation's (2001), drawing on Steve Biko's 1971 *Black Consciousness,* asserts that "any man who calls a white man "baas", [and] any man who serves in the police force or security branch is *ipso facto* a non-white. Black people - real black people - are those who can manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the white man". While this definition is problematically all-inclusive in its understanding of black people, it fails to recognise the multi-racialised nature of the South African police force and security branches. The definition

also undermines the pivotal roles played by some white individuals such as Harry Schwarz and Joe Slovo among others in the demise of apartheid. Such deliberate elisions, omissions and erasure, informs this study's need for a specific focus on Black Africans (Bantu) and the spaces they occupy in cities. Reference to "Africans" points specifically to a black South African ethnic group. Therefore, it should be read differently from the legal, constitutional meaning that refers to the people who are from the African continent.

1.2 Defining Blackness

The origin of blackness has constantly and carelessly been located within the beginning of colonial period by such writers as Winthrop Jordan (1977) even though there is nothing to nullify the notion that black identity might be as old as the origin of man. It becomes delusional to think of blackness as having originated some million centuries after those that share this identity were already in existence. The biblical children of Ham (whom the colonialists claim to have been black), mark a historical period that traces black identity some centuries before the colonial period. Other (mis)interpretations of who the children of Ham were, suspiciously sought to create docile subjects out of black people through the teaching of twisted Biblical doctrines. Relatedly, Hrabovský argues that "[b]lack skin was considered cursed and with the help of biblical anthropology, this theory justified enslavement and colonization [...] Reference to Ham's curse created a conception of the black and God's castaway" (2013: 75). The pre-colonial African period also indicate some racial dynamics that point to the prejudice of blackness. For instance, Ohlsen (2013), states that the intermarriage between the Egyptians and Asians during the pre-colonial period "produced a new mixed race [of] black Africans and darker Egyptians" (23). Consequently, locating the origins of black identity within the beginning of colonial period, as posited by Jordan, places black identity within white colonial "structural and systemized forms of racial domination" (Ohlsen 2013: 23) aimed at negating it. However, historical and artistic truth show that blackness started gaining universal recognition during slavery and the watershed period of colonial encounters. The racist undertones in William Shakespeare's *Othello* (1603), expressly show prior knowledge and acknowledgement of black identity. Anchoring the flood of negative images about black people in Africa are slavery and colonialism as economic enterprises. For them, black skin was mysterious and consequently invited close colonialists' scrutiny and critical comparison with white skin. According to Cohen (1987: 9) "the Africans' skin colour struck Europeans as unusual" as they encountered Africa for the first

time. This realization of racial differences opened a gap for racial binaries that entrenched permanent distinctions between black and white identities.

The term blackness has always been complex and difficult to define. Placed within the ever-shifting poles, its meaning is equally fluid. Various historical contexts have shaped and constantly re-shaped the meaning of blackness. In an attempt to give an understanding of this term, Ohlsen (2013: 29) notes, "[b]lackness and its meanings have been repeatedly decontextualized, its description shifted and occasionally challenged". Similarly, Tourè (2011: 5) notes, "there is no dogmatically narrow, authentic Blackness because the possibilities for Black identity are infinite". Subjecting the meaning of blackness to constant transformations means that it lacks a fixed definition.

However, understanding blackness is a task requiring tracing black identity within various historical and contemporary contexts that have, and still facilitate its meaning. The prominent phase is the colonial period, which subjected black people to colonial imaginings. For instance, a note in the first encyclopaedia that was written by French philosophers and published between 1751 to 1752 posits, "[i]f one moves further away from the Equator towards the Antarctic, the black skin become lighter, but the ugliness remains: one finds there this same wicked person that inhabits the African Meridian" (cited in Eze 1997: 91). In its definition of 'Negroes', the 1978 American edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica (cited in Eze 1997: 94) reinforces this when it says:

> [v]ices, the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law and to have silenced the reproofs of conscience.

Then and now, the object of such disfiguring images is to degrade black identity. The term "negro" means "something that is dead" (Akbar 1979: 1). It is a Portuguese construct that came to existence in the fifteenth century subsequent to Portugal's acquisition of thousands of African slaves. In the 1550s, English people discovered through Spain that "negroes" can be enslaved. Henceforth, the Spanish, English and Dutch captured African people to work as slaves in American sugar plantations in the Americas in the1650s. However, the use of the term "negro" would face its demise with the passage of time. Notable is the resistance from the 1960s black slaves, which deconstructed the term "negro" and replaced it with the term "black". Thus, its continued use today invites condemnation. It is worth mentioning at this point that black people's attempts to resist slavery innovatively fostered the notions of re-

imagining black identity that for a considerable length of time had been under negative frameworks of colonial constructs.

Resisting racially based colonial ideologies momentarily precipitated the impression of a shifting black identity from racialized colonial perceptions to a revolutionised thought that defined black people without vilification. Interestingly, Ohlsen sees this attempt to revive blackness as a lost battle against a legacy that negatively defines it. He argues that if the "naming and renaming process challenges the existing definitions of Blackness and destabilizes fixed conceptions of what black identity is about, then surely it is conceivable that this subject Blackness can also name and rename its 'other' in order to digest itself as well as the other" (2013: 30). Implicit here, especially in the context of South Africa, is that, such an understanding has partly been facilitated by the recurring discourses of xenophobia and afrophobia that have constructed binaries between local and non-local people. Non-locals find it difficult to fit into what appears to be a distinctly homogenous local culture. Embodied in local languages that non-locals cannot fully comprehend, the culture of, the locals conveniently invent derogatory terms such as "kwerekweres[1]", "kalangas[2]" and "grigambas". This stems from their hatred of non-locals, their foreign languages and the failure to speak local languages. These derogatory terms used to describe non-locals construct the 'them' and 'us' binaries between the locals and non-locals. Feeble arguments by writers like Tshlamang (in Mail & Guardian, 1999) that the term "kwerekwere" is not derogatory because it is the "name of [a] Shona clan that has been generalized to refer to all foreigners" betray myopia. This negative labelling of non-locals creates a platform for assumed local black identity to "name and rename its other in order to digest itself as well as the other" (Ohlsen 2013: 61).

The colonial experience motivated discourses of resistance and moments of celebration. Writers have "engaged with the historical [colonial] circumstances that condition the consciousness of the black race" (Bamgbose 2013: 34). Yet, the golden moment of independence has confirmed Fanon's argument on "pseudo or flag independence". Fanon interrogates the independence of former colonised states and exposes the myth and fallacy of flag independence. Beyond the symbolic flags, African states are still caught up in the crevices of the neo-colonial system. This explains the representations made by authors like

[1] *Kwerekweres* is a term that is used to describe foreigners in South Africa. It is derived from their languages that are regarded as strange languages by citizens thus, pointing to them as "speakers of strange languages" (Siziba 2014: 174).

[2] *Kalangas* and *Grigambas* are xenophobic terms that have also been coined to describe foreigners in South Africa.

Vladislavic whose racial binary formations mimic the black and white apartheid binaries that marginalise black identity. The black characters especially in *Portrait With Keys* are formed around degrading stereotypes and through notions of violence in contrast to non-violent white people who constantly live in fear of them. The same can be realised through Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* where failed post-apartheid integration between black and white identities talks to the continued discourses of the superiority of whiteness. Matlwa sets black characters on capable but disabled mode of racial crossover. Her black characters' attempts to crossover to whiteness' space is almost guaranteed by their adaptation to white people's ethos but their efforts to fit into white communities are limited by the fact that they are black. As such, these characters suffer a Duboisian double consciousness, which leaves them between contrasting white and black identity poles. Although Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* does not overtly engage the post-apartheid racial divide as shown in *Coconut,* its characters evoke gruesome and disfiguring images of black urban communities. Formal education fails to transform Mpe's post-apartheid black characters, like Refentše, who live under the grip of inescapable sexual immorality, murder and suicide. Therefore, post-apartheid black identities fail to move beyond colonial and apartheid negations.

Distinct cultural contexts hinder a universal or fixed definition of blackness. In the case of Africa, factors like xenophobia reflect national boundaries as determinants of black identity. Within national boundaries, blackness takes the dimension of tribal contexts. The case of South Africa is telling. The stigmatisation of black people from the Limpopo province in urban spaces such as Johannesburg in the novel *Jozi* by Perfect Hlongwane is a case in point. Some characters in *Jozi*, view Limpopo province as located outside the border of South Africa. The premise for this kind of thinking is that people from Limpopo province have a darker skin tone than South Africans from other provinces. In an attempt to understand blackness in relation to the above-mentioned forms of its constructions and manifestations, Wright (2004: 2) argues that "[u]nlike Black Africans, who ultimately define themselves through shared histories, languages, and cultural values, blacks in the diaspora possess an intimidating array of historical, cultural, national, ethnic, religious, and ancestral origins and influences". For Wright, the definition of blackness cannot be straitjacketed considering that there is "African" and "diasporic" blackness despite that black people "are most identified in the west as simply 'Black' and therefore as largely homogenous" (2004: 2). Drawing on Wright's view, I argue in this study that universalising blackness is problematic. Fanon (1967: 16) also points to that distinction when he states:

> [s]ince I was born in the Antilles, my observations and my conclusions are valid only for the Antilles - at least concerning the black man at home. Another book could be dedicated to explaining the differences that separate the Negro of the Antilles from the Negro of Africa. Perhaps one day I shall write it. Perhaps too it will no longer be necessary - a fact for which we could only congratulate ourselves.

In concurrence with Wright, Fanon, in the above excerpt, points to the impossibility of constructing a fixed definition of any identity such as blackness. More so, in view of the contrasting locations and contexts of those that view themselves and are viewed as black. The concept of a fixed meaning of blackness is further problematized by a struggle to categorise people of mixed race or coloureds. In South Africa, the apartheid era categorised people of mixed race as black people who, together with other ethnic groups that were regarded as such, endured marginalisation. What problematized that apartheid South African categorisation was a consent letter that qualified some coloureds as white. Petrus and Isaacs-Martin (2012: 93) posit that "[t]hose who were racially closer to Whites were able to be reclassified into the White group while those who were darker skinned remained in the Coloured group". Relatedly, Dannhauser (2006: 2) states that "[a]lthough the [coloureds] community could not be comfortably classified in terms of the racial binary, their experience was of segregation and subjugation, as was the experience of all 'Non-Whites'". That partly gave context to ambiguous notions of blackness that continue to blur the contemporary apprehension of that identity. In consideration of such racial reforms, black "existence today [is] marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness" (Bhabha 1994: 1). Hence, Johnson's (2003: 4) argument that "like a sidewinder snake "Blackness" is slippery ever beyond the reach of one's grasp, once you think you have a hold on it, it transforms into something else and travels into another direction".

1.3 Post-2000 South African Urbanity and the Contextualisation of Blackness

The end of apartheid marked one of the most crucial historical moments for South Africa. The re-imagining of black identity became a centralised subject in literary, political and social studies, with writers such as Sachs (1991: 187) motivating new writers to liberate themselves from the "ghettoes of the apartheid imagination". The motive was to reinvigorate black consciousness and identity, and counter the misrepresentations by Apartheid's "most reductionist, delusional and artificial discursive constructions" (Czajka 2005: 117). According to Biko, "[t]he first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to

pump life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity; to remind him of his complicity in crime of allowing to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of birth" (1978: 31). Biko's *Black Consciousness* attempts to dismantle apartheid's negative perspectives of black people that destroyed their dignity. In his treatise, *Black Consciousness and The Quest for True Humanity*, Biko (7-8) states:

> the history of the Black man in this country is the most disappointing history to read about. It is merely presented as a long lamentation of repeated defeats… Not only is there no objectivity in the history taught us but frequently there is an appalling misrepresentation of facts that is sickening even to the uninformed student […] Thus a lot of attention has to be paid to our history if we as Blacks want to aid each other in our coming into consciousness. We have to rewrite our history and produce in it the heroes that formed the core of our resistance to the White invaders. More has to be revealed and stress has to be laid on the successful nation-building attempts by people.

Such post-colonial early writings from black writers gathered a resistance grip that sought to reclaim black identity and clear it from colonial historical degrading confinements. Aime Cesaire's poem *Notebook of a Return to The Native Land* comes to mind in this regard. Its contextualisation of negritude validates black culture and identity against negative colonial conceptions. Although such resistance is posed as a defining factor for South African historical power shift that sought to conscientize South African blacks and to revive their identity, the representation of black identity in urban narratives has always been problematized by the dominance of non-black authors. Informed by factors such as the authors' background, cultures and pre-conceived ideas, their representations of black communities constantly falters. Therefore, a contextual reading of non-black authored urban narratives shows that they sought to focus more on reshaping the authors' identities at the expense of South African black identity.

One of the motivations of this study's focus is my interest in how post-2000 black authors, as narrators of their own identity, have represented black identity in the city beyond dominant white constructions. The question of how post-2000 black writers perceive urban spaces and/or "make it, form it, contour it so that it reflects their own" (Utley 2016: 264) black identity, is the major concern of this inquiry. The post-2000 period is crucial in that it marks the period within which South African black authors have given considerable attention to the representation of South African urban spaces. Of course, the period cannot be considered as the dawn of black writers' perspective of South African cities because a couple of "politicized literature" (Bethlehem 2009: 224) that came through *Drum magazine*, had

already narrated the apartheid city and "condemned [its] moral degradation […] contributing to a new tradition which focused on black experiences in the South African city" (Nuttall 2009: 34). Writers such as Meg Samuelson have traced the urban world of Mpe, Duiker and Vera's novels back "to *Drum Magazine*'s inscriptions of the city" (2007: 247). They simultaneously point to the writers of that 1950s magazine such as Can Themba, Nat Nakasa among others, as the first writers who "began to dream into being the city that is now taking shape around us" (2007: 248). Rafapa has "demonstrate[d] characteristics of the novels [such as] *Dog Eat Dog* […] as bearing continuities with those of the segment of black South African writers of the 1950s epitomised by Can Themba" (2014: 58). However, from the 1950's to the year 2000, urban representation has always been dominated by South African and non-South African authors whose primary concern has been to re-imagine post-apartheid whiteness that Matthews (2015: 112) perceives as lurking in crisis since the demise of apartheid. Their challenge is arguably "to find a view of the past [unsettled whiteness] through the lens of the post-apartheid present" (Nuttall 2009: 39). Nevertheless, in their process of re-thinking post-apartheid whiteness, these authors have sometimes create blackness as the "other" of whiteness. Their narratives are grounded on negative conceptions of black identity that sometimes takes into cognisance the comparison of apartheid and post-apartheid eras. Such narratives as Vladislavic's *Portrait with Keys* (2006), Beukes' *Zoo City* (2010) and Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1948), for instance, create "a white space in which black identities are an intrusive presence" (Ngara 2011: 17). Vladislavic' *Portrait with Keys*, works within established formulations of racial exclusions through the representation of what seem to be black characters' wild conduct around white characters' residences. Such negative constructions of black identity and sometimes the absence of it in these white authored urban narratives, formulate post-apartheid urban binaries that seek to maintain blackness as a negative space. The understanding of blackness as a negative space, as reflected by the title of this thesis, does not necessarily point to blackness as having been withdrawn from these white South African authored urban narratives but seeks to suggest that blackness has either been neglected or underdeveloped (in that it always carries negative conceptualisations whenever it is represented in white narratives). In that regard, I argue, "the concept of blackness has not been so far treated in such a comprehensive form" (Hrabovskỳ 2013: 66) in white authored urban narratives. There is, therefore, a need to explore post-2000 black authored novels to establish how these project black identity in South Africa's cityscapes.

My concern in this study lies in how the notion of blackness has been treated in post-2000 black authored urban narratives without overstepping the bounds that might render this study as racialised or advocating for Black Nationalism. It is thus crucial to place blackness and the city in a historical context not only to foster an understanding of the lines of racial inequalities but also assist in the on-going struggles to understand blackness in post-2000 black authored urban narratives in South Africa. This view taps into Nuttall's (2004: 732) argument that it is through working out the remains of the past in the present that fosters an understanding of the present and the future. Similarly, Mbembe and Nuttall postulate that; "the city [is] a place of manifold rhythms forged through daily encounters and multiple experiences of time and space; the city as a series of imprints from the past, the daily tracks of movement across, and links beyond, the city itself" (2004: 361). Wilkinson claims that urban thought deals with "salient memories of the (city's) past which become part of the collective urban memory and shape the perceptions of both town-dwellers and visitors" (1994:92).

Consequently, engaging with South African urban blackness is an exercise requiring historical context. Niekerk (1998: 477) suggests that making sense of the present urban spaces demands looking back to the historical context. McNulty concurs when he argues that "[s]pace is not a neutral medium but has a history" (2005: 5). Therefore, any study of the notion of blackness and the South African urban spaces should be grounded in historical context. Whenever urban black identity is analysed, reference to its historical moment is fundamental in that, "spatial relations…the distribution and arrangement of people, activities, and buildings…are always deeply implicated in the historical process" (Philo 2001:221). In other words, tapping into that historical moment fosters an understanding of its current various dimensions. Pointedly, this is not a comparative study of the past and present understanding of South African urban blackness. As Nuttall points out, confining the study of the city "to a lens of 'difference' embedded squarely in the apartheid past may miss the complexity and contemporaneity of [its] formations" (2004: 732). Even though the past cannot be detached from understanding the present, adapting a wholly historical perspective in understanding the present will be to compromise the understanding of the complexities within which the contemporary meaning is formulated.

To some extent, I regard apartheid as a moment that almost fostered a collective meaning of black identity through black people's solidarity against it that formulated a pressure group

advocating “black nationalism”. Among those who formulated this pressure group in order to deconstruct apartheid views of black people as an inferior race were Anton Lembede, Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Jordan Ngubane, Robert Sobukwe, and Walter Sisulu among others. Black people’s narratives like “Amandla Awethu” (power is ours) sought to mobilise and unify blacks against apartheid, and construct a collective sense of black identity. However, that collective identity lost its grip after the end of Apartheid. Dlamini (2015: 9) argues, “South African literary and cultural spheres shed off blackness as a collective identity [that] used to challenge white minority rule when apartheid officially ended”. In their study of post-colonial cities, Popke and Ballard (2004: 99) also argue that cities have become platforms through which new identities are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated. They argue that:

> [o]nce the nearly exclusive domain of the country’s white residents, South Africa’s metropolitan areas have become sites of formal and informal domicile and livelihood for tens of thousands of previously excluded non-white citizens. In the process, the post-apartheid city has become the setting for new forms of racial interaction, negotiation and conflict, which have transformed the nature and experience of urban space.

This cosmopolitan nature of the present urban spaces suggests a crucial turning point for the re-imaging of both black and white identity. The shift has captured the attention of such writers as Nuttall who do not only perceive Johannesburg as gradually transformed into “a centre of urban black culture” (2009: 34) but also projecting entangled identities.

As such, this study focuses its analysis of black identity through Nuttall’s notion of entanglement. For Nuttall, entanglement “is intended […] to draw into our analyses critical attention to those sites and spaces in which what was once thought of as separate – identities, spaces, histories – come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways” (2008: 20). My perspective of entangled identities that are projected through presented urban spaces seeks to show how black characters are caught within contradicting notions that construct what I will refer to as entangled black identity. The basis for employing Nuttall’s notion of entanglement is informed by the fact that since the end of apartheid, South African cities have increasingly become “multidimensional entit[ies] with social and cultural as well as territorial dimensions" (Darian-Smith et al 1996:2). This relates to Ngara’s view of the post-apartheid city wherein he argues, “just as there may be many different kinds of urban life within one city or even one locale of the city, there are varied expressions of individual identity, whether one looks at urbanity from the viewpoint of a whole city or a demarcated space within the

city" (2011: 4). These views point to the complexities that characterise post-apartheid cities. Ngara adopts a social standpoint and sees the interaction of urban dwellers as a way through which they strive for individual identities. These arguments catapult our thoughts into imagining the state of an entangled city. On that note, I find it relevant for this study to be partly grounded on Nuttall's entanglement in engaging blackness especially considering that the selected novels merge identities of various cultural backgrounds and construct characters and the urban space within the poles of traditions and modernity.

Post-apartheid blackness is also grounded on the narratives of power that constantly define black urban communities in the selected novels. Focus is drawn on Turner's (2005: 1) argument that "power is an inescapable feature of human life and structure". Although Turner seeks to engage the nature of power within the field of psychology, I find relevance in his approach in that he contextualises power within notions of influence and "that influence is based on the control of resources valued or desired by others". Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* depicts power relations that are constructed through black urban community's struggle with racism immediately after the end of apartheid. The influence of power that is entrenched by white characters through their control of major institutions in Johannesburg factors in racial binaries that black young characters constantly struggle to deal with. This thesis engages power and power relations in the context of the narratives of entitlement to South African urban spaces and resources that formulate conflicts between black and white urban communities. I regard entitlement as a crucial post-apartheid phenomenon that defines power and power relations in the sense that it projects the powerful and powerless people in represented urban spaces. For Sen (1981: 497) entitlement is "the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces". Thus, Sen defines entitlement from a legal perspective emphasising the rights of an individual or people to possess or occupy certain urban spaces.

While this definition of entitlement is "explicitly political" (Johnson 2003) and thus, problematic, its relevance lies in its delineation of power relations in the city. Powerful characters constantly determine what rights define their and the powerless characters' entitlement to urban spaces and resources. Gaining freedom from a long history of apartheid subjugation ushers young black people into another struggle against white racial power that deprives them of their entitlement to the South African city and its resources. On the same note, one will realise that selected urban narratives reflect instances of racial power clashes

and construct black-on-black power relations. This finds context in Frenkel and McKenzie's argument that "where under apartheid 'space' […] was over-regulated, it is now a more open zone – controlled more by money and power than race, by inherently complex notions of ownership and belonging" (2010: 3). Thus, in the selected novels, one reads urban spaces that, to some degree, draw attention to black-on-black power relations that are defined by economic control by a few blacks while others wallow in poverty.

Interestingly, both economically powerful and powerless characters seek to construct a sense of belonging and entitlement to the South African city and resources. For powerless urban dwellers, protests against the post-apartheid government's failure to provide basic services simultaneously relay their devastations and construct their sense of entitlement to the country's resources. With such power clashes within urban black communities, I argue that South African cities are fragmented in ways that create complex black identity. I seek to bring my analysis closer to Edward Said's thought that the formation of identities through the understanding of space is always contested and, in the words of Crang and Thrift (2003: 314), "inseparable from determinate modalities of power". On that note, I also consider the contrast of Central Business Centres (CBD) and their surrounding spaces as reflecting urban and consequently power relations that are hardly dissociated from those established by the apartheid city hence, the projection of fragmented imagined cities and complex black identities.

Without taking anything away from Mtose's (2008: 10) claim that South African black identity can only be imagined through South African whiteness, I find Sarah Nuttall's question: "how do we find a way of accounting for the transformations that are also taking place" (2004: 731) intriguing. Indeed, some transformations have been entrenched in political, social and cultural terrains since the end of apartheid. For instance, there is a need to consider the transformations that are possibly introduced by the understanding of *Black Consciousness* and Black Economic Empowerment that seek to revamp the long lost black identity by offering economic support to black business people. The process of urban spatial occupation by black people after apartheid points to a new urban identity that sought and seeks to abolish the legacy of apartheid. As such, it might as well be worthy to consider a different approach that veers from the view that contemporary urban "divisions, exclusions and inequalities" are a result of previous historical and condescending apartheid experiences.

However, it will also be problematic to completely dispute the idea that apartheid legacy is still traceable in contemporary South African urban space and that it partly shapes how both black and white urban dwellers perceive each other. That attestation is prevalent in such novels as *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and *Jozi*, with their represented xenophobia-formulated binaries that such writers as Idahosa and Vincent (2014: 94) associate with the unresolved hatred and anger of black South Africans that was motivated by apartheid "racism and the struggle for freedom". Worse still, the view of South African cities and the conditions of their surrounding townships that clearly reflect the boundaries between the rich and poor people almost mimic settings of the colonial and the colonised sectors observed by Fanon. Fanon describes the colonialist sector as "built to last, all stone and steal…a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers" (66). On the other hand, he describes the colonised sector as a "disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people […] a world with no space, [where] people are piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together" (66). From the understanding of the above quote, one imagines the contemporary urban space with the CBD that constantly strive to define itself against its surrounding townships with "shacks [that are] tightly together". On that view of the contemporary South African city, Nuttall (2004: 732) argues, "many of the old categories that were used to account for the macro-issues of class, race, domination and resistance are consequently still seen to hold in much the same ways as they did before". Plato reflects on such settings of the city when he says:

> Any city, however small, is in fact divided into two, one a city of the poor, the other of the rich, these are at war with one another, and in either there are many divisions, and you would be altogether beside the mark if you treated them as a single state (Plato, The Republic).

Plato's understanding obviously captures a Eurocentric sense of the city during his time but its preciseness is relevant to our reading of post-2000 South African cities. Manase (2005: 90) also notes these binaries in the South African city when he argues that:

> there exist affluent and glamorous low density and up-market suburbs [in urban spaces], while on the other, there are an impoverished, neglected and often over crowded high-density suburbs and slums [...] The southern African region's two cities in oneness, is noted in the existence of an open CBD, with high rise buildings and post-modern shopping and office complexes surrounded by an overcrowded, violent and poorly facilitated inner city residential area.

What captures one's interest in these scholarly views is that the representations of poor/rich binaries in the South African city, to some extent, differ from those that are defined by the

apartheid city. Unlike the apartheid city that varied and sometimes restricted the access for black people, blacks have access to the post-apartheid city yet, the failures by some of them to afford the services of urban spaces, maintain the margins between the rich and poor characters. Samuelson notes these boundaries in Mpe, Duiker and Vera's novels and argues that these novels "continue to separate the spaces inhabited by the rich and the poor, holding townships at bay from the city proper and sealing off enclaves of luxury from increasing dilapidated inner cities" (2007: 248). Almost echoing the same sentiments is Nuttall and Mbembe (2007: 38-9) who argue that since South African cities "developed into colonial town[s]", they have always failed to resist the temptation to mimic an "English town". However, it is worth arguing that the cityscape and many other topographical structures in South Africa are not entirely a case of mimicry but a case of inscribing power on space. When noting contemporary Johannesburg in their study, Nuttall and Mbembe aver that "to a large extent, this tradition of mimicry continues to determine if not the language of the city today, then at least part of its unconscious" (2007: 39). Their argument imperatively lends an unwavering view that seeks to address and interrogates colonial/apartheid ideological presence in urban spaces that continue to maintain binary motions of those spaces. The study seeks to draw some inferences on how urban blackness can be understood, in light of such urban spaces that are sometimes reflective of and determined by apartheid ideologies.

My interest on post-2000 blackness inquiry has also been motivated by the fact that South African cities have been viewed as influx, "fluid" spaces by such scholars as De Kock (2009: 33), Samuelson (2007: 250) or as no man's land with the possibility that anything can happen in them (Nuttall 2004: 732). This is partly because of the coming and going of people. This forms an image of South African cities as spaces without residential permanence. For instance, Johannesburg has always assumed this position then and now. The first discovery of gold in 1884 and the major gold reefs in 1886 by the white colonialists opened a way not only for the dwelling of thousands of white colonialists but for the construction of that city. At some point that city became an entry and exit point for Matebele, BaSotho and BaTswana (Brodie 2014). It continued seeing "Cornish 'hard rock men' and Australian miners, Scottish and American engineers, bankers, lawyers, adventurers, gamblers, schemers, criminals, and fortune hunters, journalists, sex workers, refugees, thousands of impoverished Eastern European […] Frenchmen, Italians, and Greeks" (Mbembe in Nuttal and Mbembe 2008: 40). This has continued to define contemporary post-apartheid Johannesburg. It poses as the entry and exit point for locals and non-locals who are restlessly in search of economic

opportunities. This gave rise to scholarly thoughts that this city is "marked by maps of mobility" (Samuelson (2007: 248). Most citizens and non-citizens occupy South African cities on temporary bases, which gives the impression that they are always in transit. In other words, cities such as Johannesburg have not, since its earliest settlers, invoked in its dwellers' "sense of having genuine ties with the world surrounding them" (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008: 39). Therefore, it is worth arguing that blackness is "infinite" (Tourè's 2011: 5), fluid and formulated "through the processes of negotiation and translation" (Bhabha 2006: 156). Bhabha's understanding is crucial to consider here, especially with the view that Johannesburg is a convergence zone for people of different backgrounds and nationalities whose existence and their interaction in that space constantly negotiates their identities. On that note, this thesis will also focus its analysis of blackness through negotiated identities in South African cities. That focus will also be reinforced by engaging the processes of cultural translation in urban spaces.

1.4 Aims

This study offers a reading and examination of the depiction of blackness and/or black identity in cityscapes in selected black authored narratives from South Africa. A number of black South African authors have shown considerable interest in representing South African cities and lived experiences of black people. Their interest seems to formulate a discourse of urban black identity through various social discourses that show its ever-shifting meaning. Therefore, an analysis of the shifting identities of black people through the representations of their lived experiences in urban spaces is the focus of this study.

The demise of Apartheid created the assumption of a shift in the view of black identity from the apartheid perspective. As such, there has been growing interest by black writers to redefine black identity with a view to reclaiming it from colonial condescending perspectives by turning the focus to black urban communities. Without following the trope of "writing back to the empire" this study raises the question of whether or not the colonial legacy shapes the writers' representation of South African cities and lived experiences of black people. By so doing, this study does not intend to entrench itself within the analysis of past colonial subjugating discourses but seeks to delve into notions of transition that will also focus the analysis on post-apartheid black identity. Crush's (2000) refusal to acknowledge the representational shift from colonial/apartheid perspectives is paramount in facilitating the interrogation of how post-apartheid urban black authored narratives represent black identity.

Whether or not these narratives represent black people and the urban spaces they occupy outside the representational parameters of colonial perspectives is crucial to focus the inquiry on possible black identity ambiguities. Added to Crush's argument is Nuttall's claim that "much has changed and that we need theories and ways of reading culture which take into account the extent of the transformations that have taken place" (2004: 731). The study will consider the veracity of such debates in its exploration of how blackness is re-imagined through the reading of post-apartheid black authored urban narratives.

My reading of South African urban black identity takes into consideration social factors such as xenophobia, afrophobia, entitlement, and tribal conflicts among others, to formulate new ways of imaging, imagining, seeing and telling black urban identity. Not only are these factors continuously embraced in South African urban spaces but also are reflected in the narratives under study as driving factors in shaping urban identities. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and *Jozi*, project xenophobia as a process of 'othering' that creates the "us and them" binaries. This places the understanding of post-apartheid blackness on a confusing strip that is fostered by the view that some blacks are better or worse than others. The contrast that is set here projects a complex urban blackness because it forms permanent "[t]ensions of inclusion and exclusion" (Nyamnjoh, 2006: 25) that are sometimes confusing. It gets even more complicated when some locals are adamant that Limpopo province is located outside South Africa. Hence, the understanding of locals from that province as non-locals. At the same time, it can hardly be fathomed that those individuals who regard themselves as locals can exist in urban spaces without experiencing the processes of "cross-cultural interaction [with non-locals], that [they take] nothing from other African migrant workers or non-locals in inventing an urban vernacular [identity] they now name their own" (Nuttall 2004: 736). The struggle to guard local black identity against merging with non-local identities formulates a fascinating narrative of urban binaries that form the basis for the analysis of blackness.

The aim of this study is anchored on the critical question of what it means to be black in post-2000 South African urban spaces. Exploring this question will, I hope, lead to a better understanding of post-2000 black identity. The post-2000 era has seen an emerging number of black authored urban narratives that capture the lived experiences of black people and their living conditions in South African cities. South Africa consistently embrace the narrative of freedom from apartheid. However, poverty in black communities and the black-led

government's failure to provide basic services force black people to dissociate themselves from their country's historical struggle. *Dog Eat Dog*, for instance, urges one to respond to the question of what it means to be black in South Africa without the recognition of that historical moment. This invokes Brunsma and Rockquemore's (2002: 102-3) definition of blackness when they say:

> [b]lack has been used to signify a collective structural location typically associated with restricted opportunities, economic disadvantage, and community disorganization; however, the opportunity structure has altered significantly over the past three decades and the socioeconomic status of black individuals is now quite varied. Black has been described as an expression of a unique cultural space with a particular collection of values, norms, and strategies; however, while many who write and think about race have rhetorically and theoretically articulated black culture, concomitant structural, historical and material changes have resulted in a wide variety of cultural spaces. The construct black, has also been used as an identity, a marker, a social category, a statement of self-understanding, indeed a socially imposed parameter of the self; however, the terrain of identity is increasingly multifaceted, fluid, and dynamic – a negotiated terrain not encapsulated in one colossal concept.

The argument here gives a complex and yet constructive insight that sets the fluidity of blackness. Tradition/modernity clashes and socio-political and economic issues always undermined and challenged the fixed definitions of black as shall be explored in this thesis. Drawing on Brunsma and Rockquemore, I will argue that the traditional ways of defining black are always re-shaped by social factors that model new dimensions from which its meaning has to be drawn. Engaging in this argument is crucial to understanding the question of what it means to be black in South Africa's cityscapes.

1.5 Rationale

Spanning the colonial/apartheid period, to post-apartheid democracy in South Africa, few black authors had focused on re-imagining South African urban spaces. Although in the apartheid era a couple of black authored stories emerged through *Drum Magazine*, the post-2000 era has witnessed more black authored urban narratives emerging from lived experiences and the conditions of black people in the cities. As such, the ways selected narratives depict lived experiences and the spaces occupied by black people are fascinating to follow, chiefly because the various urban social issues affect black characters and foster individual and collective identities. For instance, in *Dog Eat Dog* Mhlongo captures experiences of black characters through a "dog eat dog existence, which blacks are shown to suffer, perhaps as a foretaste of worse to come were they to disown their survival kit

embodied in their African identity completely" (Rafapa 2014: 59). Animal images and narratives as 'dog eat dog' vividly capture the post-apartheid urban situation of blacks and blackness and inform the ever-changing identities of blacks in presented cities.

Most urban studies have settled their focus on inquiring about individual and sometimes collective identities through their reading of urban narratives. However, engagement with urban identities has largely focused on white authored narratives. This is partly due to the limited number of black authored narratives that focus on black urban communities in contemporary South Africa. In fact, the few existing inquiries on black identity are located outside the parameters of the South African urban perspective. A quick disclaimer is necessary here: there might be some studies on South African black urban identities that escaped the researcher. Mbembe's (2017) *Critique of Black Reason*, for instance, interestingly traces the genealogy of black identity from the moment of slavery to the present. Although Mbembe does not focus on analysing blackness that is formed within black urban communities, his exploration of black identity raises captivating arguments that inform this study. Studies on urban spaces that give perspective on urban blackness do not offer in-depth analysis because of lack of specific focus on the subject. In his inquiry on how Vladislavic's literary urban narratives form the basis of writing the city into being in his work titled *Imagining and Imaging the City – Ivan Vladislavic and the Postcolonial Metropolis*, Ngara (2011) does not offer an in-depth analysis of black identity formation. Although this study dedicates a section that inquires on blackness, the writer analyses white authored urban narratives. The absence of post-apartheid black authored urban narratives means that the subject is less explored. There is therefore a need to give a specific and deeper exploration of how literary blackness can be read through the perspectives of black urban dwellers and the urban spaces they occupy as reflected in selected narratives.

1.6 Literature Review

The post-2000 South African urban narratives have sparked varied scholarly interest in the inquiries on on-going processes of urban identity transformations. A number of scholars who have focused their studies on these narratives have made comparative analyses of continuities and discontinuities with urban writings of the 1950's. Samuelson (2007) links *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* with South African urban stories of 1950s and comments that "[i]t is a cruel irony that […] most evocative inscribers of post-apartheid city-space [such as Mpe] should share so closely the fate of their predecessors" (248). By referring to "their predecessors"

here, Samuelson points to urban short story writers such as Can Themba, Nat Nakasa to mention a few, whose renowned works were published through the 1950's *Drum Magazine*. She, therefore, suggests that there is a certain element of continuity of the tradition of black writing that stems from the apartheid period, which has been maintained in contemporary black authored urban narratives. In her analysis of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* among others, Samuelson notes various urban boundaries that are constructed through "urban and rural, and 'traditional' and 'modern" identity clashes (Samuelson 2007: 247). Similarly, Rafapa (2014: 57) links contemporary writings such as *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and *Dog Eat Dog* with the works of Es'kia Mphahlele, the godfather of black writing, and he argues that:

> Es'kia Mphahlele can be seen as the founder of a tradition of black writing that runs through writers like Miriam Tlali, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Njabulo Ndebele and Zakes Mda to Phaswane Mpe, with the thread splicing them together being a grounding of these authors' writings in the philosophy or worldview of African Humanism.

The arguments raised here are insightful. They enhance our understanding of South African urban narratives. However, the claims of continuities in the tradition of black writing since apartheid to post-apartheid era are debatable. Early works by black writers were inclined on reverting apartheid negation of black identity. They adopted the subject of resistance during apartheid, which differs from post-apartheid works that seem to operate under different representational conditions. Post-apartheid literary writers seem to have cleared their works from the energies of apartheid resistance and transitioned to capturing ever-shifting urban identities in fragmented South African cities. The 1950s writers such as Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, and Casey Motsisi among others, sought to mobilize revolutionary energies to combat apartheid subjugation through stories that satirised apartheid. For example, Motsisi's *If Bugs Were Men* aimed at re-shaping black identity.

In apparent contradistinction to early black writers whose narratives were nationalistic, post-apartheid narratives capture a fragmented urban context with its identity complexities that contrast greatly with the 1950s stories. The writers have sought to reflect on various issues. Rafapa notes that in urban narratives such as *Dog Eat* Dog and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, "educated and urbanised individuals […] no longer identify with and share beliefs having to do with African identity and a common and accountable response to that which the community represents" (2014: 57). Important in Rafapa's argument is what I view as clashes between traditions and modernism that are projected in selected urban novels. As the study

will show, the educated and urbanised young characters constantly are at pains to break away from their traditional ways of living in pursuit of the urbanite status. Attempts at re-defining their identities alienates them from their communities. According to Hall et al. (200: 426) modernity "is that distinct and unique form of social life which characterises modern societies". It is that distinction in social life, which is influenced by globalisation and that rejects or seeks to define itself against the previous eras. Thus, modernity in this thesis is to be understood as "representing a fundamental break from the past, the past time and the past moment" (Anttonen 2005: 27). Anttonen further states that modernity is "a discourse on the surpassing, even rejection, of that which prevailed prior to a given change […] Within this discourse, the changes in lifestyle and values, social organization of society […] have been conceptualised in ways which have emphasized the uniqueness of modernity" (2005: 28). When viewed through the representation of urban spaces in selected novels, one realises that the authors attempt to capture that shift through urbanised young blacks who, despite the fact that most of them die before fulfilling their dreams, reject the traditional ways of life. Thus, Rossouw (2017) argues that the "traditional elements such as a strong communal consciousness, a sense of place, a deep tie to the land and remnants of traditional religion to this day among Black South Africans sit uneasy alongside a choice for urbanisation" (2017: 119). Clashes between tradition and modernity arise when some characters and black communities resist transition to modernised life. Sometimes the resistance persists with the consequent effect of constructing urban spaces as in-between spaces that influence complex black identity. I do not intend to give the impression that tradition is always oppositional to modernism because in the cultural sense, these terms relate especially when one considers the cultural continuities that suggest "the presence of history in the present" (Anttonen 2005: 36). As such, my thesis seeks to reflect on how, in the selected novels, the dispute around tradition-modernity discourses constitute the urban binaries that construct and formulate a new understanding of black identity.

Welcome to Our Hillbrow captures rural/urban, local/non-local binaries with issues such as promiscuity, devastating HIV and AIDS, suicide, the "shattered dreams of the youth […] the omnipotent violence that often cuts short the promise of young people" (Mpe 2001) permeating post-apartheid urban spaces. Mpe constructs lived experiences of his characters set in a context riddled with the "us and them or other" binaries. The "us" points to those who regard themselves as locals or citizens and the "other" are non-locals or foreign nationals whose identity markers are the negative stereotypes by locals. The basis for constructed

negative stereotypes are allegations that "foreigners are blamed for, among other things, 'stealing' South African women, taking away jobs from locals and committing crimes" (Dobson 2010: 18). The process of stereotyping and rejecting what the locals view as the "other" betrays fear of losing identity, and is thus, an attempt to maintain an imagined local black identity against foreign identities. This is shown through the complex discourse of xenophobia. Yet, such discourses further complicate the post-2000 meaning of urban black identity.

One also realises the contextualisation of black lived experiences within urban spaces constructed beyond inner-urban spaces in the novels under study. In other words, Mpe's representation of urban space does not only rely on the inner city Johannesburg and particularly Hillbrow, but it overlaps to other spaces such as rural, international spaces and "flows on into an ancestral realm". Noting the spaces within which Mpe's narrative is contextualised; Dannenberg (2012) employs the term "journey" in describing the movement of the novel's protagonist and the other characters from one space to another. Dannenberg (2012: 40) points out that:

> the urban identity maps of […] *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* [is] constructed out of an interplay with spaces beyond inner-urban [space], in order to produce detailed maps of both life trajectories and a vision of the wider national and global contexts to which that character belongs […] the protagonists undertake three different types of journey: first from a rural to an urban environment, then journeys within the actual city, and then journeys from the postcolonial metropolis to another country.

Dannenberg's observation of the journeys that are embarked on by young black characters invokes an urge to read black identity beyond localised notions of the city that are set through discourses of xenophobia. The journey metaphorically seeks to transcend the boundaries of "afrophobia" that are constructed through the characters of this novel. This gives the impression that contemporary blackness ought to be perceived beyond South African urban parameters.

I mention "afrophobia" to draw the reader's attention to the attitude of locals towards non-locals as compared to physical violence. According to Dube (2018: 2) afrophobia is "the hostility shown by black South Africans towards black African immigrants". Dube clearly uses xenophobia and afrophobia as characterised by the hostility of locals against foreign nationals. However, for the sake of this study, I use afrophobia as a less violent term to capturing the attitude of locals against non-locals. My study seeks to address issues of

'afrophobia' that are projected in the novels as less physical and less violent. They are shown through negative attitudes of locals towards non-locals. Notwithstanding the fact that non-locals are defined in derogative terms such as (lekwerekwere), some locals denounce such labelling and strive for integration with their fellow non-locals urban dwellers. For instance, *Room 207* presents Zulu-boy whose existence in Johannesburg is defined by both tribalism and elements of 'afrophobia" while his friend and narrator Noko befriends non-locals. The question of whose black identity is projected through the reading of selected narratives is crucial to answer, especially in light of Beville's (2013: 604) argument that "the city is home to an infinite number of singularities, styles and versions of otherness. It is open to a diversity of identities and what is properly the city has disappeared and exists only in memory and imagination". Beville projects the city as an uncanny space and as such, constructing numerous and complex identities that overshadow how the city can be imagined. Drawing on such insights, my study argues that placing the understanding of South African urban black identity between traditional fixed poles in cities that are constantly being transformed, will suppress the dynamics of black identity that are facilitated by post-apartheid cities.

This thesis also engages blackness through the understanding of fragmented post-apartheid South African cities. For Gervais-Lambony (2001: 35), fragmentation is an "absolute-break between the different parts of the city, in its social, economic and political dimensions". This suggests that urban fragmentation is a result of the formulation of urban "class relations" as noted by Lefèvbre (1968), Castells (1981) and Lipietz (1977). In other words, urban fragmentation is formulated on the realisation of economic, political and social differences between urban dwellers with the upper class always regarding the lower classes as its "other". Navez-Bouchanine points out that "the process of breaking up of urban social unity, [is] the result of an extreme diversification of urban practices and references, the increasing social inequalities, the socio-economic mechanism of exclusion and modes of social solidarity dissociation which are favoured by spatial break up" (2001: 109). In his study on urban spaces Marija (2016: 6) notes that urban spaces are determined by three components namely, identity, structure and meaning. He argues that these components rely on each other in formulating the meaning of the other to an extent that the fragmented urban space determines the understanding of identity and meaning. The study draws on such insights and suggests that blackness ought to be explored through the understanding of fragmented city.

Added to this are writers such as Manase (2005) who argue that Mpe's narrative depicts a fragmented South African urban space. The process of walking in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is characterised by various encounters in "well-structured and post-modern CBD and up-market low density suburbs […] as well as a high density, impoverished inner city and faraway townships" (Manase 2005: 91) that map a sense of fragmented Johannesburg. One part of the urban space presented by Mpe "is […] crowded and chaotic space, [and] also supports the existence of antisocial behaviour such as prostitution and the consumption of illegal drugs" (Manase 2005: 91). Young female characters that have turned to prostitution and drug abuse have also turned street corners into their homes forming one part of a poor urban space. As such, it is crucial to ground our reading and understanding of blackness on the idea of urban fragmentation.

Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* depicts an urban space through a young black university character whose lived experiences is centred on strong notions of black entitlement at the dawn of the first South African democratic elections. According to Sen (1981) entitlement is "the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces" (497). Sen engages both individual and collective identities through notions of entitlement as formulated through societal rights. What stands out in his arguments is that he overlooks the economic societal inequalities and deprives the less powerful people of that entitlement. This makes his approach problematic in that when viewed through that understanding entitlement becomes "explicitly political" (Johnson 2003). McFarlane and Desai (2015: 442) give a fascinating observation that "[e]ven when certain rights are granted, they are often not realized because of the uneven power relations that shape the everyday life of the city". This observation is crucial when re-thinking the post-apartheid situation where the less powerful people express their entitlement to South African land and resources through demonstration and slogans such as "Amandla awethu" (Power is ours).

This thesis considers McFarlane and Desai's (2015) thoughts on entitlement as constituted by both the powerful and powerless. My interest lies more on their engagement with what they refer to as "the sites of entitlement" to reinforce their understanding of the notion of entitlement. For them "sites of entitlement" are defined by "everyday experiences, claims and struggles that continually take place, sometimes through overt individual or collective action sometimes through quiet processes of subversion" (442). Therefore, I read black identity

through sites of entitlement such as demonstrations and some "quiet processes of subversion" from the urban characters that seek to re-define their sense of entitlement. In the selected novels, the notion of black entitlement is fraught with narratives that seek to propel blacks as the rightful owners of all South African spaces and resources that they need to expropriate from white people. Of course, it is worth noting that the privileges that most white people have held for a long time have, to some degree, "extended beyond whiteness to include considerable numbers of black children growing up within the fast-growing black elite and middle class" (21). However, Dingz is not conscious of the fact that South Africa's attainment of democracy does not automatically set equal opportunities for all young black and white people. That post-apartheid imbalance in privileges is clearly fictionalised in Matlwa's *Coconut* where two female black characters represent contrasting worlds; one that is privileged and the other that defines struggles for existence and miseries. This is the reason for most young people's reluctance to comprehend the democratic dispensation. On the other hand, that misery is also propagated by the failure of urban spaces to provide economic opportunities for young people, leading them to find economic stability through crime. This narrative captures the unsettling and uncertainties of South African urban spaces through the anger that is directed to almost everyone for instance, "the drivers, elderly people, students, teachers, and the administration". One might also think of this anger as stemming from urban black dwellers' struggles to move beyond the gruesome experiences of apartheid and post-apartheid lack of socio-economic transformations that are shown through "many protests that manifest themselves throughout the country, in workplaces and communities where the lack of transformation is most keenly felt" (Clarke and Bassett 2016: 183). My analysis of post-apartheid blackness is also settled on characters' encounter and how they seek to deal with legacies of Apartheid, and their contemporary socio-economic struggles in urban spaces. Their encounter and how they deal with apartheid legacies is crucial here because, in their attempts to emancipate themselves from those subjugating legacies, they simultaneously re-define their existence and their black identity.

One of the fascinating notions of black identity in this thesis is toxic masculinity. Gramme (2019) states that toxic masculinity "can be described using the more negative traits in masculinity [such as] violent verbal, physical, or sexual acts performed to assert dominance over females or other men, homophobic actions and verbal phrases used to assert dominance over other men, and the "real men don't cry" mentality" (2). Sometimes that identity is asserted by striving for economic stability in urban spaces that rarely offer economic

opportunities. My understanding here is premised on the view that toxic behaviours is entwined with the harsh urban economic condition that most black characters find themselves in. According to Kupers (2005: 714) toxic masculinity is "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence". Kupers' definition is relevant here because it reflects the negative characteristics adopted by some men to define their existence and identities. Such characteristics are shown in almost all the novels that are analysed in this study.

Toxic masculinity will be engaged through juxtapositioning with progressive masculinity. McGuire et al. (2014: 254) state that men who are "non-sexist, anti-homophobia and anti-patriarchal" characterize progressive masculinity. Unlike toxic masculinity, that seeks dominance against female subjects through violence for instance, progressive masculinity recognises female subjects and their role in the society. In other words, in the novel, male characters who are characterised through progressive masculinity such as Ntaba and Ndlela in *Penumbra* do not strive for dominance against their female peers and at some point, they are a measure through which toxic masculinity is interrogated in fictitious Cape Town. The thesis seeks to analyse toxic masculine identity through *Penumbra*'s reflection of the initiation tradition that is grounded on claims of transforming boys into real men. I regard the initiation tradition as a platform that constructs toxic masculine identity because of some writers who have criticised its operations in post-apartheid South Africa. Ntombana (2016) argues that "in recent years, the initiation practice has been characterised by an increasing number of fatalities among the initiates, criminal activities, drug abuse and inhuman behaviour involving the newly emerged men" (631-2). Although such writers as Ntombana criticise the initiation tradition and consider it as one of the "spaces of idealized masculinity" (Haider 2016: 557) that formulate toxic masculinity, this thesis does not entirely regard this tradition as such in that some characters do not only survive that process but later adopt progressive masculine identity. I argue that the declaration of some initiates as real men and some as less real because of their failure to endure the initiation pain motivates the formation of toxic masculinities. While analysing black identity through toxic masculinity, it will also be crucial to argue that such black authored narratives that reflect the toxic patriarchal power is gradually encountering resistance from female-authored narrative in post-apartheid South Africa. Attention is drawn to Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* that offers an account of post-apartheid independent women who decide to deal with toxic masculine identity by murdering their husbands. The study seeks to focus the analysis of blackness through the

positions of post-apartheid black female characters in the novel. Studying the conditions of women immediately after the end of apartheid, Philips (1996: 2) argues, "the entire debate on democracy has proceeded […] as if women were not there, or […] only acknowledged us to show us our place". What is interesting about Philips' arguments is that they point out a need to "invalidate male rhetoric, subvert unnecessary hierarchies and to de-centre the male" (Gqola 1999:3). Makholwa's novel, to some extent, suggests that the only way to deal with the dominance of men, to "subvert unnecessary hierarchies and to de-centre the male" characters is to assassinate them. The writer introduces a world of female characters that constantly seek to suppress the world of any male character that appears in the novel. To some extent, it is worth arguing that the novel constructs toxic femininities as the only way to deal with toxic masculinities. Thus, bringing a new dimension to reading and understanding black identity in the urban space.

1.7 Methodology

Novels are a symbolic and metaphorical expression of lived experiences, a reflection of life in artistic images, a response to and recreation of past and present experiences, a form of communication, and a celebration of culture, context related, historical, political and philosophical. This makes context-sensitive analyses a more effective pre-requisite than general, functionalist and sequential descriptions of the novel. For this thesis, therefore, I have chosen the critical social research method of *content analysis*.

Harvey (1990) argues that critical social research methodology stems from the belief that knowledge, and in the case of this research, of black identity, is never completed, it is never finished, because the social world is constantly changing. Furthermore, blackness and black identity are context related. As members of the social world, artists are bound to be influenced by their values and those of society. Acting as the eyes, ears and voices of society, artists, "aim to get beyond the dominant values of society, to try to see what is going on underneath the surface." (Cited in Haralambos et al; 2004: 881) Critical research methods are particularly concerned with revealing oppressive structures so that such structures might be changed. Arguing further, Harvey says: "It is important that the account [black urban narratives] be located in a wider context which links the specific activities with a broader social structural and historical analysis." (Ibid) Thus, an analysis of black urban narratives by a cross section of South Africans can be linked to changes in the socio-political and economic forces of South Africa. Other features such as social relationships, dominant ideologies and

historical contexts are very much a part of critical social research methods as the discussion below shall indicate.

1.7.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis has been chosen for its emphasis upon objectivity, reliability and simplicity - factors that make it appealing. (Pawson 1995 cited in Haralambos et al 2004: 921) Four approaches in content analysis have been identified and shall be used. These are *formal content analysis*, which involves the systematic sampling, collection and classification of black urban narrative texts for study within their historical context; *thematic analysis* aimed at discovering the ideological biases, purposes and intentions of selected writers, their telling of blackness within specific historical epochs; *textual analysis*, which involves examining the linguistic devices within the selected black urban narratives in order to show how they influence and encourage a particular interpretation; and *audience analysis*, which focuses on the responses of the audience as critics and readers (Pawson 1995). In this case, serious consideration will be made of what other critics have said about the selected novels. It is my hope that the four approaches in content analysis will help strike a balance between the researcher and other scholarly interpretations of the selected black urban narratives.

1.7.2 Desk Study

This entails a study of:

- dissertations, academic journals both online and offline, newspapers and magazine articles on black urban narratives and their relationship to the history of South Africa;
- relevant history textbooks;
- Internet resources;
- University of the Free State Library.

1.8 Chapter Delineation

The thesis has seven chapters in total; all of which are entwined, speak and flow into each other in their reading of blackness and black identity in the urban space on post-2000 South African black authored urban narratives. Marking the thesis-opening, chapter one introduces the discussion by placing it in the larger context and history of South African urban narratives from the apartheid to the post-apartheid period. It spells out the aim of the study, and grounds

the entire study in some theoretical framework that draw on existing scholars' perspectives on black identity. Subsequent to this, the chapter also justifies, through a rationale, the need to carry out the study, which is to add my voice to existing scholarship on black identity by bringing in new ways of seeing, reading and understanding blackness in a "rainbow nation" whose depiction of blackness betrays a nation that is sitting carelessly. The chapter ends with a literature review on black narratives that have focused on blackness and black identity while also spelling out the analytical methodologies that the study will follow.

Chapter two focuses on post-apartheid black identity in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. The meaning of black identity is read and understood through ambiguities formulated in the urban space. This chapter seeks to answer the question of how blackness is constructed through the co-existence of contrasting identities in urban spaces. Grappling with constructed urban spaces, I draw on Gregory's (2003: 314) undertaking that "societies are discursively constituted through a series of normalising judgements that are put into effect by a system of divisions, exclusions and oppositions". Gregory's argument shows how power relations are formulated in urban spaces. Consequently, I employ this claim to analyse the formation of power relations through superior and inferior blacks in the novel's urban space. These power relations are analysed through the clashes between rural and urban, locals and non-locals' opposites and how these clashes set claims of power around city spaces. I argue that hostilities in urban spaces hostility means that embracing black diversity remains fragmented and a mirage. The aim here is to "address the frequently fractious relations between a range of identity positions" (Johnson 2007: 109) presented in this novel. With that inquiry, I seek to draw attention to Lee's (2007: 2) notion of "epistemic relativism".

The third chapter analyses constructions of blackness and black entitlement through the lens of young black characters in Johannesburg in the novel *Dog Eat Dog*. The transition from apartheid to freedom gave young black South Africans a sense of entitlement to urban spaces and resources. As such, they constantly claim the urban spaces and their accompanying resources. Attention is drawn to Sen's understanding of entitlement as a "rights" issue. Thus, when deprivation happens, individuals' sense of entitlement is deprived and violated. However, this understanding of entitlement is problematic and explicitly political. Even in a democracy, there is no universal enjoyment of rights. Issue of identity, class, race, nationality and gender play a part and set the limits to entitlement. I, therefore, draw on McFarlane and Desai's (2015) understanding of entitlement as constituted by both the powerful and

powerless urban dwellers. Their engagement with entitlement notes certain 'sites of entitlement' as crucial when re-thinking the idea of entitlement. Accordingly, they argue, "sites of entitlement" are defined by "everyday experiences, claims and struggles that continually take place, sometimes through overt individual or collective action sometimes through quiet processes of subversion" (McFarlane and Desai 2015: 442). Instances of subversion such as demonstrations will be analysed to argue that black communities employ such narratives to express their sense of entitlement and entrench blackness within constant struggles for power.

The analysis of Hlongwane's *Jozi* in chapter four seeks to form a grounded understanding of blackness through negative representations of black urban communities. Even with its negative construction of black urban communities, reading the novel through the context of colonial negations is an anomaly. Therefore, the representation of blacks who wallow in poverty, the horrific instances of murder, and an urban space that is atrocious and unforgiving to its dwellers form the basis of my argument that negative representations of black communities in post-apartheid South Africa ridicule and lampoon flag independence. My perspective on urban poverty is grounded on Mbembe and Nuttall's (2005) view that the meaning of poverty moves beyond material deprivation and to discourses of lack of security, and inability for the poor urban dwellers "to voice, to debate, contest, and oppose vital directions for collective social life" (5). Characters in *Jozi* are in a constant struggle for survival, and some die before fulfilling their dreams in Johannesburg. I engage the idea of Johannesburg as the city of dreams. The irony that this understanding brings into play when the post-apartheid urban space becomes alienating for black characters. Several instances in the novel echo Nuttall and Mbembe's view of urban poverty that one follows through either unrealised or suppressed competences of young characters, the lack of security that results in several horrific deaths and the compromised social relations in urban black communities. I therefore argue that, from the moment of its construction during slave trade and colonialism to post-apartheid period, blackness has rarely escaped negative connotations.

Chapter five discusses blackness through the lens of toxic masculinities. Focus is drawn to male perpetrated violence against female subjects. The chapter analyses various instances in Mahlangu's *Penumbra* that construct several discourses of toxic masculinities to give a grounded understanding of black identity. According to Kupers (2005), toxic masculinity is "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the

devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (714). Kupers' study points to toxic masculinity, like any other identity, as a socially constructed identity. As such, this study argues that the initiation tradition, for instance, is a platform through which toxic masculinities are partly constructed. The study interrogates how this tradition constructs and compromises the narrative of "real men" in post-apartheid South Africa to motivate dangerous masculinities. Ntombana (2016) argues that the initiation process is now fraught with discourses of violence, the abuse of drugs and degradation of the dignity of female subjects. Young black male characters show these traits to give meaning to their existence in that city. The chapter analyses the lived experiences of characters "who suffer pangs of emasculation [and seek to] reaffirm their status as real men through compensatory consumption" (Holt and Thompson 2004: 425).

To balance the argument, the chapter introduces Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* to settle on a female urban author perspective of blackness. My analysis of this novel taps from Gqola's (2001) argument that "the writings of Black women is moving beyond boundaries, opening even these confines up for examination" (12). Gqola offers an interesting insight around post-apartheid female writings and feminism that have challenged racial and patriarchal boundaries. Makholwa's attempt to move beyond the oppressive patriarchal boundaries is fascinating because it projects an aggressive way of dealing with female oppression by eliminating most husband characters through murder. I therefore argue that the meaning of post-apartheid blackness is constantly entrenched and stuck within the continuous masculine and feminine clashes.

The sixth chapter analyses blackness through discourses of un-inhabitable urban spaces and identity un-rootedness in Moele's *Room 207*. The sad stories of black characters respond to the question of how the post-apartheid condition of black characters formulate black identity. Drawing on Arefi's definition of rootedness as an "unconscious sense of place and the most natural and unmediated kind of people place tie" (1999: 182), I show the struggles of black characters to establish themselves and their identities in post-apartheid urban spaces. Simone (2014: 136) posits that un-inhabitable spaces are characterized by the "relationships among dispossessions, the expropriation of resourcefulness, the constitution of property, the dissolution of collective solidarities, the circumscription of maneuverability, the imposition of law, and the autonomy of market". The struggle against 'dispossession', 'the expropriation of resourcefulness', 'the dissolution of collective solidarity' formulate the major concerns

leading to the dismantling of the sense of home and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. As such, the unfavorable condition of room 207 in Hillbrow, is central especially in defining how blackness can be perceived through post-apartheid conditions of black characters.

1.9 Conclusion

This introductory chapter addressed the focus of this thesis and raised the issues that will be engaged within the analysis of post-apartheid black identity. To engage post-2000 blackness, the chapter briefly followed its historical trajectory stemming from the colonial period. I pointed out that the slave trade and colonialism as noted by Mbembe in *Critic of Black Reason* were projects that constructed racial differences and defined black identity in negative terms. I stated that the construction of black identity has motivated writers such as Curry (in Utley 2016) to argue that from time immemorial, blackness has continuously been negated. Even contemporary black writers are guilty of this. Reflection of this history does not place this study in a comparative study of apartheid and post-apartheid conceptualisation of blackness. It establishes an understanding that this thesis does not consider black identity as static. In other words, since the slave trade and colonialism blackness has gained worldwide attention. Its meaning has revolved around various circumstances and narratives that have constructed new perspectives around it. At the same time, the brief engagement with that historical perception of blackness does not seek to entirely engage that identity through colonial perceptions of it in this study. This is because the selected black authored urban narratives focus on issues unrelated to the subject of writing back to the former colonialist states. As such, this chapter introduced and underpinned such issues as urban ambiguities, xenophobia, toxic masculinities to mention a few, as crucial in focusing black identity especially considering the state of South African cities that have attracted numerous and contrasting identities. With people of different backgrounds and nationalities converging in South African cities, the chapter pointed out several ambiguities that will focus how we read and understand blackness especially in the second chapter. The chapter also highlighted toxic and progressive masculinity as forming the focal point for analysing post-apartheid blackness. This is premised on the understanding that cities are spaces of violent patriarchal dominance that undermine female subjects and other men. However, the novels do not define all male characters through the lens of toxic masculinity. In fact, as this chapter noted, some characters mark a shift from the traditional masculine identity that is characterised by violence and realise the importance of their female peers in that urban space. However, because urban dwellers are both masculine and feminine subjects, I noted that it is important

to introduce the perspective of female urban authors. My aim here is to analyse how female characters respond to and engage with black identity within masculine and feminine clashes of toxic masculinities.

Chapter 2

Rethinking Blackness within Urban Ambiguities in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses post-apartheid urban blackness through varied lenses of urban ambiguities in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001). These urban ambiguities manifest in the constant clashes between rural and urban identities in Johannesburg, traditions and modernity, and locals (citizens) and non-locals (non-citizens) as they negotiate a meaningful existence in urban spaces. Heightened by character development, these issues find expression in characters who, through the journey motif, migrate from rural Tiragalong to Johannesburg in search for economic opportunities. This rural to urban migration turns locals into economic migrants, the same label that when referring to non-locals, is pejoratively applied with contempt. The novel complicates its representation of the urban space by broadening and linking it to imagined connections between the narrator on earth and his friend Refentše in Heaven. The narrator narratively journeys into and weaves through three figuratively interconnected spaces namely, Tiragalong, Johannesburg and Heaven. This narrative journeying and weaving through spaces creates consanguinity between Johannesburg, Tiragalong and Heaven. Hence, comprehending one space is an act requiring comprehension of the other two places without whose presence the existence and identity of the protagonist would be meaningless and incomplete. This is premised on the understanding that as the events unfold in the novel, the main characters are constantly identified by the narrator as children of Tiragalong, Hillbrow and Heaven. These spatial identifiers are key in understanding and reading blackness and black identity. The contrast of these spaces, even in their interconnectedness, creates a space identity negotiation that fosters constant formation of new identities in Johannesburg. Hence, this chapter explores the everyday struggles and compromises of characters in their attempt to foster relations between contrasting identities in the face of change from traditional ways of life to new and modernised forms. The spatial shift comes with sudden and unexpected changes that leave characters in a state of ambivalence – the Dubois sense of double-consciousness. My intention is to bring to light the tensions that are formulated between Tiragalong people whose view of Hillbrow is defined and constructed by negative conceptions, and urban dwellers whose identities are constructed around the modernised life of Johannesburg. Noteworthy, are the connections formulated between Refentše the protagonist who commits suicide in Hillbrow and reappears in Heaven, and Hillbrow as the narrator gives an account of this protagonist's lived experiences in that

urban space. I argue that the reader does not only encounter the black urban dweller who struggles between the poles of hope and despair but also follows the tensions that manifest when traditions and modernity intersect. These tensions foster complex identities as characters attempt to shift to modernised forms of life in Johannesburg. The result is societal alienation and a strong sense of not belonging.

The imagined Heaven, Hillbrow and rural Tiragalong constitute the metaphysical and physical settings that "mark symbolic distances" in the novel *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (Berking et al 2006: 10). Nevertheless, by shifting between these spaces, characters map symbolic connections of the settings and in the process provide various dimensions of reading and understanding post-apartheid urban blackness. The poly-facetted nature of blackness demands understanding Johannesburg and particularly Hillbrow as multi-cultural and cosmopolitan national spaces that constantly formulate complex identities. As such, this chapter seeks to respond to the question of how the novel's urban ambiguities construct the sense of post-2000 blackness. This endeavour draws my focus to Kwame Anthony Appiah's definition of identity as "coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thoughts, and patterns of evaluations; in short, a coherent kind of human social psychology" (105). In his treaties, Appiah is critical of a single definition of African identity because of the diversity and relativism of African cultures and identities. He highlights this diversity through various pre-colonial cultures and colonial experiences to show how identity is constructed on rational and irrational considerations. In the process, he proves that the theorisation of identity is fraught with uncertainties. I find Appiah's views relevant for analysing blackness *in Welcome to Our Hillbrow* because the urban spaces it portrays define multi-cultural and national amalgams that foster complex urban identities.

While reckless driving, prostitution, murder and drug dealing define the chaotic state of Hillbrow, Tiragalong is the antithesis that seeks to maintain its traditions through vigorous but inconsistent reproof of fast and modernised Hillbrow life. At the same time, Heaven poses as a space of reflection, resting and everlasting existence. But it is compromised by the eternal torment of some former Johannesburg dwellers. For me, Heaven exists in the imagination of Johannesburg dwellers in that while the narrator recollects and tells Refentše's lived experiences, Refentše does not respond throughout the novel. Heaven is, therefore, a symbolic extension of Hillbrow, which exists in the imagination of Johannesburg dwellers who constantly wish to escape the horrific lifestyle of that city. Thus, the novel constructs

two distinct but conjoined spaces in that urban space; one that is chaotic and life threatening and the other, an imagined perfect space for their extended existence. This spatial context of ambiguous blackness is projected through "well-structured and post-modern CBD and up-market low-density suburbs […] as well as a high density, impoverished inner city and faraway townships" (Manase 2005: 91). The binaries inform my reading of the "us and them" binaries that characterise the CBD as a space that marks the boundaries of wealthy urban dwellers against poverty stricken and crime infested spaces like Hillbrow. This view goes beyond the mere contrasting images of the city space to exposing the folly, vanity and fear of some middle class urban dwellers such as Refentše's cousin who find it socially and economically convenient to avoid relations with black street beggars.

Therefore, I argue that blackness poses in part as a condition that is still defined by poverty and partly as a self-fulfilling identity. I also submit that the novel's depiction of black characters and the urban spaces they occupy sets blackness as a space that is constantly negotiated through the clashes of rural/urban, tradition/modernity, locals/non-locals dichotomies that formulate a "third space" from which post-2000 black identity can be read. For a comprehensive reading and understand of representations of post-2000 blackness in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, I employ Bhabha's (1994) notion of "third space". Mpe's depiction of rural/urban, tradition/modernity and locals/non-locals disparities renders the formulation of a "third space" inevitable as these contrasts are set by the author "without privileging one over the other" (Soja 1996: 5). The notion of "third space" here is understood as an "in-between space or a border zone" formulated by the encounters of different identities that "allow particular spaces of meaning to emerge" (Kalua 2009: 23). According to Kalua (2009: 24), there exists a certain period of identity disorientation whenever identities encounter and slip "in and out of determinate identity at will and generally displaying protean, ambiguous and sometimes diametrically opposed attributes such as alienation, confusion, amorphousness, ambiguity and/or individuality, among others". Therefore, reading the encounter of tradition and modernity in the urban space in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* enables us to see the formulation of that in-between space that defines itself as a space of displacement resulting in "the slippage of signification that is celebrated in the articulation of differences" (Bhabha 1994: 235).

Particularly crucial is the narrative's representation of locals (citizens) and non-locals' (non-citizens) identity encounter in the urban space. The juxtapositioning of locals and non-locals

in the novel constructs the "us and them" binaries through a flood of negative images about non-locals who, inadvertently, suffer constant condemnation by locals for almost all the malfeasance in Hillbrow. The 'us' narrative forms the basis for the construction of notions of entitlement. However, sometimes the negotiated relations between young locals and non-locals problematize the locals' regard for non-locals as the "other". For instance, Sammy's representation in Hillbrow and Refilwe's representation in Oxford are characterised by intimate relations with non-locals. This is despite vigorous interrogation of such relations within the narrative's rural and urban spaces. As a result, Refilwe's return from Oxford does not raise excitement from those who are waiting for her homecoming partly because of her involvement with a "*Likwerekwere*" (non-local). This is seen as defilement and defacement of her identity. Coincidentally, her death before she settles for a job at home is suggestive of the conflict between tradition and modernity and an act of reprisal for her entanglement with a non-local. However, such thinking is defied by the unfolding merging of tradition and modernity in the narrative's urban space.

Welcome to Our Hillbrow follows Refentše a young man who relocates from a rural space called Tiragalong to Hillbrow in Johannesburg. He is the second young man from Tiragalong who relocates to that urban space to pursue degree studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. His relocation significantly reflects different levels of rural and urban encounters and connections that this chapter explores to draw inferences on how post-2000 black identity ought to be read. Such connections are crucial in exploring urban space ambiguities and the impact they have in re-imagining post-apartheid black identity. Although Tiragalong perceives Hillbrow in stereotypical terms such as a space and place social disorder and moral morass, Refentše and other Tiragalong young characters who migrate to Hillbrow constantly exhibit the simultaneity of hope and despair that forms the basis within which their lived experiences are contextualised. The novel portrays several young people whose arrival in Hillbrow is overshadowed by an urge to settle for a better life. However, most of them, including the protagonist, die before their dreams are fulfilled.

The opening of the novel constructs a contact zone for the interplay of clashes of rural and urban identities. When the narrative opens, Refentše's rural identity is glaring. Ingrained in him is his rural background that, for long, he struggles to settle in a city haunted by incidences of crime and whose lifestyle is way too fast for him to embrace. Arguably, the resistance that manifests through the encounters of rural and urban identities give meaning

and definition to post-apartheid black identity. The journey motif from Tiragalong to Hillbrow is as physical as it is spiritual. It marks the beginning of disillusionment and development of new identity. The journey is a form of mapping that figuratively connects urban and rural spaces as Refentše walks through the streets of Johannesburg to familiarise himself with that city. Landing in Johannesburg ushers him into a dual form of learning. His first form of orientation on how to navigate the urban spaces of Johannesburg is offered by his cousin who accommodates him. The second orientation is at Wits University during his undergraduate period. This learning-learning is a psychological exercise in understanding the urban space, which metaphorically merges rural and urban identities. For instance, Refentše's cousin points him towards the location of the house of prostitutes and expressly tells him that he can purchase sex from it converges with the people of Tiragalong's perception and construct of Hillbrow women. The convergence is the novel's attempt to connect the identities of these spaces. Refentše's trip to Wits with his cousin is a revealing moment. Streets are swarming with countless people including dirty street kids who sniff glue and others who appear to be generous beggars to Refentše but his cousin warns against responding to their greetings because not all people in Hillbrow are "innocent well-wishers" (12). The advice shows black identity as something to be read through the "us and them" binaries that are widely captured through the "easy-going" and clean CBD, and its chaotic peripheries.

Educated young Tiragalong characters like Refentše, a student at Wits, and Refilwe who attains her Master's degree from Oxford represent black identity born out of clashes of modernity and tradition. Refentše's character development has a dialectical relationship with the environment. From a lowly perceived rural traditional space, he transitioned to a modernised urban space where he studies for his undergraduate and Master's degrees at Wits; becoming a lecturer in the same institution. His education equips him with new and different ways of seeing and telling his tradition. This contrast of time – past and present – is vital in the making and mapping of new black identities. When the narrative opens, he embraces the traditions of his rural Tiragalong. Through the passage of time and the urban space syndrome, he becomes a critic of the same traditions and resolutely rejects counsel from his Tiragalong people. Attempts by his mother and former Tiragalong girlfriend Refilwe to draw him back to his traditions are futile. His character metamorphosis projects a person ready to embrace a new black identity rooted in modernity. Tiragalong community regards all Johannesburg women as prostitutes to be avoided. However, Refentše cannot resist the liberating effect of

the urban space and gets involved with Lerato insisting that both spaces are similarly defined by immorality. That Tiragalong defines itself as a place of moral conduct faces ridicule and censure through several Tiragalong young and old people who die of AIDS notwithstanding the fact that they have never visited Hillbrow; a space that allegedly breeds AIDS. Similarly, it is difficult to dissociate Refilwe from that immorality as her numerous sexual relations with different men lead to her separation with Refentše while they were still at school in Tiragalong. Although she re-creates herself as a traditional young woman through attempts to reconcile with Refentše, she fails to resist the modern life in Hillbrow and Oxford. Her disdain of her community's view of non-locals or foreigners manifests when she gets involved with a Nigerian man while studying in Oxford. Tiragalong interprets her critical illness with AIDS that later claims her life as punishment for her neglect of community traditions. This establishes traditional societal resistance against modernism as represented by urban spaces.

2.2 Reading Blackness within Rural/Urban Binaries

The repetitive use of "welcome to our Hillbrow" throughout the novel in concord with the title is crucial for the urban ambivalences that the novel constructs through rural and urban identity dichotomies. The expression enables the realisation of the simultaneity of rural and urban conflicting identities in the novel. Refentše's arrival in Hillbrow is a classic example:

> Your first entry into Hillbrow, Refentše, was the culmination of many converging routes. You do not remember where the route first began […] By the time you left Tiragalong High School to come to the University of the Witwatersrand, at the dawn of 1991, you already knew that Hillbrow was a menacing monster, so threatening to its neighbours like Berea and downtown Johannesburg, that big, forward-looking companies were beginning to desert the inner city […] The lure of the monster was, however, hard to resist; Hillbrow had swallowed a number of the children of Tiragalong, who thought that the City of Gold was full of career opportunities for them (Mpe 2-3).

The initial contact between Refentše and the urban space (Hillbrow) formulates a space of paralleled rural and urban identities that make Johannesburg an ambiguous urban space. The 'many converging routes' make Johannesburg a confusing labyrinth, a maze to the new arrival. The metaphor of Johannesburg as a threatening and menacing 'monster', which ironically is hard to resist creates the impression of a city that is as attractive to its visitors and deceptively perilous as the python. This serpentine nature of Johannesburg is the source of urban ambivalences. As a representative of the rural tradition, Refentše already knows about the cruelty and snare that await him in Hillbrow, and that he needs to manoeuvre and

negotiate. His journeying to the city has symbolic constructions of connections between contrasting rural and urban identities. Through this journey motif, varied perceptions of blackness are created. Chief among them is the potential of blackness at "showing an intermeshing of relationships across [identity] lines" (Eze 2014: 235). The intermingling and intertwining are testament to the complexities of blackness and black identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The novel constructs Hillbrow as a contact zone from which numerous identities converge and foster the negotiation of new identities. As embodiments of rural identity, Refentše and other young people from Tiragalong expedite the fusion of rural and urban identities in Hillbrow as soon as they set foot in Johannesburg, hence the claim to ownership of the urban space in "our Hillbrow". Refentše identifies with both Tiragalong and Hillbrow. This is evident when the narrator says:

> [y]ou discovered, on arriving in Hillbrow, that to be drawn away from Tiragalong also went hand-in-hand with a loss of interest in Hillbrow. Because Tiragalong was in Hillbrow. You always took Tiragalong with you in your consciousness whenever you came to Hillbrow or any other place. In the same way, you carried Hillbrow with you always. (Mpe 49)

The simultaneous existence of and the attempt to connect Tiragalong and Hillbrow identities in Johannesburg creates a fascinating and paradoxical resistance and co-existence of these identities. Refentše's realisation that his experience in Hillbrow is dominated by his attachment to Tiragalong places him and Johannesburg on the borderline synonymous with Dubois' double-consciousness syndrome, especially when the narrator claims that, "[b]ecause Tiragalong was in Hillbrow". The expletive of Hillbrow as a "menacing monster" that swallows most of their young people is negative delineation of the urban space with the potential to be misconstrued as Tiragalong's resistance of the city space. However, awareness is not resistance because young people from Tiragalong are swallowed by this monster. This shows that the city space is hard to resist – once you set foot in it. The temptations that abound in Hillbrow are also evident in Tiragalong. The irony of seeing Hillbrow in such condescending stereotypes, exposes the myopia of young people from Tiragalong who overlook the immorality they brought with them to Hillbrow. As such, it is worth arguing that the simultaneous existence and convergence of these identities, formulates Johannesburg as a shared urban space that recreates post-2000 blackness as an ambiguous identity.

The rural/urban binaries that make up Johannesburg find contestation through identity negotiations. Worth noting is Tiragalong's negations of Hillbrow, which set the hostility

between rural and urban identities while Hillbrow, figuratively, swallows Tiragalong's young people. However, the opening of the novel formulates a context that attempts to invalidate hostility boundaries between these identities. Hillbrow's despicable celebrations for the national soccer team are telling:

> If you were still alive, Refentše, child of Tiragalong, you would be glad that Bafana Bafana lost to France in the 1998 soccer world cup fiasco. Of course, you supported the squad. But at least now, you would experience no hardships walking to your flat through the streets of Hillbrow […] You would remember the last occasion in 1995, when Bafana Bafana won against Ivory Coast and, in their jubilation, people in Hillbrow hurled bottles of all sorts from their flat balconies. A few bold souls, boasting a range of driving skills, swung and spun their cars in the streets […] You would recall the child, possibly seven years old or so, who got hit by a car. Her mid-air screams still ring in your memory. (Mpe 1-2)

One gets the sense of integration of rural and urban identities projected here through Refentše's appreciation of one part of urban identity through his support for the national team. The idea of national team presupposes national collective identity, which ironically suffers still-birth when allusion is made to the reckless jubilations witnessed in "the last occasion in 1995". In its negotiation for space in Hillbrow, rural Tiragalong's identity is constantly exposed to urban identity hostility and violence figuratively captured by mid-air screams of a seven-year-old accident victim. That hostility is, however, overshadowed by the national team's loss against France and its figurative negotiation for temporary connections between these identities as Refentše safely walks through Hillbrow streets to his flat after the occasion. The process of identity negotiation suggests notions of "the spirit of Ubuntu" and its supposed effect of merging post-apartheid black communities as projected by Moloketi (2009: 243) and Tutu (2004: 25-26). It also suggests interdependence, relationality and mutuality of these post-apartheid black communities. Refentše's first day in Hillbrow shows this identity interdependence:

> [t]he following day you woke up, washed yourself thoroughly; quite a treat. Water being such a scarce resource in Tiragalong, you only used to take a proper bath once a week. Sure, there were taps at most street corners in Tiragalong. But the water taps were often as dry as a desert. So here you received a treat; warm, hot and cold water right in the flat (Mpe 10).

This lack of basic services such as water, metaphorically constructs a flawed rural identity steeped in neglect, denialism and a life of want, whose contact with the urban identity in Hillbrow, fosters a new identity for characters like Refentše. Attempt at merging these

identities manifest in the narrative's welcome note that settles Refentše within urban identity. His relationship with Lerato from Alexandra gives him comfort. The relationship tells of transcended rural and urban boundaries that point to the merging of post-apartheid rural and urban identities. The transcendence establishes identity connections at an esoteric level as Refentše and Lerato appear in Heaven after their death in Johannesburg. Hence, post-apartheid blackness is a contested terrain whose meaning has become more complex in post-apartheid South Africa as a consequence of transcendence.

Walking through the streets of Hillbrow has symbolic significance, especially when it is done by rural characters. It merges contrasting traditional rural and modernised urban identities. The discourse of walking the city significantly constructs resilient post-apartheid young rural characters (now in the city) who are determined to subvert their traditional identities and re-define themselves through the modernised way of life in Johannesburg. Refentše's walk through the streets of Johannesburg for the first time exhibits his orientation into a new identity that he embraces until his death. The walk merges the rural and the urban, the old with the new and naivety with experience. This conflation of the rural and urban through first time experience in Johannesburg is evident when the narrator says:

> So for the first time, you see Hillbrow in the splendour of sunrays. Your own and Cousin's soles hit the pavement of the Hillbrow streets […] You cross Twist, walk past the Bible Centred Church [...] Edith Cavell runs parallel to Twist. Enclosed within the lane that runs from Wolmarans to Claredon Place (which becomes Louis Botha a few streets on) is a small, almost negligible triangle of a park. On the other side of the park, just across Clarendon Place, is Hillbrow Police Station, in which you take only minimal interest […] In Kotze you turn right to face the west. Cousin stops you. If you want it, he says wryly, you can go into this building. He points to a building […] called Quirinalle […] One semi-naked soul comes out […] and Cousin's point is made (Mpe 10-11).

The journey from Tiragalong to Hillbrow is a construct that moves beyond rural "social and cultural boundaries" (Ting-Toomey 2005: 211) by formulating connections between rural and urban black communities despite their notable conflicting traditions. After migrating to Johannesburg, Refentše and some characters from Tiragalong do not revisit their rural space but embrace some of its traditions in that city, thereby constructing the connections between the two spaces. However, this should not give the impression that the chapter regards Tiragalong as an urban space. Its perception of, and constant reference in Hillbrow are crucial in shaping conflicts between tradition and modernism in the city.

For Refentše, the initial connection with the urban space, though dependent on his cousin's "motility", forms the basis for identity reconstruction as he walks through the streets of Johannesburg. Kaufmann (2002: 37) defines motility "as the capacity of a person to be mobile, or more precisely, as the way in which an individual appropriates what is possible in the domain of mobility and puts this potential to use for his or her activities". In the case of Johannesburg, appropriation means identity change in order to fit into and survive the fast and furious Johannesburg culture. That process "includes physical capacity [and the] knowledge of the operations necessary for a mode of mobility. Even walking on the sidewalk in a large city requires a practical knowledge of traffic and pedestrian norms" (Brown and Shortell 2016: 4). Fascinatingly, the process of walking connects the urban way of life to the configurations of the city. As such, when Refentše walks through the streets of Johannesburg, he metaphorically aligns himself with the conventions of that city. Arguably, that process affords him a certain sense of temporary possession of that city, especially when he later occupies a lecturer position at one of the biggest institutions in that urban space. Walking through Hillbrow also establishes a sense of belonging for Refentše who gets identified as the "child of Hillbrow". My view here is motivated by Brown and Shortell's argument (2016: 1-2) that walking is "associated with a way of living in the city [and it is] a way of extending social reality". Physical walks through the streets of Johannesburg combined with encounters with the urban life extend the 'social reality' of characters and construct their transition from their familiar traditional Tiragalong life to modernised Johannesburg life.

The urban infrastructure is crucial in restructuring and re-orienting rural identity and Refentše's connections with the urban identity. For instance, buildings such as the "Bible Centred Church" and "Hillbrow Police Station" with their capitalised inscriptions give the impression of a restricted and constricted space with limitations that are defined by law and religion. Additionally, the church does not only reflect effected measures and/or limits for certain moral conduct for urban dwellers but it also facilitates the merging of various identities. As a place of communion, the church is an all-inclusive space that accommodates people of different cultures and traditions, backgrounds and nationalities. Knot et. al (2016: 126) define it as a "positive expression of urban multiculturism". As such, Refentše finds himself within a space that amalgamates various identities and extends its horizons through its acceptance of rural identity. The Hillbrow Police Station reinforces the merging of various identities that exist in the urban space. It is a symbol of the justice system that protects and binds Hillbrow dwellers. Introducing Refentše to "Quirinalle" – a building where sexual

services can be purchased – exhibits Refentše's cousin's familiarity with the urban space and his strong sense of belonging. This move beyond Tiragalong people's perspectives of Johannesburg women. Initially, Refentše resists compromising his rural identity. However, as he assumes the new urban identity through his relationship with Lerato, we begin to see the merging of the urban and traditional identities in one body.

The merging of rural and urban identities in the city is shaped by discourses that seek to rehabilitate and reposition the rural and urban as mutually intelligible. This puts pressure on Refentše to align his old and new found identity with that of the urban space. Therefore, the character metamorphosis he goes through is a process of rehabilitating his fear of this urban space as he constantly negotiates through instances of crime in Hillbrow. His first night in Hillbrow is a figurative construction of his fear of the city, presumably on account of stories he had heard about Hillbrow, while in Tiragalong:

> Your cousin, after feeding you well, left you alone to go to bed because you cried about exhaustion. Your guide left with him too. They were going to see Hillbrow, they said […] Will they come back? You asked yourself initially. Will robbers break into the flat? And if they do, what will I do? […] You were struck by the quietness of Vickers and its immediate surroundings. And now, as you gradually fell back to sleep, it was the screams of human voices and police sirens that surged up from the depths of your sleep into the nightmares and dreams of your first night in Hillbrow (Mpe 9-10).

The multiple rhetorical questions and nightmares on his first night in Hillbrow betray Refentše's anxiety about the city and his strong sense of insecurity. His deracination from Tiragalong, a place and space of familiarity and rural identity marks the beginning of a process of reconfiguration of his identity. His sleeping is preceded by a moment of quietness that allows the assimilation of such urban identifications as the "voices of people" and "police sirens that surged up from the depths" into his rural identity. Of interest are Refentše's nightmares. Nightmares hardly encompass clear meanings as they define themselves through confusing conversations. In this instance, these nightmares metaphorically pose as a "third space" in that they formulate themselves through the fusion of Tiragalong tradition and urban activities that reach Refentše while he is sleeping. As such, it is worth arguing that blackness occupies that third space as it poses as an ambiguous identity that is formed through the coexistence of traditional rural and modernised urban in his dream.

The "welcoming" nature of Hillbrow conflates traditional rural and urban identities and invalidate the boundaries between these identities. The effect of this identity merging is the

construction of black identity as seeking integration. The black urban space reflects various spaces defined by social classes. For instance, the CBD with its surrounding spaces are teamed with dirty beggars and drug addicts who occupy street corners. Such mapping of urban spaces hardly deviates from colonial urban imaginings of the city that set binaries between the coloniser and colonised. Muchemwa (2013: 8) argues that such mapping of the urban space underpins "imagination [that] erected boundaries based on fear of contamination and the construction of the colonial other as dirty and immoral so as to justify the denial of spatial privileges to the colonised". Thus, the urban space in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is characterised by the discourses of power that according to Sibley (1995: ix), is "expressed [through] monopolization of space and the relegation of weaker groups in society to less desirable environments". Those power relations had already been noted by Engels' (1971: 31) as he argues, "everyone exploits his neighbour with the result that the strongest tramples the weaker under foot. The strongest of, a tiny group of capitalists, monopolize everything, while the weakest, who are in the vast majority, succumb to the most abject poverty". Although Engels' view is set on power relations in England, it seems relevant in relation to how the novel has constructed its city. However, with the influence of what appears as a tradition of greeting every person he meets, Refentše unconsciously transcends those boundaries thus, showing attempts by some black urban dwellers to integrate these urban space binaries. Refentše's attempt to relate with street beggars is hilariously telling about the deceptive nature of the urban space:

> [f]urther on, about fifty metres from the head of Kotze, you see some old people, about fifteen of them, sitting against a cream and brown wall. Cousin tells you that they are beggars […] as you draw level with the last of them, he shouts: *Aibo!* Cousin ignores him. You wave your hand at him. *Ngiyabonga Baba*, he returns your greeting with a smile. Hey you! You do not go around greeting every fool in Hillbrow. He looks harmless. But not all people who greet you in Hillbrow are innocent well-wishers (Mpe 12).

Evidently, beggars are constructed as the "other" of that space. They are perceived as "foolish" and "untrustworthy" despite Refentše calling them helpless, old and innocent. We see contrasted spaces of the powerful and powerless manifested through mapping physical urban spaces and by defining the powerless in degrading and dehumanizing terms. These defining moments represent structural inequalities of Johannesburg, which are exemplified by freeways or motorways and the way they demarcate places like Sandton and Alexandra Park. However, on his return journey from Wits, Refentše betrays the naivety of his rural identity when he chooses to respond to the same beggars. The narrator notes: "[o]n your way home

[…] you again respond to the old man's *Aibo!* Again, he thanks you for your generosity. You are persuaded to search your trouser pockets for a cent or two…" (15). His connection with beggars compromises existing binaries within depicted urban space. It blends the rural and the urban, the poor beggar and the educated. Refentše maintains the connection even as he is appointed lecturer:

> [i]t was during your second month as lecturer that you saw your friend from the shelter being wheeled away in a wheelbarrow, in the direction of Hillbrow Hospital […] In the five years you had known him, you had become friends without ever saying anything to each other, except for the mutually warm greetings (Mpe 16).

Refentše's connection with the "other" of this urban space is rooted in his second day encounter with the beggar in Hillbrow and his rural hospitality that prompts him to pass a greeting. Here, the rural-urban binaries intersect to create black commonality in the urban space. However, what begins as rural hospitality in a shared urban space ends prematurely with the beggar's hospitalisation. This transition from hospitality to hospitalisation interrogates continued binaries within contemporary black urban spaces. His position as a lecturer at a renowned university in South Africa notwithstanding, Refentše stays in Hillbrow; one of the precarious, perilous and degraded spaces of Johannesburg. He interacts with the "other" in the urban space, and thus, is identified as the child of Hillbrow. His behaviour and lifestyle flies in the face of historically structured urban binaries. Hence, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is a post-apartheid urban protest narrative that through black identity, annuls binaries and integrates black urban communities.

Blackness and its endeavour for integrating black communities entrenches itself in how some characters perceive Hillbrow and Tiragalong. For Refentše's cousin and other like-minded people from Tiragalong, Hillbrow is a space of moral decay, very much antithetical to Tiragalong and its high moral aptitude. However, Refentše disagrees as he sees Hillbrow and Tiragalong as converging spaces:

> [i]t was your opinion that the moral decay of Hillbrow, so often talked about, was in fact no worse than that of Tiragalong. Think about it, Cousin, you would challenge. How many people are here in Hillbrow? How many of them are criminals? If you consider that the concentration of people in Hillbrow is dense, and work out the number of crimes in relation to the number of people, I tell you, you will find Tiragalong to be just as bad (Mpe 17-18).

Refentše's call to juxtapose stereotypical constructions of Hillbrow with common place and untested crime statistics in both Hillbrow and Tiragalong intersects the two spaces and the subsequent black identities they represent. Sameness in the degree of moral decay is what makes a one-time child of Tiragalong become a child of Hillbrow. They are both spaces of familiarity even though geographically spaced. As such, Refentše's argument destabilizes constructed views that seek to maintain permanent binaries within urban black communities. This finds reinforcement when Tiragalong young people who fail to establish themselves in Johannesburg through conventional economic means, resort to irresponsible sexual relations and die of AIDS. The narrative brings this to light through Cousin's comments when he says: "[a]h! This AIDS nonsense! I wish those girls and boys in our villages had more respect for their genitalia and did not leave them to do careless business in Hillbrow" (20). Through Cousin's comments, we see that Tiragalong young people enable and participate in Hillbrow's immorality. The apparent moral uprightness of Tiragalong is ridiculed.

Worse still, Refilwe, from Tiragalong hardly escapes that immoral sexual conduct. She is mentioned among those involved in countless sexual relations – a code of conduct that can be traced back to Tiragalong when she was still at school. The sexual immorality is the reason for the breakdown of the relationship between Refilwe and Refentše while they were still in Tiragalong: "[o]ne of the chief embellishers was Refilwe, your sometime Tiragalong girlfriend, with whom you parted company when you discovered that she had at least four other love relationships ongoing" (31). Although her illness is realised on her arrival in Tiragalong from Oxford, and is thus attribute to the influence of Oxford, Refilwe's sexual (mis)behaviour is very much an expression of Hillbrow and Tiragalong. Furthermore, Refentše speaks of a young Tiragalong woman who is ostracised by her community when she falls critically ill with AIDS linked to her sexual relations with numerous "kwerekweres". This casts light into the narrative's attempt to bridge the gap between rural and urban identities. Those who sympathise with Refentše's heroine criticise her community for rejecting her for bringing and living the Tiragalong way in Hillbrow. As the narrator says, the:

> […] sympathetic ones went further and pointed out that there was no actual evidence to say that she was in love with a *Lekwerekwere*. Anyway, if she was, what was wrong with that? Who said that the people of Tiragalong were cleaner than everyone else? Were there no stories of Tiragalong people who died of sexually transmitted diseases, with genitals so swollen and decaying that one could hardly recognise

> them […] Villagers who had never been to Jo'burg […] and whose sexual experiences were limited to encounters with other villagers (Mpe 54-5).

Clearly, Tiragalong can hardly define itself outside normative constructions of Hillbrow. The sexual disease imagery in Tiragalong members die "of sexually transmitted diseases, with [their] genitals so swollen and decaying that one could hardly recognise them" testifies to a morally depraved society with a misplaced sense of puritanism. Of interest is the futility of trying to make Hillbrow the epicentre of all sexually related diseases manifesting in Tiragalong. The understanding that some Tiragalong members who die of such diseases have never been to Johannesburg and their "sexual experiences [… are only] limited to encounters with other villagers", downplays the urge to draw a distinction between Tiragalong's immoral conduct from that of Hillbrow. Both spaces portray blackness as an identity that is constructed on integrationist narratives of post-apartheid black communities.

Refentše takes this integration to another level when he resists a Tiragalong girlfriend. His resistance is the source of conflict with his mother who, after failing to convince him to find a Tiragalong girlfriend, disowns him. It further resurfaces through his conversation with Refilwe who attempts to convince him to consider reconciling their past broken relationship. Refilwe's argument reflects a generalised and collective perception that all Tiragalong women are cultured compared to Johannesburg women such as Lerato his girlfriend:

> [b]ut, Refilwe argued, since you have admitted that you love us both, would you not feel more at home in the arms of a child of Tiragalong? We know what Jo'burg women can do to man…! You said: Yes, some Jo'burg women are certainly terrible. But the same can be said of some Tiragalong women. Are some of them not known for throwing love potions into the food and drink of their husbands or illicit lovers? Love potions that are sometimes so strong that they turned the men into madmen? (Mpe 90).

Refilwe's argument offers contrasting perspectives of rural and urban spaces. These spaces are defined through permanent binaries. Refilwe's view casts deliberate blindness to her earlier flaws while she was still in Tiragalong as she conveniently ignores Tiragalong women who are as immoral as some Johannesburg women. Urban immorality is portrayed through a whorehouse and characters like Lerato's mother who "could not say no to any drop of semen found flowing aimlessly in the streets" (82) with Lerato's infidelity consequently forcing Refentše to commit suicide. Refentše's argument, without resisting Tiragalong's claims about the sexual immorality of Hillbrow women raise Refilwe's attentiveness to the flaws of Tiragalong women who are the same as those of Johannesburg. Among the flaws is the use of

"love portion"; a traditional medicine that some Tiragalong women use to gain control over their husbands or boyfriends. Judging from how Refentše perceives the use of that traditional medicine, Tiragalong women move beyond immorality and reflect necromancy that leads to their male victims' mental illness. It is on the basis of the conflicting view of these characters about both rural and urban spaces that I find it worth arguing that establishing blackness is trapped within tensions that black communities struggle to escape.

Through its construction of the lived experiences of young black people Mpe's narrative positions blackness within the grasp of hope and despair. The novel defines the initial arrival of all young people in Hillbrow through discourses of hope for a better life. However, Hillbrow shatters the dreams of most of them. The use of the phrase "Welcome to Our Hillbrow" throughout the narrative significantly suggests a sense of comfort and hope that the novel constructs around the newly arrived young characters in Johannesburg. Yet, one realises that the phrase is also ironic in that Hillbrow ushers a shade of despair as it fails to provide employment for young people whose involvement in sexual relations and other immoral undertakings to fend for themselves and their families, lead to death. Refentše's arrival in Hillbrow is a crucial example. He arrives in Hillbrow with a hopeful future that is determined and motivated by his commitment to education. He is not only the hope for his hopeless mother who is economically struggling in Tiragalong but he becomes the pride of Tiragalong in that he is the first child of that community to pursue his education up to Master's degree and to be appointed as a lecturer. He becomes an image of hope for Tiragalong community as he builds the first community library with young Tiragalong people such as Refilwe's success in getting employment relying on his testimonial letters. Yet, that hope is overwhelmed by the seducing energies of suicide that depict blackness as a "mere [indicator] of an absence of achievement" (Mbembe 2017: 12). Narrating Refentše's tragic moment the narrator says:

> […] when you found your Lerato and Sammy moaning together in your bedroom that morning, your enthusiasm for life got badly shattered. This was partly because you had invested too much faith in Lerato, as if she was incapable of committing the same deeds that you had committed. And it was partly because you could not now go to cry on your mother's shoulder. You knew she would say: I told you! […] Equally, how could you turn for comfort to your friend-turned-traitor, Sammy? And since love, friendship and motherhood did not provide any sanctuary in your hour of need, you began to look increasingly at the positive sides of suicide (Mpe 40).

Refentše's decision to commit suicide emanates from a moment of his struggle between the narratives of hope and despair. These narratives are defined by his successful life and the fateful experience that he encounters. His discovery of Sammy and Lerato's betrayal construct an overwhelming narrative of despair that shatters his world. It places Refentše in an overwhelmingly vacuumed space that overrides an imagined hope that he assumes before committing suicide. His strained relations with those that are closer to him push him to succumb to the manipulative power of suicide. Refentše's high level of education does not rescue him from the colonial claim that blacks are barbaric death-bound subjects as shown here by his suicide. His act of suicide, reminiscent of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* upon realising the betrayal by Umuofia, positions black people as afflicted by barbarism that continuously place them as "member[s] of a stigmatised out-group" (Galinsky et al 2003: 222). As such, it is worth arguing that the reading of this novel constructs a perspective that places blackness within contrasting spaces of hope and despair.

Moreover, the narrator's re-imagined life experiences in Hillbrow, the afterlife experiences in Heaven and the failed attempts to connect these spaces further places black identity within contrasting spaces of hope and despair. The tendency of Hillbrow to lure young people into it and destroying their dreams defines itself as a space of despair. The view that Hillbrow seems to be abandoned by "God and Devil, gods and Ancestors" as they "click […] their tongues with deep sadness or grim amusement when people devoured one another" places this urban space between the throws of "heaven and hell". On the other hand, Heaven positions itself as a space of reflection, allowing Lerato and Refentše to flashback to their lived experiences in Hillbrow as they watch the movie *Times of our Lives*, and resting hence, my view of it as a space that rekindles hope for former inhabitants of Tiragalong, Hillbrow, and Alexandra. However, characters like Sammy who can hardly move beyond hopelessness that seems to be attached to them in this new space problematize the spiritual space. Refentše and Lerato's tour of Heaven leads to an encounter with Sammy who is "bask[ing] in the sanctuary of his insanity" (Mpe 69) as the narrator notes: "you both heaved a big sigh: Poor Sammy!" (Mpe 69). For Sammy and other ill-fated inhabitants of this new space, despair becomes a permanent condition that remains attached to their existence even after they have moved beyond Hillbrow's boundaries. The reflection of Heaven defining itself as a space of hope is also captured by the narrative's exclusion of non-locals who are depicted as perpetrators of all social ills in Hillbrow. Non-local characters are deprived of all privileges that are assumed by the narrator who further claims that Heaven is his space through his expression "Our

Hillbrow, Alexandra and Heaven" (Mpe 68). Heaven is shown as resembling the local people's imagined idyllic Hillbrow and Alexandra. It does not embrace the social ills that haunt their contemporary worldly Hillbrow and Alexandra. It is a space that locals have imagined and wish to exist in without the presence of non-locals that they marginalise in Hillbrow and Alexandra through xenophobia. The context of this perspective also finds relevance within the narrator's claims that:

> Heaven is the world of our continuing existence, located in the memory and consciousness of those who live with us and after us. It is the archive that those we left behind keep visiting and revisiting; digging this out, suppressing or burying that. Continually reconfiguring the stories of our lives, as if they alone hold the real and true version (Mpe 124).

Such claims make one almost think of Heaven as existing within the minds of locals who imagine and re-imagine it as a secured space of hope that surpasses the depicted Hillbrow. As such, the physical connection of Heaven and Hillbrow remains a mystery especially with the communication constraints between the characters in both spaces and their failure to influence the destinies of each other in these spaces as the narrator notes:

> You could not return to Alexandra, where Lerato was staying at her mother's house, when she swallowed the tablets. You could not, because you were not in control of life on Earth […] now that you are alive in a different realm, you know for sure that you do not own life. You have watched God and Devil, gods and Ancestors, wondering whether *they* owned it, this thing called life. As far as you could see, nobody appeared to own it, judging by the way they too cast their eyes in the direction of our Hillbrow, Alexandra and Tiragalong, clicking their tongues with deep sadness or grim amusement when people devoured one another (Mpe 67-8).

The passage sets a dead bolt-lock to the fulfillment of the dreams of young people that do not only manifest through Lerato's death in the despair of Alexandra but also through Heaven's reluctance to rescue her. Refentše, who watches and only anticipates Lerato's arrival in Heaven, can hardly prevent the execution of her suicide plan. This placement of characters in association with a long history of determining human existence both in Heaven and on earth, makes Heaven a seemingly hopeful space for these characters. Such characters as "God […] gods and ancestors" have had a long history of being consulted especially by blacks as their life benefactors. For instance, the colonial experience with its construction of binaries between the coloniser and the colonised formulated various discourses of the coloniser's God whose superiority denounced the existence of the assumed evil gods of the colonised. These characters still assume the same consultant positions as life benefactors in both African and

Western contexts. As such, their existence in Heaven secures it as a space of hope for such characters as Refentše whose co-existence with them shows the imaginary blending of black identities in a neutral space called Heaven. It becomes ironic though that the narrative constructs the co-existence of both God and the Devil in the same space as if to suggest that evil comes out of a good space. Their co-existence is ironic in the sense of contrasted identities that define these characters. Biblically, God assumes the position of a founder and creator of Heaven and the earth in the book of *Genesis* yet, the Devil, who is depicted in the same Bible as God's rival is constantly referred to as the perpetrator of such dark human experiences as the catastrophes that are formulated in this narrative. As such, the Devil's presence in that space constructs a certain defaced degree of hope that can be considered through the view of Sammy who is under the "sanctuary of insanity". Through the context of contrasted Heaven and Hillbrow, and the characterisation of those who occupy these spaces, it can be argued that black identity sets itself within the grasp of hope and despair.

By foregrounding hope and despair the narrative defines the lived experiences of Hillbrow inhabitants through constructs that are crucial in understanding post-2000 black identity. The constructed simultaneity of hopeful lives of characters such as Refentše with urban crime that threatens them on a daily basis highlights this. Refentše's near-death encounter with thieves reflects the compromised hope for black communities. Narrating that near-death experience, the narrator says:

> The first time someone took out a knife on you, it was in Hyde Park Village, near Sandton, where you accidentally disturbed thieves stripping cars of their radio sets in the parking lot; Hyde Park, with its lily-white reputation for safety and serenity. You were not stabbed, but only because you made it just in time into the courtyard of your aunt's employer's house, and the butcher knife pursuing you hit the door to the courtyard just as you turned the key to lock it (Mpe 22).

Johannesburg that supposedly is a space of hope – real or imagined – in the welcoming phrase that points to the collective ownership and belonging to "our" Hillbrow, is simultaneously imagined and overshadowed by crime that its inhabitants must escape on a daily basis. Refentše embodies a semblance of hope because he is formally employed but becomes a victim of and has to escape crime. Of interest, is the understanding that Refentše's aunt works in a low-density urban space reputable "for safety and serenity" (Mpe 22) yet, Refentše encounters a near-death experience that facilitates an untimely fateful shift from hope to despair in the same space. On the other end, his relationship with Lerato is a result of uncertainties that these characters have to deal with on a daily basis. It is not coincidence that

the day that follows a robbery that almost claims their lives, Refentše decides to express his love for Lerato, "just in case there should be another robbery and this time the robbers should be in a hurry to kill" (Mpe 24). Anxiety, uncertainties and insecurities cloud character judgement and decisions are made impromptu for fear of a future dead-end. Through the urgent love proposal, the narrative coils a view that though presented with urban inhabitants defined by hope, their future is not always certain in an urban space that flows with "milk and honey and bile" (Mpe 41). Therefore, the reading of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* constructs blackness caught within the grasp of hope and hopelessness.

The rural and urban interaction defines blackness as an ever-evolving identity. In other words, we are presented with a context that defines blackness constantly seeking new ways of shifting from its traditional meaning. Its evolvement results from young characters who embrace modern life that forms part of urban identity. Without taking anything away from the view that the study places blackness as a negative construct, there is however resistance to tackling black identity within traditional colonial perspectives that shaped it for a long time. This is premised on the conscious or unconscious resistance of the young people of Tiragalong against their traditions that seek to keep them within the parameters of their traditional identities. Refentše's resistance to marrying a Tiragalong woman as a community is more crucial to consider in this regard. Narrating that resistance, the narrator says:

> You had quarrelled with your mother because you insisted on being in love with Lerato, a Hillbrow woman - as Tiragalong insisted on labelling her […] She despised her, because your trusted female cousin had told her that, judging by the way you no longer cared for or about anyone from Tiragalong, it was absolutely clear that Lerato had spiced your food and drinks with I-am-the-only-one, the love potion known in Tiragalong and beyond […] She had, indeed, told you. That if you did not part from Lerato, you were no longer your mother's son (Mpe 38-40).

That Refentše is disowned by his mother and the Tiragalong community reflects a traditional undertaking failing to come to terms with a modernised experience that now forms part of Refentše's life. Refentše transcends Tiragalong tradition and adopts an identity that is intolerable in that community. This strains his relations with other Tiragalong members in urban spaces. On the other hand, Refilwe's determination to deal with Refentše's traditional disorientation sets the undertones of resistance that seek to keep Refentše's identification within that tradition. However, that projection proves futile when it confronts Refentše's resistance. What we see is Tiragalong with its community mores and Refentše with his new identity carved by Hillbrowism, looking at each other with mutual distaste. On the surface,

the tradition-oriented efforts by Refentše's mother and Refilwe to draw him back to his traditions offers a sense of resistance against the transition from traditional to modernised way of life. However, it is an act of selfishness driven by a common default setting – self-centred materialism. Even after Refentše's death, Refilwe continues to resist the new identity that Refentše had adopted by defacing Lerato through her degrading views about her. Despite her successful endeavour in negating Lerato, Refentše and Lerato's reunion in Heaven allows them to reflect on and reconcile their regrettable decisions in Hillbrow and downplays that resistance. On the other end, failed attempts by Terror, Refentše's long-time enemy and renowned rapist, to undermine Refentše's commitment to Lerato by pursuing sexual relations with her reinforce his enmity even after Refentše's death as he constantly threatens Lerato who eventually commits suicide. However, her suicide hardly compromises Refentše's new identity that clashes with his traditional identity as he reunites with Lerato in Heaven and out of the resistance that she endured from Tiragalong community. Of interest in this instance is that when they meet in Heaven, Refentše's mother approves their relationship and they live a happily-ever-after life in Heaven. Heaven becomes an equalizing space that takes away the earthly claim that mother is supreme. Hence, the study skilfully projects blackness through negative constructions without wholly tacking it within the parameters of tradition. Rather, it is modelled by evolving experience of black people in modernised urban spaces.

2.3 Blackness and the Uncanny Urban Space of Locals and Non-locals

The co-existence of locals and non-locals in Mpe's urban space creates a space of strained relations that stems from on-going attempts to define "the matrix of insiders and outsiders" (Siziba 2014: 174). The locals and non-locals dichotomy formulates the "us and them" binaries when the locals from Tiragalong, Alexandra, and Hillbrow perceive non-locals through xenophobic eyes. Mpe's apparent "stigmatization" of non-locals, to some extent glorifies the existence of locals who in their attempts to seek a non-contact zone with non-locals end up negotiating space with them. From this coexistence of locals and non-locals in Hillbrow, I draw the argument that black identity is constantly negotiated in the urban space. The view is significant when looked at alongside Abdoumaliq's (2009: 9) argument that "the nature of cities is that they are endlessly remade". This charge defines the merging of various identities in the urban space. As such, identity and space negotiation set on rivalry footing through the instigation of xenophobia, constructs Hillbrow as an uncanny space that shapes my perspective of black identity in this section.

The contrasting images of locals and non-locals are flooded with negativity about non-locals, which is set on speculation and not fact. This gives local identity the "us" position of power that facilitates the "nam[ing] and renam[ing of] the "other" in order to digest itself as well as the "other" (Ohlsen 2013: 30). For instance, Refentše and his cousin's arguments are set on defining such contrasting identities and the distaste of locals for non-locals. The narrator says:

> Like most Hillbrowans, Cousin took his soccer seriously. You and he had had many disagreements on the subject of support for foreign teams – especially those from elsewhere in Africa. You always accused him of being a hypocrite, because his vocal support for black non-South African teams, whenever they played against European clubs, contrasted so glaringly with his prejudice towards black foreigners […] Cousin will always take the opportunity during these arguments to complain about the crime and grime in Hillbrow, for which he held such foreigners responsible; not just for the physical decay of the place, but the moral decay. His words were echoed by many others – among them, the white superintendent at your place […] who told you when you moved in that Hillbrow had been just fine until those Nigerians came here with all their drug dealing (Mpe 17).

The unification of black identity that Cousin's support for African teams tries to bring exposes Hillbrow as a space of resistance that formulates blackness as ambiguous. Refentše's cousin, among many others, facilitates permanent binaries by accusing non-locals as responsible for crime and "moral decay" in Hillbrow. Locals are dissociated from such social ills even by the superintendent who avows that Hillbrow was a safe space before the arrival of foreign nationals. Consequently, the novel is elaborate in constructing permanent margins that resist transcendence of locals' identity as it simultaneously constructs symbolic and counteractive measures for locals who attempt to move beyond that identity boundary. For instance, Refilwe's blissful involvement with a Nigerian man in spite of her knowledge of how her community disapprove of non-locals is figuratively checked by devastating AIDS and death. Of course, AIDS is not literally constructed as Tiragalong's chastisement for such characters as Refilwe who resist their traditions. However, her excommunication from Tiragalong on account of "foreign ingested" AIDS means that she dies without any effort by her people to help her with during illness. Inadvertently, AIDS becomes a way through which this community sets permanent binaries between itself and urban identity. Refilwe's critical illness renders her unemployable and leads to her rejection by Tiragalong and Heaven, as shown by her blurry appearance in heaven. The narrative's constructs of Heaven further reinforce constructed binaries between locals and non-locals in that it excludes non-locals in that space. Some locals, such as Refilwe, who die of HIV-AIDS, are welcomed in Heaven

though her appearance is blurry yet non-locals who are regarded as carriers of HIV-AIDS and die of it in Hillbrow hardly find a resting spot in that space. For instance, Refilwe's Nigerian boyfriend, who is clearly beyond the state of recovery from HIV-AIDS when he travels back to his country, does not make a reunion with Refilwe in Heaven like Refentše and Lerato. What is ironic is that the novel formulates the re-union of both Johannesburg and Tiragalong local people who live a happily-ever-after life in that space despite that in their physical urban and rural spaces, their identities remain within permanent binary opposites. This points to blackness as an ambiguous space that is determined by permanent binaries between locals and non-locals in this urban space.

However, there are moments when the narrative transcends local and non-local binaries and constructs blackness as an identity that integrates African black communities in Hillbrow. Despite the widespread negative labeling of non-locals in this novel, the narrator and some characters in the novel sometimes override its exposition. For instance, Refilwe's involvement with a foreign man is an attempt to delocalise her identity. Also, the narrator's comments are oriented towards deconstructing the artificially constructed differences between locals and non-locals:

> Many of the *Makwerekwere* you accuse of this and that are no different to us – sojourners, here in search of greener pastures. They are lecturers and students of Wits, Rand Afrikaans University and Technikons around Jo'burg; professionals taking up posts that locals are hardly qualified to fill. A number of them can be found selling fruit and vegetables in the streets, along with many locals – so how can they take our jobs? Of course there are some who do drug trafficking. But when the locals are prepared to lap at them like starved dogs, what do you expect the struggling immigrants to do? (Mpe 18).

Migrants are an embodiment of humanity, hard work and honesty even though some are rotten apples. However, xenophobia is the political outlet through which the locals express their grievances to those in power; an undertaking that exposes their failure to deal with their excruciating past. The fact that locals are not qualified for some jobs in that urban space, which jobs end up in the hands of non-locals, is the source of anger at and reproach for non-locals of taking their jobs. By constructing both locals and non-locals as sojourners who are "in search of greener pastures" in the urban space, the novel invalidates this xenophobic notion. In other words, Mpe's narrative shades off any trace of differences between locals and non-locals as it positions Hillbrow as a space of convergence without permanent citizenship. This speaks to Beville's (2013: 604) argument that the city is now "open to a diversity of

identities and what is properly the city has disappeared and exists only in memory and imagination". The narrative's deconstruction of differences between locals and non-locals is further established through the novel's flexibility with the provisions of post-apartheid freedom benefits that are extended even to non-locals. This is formulated through valorising Nelson Mandela as an African saviour figure who opened the country's borders for non-locals. The narrator states that Mandela "welcome[d] guests and visitors unlike his predecessors who erected deadly electric fences around the boundaries of South Africa trying to keep out the barbarians from [...] all over Africa fleeing their war-torn countries populated with starvation" (26). Thabo Mbeki (1996: 6) also echoes this reception of non-locals when he writes:

> I owe my being to the Koi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape […] I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land. Whatever their actions, they remain still, part of me. In my veins courses the blood of Malay slaves who came from the East … I come of those who were transported from India and China.

Echoed here is the notion of "Ubuntu" which translates to "a person is a person through other persons, or – I am because we are" (Oppenheim 2012: 369), which strives to deconstruct the binaries that exist between African black communities in Hillbrow. The construction of that narrative that is marked by "I am because we are" is grounded on the understanding that while locals are not qualified for the jobs, qualified non-locals are employed for the country's economic growth. Therefore, shared capabilities between locals and non-locals play a crucial role in constructing a narrative of a unified black community. A case in point is Refentše, a local lecturer who is among non-local lecturers from Wits and other institutions. Perspectival, the novel deconstructs inequalities between locals and non-locals that stem from the apartheid era whose characteristic "predecessors […] erected deadly electric fences around the boundaries of South Africa trying to keep out the barbarians [or non-locals]" (26). To maintain a balanced view of both locals and non-locals, the narrative formulates unsavoury identities of locals wherein the narrator says:

> [t]here were other chilling stories of what happened in the kitchens. Of white madams raped and gagged by their South African garden boys – that is, black men to whom they could not afford to show any respect […] of whites killed simply because they were wealthy and tried to protect their wealth [… such] are examples of the many cases of crime not caused by *Makwerekwere* […] *Makwerekwere* knew they had no recourse to legal defence if they were caught. The police could detain or deport them without allowing them any trial at all (Mpe 22-3).

The gruesome representation of locals has an overlapping contrast with formulated negative images about non-locals. Of course, the quotation barely disputes the denunciation of non-locals by locals by positioning locals as murderers. This is instrumental in deconstructing established differences between locals and non-locals. That deconstruction of binaries finds eloquence in the narrator's argument as he warns: "and while we're so busy blaming them (non-locals) for all our sins, hadn't we better also admit that quite a large percentage of our home relatives who get killed in Hillbrow, are in fact killed by other relatives and friends – people who bring grudges with them to Jo'burg" (Mpe 18). The shared responsibility and negative imaging of both locals and non-locals for creating a crime-riddled urban space construct an indisputable unification of locals and non-locals in Hillbrow. Hence, blackness integrates both local and non-local black communities.

The integrative force of blackness in the urban space that brings locals and non-locals together is shown through constant sexual relations between locals and non-locals. How these relations consciously or unconsciously negotiate new identities for both locals and non-locals is crucial to note, especially when we consider irreversible consequences of these relations. The failure by Refilwe to control emotions for Lerato captures an unexpected representation of Lerato's biography that defines itself as a negotiated identity. The narrator says:

> [b]ut worse still, the woman is not even a Johannesburger, Refilwe had intimated. I hear from reliable sources that her mother comes from Durban. But her father is a Nigerian, who fled his war-torn country. The two of them met in Alexandra, where the mother lives. Apparently, the mother had been struggling somewhat. She lived on lice, so to speak. So she was quite happy to find this Nigerian. You know *Makwerekwere!* When they love you, they simply dish out all these monies they have to you. Drug dealing being such a business, you can always be sure to be well off with a Nigerian man (Mpe 44).

Despite the continued negative portrayal of non-locals as drug dealers, the union between Lerato's mother and father is anchored on the dependence of a local on a non-local, and formulates an identity that can hardly be disfigured. Thus, Lerato is figuratively positioned as an epitome of merged local and non-local identities. Even though skeptically identified as a Nigerian by Refilwe, she finds a place in being identified as a local on the basis of her mother who, as the narrator says: "could not say no to any drop of semen found flowing aimlessly in the streets" (Mpe 82). Worth noting in such relations is the interdependence between local and non-local identities in that while non-locals "dish out" money that local women are ready to receive, they also use that as a means of acquiring legal documents to stay in South Africa

(Mpe 21). Even though the relationship sounds commercial and transactional, it integrates identities of locals and non-locals that find approval and recognition in Heaven as shown where it says: "you look so much like Tshepo! I would not be surprised if I was told that something happened between his father and your mother" (Mpe 70). Relating Tshepo's father to Lerato merges the identity of this Nigerian non-local with local black community as he is also involved in Tiragalong meetings that are held in that place. However, what remains unfathomable is that Refilwe is the only character who points to Tshepo's father as a Nigerian while he is identified as Piet in Heaven. Added to this unrecognisability of Lerato are Refilwe's words that: "Lerato was not just a Johannesburger, in the way that people born in the city could be said to be Johannesburgers. She was far worse than these; she had a blood of *Makwerekwere* running in her veins" (Mpe 81). Such views show precarious identities and have a tendency to place uncertainties within the reading and understanding of black identity. Yet, the narrative's attempt to place both local and non-local black communities under the same spotlight formulates blackness as a space that attempts to integrate local and non-local identities.

The insecurity and intolerance in Hillbrow constructs blackness as a precarious identity. Hillbrow is overwhelmingly insecure for its dwellers who despite their effort to pursue economic opportunities find themselves victimised by it. As a result, Tiragalong people ironically imagine and image it as a space that simultaneously flows with "honey and bile" or as a space that is "attaining both the notoriety of danger and the glamour of fascination" (Manase 2005: 116). Hillbrow is fraught with such exhilarating and uncontrollable events as spinning of cars, irresponsible New Year's Eve celebrations, robberies, murders, drug abuse and prostitution that claim the lives of many young people making it "a site of trauma and [a] site of refashioning of both the city and the Self" (Muchemwa 2013: 2). Although viewed as a space that augments the dreams of young people, it becomes ironic that almost all dreams are horribly shattered in that space under the watch of futile law enforcement agents. For instance, when a ten-year-old child is hit by a spinning car whose driver forms part of those who are celebrating the winning of the national soccer team, the traffic cops who arrived "a few minutes later, found that the season of arrest had already passed" (Mpe 2) because the driver had fled from the scene. When viewed through Refentše's cousin who is a police officer, the understanding of Hillbrow as an insecure and intolerant space for both local and non-local people is clearly evidenced through the narrator's note that:

> Together with his colleagues, [Cousin] would arrest *Makwerekwere*. Drive them around Hillbrow for infinite periods of time. See it for the last time, bastards, they would tell the poor souls. When the poor souls pleaded, the uniformed men would ask if they could make their pleas more visible. They did. Cousin and his colleagues received oceans of rands and cents from these unfortunates, who found very little to motivate them to be sent back home […] The *Makwerekwere* had also learned a trick or two of their own. Get a member of the police, or a sympathetic South African companion, to help you organise a false identity document – for a nominal fee (Mpe 21).

The cancer of corruption points to Hillbrow and the whole African continent as an insecure and intolerant space for its black citizens. The police are complicit to the illegality and crime that riddle Hillbrow. Hillbrow is a convergence zone for African identities. The police are aware of this and capitalise on the presence of undocumented migrants to take bribes. The failed economies of African countries create an insecure environment for their citizens who migrate to Johannesburg. This positions Johannesburg as an economic hub for the African continent. However, that Hillbrow is more insecure for and intolerant to some non-locals because of their illegal status leads to exploitation by law enforcement agents like Refentše's cousin whose pretentious and theatrical determination to force them out of that space is formulated through xenophobia that ironically nourishes corruption when he comments that: "South Africa [has] too many problems of its own" (Mpe 20). His zest to force non-locals out of that South Africa's urban space has intonations of dehumanization of non-locals as he calls them "bastards". For non-locals to survive in this urban space bribery serves the day and "no one seem[s] to care that [their] treatment [… run] contrary to the human rights clauses detailed in the new constitution of the country" (Mpe 23). This further consolidates our understanding of the intolerance of the urban space in South Africa. It is worth mentioning that, the space is not only insecure for non-locals but for locals as well. Most crimes in that space are committed by illegal and/or unidentified Hillbrow dwellers who "learned a trick or two of their own" through the utilisation of locals to get illegitimate documentations that guarantee them a stay in Johannesburg. Consequently, crimes committed in the urban space affect both locals and non-locals. This construction of Hillbrow as uncanny space that defines gross exploitation and victimisation of its dwellers, makes it worth reading blackness as a precarious identity and space in the city.

2.4 Reading Blackness through Tradition and Modernity Clashes.

My perspective on tradition in this section follows the novel's construction of cultural traditions that are embraced by people in Tiragalong and when there is transition to Johannesburg. These cultural traditions formulate values that construct the pride that Tiragalong people jealously guard when they come into contact with the modernised life of Johannesburg. There, any deviation from tradition or "to act unjust [is] to skew the balance of things, so that punishment [is] meted out in order to the balance" (Rossouw 2017: 113) as is the case with Refilwe. My engagement with clashes between tradition and modernity in this section is partly informed by Rossouw's argument that "traditional elements such as a strong communal consciousness, a sense of place, a deep tie to the land and remnants of traditional religion to this day among Black South Africans sit uneasy alongside a choice for urbanisation, the state as main" (Rossouw 2017: 119). Although Rossouw's focus is not necessarily on such cultural traditions that are represented in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, his engagement with the liturgical patterns between South African tradition and modernity offers thoughts that are crucial for my arguments here. For him modernisation is characterised by "urbanisation, individualism […] as well as the modern territorial state and its conception of geometric space as opposed to a sense of place" (Rossouw 2017: 118). Through educated young Tiragalong characters such as Refentše and Refilwe, the novel constructs notions of individualism and a break from the traditional sense of place that is emphasised by their Tiragalong people who expect them to maintain their connections with home. For instance, because of his success in the urban space, Refentše faces constant criticism from his Tiragalong people in Johannesburg for not maintaining relations with his mother and people. This section seeks to respond to the question of how the clashes of traditions and modernity construct black identity especially in cognisance of Gikanda's (2003) view that the notion of identity "insists on the ideals of self-conscious subjectivity and the desire for freedom" (470) while expecting that "each generation does better than its predecessor" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001 17). According to Anttonen (2016: 27):

> [O]ne of the key elements in the word 'modern' is that it is a temporal category that also constructs its own otherness. It is not only used to predicate the present, but also to mark how this predication draws a distinction between the present and the non-present. It emphasizes that the present – meaning both the present time and the present moment – represents a fundamental break from the past, the past time and the past moment. 'Modern' in the sense of 'just now' breaks away from that which is not 'just now'. It does not simply indicate succession, but emphatically separates the present from the past, from that which is not modern.

Anttonen's view of modernity and tradition serves an important purpose in the section, which grapples with the clashes between tradition and modernity in the narrative. The movement of young characters from rural to urban and back as they seek to establish new identities, underpins the struggles between tradition and modernity. In the process, the narrative seems to bastardise tradition by projecting modernity as "inherently destructive of traditions" (Ó Giolláin 2000: 12). *Welcome to our Hillbrow* formulates clashes between traditions and modernity that surface through vigorous space negotiation between rural and urban identities. This understanding follows Sewlall's (2003: 338) view that *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* "embodies multi-vocal characters with different viewpoints regarding religious beliefs, tradition, and modernity". The clashes between tradition and modernity reflect intense resistance that seeks to elevate the cultural traditions of Tiragalong against the disputed superior positions of modernity through negative images that Tiragalong forms around Johannesburg and Hillbrow in particular. Although that resistance is occasionally compromised through such young Tiragalong characters as Refilwe and Refentše who despise their traditions and identify themselves with the modern life of this urban space, some Tiragalong people in the rural community and Johannesburg firmly guard their traditions against merging with the modern urban identities.

When reading *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, one realises the narrative's use of contrasting rural and urban spaces to bring out clashes between tradition and modernity. The rural space is fraught with various rural traditions that Tiragalong people safeguard by attempting to tease out any form of intercultural relations. The urban space on the other end leads a life that is modeled by fast-changing global modern life. As such, Refentše's movement from the rural to the urban space is interesting to follow in that it unfolds experiences that model intense clashes between tradition and modernity that are accelerated by his resistance towards Tiragalong traditions. Thus, his characterisation raises the "key implication of modernization […] that tradition prevents societies from achieving progress. Hence, to be modern is to turn ones' back on tradition, to live in the present and be oriented only towards the future" (Ó Giolláin 2000: 13). Studying for a degree at Wits and his subsequent appointment as a lecturer reorients Refentše and settles him into a modern life that Tiragalong constantly resists. Although Tiragalong community celebrates his success to study at Wits and that he is the second child of that community to do so, the celebratory moments are short-lived as he rivets to modern life that undermines his traditions. For Refentše, marrying in Tiragalong is not an option. This models him as a character whose perception does not only position itself

within the bounds of modern life but also reflect how black identity is changing "in the South African context […] where histories, cultural values and notions of self […] are constantly renegotiated and remade" (Crawshay-Hall 2013: 6).

Refentše's modernised reasoning intensely interrogates almost every aspect of Tiragalong tradition and disputes the idea that Tiragalong remains a mere morally disciplined space than Johannesburg. Where Tiragalong people denounce the conduct of urban spaces, Refentše gives a counter argument that seeks to address the flaws of those members that can hardly be distinguished from negative conceptions that they have created about Hillbrow. His argument with his mother on whether or not to marry a woman from Tiragalong finds defense in his reasoning that Tiragalong like Hillbrow is also fraught with immoral behaviour. Thus, one reads into the writer's notion of the fluidity of black identity, "which in reality is constantly shifting" (Doy 2000: 223) as Bhabha (1994: 50) notes that "identity is never a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality". Discussing what he refers to as the "African identity" Appiah says, "it is still in the making. There isn't a final identity that is African" (1992: 73). His refusal to be tacked under his tradition is also elaborated by another counter-argument against his sister cousin's imagining that Lerato has fed Refentše with a "love potion". He points out that women's use of "love potion" in Tiragalong community surpasses that of Hillbrow in that it turns "men into madmen" (Mpe 90). To some degree, that practice can hardly be dissociated from the practice of witchcraft, which earned Africa the tag of the heart of darkness from the colonialists. It is worth noting that witches and wizards in African communities were widely a means through which the colonialists did not only perceive and model black identity but the whole continent as inferior. Therefore, through modernisation's interrogation of traditions and its attempt to replace it, one can only think of black identity as "living in the midst of several times and several histories at once" (Mbembe 2017: 6-7). Thus, it attempts to position itself within a traditional standpoint while dominantly defining itself through modernised life experiences that are brought about by such characters as Refentše.

We can also view the capability of blackness to reside "in the midst of several times and several histories" (Mbembe 2017: 6-7) through Refilwe's life experiences that are brought about by her struggle for self-identification between the spaces of tradition and modernity. On the one hand, the narrative models a traditional Refilwe whose reasoning is, for instance, affiliated to Tiragalong's negative view of Hillbrow women. When attempting to convince

Refentše to consider reviving their long broken relationship, Refilwe aligns her perspective with Tiragalong's understanding of Hillbrow women as "prostitutes, who spent their nights leaning against the walls of the giant buildings in which they conducted their trade of under-waist bliss" (Mpe 39). Yet, this characterization of Hillbrow women is similar to her characterised experience of sexual involvement with several men at the same time. Her argument seeks not only to draw Refentše back to their Tiragalong tradition of marrying in that community but to reflect and position herself as a traditionally oriented individual who assumes moral discipline that is claimed by her Tiragalong people. However, her movement to Oxford jeopardises the grip of that tradition in that Oxford turns her into a libertarian who consciously or unconsciously challenges her traditions. She does not only overlook her involvement with a *Kwerekwere* man that she is determined to bring back home but she is lured into visiting pubs as the narrator notes that: "*Jude the Obscure* was undoubtedly the place to be on Wednesday evenings if you were in Oxford. Especially if, like Refilwe and the other inhabitants of J9, you knew that there was as much knowledge and relaxation to be found in the pubs as there was in the books" (Mpe 107). Thus, she becomes part of a tradition that clearly contradicts her Tiragalong traditions. However, her attempt to shift to that defining modern life is fraught with challenges as she subjected to racism. Oxford University residences define a space of racial binaries that clearly endorses the view of black students as inferior to their white counterparts. The narrator highlights this through the capture of Refilwe's resident as he notes that:

> The section of Block J that she would stay in was J9. It comprised five bed-sitting rooms with a shared bathroom, toilet, lounge and kitchen. She was dismayed when she walked into her room for the first time and realised how tiny the windows were. She discovered too, that they did not open widely enough for her liking. For the first time that she spent in that room, she suffered claustrophobia. She would wake up at awkward times of the night with a feeling that someone had put a plastic bag across her mouth and nose so that she could not breath (Mpe 105).

Her attempt to shift to modern life experience encounters challenges such as the racial prejudice. She somehow manages to normalise as she familiarises herself with the new place and connects with her J9 mates. Her efforts to adopt modern orientated tradition that is fluent in this space are however bastardised by devastating AIDS that claim her life before she is established within the parameters of modernity. This echoes Mbembe's argument that with Johannesburg as the space of modernity for black people it is also "the dominant site of their exclusion from Modernity" (393). Through the death of Refilwe, with her dual identity of a

traditional and modernised persona, Mpe's narrative foregrounds young black people's permanent struggles between tradition and modernity and echoes Mbembe's view of blackness' capability to exist within different times and histories.

The reading of the novel seems to project blackness as a space of resistance. This is evident in the clashes between Tiragalong and urban life and their connectedness to Refilwe's illness. Tiragalong highly regards its traditional medicine in place of modern cues. This constructs hostility that is projected through Tiragalong people's view of Refilwe's illness as shown when the narrator says:

> They knew the moment they saw her, that the African Potato, a medicinal plant that looked like the bulb of a beetroot, would not be able to cure her. The African Potato was said by some to work much better than Virodene (which was then the latest pharmaceutical invention for the treatment of AIDS) providing the disease was caught in the initial stages […] The African Potato was said to out-perform all other pharmaceutical inventions. But Refilwe's family knew just by looking at her that she was beyond this or any other help. She was at an advanced stage in her journey through this world (Mpe 119).

The contrast between Tiragalong traditional medicine and "Virodene, the medicine that was developed in South Africa, and was claimed to cure AIDS", figuratively construct resistance that form binaries within black communities and the refusal to shift from tradition to modern way of life. That "she was at an advanced stage in her journey through this world" does not only serve to show the criticality of her illness but also spells Tiragalong's alienation of Refilwe who can hardly be recognised after her arrival from overseas. In other words, Refilwe, like other young characters who exist in a modernised city life and resist their Tiragalong traditions, are death-bound subjects by virtue of positioning between these two contrasting identities. As such, these post-apartheid young characters find themselves existing on the margins of their black communities. By devaluing Virodene and upholding their traditional African potato claiming that it "out-perform[s] all other pharmaceutical inventions", Tiragalong people who are both in that rural space and in Johannesburg, seek to construct permanent resistance of what they regard as toxic urban identity. I therefore view Refilwe's illness as symbolic of that resistance, especially when viewed in relation to their reluctance to assist her and the fact that they are only waiting for her dying day.

Even though Refilwe and other young characters face alienation in Tiragalong on account of the resistance that they wedge against Tiragalong traditions, Tiragalong finds its traditions

gradually merging with urban traditions partly because of media influence on both young and old people. The narrator says:

> [a]nd, of course, television added its lustre to the radio snippets. Crime was glamorised on the screen and robbers were portrayed as if they were movie stars. Heroes of grimy courage and exceptionally vicious greed were followed by the voracious lenses of modern technology, and the little boys of Tiragalong emulated their TV heroes, driving their cars made of wire with wheels of tennis balls (Mpe 5).

Tiragalong's hostility is somewhat defied by the media that idolises criminals as heroes. The imitation of that heroism on the streets of Tiragalong birthes a new culture and philosophy of life in that community as its members are becoming modernised. At this point, one realises that what this community condemns as attributes of Hillbrow, gradually merges and shares space with their tradition. On that note, it can be argued that the idolisation of crime figuratively fosters the modernisation of Tiragalong by delocalising its culture and traditions. Appiah's (2006: 113) argument that "cultural purity […] is an oxymoron" as relevant here in that, adds Appiah: "culturally speaking, [they] already live a cosmopolitan life, enriched by literature, art and film that come from many places, and that contains influences from many more". In other words, to keep the purity of Tiragalong traditions is "Much Ado About Nothing" to borrow from William Shakespeare, considering the influence of the media in the lives of young ones in both rural Tiragalong and Johannesburg. Thus, the cultural osmosis that sees modernised life making inroads in Tiragalong, despite intense resistance from its people, projects blackness as a shared space between tradition and modernity.

Establishing the Tiragalong Burial society in Johannesburg pictures the coexistence of rural traditions and modernised urban life that further defines blackness as a shared space. The Burial Society is a stronghold for the revival of Tiragalong traditions in that, the members meet once a week to solve their problems among other issues. The novel shows Piet as one of the influential members: "Piet was going to Alexandra, as he did every first Sunday of each month. The Tiragalong Burial Society, of which he was a member, gathered there to make their monthly contributions and to discuss whatever problems that needed to be addressed" (Mpe 71). The identification of this Burial Society with Tiragalong is an attempt to salvage and uphold what remains of the tradition of that society. This is brought about by their monthly contributions and meetings to discuss their problems – Tiragalong problems in Johannesburg. It can thus be argued that the members of this Burial Society make up a group of Tiragalong members that find themselves caught between their Tiragalong traditions and

the complications of the urban modern life. Thus, they have "moved beyond the camps of [their rural] identity and alterity and are located in a 'third space of cultural hybridity'" (Dannenberg 2012: 39). Such an understanding is illustrated by the novel's characterisation of Refilwe as she is identified as the child of Tiragalong, Hillbrow, and Oxford. Refilwe's characterisation foregrounds a perspective that formulates blackness as a shared and contested space and that also centers on the identity of the narrator. Black identity cannot be confined and limited by space. It transcends borders – the same way Refilwe, in her physical and metaphysical state transcended national and the earthly borders. In what reads like an address to Refilwe, the narrator identifies with both Tiragalong tradition and urban modernism when he says: "like Refentše, the first real Bone of your Heart, you too have had your fair taste of the sweet and bitter juices of life, that ooze through the bones of our Tiragalong and Alexandra, Hillbrow and Oxford … Refilwe, Child of our World and other Worlds … Welcome to our Heaven" (Mpe 124). That identification that adapts tradition and modernisation clearly seeks to represent post-2000 blackness as a shared space whose fluidity responds to physical and esoteric spaces.

2.5 Conclusion

Welcome to Our Hillbrow is set on showing various urban ambiguities that this chapter has noted in its attempt to offer a new reading and understanding of post-2000 South African black identity. The narrative's simultaneity of rural and urban identities in the urban spaces motivates the urge to define that space as ambiguous. That ambiguity is effected by the migration of many young people from rural to urban spaces. The contrast of rural and urban identities formulates resistance that constructs permanent binaries between these identities. This offers a reading of blackness as an ambiguous space. However, that resistance is undermined by the narrative's attempt to merge rural and urban identities, thereby feeding into our understanding of blackness as a space that integrates these identities. The existence of rural and urban identities in the urban space comes to light through young characters who are identified as children of Tiragalong, Hillbrow, and Oxford. This metaphorically integrates rural and urban identities despite the resistance that is reflected between these identities. This is also shown through hybridised identities of young characters in Mpe's narrative. For instance, Refentše emerges in Hillbrow as a rural young man who is about to spend his adulthood in Hillbrow. When he visits Tiragalong, he is also identified with Hillbrow. To that end, the narrative's depiction of urban space, gives the impression of black identity integrating the rural and urban spaces.

The ambiguous urban space that this chapter noted is also determined by contrasting locals and non-locals' identities. The reading of locals and non-locals in the urban space further places blackness as an ambiguous space characterised by mutual distaste between locals and non-locals but with the potential to co-exist. Locals create a flood of negative images about non-locals and as a result, traceable permanent binaries become visible between these identities. That contrast further defines blackness as a precarious space in that diseases such as HIV-AIDS mark the contact between local and non-local identities. Non-locals are a cancerous virus that eats into the moral fibre of Hillbrow. Moreover, the depicted urban space of locals and non-locals is fraught with crime that locals determinedly and consistently attribute to non-locals. Against such locals' perceptions of non-locals, the narrative places both locals, and non-locals as perpetrators of gruesome crimes in that urban space. Blackness is further modelled as a precarious space in that illegal non-locals constantly offer bribes to the police force as a way of guaranteeing their stay in the urban space – albeit illegally. To some extent, some of such unidentified non-locals as those who offer bribes to the police instigate crimes that turn Hillbrow into an uncanny space. On that backdrop, the understanding of blackness as a negative space becomes apparent considering the fact that the narrative's urban space is fraught with crime and devastating HIV-AIDS. The consequences that are brought about by crime and HIV-AIDS in the urban space further places blackness between the grasp of hope and despair in the face of unfulfilled dreams of young characters whose initial travel to the city space is marked by hope for a better life. This is made apparent through the writer's subjection of young and academically successful characters to death. For instance, Tshepo dies before graduating, Refentše studies up to his Master's degree but dies shortly after his appointment as a lecture and, Refilwe who also successfully completes her Master's degree with Oxford, dies before she is employed. Reading through such contextualisation of black young people, the study's understanding of blackness as a negative space become coherent in this narrative. That negative space is also reinforced by the writer's demobilisation of God in Heaven to intervene and curb crime and the horrific death of young characters in depicted black communities. Thus, black communities and their identities are left to perish in that crime infested and notorious urban space. The fact that Hillbrow is a convergence zone for local and non-local identities, urges one to view blackness as a space that seeks to integrate these identities.

The chapter's reading of blackness through *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* has been set on urban binaries that are triggered by clashes between tradition and modernism. The chapter notes

that Tiragalong encompasses a tradition that constantly seeks to resist a process of merging with depicted urban spaces that clearly embrace modernism. Therefore, Mpe's bastardizing of Tiragalong traditions and his elevation of modernity that infiltrates Tiragalong, its resistance regardless, define blackness as a fluid space and identity. The use of young characters who partly despise their traditions for modern life that turns them into libertarians resists the tendency to view blackness as tacked within the parameters of tradition. While most of these young characters are subjected to death as a metaphorical resistance of Tiragalong tradition, their reunion in Heaven where they live a happily ever after life traces the evolving nature of black identity. At the same time, black identity embraces both tradition and modernity. As such, blackness, as noted in this chapter, reflects an identity that exists within different time and histories. This makes blackness an ever-evolving space.

Chapter 3

Black Entitlement and Black Identity Imaging in *Dog Eat Dog*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter situates the discourse of entitlement within post-colonial theory as defined by Rukundwa and van Aarde (2007: 1171) as "a means of defiance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and space, can be challenged". I put forward the argument that the urge for entitlement demonstrated by black characters in *Dog Eat Dog* (2004), constitutes catharsis; a post-apartheid struggle and resistance against the neo-apartheid system of dominance that still maintains its "exploitative and discriminative practices". This disillusionment marks the realisation of the fallacy of democracy coated in the discourse of "rainbowism". It shows that the form of independence celebrated at some point in the novel echoes Fanon (1968) and Slemon's (1995) idea of "flag" or "pseudo" independence that maintains the privileges of white people and their entitlement to South African spaces and resources. This kind of independence, argues Fanon (1968: 110), offers "nothing save a minimum of re-adaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag waving, and down there at the bottom an undivided mass, still living in the middle ages". Fanon sees states that are under a new and unrealised form of colonialism that still maintains white people's privileges and entitlement to state assets. This resonates with Serequeberhan's (1994: 82) contention that independence from colonial rule "is nothing more than the *de facto* renegotiation of the colonial status". Perceptively, independence becomes a means to new ways of dominating, marginalising and re-imagining black people by Western countries.

Therefore, the post-apartheid entitlement is, in this chapter, analysed against the backdrop of black people's constant struggle against the neo-colonial system that "locates and incarcerates them in the positionality of the other" (Sithole 2016: 179). In addition, Motamedi et al. (2016) inform the context of this engagement through their view that "there is a link between essentialism and classification of the society into superior and inferior. The marginal group accordingly tries to define itself by its own standards". Thus, the efforts by black characters to re-claim their entitlement to South African spaces and resources from a neo-apartheid system of dominance mean that they still operate within spaces of marginality. Their attempts to shift from those marginal positions through neo-apartheid resistance that is informed by the realisation of certain rights make for fascinating reading and understanding of entitlement. According to Motamedi et al. (2016: 27), essentialism refers to the defence of

the rights of those positioned on the margins of or the "Other" in the community. Ashcroft et al. (2007: 74) notes that the purpose of essentialism is "to expose the falsity of this mode of representing the colonial subject as an "other" to the Self of the dominant colonial culture". Therefore, the urge for entitlement by Black characters follows similar thoughts. They attempt to deconstruct the notions of inferiority of black characters by exposing the neo-apartheid system of dominance that still haunts black communities decades after the demise of apartheid.

The realisation that the struggle for entitlement against a neo-colonial system of dominance that is grounded on violence and black/white confrontations, as clearly delineated in *Dog Eat Dog*, creates platforms for employing Spivak's strategic essentialism in our reading of the text. According to Rukundwa and van Aarde (2007: 1173), neo-colonialism is "another form of imperialism where industrialised powers interfere politically and economically in the affairs of post-independent nations". Cabral (in McCulloch 1983: 120-121) refers to it as "an outgrowth of classical colonialism". Young (2001: 44-52) defines it as "the last stage of imperialism" and Altbach (1995: 452-46) views it as "partly planned policy" and the "continuation of the old practices". Notably, neo-colonialism maintains two aspects that are in focus in this chapter as it grapples with post-apartheid blackness. Firstly, it is calculated to maintain colonial domination and secondly, its closed nature, fixity and rigidity seek to maintain black people in the position of marginality. Hence, entitlement is considered here as a post-colonial phenomenon that places former colonised nations in a perpetual struggle against neo-colonialism, to borrow from Bhabha (2001).

This chapter focuses on representations of claims of entitlement by black characters in the novel. For instance, violence in its diverse forms is central in black resistance to white dominance and, in the quest for black entitlement to South African spaces and resources. On the same note, the said dominance defines itself through notions of racial violence that are also crucial to note. As such, violence becomes one of the focal points that this chapter engages in its analysis of post-apartheid blackness. The chapter endeavours to respond to how violence can be read as a manifestation of the psychological state that is informed by racial attitudes. An argument is put forward that the historical experiences and formulations of white people as oppressors and illegally entitled to South African spaces and resources, inform the racial perceptions and attitudes of young black characters as they resort to violence when confronting white characters. The discussion draws on Fanon's (1963)

commendation for violence as the only way through which the colonised can attain freedom. In his commendation, Fanon uses an interesting analogy, "the last shall be the first" to reflect the possible shift of positions between the coloniser and the colonised that can only be facilitated through violent resistance against colonial dominance. He argues:

> [f]or the last can be the first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists [the coloniser and colonised]. This determination to have the last move up to the front, to have them clamber up […] the famous echelons of an organized society, can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence (3).

His delineation of violence in a colonial context constructs an understanding that the attainment of entitlement has always been the result of violence that can be traced back to the long processes of colonialism where the colonialists used violence to possess African spaces and resources. For the colonised, violence became the only way to attaining freedom and reclaiming their entitlement to African spaces and resources from the coloniser. The researcher is aware of the criticism levelled against Fanon and claims that he is inciting violence. However, Pithouset (2003: 109) offers an interesting view in defence of Fanon's understanding of violence. He argues that while Fanon is accused of inciting violence through his notion of humanism "there is no scandal about the fact that most of the political philosophers in the (white) Western canon gave a theoretical endorsement to the use of violence in certain circumstances". The same violence has remained in former colonised states in their continuous struggles against neo-colonial/apartheid systems of dominance as reflected in *Dog Eat Dog*. Mhlongo depicts a racial characteristic of this violence through his reconstruction of black/white confrontations and/or interactions. For instance, a character like Dingz is formulated around violent confrontations of post-apartheid white characters as he attempts to re-claim his entitlement to South African spaces and resources. Therefore, the chapter addresses violence as a form of resistance in the context of Zein-Elabdin's (in Keita 2011: 223) view that "postcoloniality can offer a powerful mode of resistance to […] representations of being and becoming". The chapter considers attempts by black characters to re-claim entitlement as a pathway through which notions of "being and becoming" of blackness are formed.

3.1.1 Problematizing Entitlement within the South African Context

Various studies have widely focused the understanding of entitlement through 'rights-based approach' that asserts that certain individuals or a group of people who define themselves as entitled have "rights to resources" (Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall 2004: 2). Sen (1984: 497) defines entitlement as "the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces". For him, societal rights ought to define individual or collective entitlement to certain resources or property. However, if that line of thought is adhered to, entitlement becomes "explicitly political" (Johnson 2003) considering the existence of binaries between the powerful and the powerless that usually see the powerless/poor people being deprived of "adequate formal rights" (McFarlane and Desai 2015: 442). When reading Sen's perspective on entitlement, one traces a certain link with Nozick's (1974) controversial arguments in his entitlement theory. Nozick sees entitlement as the "principle of justice in acquisition" (35). This understanding entails that for one to be entitled to resources or property, a just way of acquiring such resources or property should be pursued. What seems problematic here is the lack of clarity on the definition of 'a just way' and who determines it. Rentmeester (2014: 18) draws this problematique into context through his criticism of Nozick's approach. He argues that Nozick's approach "does not spell out exactly what justice in acquisition entails, [and as such,] one can surmise that any uninhabited property and unclaimed resources that one may happen to stumble upon are fair game to appropriate as one's own".

Similarly, McFarlane and Desai (2015: 442) maintain that "[e]ven when certain rights are granted, they are often not realized because of the uneven power relations that shape the everyday life of the city". In a post-apartheid, South Africa, power relations often compromise individual and collective rights. For instance, the powerful (including the politicians) determine how and when the powerless people must acquire urban spaces and resources and in the process the rights of the powerless are constantly compromised. This is traceable in powerless people's constant demonstrations for service delivery around South Africa. While power relations seem crucial in determining entitlement, crime can hardly be side-lined when re-thinking those relations as espoused by McFarlane and Desai. Crime has the potential to compromise the rights of both the powerful and the powerless. In South Africa especially, with its record high rate of crime, it sometimes determines who is powerful and powerless in relation to acquiring urban spaces and resources. What is fascinating about Nozick and Sen's 'rights-based approach' to entitlement is that it places the experiences of

the powerless/poor at the periphery of the discourse of entitlement. In the South African context, however, one realises that the powerless constantly and persistently empower themselves as they strive for entitlement.

Attempting to understand entitlement through Nozick and Sen's 'rights-based approach' in post-1994 South Africa is problematic in that, for decades, crime and the realised rights of the powerless constantly shift the boundaries of its meaning. The end of apartheid constructed platforms through which the historically disempowered and disenfranchised (most of whom were poor black people) sought to establish their sense of entitlement to South African spaces and resources as reflected in *Dog Eat Dog*. The apartheid era had constructed the sense of entitlement around white apartheid perpetrators who claimed and controlled both the South African cities, vast tracts of rich farmland, underground and over ground resources and black people. The end of apartheid brought a shift and controversy to the understanding of entitlement, whose fluidity attaches it to key historical moments. Entitlement, in post-apartheid South Africa staggers within historically defined racial relations mapped by white people's attempt to maintain their dominance against blacks who, because of newfound freedom, seek to resist that domination as they lay claim their entitlement to South African spaces and resources. As such, entitlement is a contested post-colonial phenomenon because on one hand, it projects itself through constant struggles against the neo-apartheid system of dominance and, on the other, through experiences of power struggles between the powerful and powerless black urban dwellers. This speaks to McFarlane and Desai's (2015) approach to entitlement, which perceives the discourse of entitlement as constituted by both the experiences of powerful and powerless people. Their engagement with entitlement notes 'sites of entitlement' as the basis through which entitlement must be defined.

Accordingly, "sites of entitlement" are defined by "everyday experiences, claims and struggles that continually take place, sometimes through overt individual or collective action sometimes through quiet processes of subversion" (MacFarlane and Desai 2015: 442). Thus, social incidences like public demonstrations are 'sites of entitlement' that ought to be engaged with in order to understand the discourse of entitlement. These writers engage 'sites of entitlement' through what they refer to as the "moral economy". They define "moral economy" as "both collectively understood informal regulations around expected behaviour and an individually held sense of what is expected that may or may not coincide with that shared collective view" (442). However, 'moral economy', is rarely limited by a collective

view because sometimes individuals "construct their own preferences and contestations in relation to those collective views, sometimes in oppositional ways, and this dialectic shapes a sense of what individuals feel they might reasonably expect from others" (442). *Dog Eat Dog* formulates various 'sites of entitlement' that revolve around individual and collective demonstrations. The constructions of such 'sites of entitlement' are to some degree founded on 'regulations around expected behaviour' that are collectively and individually constructed. These 'sites of entitlement' are in this chapter read as performances of radical self-assertions that are aimed at retaining black characters' entitlement to South African urban spaces and resources. As such, McFarlane and Desai's approach to entitlement will be crucial to consider in exploring constructed discourse of entitlement as the chapter explores the understanding of post-2000 blackness.

3.1.2 Black/White Entitlement Formations

The opening of *Dog Eat Dog* captures South Africa's 1994 transition from the apartheid regime to a free and democratic country that recognises the independence of former oppressed black communities. The transition process manifest in the narrative's reflection of the first democratic elections and the resultant celebrations of Nelson Mandela's victory. As the narrative unfolds, deliberate focalization on the lives of Dingz, the black protagonist and narrator, and other young black characters makes apparent leitmotifs of black entitlement culture. That Dingz's story opens with a letter from the University of Witwatersrand that regrettably informs him of his rejected bursary application is telling. It sets the stage for the politics of spectacle and theatricality of racial politics, with Dingz as the entitled main actor who confronts his white nemesis. Dingz is convinced, even without momentary self-introspection, that the rejection of his application is racially motivated. As such, he storms into the Financial Aid Office, hurling racial insults on white personnel whom, he believes, are denying him what he is entitled to. However, the white personnel's response to Dingz's approach to this issue is interesting to note. It defines black/white confrontations that reflect South Africa's race relations; an aspect that this chapter engages in its attempt to re-define black identity. Dingz's quest for entitlement is first created through the narrative of a long history of apartheid that deprived black communities of their identities in relation to their claims of South African spaces and resources. Secondly, the quest rests on the promises of free land and resources that the ANC made in 1994. Besides inculcating false hope, the promises established black people's sense of entitlement to their country's land and resources. Nevertheless, the socio-political terrain of South Africa has witnessed numerous

violent demonstrations by black people in their quest to claim their entitlement to national spaces. They also show the failed struggles of the ANC to deal with the neo-apartheid system whose continued existence and dominance fly in the face of independence and its attendant benefits of black entitlement. Black entitlement culture, therefore, assumes and attempts to establish black people as legitimately entitled to South African spaces and resources. The recent provision of free education under the spotlight of students' "Fees Must Fall" demonstrations and the passing of the motion on land appropriation without compensation give context to the on-going pursuit of what this chapter considers as the South African black entitlement.

Difficulties faced by young black people in accessing higher education as shown in the novel, are crucial to consider as the chapter engages post-apartheid black entitlement culture. The church works with the education systems to create bottlenecks for black students as shown when a white priest who is responsible for one of the student residences and the university makes it difficult for black students such as Dingz to access higher education. When he is expelled from campus residences, Dingz faces economic and social challenges having to attend his lectures coming from Soweto. As a historically disadvantaged black South African, Dingz considers himself entitled to a university bursary. Thus, when he does not make the short-list by the bursary committee, he resorts to violence and the politics of racialized protest. For a book published in 2004, *Dog Eat Dog* is prophetic in its narrative thrust in that it foreshadows student protests of the year 2015. The protest by Dingz in the finance office is a pre-mortem reflection of notions of 'fees must fall' that motivated free higher education for formerly disadvantaged South African students. The demand for free higher education through several student protests and the subsequent compromise made by government to meet students' demands speak to what this chapter refers to as entitlement culture. At some point in the chapter, paralleling Dingz's protest with the notion of 'fees must fall' will be crucial to creating a platform for engagement with the psychology and sociology of entitlement to education and how black identity ought to be understood thereof.

Dingz is from Soweto and, for that reason; he is placed on the waiting list when he approaches the university residence offices for help with accommodation. The move to place him on the waiting list is not only satiric and patronising but also invites one to consider Soweto as metaphorically a black space. As such, Soweto becomes a focal point in my analysis of black entitlement culture because it is synonymous with the struggle against

apartheid and the historic deaths of many young people who sought to dismantle white-formulated structures of entitlement. In my engagement with post-apartheid black entitlement, I also consider Ndebele's (2000: 48) argument that in South African white entitlement remain clearly defined "particularly where strong pockets of white power remain, such as in commerce, industry, and in high education". Oelofsen (2015: 131) also adds that "the way in which former colonial subjects were encouraged to think, are often still determined by the former colonial powers in post-colonial countries, as a result of the economic and cultural power the former colonisers wield". This paradoxical realisation that nothing has changed except the realisation that nothing has changed is what drives Dingz to the edge. Hence, the protest.

In *Dog Eat Dog*, Dingz and other black characters constantly confront the reality of the university of Witwatersrand as an institution that seeks to maintain white supremacy and entitlement. At the same time, white-owned companies in Johannesburg define the visible traces of white entitlement that arguably find its anchor on the 1944 sentiments projected by the former chairman of Afrikaner Broederbond J.C van Rooy who said:

> God created the Afrikaner people with a unique language, a unique philosophy of life, and their own history and traditions in order that they might fulfil a particular calling and destiny here in the southern corner of Africa. We must stand guard on all that is peculiar to us and build upon it. We must believe that God has called us to be servants of his righteousness in this place (in Thomson (1985: 29).

The notion that white people (Afrikaners) are a peculiar people with a certain particular calling to inherit South African terrain lay foundational claims to what this chapter refers to as white entitlement. Commenting on that sense of entitlement, Ndebele (2000: 46) states:

> the combination of political, economic, and military power, validated by religious precept, yielded a universal sense of entitlement [for Afrikanerdom]. Afrikanerdom was entitled to land, air, water, beast, and each and every black body. At this point, the treatment of black people ceased to be a moral concern.

This God-chosen-people syndrome formulated the whites-only designated spaces principle in most South African inner cities while the peripheral spaces of these cities marked black identity negation. Segregation was deployed in ways that ensured "black people were essentially aliens in urban areas" (Maylam 1995: 22). Their presence in whites-only spaces was criminalised. Harrison et al. (2014: 235) state that for black people, the inner city of Johannesburg was a space of "[…] transience only. They were allowed to shop in it (albeit in

black shops) and some were permitted to enter the city daily to sell their labour, but their attachment to and presence in [that] space was otherwise not tolerated". The racial divide that apartheid perpetrators formulated is testimony to white people's entitlement to urban spaces. They controlled both inner cities and their peripheries as a way of monitoring and policing the movement of all non-whites. However, in post-apartheid South Africa, white people no longer use guns and force; they use capital to control and maintain the status quo and to keep the likes of Dingz in their black cocoons. This gate keeping, which manifests in institutions of higher learning, here exemplified by Wits university, is the rock bed for the discourse of entitlement.

3.2 Performances of Radical Self-assertions

Set on the verge of apartheid's demise and immediately after 1994, *Dog Eat Dog* captures several incidences that construct black characters striving for self-assertion against apartheid's dominance. This radical self-assertion is the re-imagining of self or one's identity through the process of reversing negative conceptions that defined an individual or a group of people. As such, the experiences of a group of people also referred to as collective self-assertion, or individuals, commonly known as individual self-assertion define self-assertion. In this section, I subscribe to Arun's (2007: 82) view that self-assertion has various phases, one of which is conflict. Arun argues that it is through conflict that an individual or group of people seek to define themselves and their identities against their adversaries as an attempt to break out of certain false consciousness. One popular and fascinating strategy employed by black characters to formulate a sense of collective self-assertion is the singing of "struggle songs" (61) or songs of resistance. They are referenced as songs of resistance here because they construct narratives that motivate "intragroup solidarity and […] aggression" (O'Connell 2010:12). In a different context, Alec Pongweni (1982), described them as "songs that won the liberation war". Such scholars as Cloet (2016) and Roux-Kemp (2014) note the significance of these songs in facilitating the apartheid demise and black people's striving for self-assertion. According to Cloet, the struggle songs were "inseparably associated with a moral struggle for the recognition of the humanity of Black people in the face of White oppression" (17). As such, liberation songs are thought of as instruments through which the colonially dehumanised blacks sought to re-construct their dignity and identities. Roux-Kemp states that these songs communicate, "shared experiences and from this common experience of oppression grows a culture of defiance, self-assertion and group pride and solidarity. It not only restores Africans' faith in themselves but also offers hope in the direction taken" (248).

Roux-Kemp's view is echoed in the following lines from one of the songs: "[u]Mandela uthi ayihlome (Mandela says let the warriors get ready) Uthi ayihlome ihlasele (Yes, let's get ready) USisulu uthi ayihlome ihlasele (Sisulu says let the warriors be ready for the battle) UDe Klerk asimfuni (We don't want De Klerk)" (61). The song reflects the sense of solidarity that significantly represents black people's attempt to retain their identities and entitlement to South African spaces and resources. Solidarity is constructed by invoking Mandela and Sisulu; the iconic leaders of the anti-apartheid revolution. Defined by their different ethnic backgrounds, the presence of these revolutionary icons in liberation songs constructs a sense of solidarity that sought to nullify those differences and binaries as they shared a common vision and struggle against apartheid.

Even though such songs reinforce deep-seated racial divisions, one notes that they construct a "culture of defiance" that enables black urban dwellers to re-claim their entitlement to South African spaces and resources. Defiance can be read through the above song's call for a "battle" against De Klerk and his apartheid system. Revolutionary songs played a crucial role in the black consciousness movement. The black consciousness movement is an essential part of the process of re-claiming black entitlement to South African spaces and resources because it motivates the realisation of black oppression and the need for freedom. Biko (1978: 92) articulates this when he says the "essence is the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them perpetually to servitude". What is fascinating is that black consciousness also encouraged the formation of black people's solidarity. Pollard (1999: 114) argues that it "infused Blacks with a spiritual fibre, a mettle and a fighting spirit. It is the inner soul-force seen to be invincible". What is worth noting here is that the historic solidarity motivated by the above song and the battle against oppression, retained what I view in Fanon's terminology as "pseudo" entitlement to national spaces and resources. As such, the singing of liberation songs in contemporary South Africa, especially during demonstrations against the government's failure to provide basic services, shows black identity as defined by a constant struggle against self and neo-colonial/apartheid system of dominance that still sets it on the margins.

Worth noting in the performances of self-assertion is the urban black communities' sloganeering accompanying the widespread liberation songs in the *Dog Eat Dog*. The novel reflects several instances where thousands of black urban dwellers chant the "Amandla!

(power) Awethu! (To the people)" (Mhlongo 62) slogan to motivate resistance against apartheid and mobilise themselves for their first democratic elections. In the context of the struggle against apartheid, the novel poses slogans as marshalling fearless resistance that forms the basis through which attempts by black people to re-imagine their identities out of apartheid laws and perspectives are established. Roux-Kemp (2014: 250) states that the slogan "was often utilised in direct marches against Apartheid officials or police and had as its object to instil fear or to intimidate". The notion of instilling fear and intimidation that this writer claims as reflected in that slogan does not only construct black people's resistance but it also seeks to shows their hostility and preparedness to confront the brutal and oppressive apartheid law. A slogan is a collective catharsis. Thus, when one views the slogan as aggressive on the account that it instils fear or intimidates, it is also worth arguing that the same slogan unifies, instils courage and fearlessness that hinge on the spirit of sameness, one goal and one vision. Slogans made the process of re-claiming entitlement in South Africa a violent one that was defined by a forceful power transfer from white apartheid perpetrators to black people. It is only through aggression that we see the formation of a controversial, conflicted and conflictual black empowerment process surfacing after 1994. That black empowerment process re-defined black people as they re-gained power to govern South Africa and re-assert their entitlement to its resources.

However, the slogan remains a complex site of struggle for entitlement, especially with its mutation into the contemporary protests against a black-led government. This earns it a paradoxical flare that makes it difficult to understand whose slogan it is and whether the power that this slogan pronounces is for black people. Contemporary South African demonstrations that are defined by violent encounters with the police, sometimes result in the death or injuries of some protestors. This complicates our understanding of slogans considering that the same slogans that once challenged apartheid are now confronting the post-apartheid black-led government. For instance, the 2012 Marikana massacre that claimed lives of more than thirty miners who were protesting for salary increments, mark a turning point in the understanding of the power that slogan claims. In contemporary South Africa, that slogan is a reflection of power struggle between black people as they attempt to establish their entitlement to national spaces and resources. The slogan does little to exhibit notions of empowering ordinary black people and establishing their entitlement to the country and its resources. Instead, it reflects the interest of the powerful politicians who constantly strive to

protect their entitlements to South African spaces and resources at the expense of many ordinary black citizens whose claim power remains stuck in the slogan and poverty.

Entitlement to Land is a major conflict in the novel *Dog Eat Dog*. The consanguinity between land and black people of Africa defines African identity. Hence, black people continuously seek to reclaim their collective and individual self-assertion in post-apartheid South Africa by laying claim to land. For them land means more than occupying physical spaces. It extends to defining their "space of rootedness, a locus of life and a place of history–making where identities are formed" (Vorster 2019: 4). Vorster states that "for most South Africans, access to land is not primarily about finding a livelihood, but about reconnecting to historical roots" (4). As such, attempts by African black people to reclaim land from white colonial/apartheid perpetrators is crucial when re-thinking their self-assertion. In Southern Africa, that sense of collective self-assertion that relates to reclaiming land from the colonialists can be read through Zimbabwe's land invasions motivated by the belief that the prosperity of black citizens depends on the land that was illegally owned by white farmers. According to Monyoro (2018: 28), "the white minority who comprised 3% of the population controlled 75% of the economically viable land, whilst the black majority only had the remaining overcrowded, scattered and infertile land at their disposal". Thus, when we look at the essence of land to Africans through Beinart et al. (2017: 76) who describe black people's connections to land through traditional practices such as burying of umbilical cords , we note that, for black Zimbabweans, the move to reclaim land was an attempt to re-assert their colonially compromised identities and entitlement. In South Africa, black people's attempts to follow similar land expropriation to re-define their self-assertion against fallacies of apartheid perpetrators on land entitlement go back to 1994. The present policy of land expropriation without compensation flies in the face of white entitlement to South African land. This has birthed the 'Afro-radical' discourse on land, which projects white people as illegally entitled to the South African land. Their argument is informed by the understanding that white people are illegal settlers in Africa who established their entitlements through colonial "production and reproduction of dominance" (Frankenberg 1993: 236).

Through the reading of *Dog Eat Dog*, one traces the on-going land entitlement conflict between black characters and white farmers speaks to the dog eat dog metaphor that plays out through attempts by blacks to reclaim land from white farmers. It is a quest by blacks to re-

define themselves in relation to what they regard as their fatherland. The graffiti that Dingz reads in Wits campus toilet is used as a symbol of this conflict:

> KAFFIRS INVADED OUR FATHERLAND, VIVA AWB. ONE SETTLER ONE BULLET – VIVA AZANIA. THIS COUNTRY BELONGS TO BLACKS, FUCK ALL THE WHITES. WHITES MUST START TO LIVE IN THE CONDITIONS STIPULSTED BY BLACK OR MUST LEAVE THE COUNTRY PEACEFULLY (Mhlongo 171).

Reference to the "fatherland" that has been invaded by "kaffirs" constructs an interesting sense of resolute claims to South African land by Whites. In a post-apartheid context, this claim is an attempt by white subjects to reposition an apartheid aligned stigmatisation that "whiteness is the Subject, the Absolute – blackness is the Other – the objectification of blacks have made them inferior […] the racialised Other" (Pickering 2001:62). The word invasion creates the impression of victimhood on the part of Whites and trespassing and thuggery for Blacks. That attempt to negate a South African transition from apartheid coercion to a democratic South Africa is grounded on the strong support of AWB. AWB is a South African Afrikaner white supremacist group that advocates for apartheid racial ideologies and "amongst its sympathisers are supporters of a cross-section of Afrikaner nationalist political parties" (Sunter 1986: 79). Despite that, in South Africa, Afrikaner people "make less than 9% of the population" (Halvorsrud (2017: 2), their paramilitary members constantly protect their entitlement to what they refer to as their fatherland especially from black communist parties whose intentions are to confiscate it.

White entitlement to South African land has formulated a conflict that black people seek to resolve aggressively as they re-define their self-assertion and entitlement to that land. The aggressive response that is shown through the slogan: "one settler one bullet" does not veer far from Malema's controversial "Dubul' Ibhunu, Kill the Boer" song that was also aligned to the principle of land expropriation without compensation. While the singing of that song coincided with the murder of several farmers such as the leader of the AWB Eugene Terre'Blanche, the ANC through its Secretary General Gwede Mantashe dissociated the slogan song from murder of white farmers, choosing to refer to "ibhunu" as a metaphor of apartheid perpetrators. He argued: "when we talk [about] amabhunu, we were not [referring to] whites, we were talking about the [apartheid] system […] The biggest problem I have is when journalists interpret (Dubula Ibhunu) as 'Kill the boer, kill the farmer', which is a vulgarised interpretation of the song" (quoted in Bloom, 2010). The graffiti does not only

formulate the aggressive attempts at re-definition of self-assertion by black people but it also sets the entire apartheid system as illegitimately entitled to South African land and resources. This notion is constructed through mobilisation of claims that define white people as second-class citizens while legitimising black people's entitlement to the country. What is fascinating in the graffiti is the abrupt shift of positionality of the oppressor and the oppressed that Fanon sums up in his analogy: "the last shall be the first". In the context of the graffiti, the first entails the position of entitlement that reinforces its legitimacy and self-assertion through tendencies of criminalising and marginalising its subjects. However, the latter must be read with caution because in post-apartheid South Africa the majority of white people do not exist on marginal spaces. They have total control of the economic and land ownership. Except, the murders of white farmers, among others, are always interpreted by non-South African and South African white people as defining moments of their marginalisation.

White dominance is echoed by Dolamo's (2017: 1) argument that "black people who are in government and parliament have political power but lack economic power". Strauss' (2006: 181) also offers context to that understanding when she says: "[t]he process of opening white Afrikaans identity to previously suppressed and acknowledged racial and cultural interdependencies is, of course, necessary in undoing the excess of domination that myths about racial superiority generated in South Africa". This creates the impression of a post-apartheid South Africa characterised by white hostility towards blackness, and attempts to maintain its superiority, which take away claims of their marginalisation in post-apartheid South Africa. Commenting on this sustained white superiority, Ntombana and Bubulu's (2017: 1) state: "South African society is still racially divided and that many white people still find themselves in a position of privilege, while many black people are still poor and marginalised". Therefore, claims of white genocide that project white people as marginalised come from strategic and empathetic white platforms that aim to maintain white people's position of dominance and entitlement. This discourse, peddled through social media, formulates an imaginative white genocide in South Africa while simultaneously projecting blackness as savage "dangerous and threatening" (Hooks 1992: 10). For instance, through his twitter handle, Donald Trump constructed an imaginative marginalised South African whiteness. He wrote, "I have asked Secretary of State @SecPompeo to closely study the South Africa land and farm seizures and expropriations and the large-scale killing of farmers. South African Government is now seizing land from white farmers" (Trump 2018). Interestingly, the responses to the tweet echo similar sentiments from those in the above

graffiti. For instance, Salejee (2018) responded: "South Africa is a country that has its problems on various levels but we really need our black majority to get back their land that was originally STOLEN from them, you should mind your business, leave things you have ZERO understanding about you white supremacist". Thus, viewing whiteness as marginalised might be problematic in that sense. Easily traceable in the graffiti is the criminalisation and demonization of whites. Black people invoke history to define apartheid atrocities, challenge white superiority and lay claim to national spaces and resources such as land. Arguably, post-apartheid blackness poses as a site of continuous struggle for self-assertion and entitlement against the historical dominance of whiteness.

There arises a conversation of self-assertion and entitlement between the graffiti and Dingz's confrontation of whiteness. His confrontation of white characters is motivated by his sense of entitlement to all post-apartheid South African resources. Post-apartheid Black entitlement has historical underpinnings in that during apartheid, "black South Africans had experienced great losses: life and limb, land, dignity and pride, self-respect, botho/ubuntu, culture, religion, political freedom and self-determination, self-reliance, and so on" (Dolamo 2017: 1). As such, Dingz's rejected bursary constructs a conflict that one traces in his emotional response: "they should have told me plainly, '[w]e regret to inform you that you are black, stupid and poor; therefore we cannot waste our money on your thick Bantu skull' I could have swallowed the words if they were simple and direct" (Mhlongo 8). Dingz invokes historically created racial stereotypes of blacks as lesser beings. Thinking of his rejected application as racially motivated does not only highlight South Africa's racial conflicts but also post-apartheid black people's struggle to assert themselves against hostile white apartheid perpetrators. Dingz encounters the hostility when he storms into Wits' "Financial Aid Office" with the impression that, as a South African black disadvantaged young man, he is entitled to a bursary. By avoiding the long queue and confronting the coloured secretary, Dingz demonstrates misplaced self-assertion and his sense of entitlement to the bursary. Jumping the queue gives meaning to the metaphor of the last being first and vice-versa. However, the racialised response he gets from the secretary is pellucid in its echo of apartheid negations of black subjects as she says: "[s]hoo! You know I thought they lie. But they were right to say that if you want to hide money from a black person, you must put it in writing […] What do you want in the university if you cannot read […] Can't you see what is written there?" (Mhlongo 12). That a "coloured" person is used to ridicule blackness is revealing of the system's divisive style. The response perpetuates the historical understanding of

"blackness as anathema to the discourse of whiteness" (Enwezor 1997: 23) while positioning whiteness with the "role and sense of superior entitlement in the cultural and political life of the nation" (Enwezor 1997: 27). Reducing Dingz to a mere failed project of whiteness positions blackness "in the zone of non-being" (Sithole 2016: 179). Evidently, young black characters like Dingz find themselves existing in an anti-black post-apartheid South Africa designed to perpetually deprive them of positions of entitlement by virtue of their dark skin. This speaks to Grosfoguel's (2007: 219) argument that, "[a]lthough 'colonialism administrations' have been entirely eradicated and the majority of the periphery is politically organised into independent states, non-European people are still living under crude European exploitation and domination".

However, Dingz's response to the secretary establishes a fascinating resistance that seems to challenge the understanding of "blackness as a stigmatized inferior 'Other'" (Mtose 2008: 1) and establish his sense of entitlement to the bursary as he says:

> '[b]ullshit! What does a bimbo like you think I want? Gold?' I heard a sigh of awe from other students in the queue. 'Get out of this office at once' shouted the secretary […] 'This guy! Who the hell do you think you are to speak to me like that?' Without thinking I answered. 'I'm Jesus from heaven.' The sound of laughter came from nearby (Mhlongo 13).

Dingz's response formulates a narrative that is not only aimed at dismantling white entitlement to South African resources but also defines his attempt to re-construct his self-assertion and entitlement in an anti-black post-apartheid South Africa. He fascinatingly employs such derogatory terms as "[b]ullshit, bimbo" while he ironically claims that he is "Jesus from heaven" to raise the question of compromised black identity and his sense of "liberation by focusing on the reality that African [black] people […] are affected by the significance of race and racism" (More 2008: 47). Identification with Jesus positions him as the sacrificial lamb offered for the liberation of the majority black students. He is the messiah whose boldness to stand and confront a closed and rigid system that is about to sacrifice him is symbolic of the black struggle for freedom of access to material resources in South Africa. His response echoes what Fanon (1963) and Sithole (2016) refer to as "existential necessity"; a concept that they contextualise as a roadmap that enables black subjects to shift from "existential condition of dehumanisation" (Sithole 180) or positions of oppression. Thus, his resistance not only depicts his conscious existence in dehumanising neo-apartheid South Africa but also reflects the urgent need to re-define his identity and liberation for the

attainment of what Fanon calls "humanism". According to Alessandrini (2009: 65) humanism "is a position that equates being a subject with being fully human". Thus, through the above response, one realises that the reversal of colonial and apartheid repression that dehumanises black subjects is crucial for Dingz and other young black characters' re-construction of their self-assertion. Dingz's actions here serve as a "device for conveying personal racialised experiences but also as a way of countering the metanarratives – the images, preconceptions, and myths – that have been propagated by the dominant culture of hegemonic Whiteness as a way of maintaining racial inequality" (Treviño et al 2008: 9). His determination to counter the neo-apartheid negations of blackness forms the basis through which we note his attempt to regain a selfhood that has been under apartheid suppression. That self-assertion offers black identity a sense of re-birth as it emerges as a counter-narrative to whiteness.

It is also prudent to realise that Dingz and other black characters' confrontation of whiteness with a view to attaining black entitlement operates within the constraints that can be read through McFarlane and Desai (2015: 442) notion of "moral economy". These constraints border on notions of reconciliation and rainbowism that stipulate South African spaces and resources as belonging to all South Africans despite their race, tribe and the language they speak. Worden (1994) states that reconciliation stipulates that, "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people [...] the rights of the people shall be the same regardless of race, color or sex […] all apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside)". This forms part of South Africa's narrative of reconciliation that emerged immediately after apartheid as a strategy to unite black and white people in what is defined as the rainbow nation. However, notions of reconciliation problematize Dingz and other black character's efforts to deal with issues of entitlement. The understanding is that white South Africans that Dingz and other black characters confront are equally entitled to South African resources and spaces that black characters define as theirs. As such, the narratives of land expropriation without compensation and the illegal grabbing of resources from white people in the name of retaining the entitlement of black people, defies the South African reconciliation. Conveniently, white people remain an empowered minority whose dominance is maintained especially in the economic sphere. Reconciliation between black and white South Africans remains a pipe dream. What makes that reconciliation a mystery is the continued subtle forms of white dominance that constantly remind black people of apartheid subjugation – something that they want to end violently. Murray and Semeon (2007: 699–700) point to the myth of

South African reconciliation in their interrogation of post-apartheid claims when they question, "[h]ow could reconciliation be achieved between the newly empowered black majority and the white minority, given the legacies of apartheid, minority rule, and the continuing and profound economic and social inequalities between black and white people?". Majority black South Africans are still entangled in abject poverty and have very little if any access to South African land and resources. Consequently, a reconciliation with post-apartheid whites who are still defined through certain privileges that are barely enjoyed by black people is unimaginable.

The realities of Dingz's post-apartheid conditions as a black young man are the basis for his longing for self-assertion and a sense of entitlement. The foundations of his condition of poverty are in apartheid and characterise almost all post-apartheid South African black communities. They are a historically generated mechanism of deprivation that seeks to keep him in positions of marginality that shroud his identity and entitlement. This is partly understood through Lephakga's (2016: 1) argument that colonialism and apartheid "institutionalised poverty amongst the colonised to maintain the supremacist status of the coloniser and the colonial status of the colonised as non-beings". According to Mtose (2008: 198) the subjection of black characters in conditions of poverty, "create an inferior black subject positioning in relation to a white superior subject positioning". Thus, for Dingz and other black characters, being entangled in poverty does not only define them as inferior but also deprives them of entitlement to South African resources that are determined by white people who, for instance, nominate the bursary beneficiaries; a whiteness position that Dingz and other black people seek to contest. Dingz's apartheid-instituted condition of poverty is noted in the following quote:

> [d]id anybody even read my application? [..] I thought I had supplied everything that the Bursary Committee needed: copies of my father's death certificate and my mother's pension slip, an affidavit sworn at our local police station giving the names and ages of the nine other family members who depend on my mother's pension […] My family did not own any immovable property as the house in Soweto that we had been living in since 1963 was leased to us by the apartheid government for a period of 99 years. What more information do these people want about the poverty that my family is living in?" (Mhlongo 8).

Detailing the contents of his bursary application chronicles and bares the painful reality of blackness and black lives in post-apartheid South Africa. A lifetime of poverty is delineated through the emotive approach in order to show the gravity of the sensitivity of the matter at

hand. Claim to entitlement is not political. Rather it is an economic discourse that challenges an economic system that continues to privilege whiteness at the expense of blackness. Dingz's narrative is shaped by the thought that the system constructs and maintains the existence of his family in marginal positions of abject poverty that he traces through the death of his father, the family's reliance on pension funds and their leased house. The notion that Dingz's family stays in a leased house is enthralling in that it constructs platforms to interrogate black people's entitlement in post-apartheid era. Despite indications of celebrated independence at some point in the novel, the idea of leased houses does not only construct black communities as inferior and less commendable for land entitlement but it also traces the whiteness' subtle tendencies of marginalising black communities. Leased houses are symbols of leased independence. According to Beall et al. (2002: 58), the low-cost houses built by the apartheid regime complied with the system's construct of inferior blacks and limited black urbanisation.

Conditions of Dingz's family re-trace the sense of apartheid's racial, economic inequalities. There is biting satire when Black people are deprived of their rights to education in a post-apartheid rainbow nation; a crucial aspect in the process of asserting their selfhood and laying entitlement claims to national resources. Such apartheid strategies define and maintain the image of blacks as non-progressive, and were constructed through an apartheid employment system that offered black people less-paying jobs despite their capabilities and appropriate skills (Seekings and Natrass 2005: 3). The experiences of black people, including Dingz's father, fit into Seekings and Natrass projection of institutionalised racism in Apartheid South Africa. Dingz's large family strives for survival through pension funds while staying in a leased house. Leibbrandt et al. (2007: 2) offer an interesting insight into strategies of sustaining black people's positions of poverty stemming from the apartheid period and continually defining black communities as non-progressive in post-apartheid South Africa. They argue: "the inheritance of a huge group of poorly endowed and marginalised poor [people] has greatly increased the difficulty and the costs of post-apartheid social delivery and effective poverty alleviation". Although the conditions of poverty in post-1994 are partly a result of the failure of the black-led government to deal with the consequences of apartheid, we cannot take away the historical fact that those conditions of poverty are partly a long-term apartheid strategy that still seeks to define the inferior position of black people in post-apertheid South Africa. For Dingz and other black characters who are defined through daily conditions of poverty and deprived rights to decent homes and resources, South Africa's new

dispensation means an opportunity to re-define their selfhood and reclaim their entitlement to its spaces and resources.

What also attracts attention in *Dog Eat Dog* is the writer's constructed metaphoric neo-apartheid system that hinders black characters' attempts to re-define their selfhood and to re-claim their entitlement. The novel regenerates elements of South Africa's excruciating past in ways that suggest that black communities have not completely escaped that oppressive system. Although the writer modernises his characters and their urban spaces, the reading of the novel offers the sense that these black communities remain stuck in the oppressive past more than two decades after the country's transition to democracy. This agrees with Sithole's (2016) proposition that such regeneration of the past constructs a view of black South Arican writers as continuously "struggling against subjection, which questions the humanity of black subject" (24). Thus, viewing blackness as a post-colonial/apartheid phenomenon that is in transition or shifting from condescending colonial/apartheid perspectives becomes futile in view of post-apartheid black-authored negations that re-define and maintain blackness within marginal spaces of whiteness. In other words, when reading a post-1994 narrative that imagines South Africa beyond that excruciating historical moment, one can only think of blackness as permanently defined by colonial/apartheid negations. The campus residence, the YMCA where Dingz is temporarily accommodated while "sorting [… his] disagreement with the University Bursary Committee" (Mhlongo 8), sets this into context. The "Y", as nicknamed by Dingz and other students, exhibits a figurative apartheid-oriented authority that constrains the freedom of such black students as Dingz. For instance, "no female visitor was ever allowed beyond the reception. [and] [t]hat was number one rule, and it was non-negotiable" (Mhlongo 126). This rule, among others set by the white priest, constructs an institution that seeks to compromise the defined post-apartheid freedom of young people like Dingz. The rule recreates a sense of post-apartheid white dominance that parallels itself with apartheid authority and its subjugation of black communities. For instance, the apartheid authority uncompromisingly imprisoned black people who disregarded pass laws that were set in cities. For Dingz and Dworking his roommate, the YMCA and apartheid rules define similar authority because they maintain white dominance that they are determined to resist as they strive to re-define their blackness and its accompanying entitlements. Dingz and Dworking's resistance sensibility also manifest ridicule that undermines white dominance and seeks to establish their freedom. Their involvement in numerous sexual relations with young women in their YMCA room is a form of protest – albeit misguided one. They use sex

to assert their authority and define their desire to break from white-constructed sense of marginality. Their struggle to negotiate with and resist the YMCA rules, constructs young black people whose attempts to retain their freedom are thwarted by post-apartheid white dominance. Dingz and Dworking epitomize young black people's struggle for freedom that is negotiated on several points before it is invalidated by white dominance. It is first negotiated at the entrance of YMCA where the hostility of the black caretaker seems less threatening. It is also negotiated between Dingz and Dworking as Dingz says: "when I returned to my room Dworking, my roommate, lay on his single bed. I had to break the news to him so that he could give me some privacy when Nkanyi arrived. That was our arrangement when one of us had a female visitor" (Mhlongo 123). Negotiated freedom defined by black-on-black dialogue constructs a racial counter narrative that, though crucial in their attempts to re-claim their sense of entitlement, is hindered by white dominance. The white priest whose committee uncompromisingly dismisses Dingz from YMCA is the architect of white dominance. His dismissal and the suspension of the black caretaker play out racial undertones that seek to guard white dominance against subjects of inferior race in such institutions and creates a sense that "whiteness is inescapable and omnipresent in black identity" (Mtose 2008: 190).

3.3 The Metaphor of Soweto as a Black Space

The foundational base for Soweto as a metaphor of black space is in history. It is "associated with the history of apartheid; of segregation, subjugation and marginalisation" (Zono 2015: 8). Soweto, among other townships that surround Johannesburg is an apartheid construct of segregation purposely overpopulated with black people and a flood of negative images. In spite of its inhabitable environment, Soweto became home to blacks who were forced into such spaces to facilitate the development of inner Johannesburg – a pre-dominantly white space. Gorodnov (1988: 8) aptly captures the negation of Soweto and its dwellers as a black space:

> Sowetans are an inalienable part of white Johannesburg. They work at the factories run by whites and are servants in white households. The white city pays for their labour – the pay is in no instance commensurate with the expanded labour - and 'graciously' permits them to live in the ghetto laid out for them.

The apartheid system did not only construct Soweto as a space that is occupied by black people but it also placed it under its excruciating domination for easy access to cheap labour. According to Gorodnov, the development of Johannesburg depended on the cheap labour

provided by black people whose township leaving conditions were characterised by extreme lack of service delivery. Freund, (2007: 126) asserts that even though the policies of apartheid denied acknowledgement of black people as permanent urban dwellers, their presence was essential for the development of white space. Their presence in white spaces was permissible on conditions of labour services that they offered under close supervision. To this, Jones (2016: 4) adds, "[a]reas like Soweto came into being as a result of white capital's demand for cheap black labour". Wafer (2005: 43) states that, "[t]he black townships located on the outskirts of apartheid Johannesburg were conceived not simply as black residential areas, but as working-class dormitories to serve the mines and industries". Thus, Soweto and other townships initially emerged as black-occupied spaces that defined black people as beasts of burden, hewers of wood and drawers of water, non-progressive and inferior subjects that were to remain apartheid white people's labourers until the demise of apartheid. With its underdevelopment, Beavon (2004: 121) claims that Soweto appeared as "little more than a bleak residential outpost on the veld". Understood through this lens, apartheid-constructed Soweto is a space that reinforced colonially formulated negations aimed at maintaining major racial binaries while dehumanizing and bestialising black people by locating their dwelling spaces in the veld. In other words, Soweto reflects a space excluded "from the field of human [and was] cast within the parameters of animality" (Mbembe 2001: 236). This is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad and Rider Haggard's delineation of Africa and Africans in *The Heart of Darkness* and *King Solomon's Mines.* For Jones (2016: 4), Soweto "was defined by identical, single-storey matchbox housing, unpaved roads and an almost complete absence of public amenities or greenery". Such deliberately created conditions of Soweto made it virtually impossible for black dwellers to maintain the sanity of their environment. Hence, the outbreak of various terminal diseases that became a common cause for the justification of colonial/apartheid claims of blacks as people of inferior race.

Fanon (1963: 4–5) captures the conditions of the colonised's space when he says the colonised space "is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people […]. It's a world with no space, people are piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together […]. The colonized's sector is a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostate". Although the post-1994 Soweto distinguishes itself from pre-apartheid Soweto through some aspects of development such as the infrastructure, the novel sets it as a space only inhabited by poor black people and haunted by crime traceable back to apartheid. It is a polluted space with high unemployment especially for young characters and

lacking in basic service delivery. As such, this section defines Soweto as a destitute and fearsome black space. Entrapped characters like Dingz who dwell in it wish to escape.

Dog Eat Dog offers a crucial construction of Soweto to consider in engaging with the post-apartheid sense of black entitlement and identity. Understanding Soweto as a black space goes beyond the simple fact of its occupation by black people. Soweto is synonymous with the struggle against apartheid. On many occassions, it is defined through the death of many young people whose daring confrontation of apartheid with the aimed of dismantling whiteness' self-acclaimed entitlement to the country's wealth, is celebrated in contemporary South Africa. Glanvill (2012: 170) states, "[y]oung South Africans […] played a significant role in helping to bring about democracy especially in the traumatic events of the June 16 Soweto Uprising". The popular 1970s young people's struggles portray Soweto as a space that motivates the construction of black entitlement culture and the mobilisation of black people to re-construct their apartheid-deconstructed identities. It is a space that formed the psychological basis for black people's resistance sensibility by mobilising intense resistance strategies that have been adopted by the post-apartheid generation. Young black people of South Africa were the architects of 21 March 1960 Sharpeville Massacre and 16 June 1976 Soweto Uprising. These historical moments are the motivation for university students and most citizens to express their grievances through violent demonstrations, which have become part of broad South African culture of re-claiming one's sense of entitlement.

Notwithstanding the much celebrated historical struggle, the novel constructs irony that is defined by Soweto's abject poverty. When Soweto's struggle for freedom against apartheid is paralleled with the notions of post-apartheid Soweto's struggle against poverty that can be traced back from centuries of oppression, it is worth defining blackness as a sight of struggle. This is premised on the understanding that Soweto poses as a space of struggle against apartheid that witnessed the shooting of more than sixty young people and, its dwellers continuous struggle against abject poverty that the novel depicts through young unemployed and unemployable people. In the face of his experiences of excrutiating apartheid conditions and the post-apartheid's failure to transform and improve black people's lives, Dingz comments, "many of us there thought this election would reshape our lives in the southern part of this unruly 'Dark Continent'" (Mhlongo 66). What I find striking here is Dingz's invocation of Joseph Conrad is his reference to Africa as an "unruly Dark Continent". This is a familiar colonially-constructed stereotype, which shows that nothing has changed. His

understanding of Africa through such stereotypes is informed by the realisation that despite the acclaimed South African freedom, the conditions of black people have remained stagnant partly because of government officials whose corrupt acquisition of wealth have maintained poverty within post-apartheid black communities.

Also, when Dingz reflects on the poverty of his family in Soweto he draws parallels between the oppressive apartheid system and the post-apartheid black-led government officials' corruption and subsequent failure to deal with apartheid's aftermath. Soweto is a space that swarms with unemployed and unemployable young people. Associating Soweto with negative expletives about Africa is telling. That the African continent is dark as noted in Dingz's comment is to resuscitate degrading colonial narratives that formulate the African continent as hopeless and a burden to black subjects. Therefore, Dingz's comment creates the impression that the black-led government is incapable of governing its people and changing their unfortunate circumstances into fortunes. Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo (2017: 5) argue that: "such constructs manifest as "burden" for black Africans […] not only because they experience […] marginalization as a result but also because they are deeply aware of these constructs and how they are often positioned as inferior". The construction of black subjects and their continent as inferior, reflects on colonial mentalities of Africa as an inferior space. When Dingz applies for university accommodation, the white personnel in the accommodation office places him on the students' waiting list because he is from Soweto. That placement is not only satiric and patronising but it also re-generates and maintains binary opposites between post-apartheid black and white people and ultimately deconstructs the understanding of South Africa as a rainbow nation. Dingz's experience seems to define a white space that is intolerant of his presence. His presence has conditions: he leaves that white space at the end of his lectures. Reference to Wits as a white space set immediately after the end of apartheid traces various incidences that underpin it as controlled by white people. As such, Soweto is not only a space that Dingz belongs to as a young black character but it remains a segregated space of inferiority that is defined by the backwardness of its dwellers whose daily attempts to occupy white spaces are thwarted by white dominance. As a black space, Soweto raises thoughts of unresolved sense of black marginalisation and black identity as continuously struggling within the margins constructed by the colonial perpetrators.

3.4 Violence and the Construction of Black Identity

The construction of violence and its relatedness to blackness is crucial to the formation and understanding of black entitlement and black identity. Violence is posed as a physical manifestation of most characters' psychological state that is informed by racial attitudes. In other words, the violence that plays out in the novel is constructed on the backdrop of racism that still exists in post-apartheid South Africa. Of course, the construction of racial violence can be traced back to the colonial/apartheid periods' formation of racial binaries between black and white people. According to Nayar (2011: 22), black post-colonial violence is "a consequence of the violence inherent in the colonial system itself. [It] is embedded in the dialectic of master-slave, where the only means to attaining selfhood the dehumanized slave has is violence because it is the only language of colonial relations". On one hand, the white-on-black violence that the writer constructs in the novel is informed by the white characters' perceptions of blacks as inferior subjects. On the other, the historical colonial/apartheid oppression of black people permanently set black-on-white hatred that see black people fighting for recognition and deconstruction of negations that defined their identities for a long time. In many instances, that process is characterised by elements of racism that place the notion of post-apartheid reconciliation into question. Historical experiences show that violence did not only define the colonial/apartheid oppressive system but also reflected in revolutions against that system. Ironically, the perpetrators of colonial/apartheid violence never defined it as violence because, as Fleming (2011: 23) asserts, those systems determined what was just and unjust. In the same vein, Dodd (2009: 47) states that for those systems, "violence often comes dressed in the garb of authority, power, right or legitimacy, even when in effect it announces their absent". The colonial/apartheid system justified the use of violence as a means of civilising the natives while maintaining the self-acclaimed entitlement of the perpetrators of oppression.

However, post-colonial theorists like Fanon widely condemned colonial violence as oppressive and dehumanizing to the colonised subjects while paradoxically condoning it as a necessary evil for purposes of decolonisation. Fanon (1963: 2–3) states that decolonisation is characterised by violent clashes of the coloniser and the colonised. In support of Fanon's perspective of violence Sarte (in Fleming 2011: 24) argues, "irrepressible violence […] is man recreating himself, and that it is through mad fury that the 'wretched of the earth' can become men". However, the violence advocated by Fanon and Sarte has been criticised by Arendt (1970: 65) who accuses them of "glorifying violence for violence's sake". To some

extent, she acknowledges that Fanon seems conscious of the consequences of that violence, unlike his admirers like Sarte. She argues, "Fanon himself, however, is much more doubtful about violence than his admirers […] Fanon knows of the unmixed and total brutality [which], if not immediately combated, invariably leads to defeat of the movement within a few weeks" (1970: 14). Responding to such criticism Pithouse (2003: 109) argues that while Fanon is accused of inciting violence "there is no scandal about the fact that most of the political philosophers in the (white) Western canon gave a theoretical endorsement to the use of violence in certain circumstances". However, the issue is not whether violence is perceived as a construct of colonial/apartheid system or embraced by former colonised subjects; the paradox of its use is what matters for my argument. The apartheid system used violence to protect white entitlement, and blacks embraced and deployed it as an essential weapon to re-claim that entitlement.

This section partly adopts Fleming's (2011: 24) idea of "symbolic violence", and his argument that its formation rests on stereotypes and fixed ideas about 'Other' societal members. He further argues that formulated stereotypes and fixed ideas "are resistant to change even when confronted by determined action to transform" (Fleming 2011: 24-5). Drawing on Fleming's arguments, I explore several colonially constructed stereotypes and fixed ideas about blacks that some white characters strategically retained to guard white entitlement to South African spaces and resources.

The writer's reflection on sentiments of violence positions post-1994 South Africa as permanently eclipsed by the spectre of apartheid violence. Some writers have argued that post-aparthied violence is a result of the country's failures to deal with the consequences of apartheid violence, which manifest in the measures that are sometimes used by the government to deal with black communities. For instance, Dingz's encounter with corrupt and violent police officers and their disregard of his rights is reminiscent of apartheid-motivated racialised ways of dealing with black subjects. Even after paying a bribe to escape arrest, Dingz does not escape what is notably a racialised brutal assault from the police officers. I partly consider his assault as racially-motivated because, at this point, South Africa was still at the infancy of defining itself as a new dispensation after ending apartheid. However, the institutions that served and saved the opressive system of apartheid for decades were still in place and being used by the new black government. As such, his assault, after he fails to record the police officers with his "Walkman", casts doubts on the freedom that black

communities have been yearning for since the beginning of apartheid. His limited knowledge of law, claim and keenness to exercise his rights, gained through his studies encounter the same resistance that black communities encountered before the end of apartheid. Narrating his encounter with police officers Dingz says:

> I took my Walkman out of my pocket; the record and play buttons on it were still pressed down, and the red record light was flickering. I showed it to Sergeant Viljoen. "What now" he asked, perplexed. "Are you stupid?" "Can't you see that our conversation is recorded on this cassette?" "Shit! You fucking bastard! You will pay for this". [w]ithin the blink of an eye the two officers were out of the car […] Suddenly Naicker's big hand was around my balls and I was standing on my toes with pain. Viljoen grabbed the Walkman from my pocket. I tried to resist, but Viljoen's fist struck me across my mouth. I tasted blood. Naicker let go of my balls and I staggered and fell down (Mhlongo 57).

The duality of violence – physical and verbal – meted against Dingz by the police in post-apartheid South Africa is testament of the systemic violence that has its roots in the apartheid system. Black communities are still muzzled by "symbolic violence" that is reflected through police officers.

The racial undertones that negate black identity echo the stereotypical perceptions of blackness that characterised the colonial and apartheid periods. The derogatory reference to black people as "bastard" has colonial/apartheid undertones used by whites to define black people. During the colonial/apartheid eras, such terms defined black people as disobedient, uncivilised, and therefore deserving physical violent disciplining. That Dingz is a law student at Wits (56) does not help him before the police officers. The police give him two options – to rescue himself through bribery or face imprisonment. When he gives in to paying bribery, we see a character who acquiescently submits to a system that further brutalises him. Additionally, the names of the police officers define them as non-black, and their assault on Dingz as a black subject retains the thought of racially-inspired apartheid violence. Their racially-inspired violence makes them agents of an oppressive system that 1994 South Africa has failed to eliminated. That, "Naicker's hand was around [Dingz's] balls" and at some point [Dingz] taste blood after "Viljoen's fist struck [him] across [his] mouth", defines a system whose racially inspired violence maintains the dehumanisation of black subjects through its contempt tendencies. Dingz's continued subjection to that oppressive system shows that his sense of entitlement remains a mirage. This positions blackness as a precarious space continuously struggling against its historical past.

Besides reflecting on the sense of violence as constructed through white characters, the novel also depicts black-on-black violence that, to some extent, projects blackness as a space of struggle. Black-on-black violence in South Africa is attributed to the long history of apartheid oppression. Abrahams (2010: 498) argues that apartheid is "the largest contributing factor to the […] violence that prevailed in South Africa for decades". According to Ndlovu (2017: 97) "black-on-black violence is a product of coloniality—a racist global power structure that makes incidents of non-revolutionary violence among the oppressed black subject inevitable." *Dog Eat Dog* captures instances of encounters between black people that betray constant frustrations of black people as they seek to establish themselves in South African spaces that were formerly a preserve of whites. For instance, black people's experiences in a taxi rank – a space characterised by violence of both taxi drivers and rank marshals – construct the sense of Flemming's "symbolic violence" that Dingz aptly describes when he says:

> [t]he taxi queue marshals were busy calling loudly in Zulu. 'Orlando, Dube, Phefeni lapha side. Chiwelo, Mapetla, Protea this side. Naledi, Zola, Mndeni wozani ngapha.' Each one of them pointed at the minibus-taxis that were standing there. 'heyi wena msunu kanyoko ngithe ugibele kuleya taxi ebomvu uma ngabe uya eProtea hhayi kulena, man. Hey you, your mother's cunt! I said board the red taxi if you are going to Protea and not this one' shouted one of the queue marshals. He was abusing a male commuter in a blue suit and tie […] 'Manje unngithukelani pho? But why insult me like that?' […] The queue marshal began to roll up his blue shirt as if preparing for a fight. 'Ufunukulwa, masimbakho? Do you want to fight, you shitpot?' (Mhlongo 83).

The account by Dingz traces the novel's construction of the sense of "symbolic violence" through several derogatory labelling of black commuters by taxi queue marshals. Such labelling resonates with colonial negations that degraded the colonised subjects. In post-apartheid South Africa, such derogatory narratives give insight into the physical violence associated with black spaces. This sense of "symbolical violence" defines the taxi marshals' attempts to construct spatial control and their sense of entitlement. It also constructs fragmented urban spaces whose entitlement is sought after by black dwellers. The encounters reflect the constant conflicts that play out in post-apartheid black communities as a consequence of social inequalities symbolised by notable differences between taxi marshals and the formally dressed young man. The contrast defines re-imagined permanent binaries between black subjects that resemble those that were formulated through apartheid's deployment of segregation. The binaries present rank marshaling as an informal low-paying form of employment with disregard for commuters, and the young man in formal outfit

represent the economically established part of that black community. The latter are constant victims of crime and violence in South Africa because, in the same way the colonised always wished to occupy all that the coloniser had (Fanon 1963: 5), some economically unstable members of black communities target the wealth of those whom they regard as inheritors of white privilege in South Africa.

Beyond social violence, politically motivated violence is synonymous with black entitlement and identity. This violence mirrors post-apartheid political conflicting ideologies that categorise black people and position blackness as either fragmented or marked by conflicting categories. The novel recreates the political struggle between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in ways that ingrain violence into black DNA. Historically, the conflict of these parties is not just about conflicting ideologies but also has several instances of violence that were partly invoked by conflict "over constituencies in 1990" (van-Baalen 2014: 18). The conflict of these political parties is reflected through train violent incidences. Recounting the death of his neighbour in train violence, Dingz says:

> I had this idea that traveling in this carriage, I would be able to avoid the pickpockets that run rampant on the trains I was also troubled by memories of the train violence that had hit Gauteng a few years earlier. I had found it difficult to erase the terrible picture I had seen on TV of my neighbour, who had been hacked to death with a panga. At the time the ruling National Party tried to explain the blood bath as black-on-black political violence. However, they were not alone in the finger-pointing: the ANC blamed it on the Inkatha Freedom Party […] The IFP in turn blamed it on the ANC (Mpe 201).

The train setting reflects the binaries that define members of black commuters within various categories that the novel construct through violence. The train violence depicts the notable fragmantion of black communities shown through those who are in constant fear of violence and its perpetrators, especially the political parties that are in permanent clashes. The only way to overcome fear of train violence, albeit temporarily is by travelling in the carriage that renders religious services. Religious services are a desperate quest for divine protection and intervention by surrendering to an esoteric force. The formulation of binaries define the spaces of security and vulnerability were the precariate are always in a struggle to escape victimisation. Moreover, it can also be argued that the violence that results in the death of Dingz' neighbour creates another sense of fragmented black communities. That fragmentation is reflected through the apartheid government's projections that such death incidences result from "black-on-black" political violence. This perspective sets the apartheid period as significant in re-thinking black people's struggle for political recognition and

power. That struggle for power resulted in not only the fragmentation of blackness but also the establishment of a platform wherein the formulated categories in black communities are in constant conflict. Mhlongo's novel recreates fragmented blackness or black identity that poses as a space of conflicting categories.

3.5 Male Chauvinism and Black Identity Formation

In *Dog Eat Dog*, Mhlongo recreates blackness as a space that is oriented towards reinforcing male chauvinist attitudes that border on toxic masculinities. Blackness poses as a space that endorses patriarchal ideologies that reduce feminine figures into secondary citizenship. Where power shift gives female characters executive positions, male black characters like Dingz are instrumental in undermining their roles. Dingz's encounter with the secretary in the finance office smacks of toxic masculinities. Dr. Jane Winterburn is the chairperson in that finance office and a registrar of Wits; however, Dingz drops her title and calls her by her first name as a way to spite her. This not only undermines her credibility and worthiness but also exposes a society replete with patriarchal dogmas. Dingz underpins this through a flood of verbal abuses that he directs at female personnel in the same office.

Furthermore, Dingz and his friends' sexist remarks towards two young women that project the nightmare that haunts post-apartheid South African spaces:

> Themba stopped singing and wolf-whistled them. The ladies looked back in our direction and Themba stuck out his tongue around his lips and curled it around the corners of his mouth […] Wow! The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice," I muttered […] Themba continued, "the darker the skin, the deeper the roots." "When did you guys become interested in kids? Com' on gents those are still very young," cautioned Dunga […] "Never" said Themba. "Just look at their breasts, man! Kids don't have that kind of dairy. They could feed the whole Soweto [...] "Ag shit, man! If they can be horny then they are ready, man," I said. "Why bother? Fuck the age of consent anyway. It is against the act of nature." (Mhlongo 97-8).

Beneath the blatant objectification of women as sexual bodies to be ravaged by men lies a threatening mood of the imminence of rape and confirms the recent delineation of gender based violence as a pandemic in South Africa. The crude sexual innuendos are "a form of violence against women as it is a reminder of women's object's status, sexualisation, lack of power, as well as a violation" (Boyle 2005: 125). The sexually demeaning tongue sticking out gesture creates insecure spaces for women. It also creates a sense of acceptance and naturalisation of such degrading sexualised positions of women and Dingz and his friend's notion of entitlement to feminine sexual control. The sexualization of Nkanyi betrays male's

misplaced entitlement to the female body. As if to confirm the entitlement, Dingz lures her into several sexual relations shortly after that encounter.

Evidently, "blackness becomes a product of binary opposition" (Mtose 2008: 160) defined by notions of men's superiority and women's inferiority. The blatant denigration of women manifest in the way they are defined through their bodies. Describing female breasts as "dairy that could feed the whole Soweto", is animal imagery that dehumanizes women and runs against the grain of celebrating womanhood. About their age, Dingz highlights the sickness and devastation of patriarchal control by claiming that men decide these females' sexual activeness. Dingz and his friends are representations of failed male figures who redefine and reassert their manhood through sexual exploitation of women.

The fragmented urban space is also traced through clashes between homosexuals and Christians. Dingz encounters a group of protesters with fliers inscribed: "RECOGNISE GAY AND LESBIAN RIGHT NOW" "GAYS AND LESBIANS BY NATURE NOT BY CHOICE" "STOP TREATING US LIKE EVIL PEOPLE WE ARE AS HUMAN AS YOU ARE" (Mhlongo 194). The inscription challenges the dominance of heteronormative sexualities and demands spatial recognition of other sexualities in black urban communities. The demand for recognition shows blackness as a fragmented space. The inscription depicts the "Otherness" and dehumanisation of homosexuals. The protesters construct a sense of entitlement by demanding to be recognised the same way as natural and authentic as heterosexuals. That authenticity defines itself through counter fliers that are inscribed: "GOD CREATED ADAM AND EVE – NOT ADAM & ADAM OR EVE & EVE" "GOD DOES NOT TOLERATE MORAL SINNERS" "GOD CREATED SEX FOR A MAN AND A WOMAN TO ENJOY" (Mhlongo 194). Metaphorically, this inscription categorises heteronormative sexualities as natural and seeks to formulate an impression that this category defines aunthentic blacks.

Clearly, homosexuals are dehumanised. Although homosexuals have gained recognition in South Africa, both black and white communities have hardly accepted them as a result of the same reason that is reflected in the inscription above. This view follows Dlamini's (2016: 68) understanding that in South Africa, "the privileging of heterosexuality manifests in hate crimes such as homophobia, corrective rape of homosexual men and women, and the murder of men and women who self-identify as lesbians and gays". The violence against same sex relationships depicts binaries that are entrenched in South African communities. The binaries

make blackness a permanently fragmented identity with conflicting categories that define urban black communities.

3.6 Constructed Notions of Reconciliation and Black Identity Formation

The reconstruction of blackness as a space that is in a constant state of reconciling with its excruciating past speaks to hauntology and spectrality of history. Mhlongo contextualises his novel in the history of the struggle for black entitlement, which places reconciliation at the centre of black identity formation. Contrary to the revenge that is projected by the black homeless man against his white homeless counterpart, most black communities have embraced the reconciliation that Nelson Mandela upheld when he became the first South African black president in 1994. The dawn of democracy beamed with the spirit of reconciliation with former white apartheid perpetrators. However, disillusioned politicians like Julius Malema and young black South Africans have created the narrative that by extending the hand of reconciliation to former oppressors, Nelson Mandela betrayed South African black communities. Dingz and his friends give context to this understanding of reconciliation by mimicking an imaginary postponed ANC gathering at which Mandela was supposed to present a speech:

> 'Ag man, away with politics,' moaned Themba. 'His speech would have been the same old rhetoric of reconciliation'. 'People of South Africa,' started Dworkin, mimicking President Mandela's faltering voice, 'we must live together, black and white, in this land of ours. You must not fight. When conflict arises, let us go to the negotiation table. We will find solution. Like Mr De Klerk and myself did in CODESA. We shook hands. I thank you' […] 'I hate the fact that Dingane's Day has been changed into Day of Reconciliation with this absurd post-apartheid renaming' continued Dworkin […] this renaming is totally blotting out our history. Instead of thinking about King Dingane fighting the Boers, we now think of reconciliation with the same enemy who killed him' (Mhlongo 251–2).

The biting satire above reflects reconciliation as a contested terrain within black communities. Worth noting is the disillusionment of young people who are keen to gain a sense of entitlement to South African resources and spaces while rejecting what the leaders of that historic revolution regard as the only solution to construct peace between black and white people.

For Themba, lampooning the monotony of attending gatherings where leaders of the historic revolution repeat the same rhetoric of reconciliation that does not benefit young people is an expression of bitterness and a sense of betrayal to black entitlement. Similarly, that rain has

resulted in the postponement of the gathering, is a quest for new life for black communities. Rain is life giving, and its potential to cleanse and wash away dirt exposes the different level of consciousness in black communities. The same rain is a moment of revelation when flooding happens in black communities where poverty still rears its ugly head – making a mockery of the rhetoric of reconciliation and reconstruction. It is no wonder Themba, as a young black South African does not find it crucial to attend such gatherings, which are a constant reminder of the betrayal of the majority black by the new black government. Themba represents young South Africans who perceive the struggle against the apartheid regime as insignificant in re-imaging post-apartheid young black people's identities. Thus, the satiric tinge in mimicking Mandela's voice and his narrative of reconciliation represents Dingz and his friends' attempt to distance themselves from the new dispensation.

The end of Dworkin's imitation of Mandela is marked by a "short burst of laughter" from Dingz and his friends. Laughter is a coping mechanism that eases off tension and anger. Their laughter arguably undermines the revolutionary narrative that is represented by freedom fighters like Mandela. What seems ironic in that speech that is imitated by Dworkin is that it creates an impression that South African land belongs to both black and white people regardless of the fact that the majority of that land is still owned by white people as the quotation reflects: "we must live together, black and white, in this land of ours". In other words, the speech casts a dark shadow at, and betrays the notion and spirit of black entitlement to land in South Africa. Through the actions of Dingz and his friends, and their mimicry of Mandela, we begin to see the sowing of a seed of the current discourse of Mandela as a symbol of betrayal. Therefore, the rejection of reconciliation is constructed around the continued marginalisation of black people's cultures, wishes, dreams and hopes. Thus, the renaming and the undermining of black people's history grounded on the replacement of Dingane's Day by Reconciliation Day, does not only accommodate the cultures of white people who perpetrated the oppression of black people but also eclipses indigenous black people's history and undermines black identity.

We see erasure and palimpsest when the contribution of Dingane, who fought with the Boers and died in that struggle is overshadowed by his predecessors who resolved to reconcile with what Dworkin refers to as the enemy. While, the replacement of Dingane's Day "meant that [South Africa] had to include the stories of both men and women in its constructive interaction with human rights violations" (Kobe 2017: 1), there is potential for swallowing

black history and identity into oblivion. However, despite resistance against reconciliation by some black people, the contemporary black-led government has attempted to reinforce it through hollow rhetoric. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) formed the basis from which all races in South Africa were brought together to formulate a rainbow nation. According to Kobe (2017: 1) "[a]t the beginning of the TRC of South Africa, Desmond Tutu announced that in the new democratic South Africa, everyone, everything, belongs. None are outsiders, all are insiders, and all belong." In other words, Tutu as the chairperson of TRC at the time, sought to discourage any form of revenge that could have risen from black communities after many years under excruciating apartheid subjugation. That reconciliation is traced in the emphasis of rainbow nation narrative that still operates as a mechanism of bringing all South Africans together despite their racial and cultural backgrounds. To buttress the notion of reconciliation the system strategically constructed narratives of *ubuntu* that sought to lull the resentment of black apartheid victims. According to (Godobo-Madikizela 2005: 32):

> [t]he Ubuntu approach to truth and reconciliation, predicated on the belief that 'I am because we are', recognises the value of dialogue as part of transitional justice efforts in post-conflict regions. This approach was evident in the testimonies of women who had experienced trauma or lost loved ones. Their ability to forgive perpetrators was possible because of their recognition of the humanity of the perpetrator.

Such narratives as *ubuntu* have contributed into defining contemporary South Africa as a rainbow nation and arguably constructed the impressions that all South African black communities have embraced that reconciliation. The emphasis placed on reconciliation poses blackness as a space that continuously embraces reconciliation. However, that reconciliation remains a myth considering the traces of racism and on-going murders of white farmers in South African land. The glaring inequalities have continued to threaten and mock the spirit of reconciliation. Dingz and his friends expose this through humour when they censure the political leadership and their talkshow politics of oneness. The precarity of black identity in black urban spaces continues to manifest even when reconciliation is talked about. It is therefore prudent to conclude that the mimicry by Dingz and friends symbolize a disillusioned generation and the gathering of the storm of another youth led revolution.

3.7 Conclusion

Through the violence of young black characters, *Dog Eat Dog* construct a narrative of the dialectics of black entitlement culture and black identity in South Africa. That entitlement is constructed against the backdrop of white superiority and oppression that black communities continue to endure in the post-apartheid era. Through Dingz, who seeks to construct his sense of entitlement by violently challenging white characters in a space that they still dominate, the chapter notes that black identity poses as a confrontational space. Dingz is convinced that the reason for his rejected bursary application is racially motivated. As such, he confronts the white personnel at the finance office who, in turn, undermine his sense of entitlement by projecting a flood of negative images about him. Notably, in an attempt to construct their sense of entitlement, young black characters fail to realise the limits within which that black entitlemnet culture is and can be constructed. The rules that the Priest constructs for students, make one almost think of blackness as figuratively and continuously confined by the dominance of whiteness in urban space.

Black identity continuously exists in the shadows of white identity. White-owned companies where black subjects work are riddled with the fear of dismissal. Their existence entirely depends on their employment, and by extension on Whites who are their employers. As such, they try to find ways to avoid conflicts with their superior white employers. Ironically, contemporary South African young people seem keen to reject their traditions in favour of whiteness. The tendency by Dingz to criticise previous black kings like Dingane in support of whiteness overshadows the South African history of struggle against apartheid. The criticism projects blackness as fragmented or positioned within conflicting categories. Notably, elders are keen to identify themselves through the struggle against apartheid while young characters transcend those boundaries and sometimes ridicule that struggle.

The chapter also noted blackness as a space of struggle. The black communities are in a constant struggle against poverty and exploitation by a government that fails to provide basic services as promised. Dingz's family still stay in apartheid government's leased house and survive with the grant that the government offers Dingz's mother. This reflects the continued subjugation of blacks. Voting becomes an attempt to escape the burden of blackness by bringing possible change. However, the voting system is another of the capitalists and former oppressor's deodorised dog shit, to borrow from Achebe.

Black identity poses a burden in that it is constantly associated with negative conceptualisations that dehumanises black subjects. However, black identity can also be understood as a space that establishes connectedness and commitment in attempts to deal with the continued white dominance. The novel reflects on that through revolutionary songs that are accompanied by slogans as black establishes self-assertion that constructs a sense of entitlement to South African land and resources. However, what is interesting to understand is, the sloganeering that reflects a sense of entitlement to South African land and resources is compromised at many points. Firstly, it is compromised by the notion of reconciliation that declares all South Africans despite their race and cultures as belonging to South Africa and entitled to its land and resources. On the other hand, the post-apartheid sloganeering constantly encounters government control through the police. This raises many questions on whether or not the power to reclaim entitlement belongs to ordinary black South Africans. The police, an oppressive system of apartheid, is seen serving the interests of the new black government in the same way it served apartheid. This manifests the paradoxes and contradictions that manifest in the construction of black identities. The paradoxes leave blackness and its claim to entitlement to South African spaces in a state of ambivalence. Thus, the question of belonging, rootedness and un-belonging is entwined with delectics that play out blacks and history, and blacks and land.

Chapter 4

Urban Negations and black Identity in *Jozi*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the misfortunes of several black characters and the depiction of Johannesburg as an ambivalently entangling urban space to explore blackness as a negative space in *Jozi*. Hlongwane imagines a monstrous Johannesburg that figuratively chews its dwellers and spits them as "lifeless mince" (Hlongwane 1). In apparent contradistinction to *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, which narrativizes the short-lived celebratory moments of success and optimism of characters' transition from a rural space to Hillbrow, characters in *Jozi* exist within an excruciating sense of despair defined by their failures in the urban space. Fascinatingly, the novel *Jozi* modernises its characters whose embrace of modernity acts as a boomerang that accelerates their failures. My reading of these characters is informed by Berman's (1983: 15) description of modernity wherein he states that, "[t]o be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are". Berman's delineation here is inadvertently, an apt description of Johannesburg. With all its splendour and entrapments, Johannesburg offers a great deal of pleasure for all its dwellers, especially the newly arrived who find themselves overwhelmed by an urge to pursue the promises of that urban space, which constantly threatens their existence. Underpinned by the novel's negative depictions of Johannesburg and its dwellers is blackness as a negative space. Therefore, this chapter argues that through the negative portrayal of Johannesburg, blackness is permanently bound within an inescapable maze that puts characters in a self-destructive mode, which makes their downfall an eventuality. To analyse blackness in this chapter, I engage with the experiences of black young characters in the aftermath of their shattered dreams and the urban society that the novel constructs. Their post-hope or experiences of despair are traced within a context of poverty that dehumanises and haunts them. My understanding of poverty in this disquisition is not limited to material deprivation because, as Nuttall and Mbembe (2008: 5) state, urban poverty manifest in various ways. They argue:

> [u]rban poverty itself is many things, some of which have to do with material deprivation; others with lack of security and dignity; others with what Appandurai calls the 'exposure to risk and high costs for thin comforts'; and others still with 'terms of recognition' – the ability and capacity of the poor to voice, to debate, contest, and oppose vital directions for collective social life.

Traced beyond the sense of 'material deprivation', Nuttall and Mbembe's understanding of poverty accounts for the complications of entangled identities of urban dwellers, the compromised social relations and the power struggles that constantly hinder the progress of the less powerful. The novel recreates several instances that echo Nuttall and Mbembe's view of urban poverty, which can be followed through either unrealised or suppressed competences of young characters, lack of security resulting in several horrific deaths and compromised social relations in urban black communities.

In discussing the construction of blackness as a negative space, this chapter engages with the novel's portrayal of young black characters and how their identities are shaped by and become part of the negativity of the urban space. To motivate the understanding of blackness as negative space, I draw on arguments by Hrabovskỳ (2013: 85) who argues that, "blackness is still the main "criterion" of a "lower" racial origin. The ancient environmental meaning of black skin as being caused by sunlight is [still] diffused together with the meaning of black as a negation, death, bad nature and even illness". Tracing this view of blackness from the colonial periods to contemporary writings, Hrabovskỳ concludes that despite the claimed independence of former colonised nations, black communities are in constant struggle to define their identities outside the parameters of colonially formulated negations of black race (85). The idea of blackness as a negative space is a colonial historical construct of racial hierarchy where whiteness resembled civilisation and superiority while blackness is set in clear contrast resembling the uncivilised and inferior race. Commenting on this manufactured colonial ideology, Hrabovskỳ (2013: 84) states that blackness was invented "as something considered inferior to the whole story of Western civilization, which had discovered whiteness not only as a colour but as a regime of political and economic power". Added to this is Krueger's (2008: 12) argument that the discourse of racial hierarchy "provided a demeaning description of all races other than the so-called white race". In post-1994 South Africa, blackness remains stuck within demeaning constructions of such narratives as *Jozi*. The novel's negation of black characters and their urban spaces places black identity in an irredeemable position or as "an emblem of unresolvable crisis" (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008: 5). However, the question that seems crucial to address is whether blackness is affected by 'time and space'. That is, whether or not its contemporary meaning is shaped by and speaks to nineteenth century colonial degrading perspectives considering that several decades have passed since the official end of colonialism. More so, we live in an era where the representations of black urban communities are largely black authored.

Dionne Brand's (2001: 4-5) argument in *A Map to No Return* is among the scholarly views that grapple with the thought of whether blackness is affected by 'space and time'. She avers that slavery and colonialism disfigured time and space and constructed a "tear in the world […] a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being […] a physical rupture, [and] a rupture of geography". The repetition of "rupture" conjures the big-bang moment of destruction with the aim to cause permanent damage. In other words, the continued existence and aftermath of the moments of rupture in former colonised states shatters the boundaries of time and space. This explains why blackness as a negative space continues to be seen through the lens of colonial negations. However, the chapter does not only construct a view of blackness as a negative space through continued negative representations of black urban dwellers but also exposes the post-apartheid hindrances that have led to failures in re-claiming black people's identities from the bounds of colonial negations. Therefore, I consider Nyambi's (2012: 142) argument that "[a]n important development in postcolonial theory is its gravitation towards an interpretation of the political and social-economic present as a consequence of not only the accumulating effects of the colonial past but most importantly, of the local forces that have emerged in the post-independence epoch". This partly explains the post-apartheid government's failure to provide economic opportunities for black people as depicted in the novel *Jozi*. Capable young characters are left to perish on the streets of Johannesburg for lack of economic opportunities. They continue to exist on the margins that were constructed by the colonialists and apartheid perpetrators.

In order to engage with this understanding, I consider Sen's (1999) capability approach that traces development as a strategy of formulating opportunities for people to delve into doing what they value most. In other words, for post-apartheid South Africa to talk of transition from colonial/apartheid condescending perspectives about black identity, the government must embrace the sense of development. What is fascinating about this approach is that it opens a gap for re-claiming identities. Mkhwanazi and Wilson-Strydom (2018: 1) argue that "the capability approach brings values essential for human flourishing (such as respect and dignity)". As such, perceiving black identity as only constructed by colonial/apartheid negations of black subjects and ignoring the post-colonial/apartheid government's failures that maintain blackness in marginal spaces becomes problematic.

The Johannesburg that Hlongwane depicts in *Jozi* is a dreadful space where most characters encounter horrific death before attaining their dreams. Intelligent, creative and talented young

men are overwhelmed by despair that makes them death-bound subjects. Their existence in Johannesburg is characterised by economic failures that eclipse their future and destroy their dreams in a city veiled with optimism, especially for those yet to arrive in it. The novel does not only reflect hopeless and helpless urban dwellers but also constructs deteriorated inner Johannesburg through images of underdeveloped Hillbrow and Braamfontein; a perspective that raises questions about the "goldification" and glorified "city-ness" of Johannesburg. Therefore, exploring the "city-ness" of Johannesburg is crucial to our understanding of blackness as a negative space. This exploration of blackness through urban spaces is motivated by the view that colonial history negated black people's spaces in order to further dehumanise black races through poor infrastructure that was not conducive for human habitation. In post-apartheid South Africa, former whites-only designated urban spaces such as Hillbrow are populated by historically oppressed blacks whose presence in these urban spaces is an opportunity for us to engage post-apartheid claims of transition from colonial/apartheid negations of black people's spaces. By engaging with the "city-ness" of Johannesburg, I am invoking Simone's (in Nuttall and Mbembe 2008: 68) argument that "[t]he inner city of Johannesburg is about as far away as one gets from the popular image of the African village". Similarly, the chapter also considers Hamilton's (2006: 3) argument that Johannesburg "remains geographically isolated, and is dissimilar in many ways to global cities of the core but also stands out as one of Africa's most important economic hubs and a centre for specialised services". The contrast of Johannesburg with typical global cities raises questions about its recognition as a city. It also shows its continued failure to deal with crime, poverty and the deteriorating infrastructure that dates back to the colonial era.

The negative imaging of Johannesburg is introduced in the opening paragraph and is a motif that runs throughout the novel. The novel is set in the post-2000s period, at the peak of Jacob Zuma's rise to presidency and xenophobia, which resulted in the death of many foreign nationals. The influence of these events in its representation of horrific urban spaces manifests in the way the writer reflects and recreates instances of xenophobia and how they define the uncertainties of non-locals in South African urban spaces. The story line of *Jozi* unfolds in numerous subsections of recurring characters whose experiences in urban spaces project notions of political transition, devastating HIV and mob justice, the government's failure to deliver basic services, social injustice, architectural deterioration, and xenophobia. Through Frank, one of the narrators, the author presents brilliant young black characters whose economic failures drive into the abyss of alcoholism and eventual death. The reckless

conduct of Senzo, Frank's friend, of having multiple sexual relations without revealing his HIV status reflects the urban space as a breeding site for that disease. This perspective is also shared by *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. For instance, opportunistic Senzo does not reveal his HIV status to a female Danish journalist that he is sexually involved with numerous times as he also delights in spending her money. In addition to his HIV status, Senzo openly reveals his alcoholism that he underpins as a culture shared by young South Africans who "drink to erase tomorrow" (Hlongwane 8). This state of despair expresses the defeatism and fatalism associated with blackness in the urban space. The only move towards redemption is sex with multiple partners, which is seen as an act of conquest and redefinition of black identity.

The same urban space facilitates the destruction of a brilliant poet who first becomes homeless and later disappears leaving an incomprehensible written note for his friend Frank. The writer thrusts the poet within a stifling urban community that does not provide him with the economic support to nourish his creativity. Silence is complicit. Both the government and private economic institutions conspire through silence, to destroy young black people's talents. In the poet's case, his poetic creativity is only acknowledged on the streets where he survives with little provisions from pedestrians. Down and out in the urban space, the poet is, in many instances, found struggling under the overwhelming burden of alcoholism, which is not only a coping mechanism but also symbol of resignation. The poet's disappearance after his psychological breakdown that gradually manifest through depression and excessive alcohol consumption displays suicidal tendencies akin to defeatism. The experiences of such character are crucial to note because they shed light to the understanding of the urban space as closed, rigid and fixed, and instrumental in destroying the dreams of young people. The tragedy of the poet does not begin from his disappearance but from his lived experiences of repeated failures at several points in the novel. For instance, his failure to pay rent results in his eviction into the streets. The novel also depicts Sipho an Umkhonto weSizwe cadre whose HIV-related death does not sit well with young characters like Senzo who seem keen to avoid the pandemic but still succumb to it. The paralleling of that cadre with HIV that destroys him offers a reading that is crucial to note in relation to post-1994 negations of blackness in that it further undermines black subjects through their liberation struggle. In that view, I argue that the negation of blackness when juxtaposed with the urban space is a mockery of black identities that are defined by the struggle but are figuratively marginalised and/or undermined within that urban space. The imminence of death in the urban space is shown through Frank's involvement in the murder of a bag-snatcher. By tripping the bag-snatcher, Frank facilitates a

horrible mob-justice that is perpetrated by unsympathetic urban dwellers. That both young and old people are involved in murdering the victim does not only reflect the lawlessness and chaos, and moral morass in that urban black community but also defines that space as insecure. Insecure because of the horrific experiences of crime that the novel reflects through the bag-snatcher and some urban dwellers whose rights are constantly compromised by others, leading to social injustice. The late arrival of the police on the murder scene and the fact that no one among urban dwellers involved in murdering the bag-snatcher is arrested betray a justice system that is porous. As such, *Jozi* is a novel of never-ending tragedy and almost all characters are in a state of self-destruction and/or are destroyed by their urban space.

4.2 Self-Marginality and Black Identity Formation

This section engages black identity through the novel's constructed sense of self-marginality. It borrows its context from Perlman's (1976: 91) definition of 'marginal' as "shiftless, dangerous, never do well communities who are associated with the underworld of crime, violence, drugs and prostitution" and abject poverty. The diction of violence and impending danger delineates a precarious space. I also consider Garde's (1999) understanding that, "marginal spaces are generated as inevitable by-products of the processes of urban spatial development and remain as secondary areas". However, the section moves beyond Perlman's definition of 'marginal' by tracing the sense of marginalisation beyond characterising it through impoverished communities as noted by Nuttall and Mbembe through their sense of 'urban poverty'. In this section, self-marginality is defined on the backdrop of the reality of post-independence South Africa; an era that mirrored black occupation of former whites-only designated inner urban spaces and increased chances of black identities' shift from apartheid-constructed spaces of marginality. However, what arguably remain as one of post-apartheid concerns is the maintained and re-imagined spaces of marginality that further entrench black identities into colonial/apartheid negations wished away by black communities who claim to have escaped. Such influences of re-imagined spaces of marginality depict the indignity, deprivation, insecurity, lack of economic opportunities and abject poverty as constructs of the negation of blackness in urban spaces. This partly formulates the focus of analysis in this section. That self-marginality is to some extent understood through Manase's (2005: 94) argument that "the southern African city is portrayed within the background of […] socio-economic influences, whose impact dislocates and fragments the inhabitants". What is crucial to note is that fragmented urban inhabitants are defined by power relations that determine the

control and the marginalisation of other social black community fragments that have been defined as inferior. One finds that sense of constructed marginal space in Thabo Mbeki's speech in the 2003 National Council of Provinces. His speech reflects not only the sense of fragmented South African communities but also traces existing post-apartheid spaces of marginality. He says:

> [t]he second economy (or the marginalised economy) is characterised by underdevelopment, contributes little to GDP, contains a large percentage of our population, incorporates the poorest of our rural and urban poor, is structurally disconnected from both the first and the global economy, and is incapable of self-generated growth and development.

The sense of fragmented communities that is reflected by Manase is also arguably echoed in the above quotation that defines a constructed marginal space that disconnects poor blacks from the 'global economy'. Reading *Jozi* reflects a similar perspective through characters that exist within the parameters of the second economy and constantly see themselves being pushed to the margins by their post-apartheid government.

In reading black identity through self-marginality, this section also taps into some thoughts by such writers as Itkonen (2009: 9) who argues that "for a person to have a marginal status in a society, it means to be positioned outside the mainstream culture and central social processes" (9). In the context of this chapter, the lack of economic opportunities and black-on-black stigmatisation in that urban space partly defines a certain sense of self-marginalisation that I engage with in order to define the understanding of blackness as negative space. Although one notes that most young characters in the novel exist on the margins of depicted urban spaces for varied reasons, it is crucial to note that they also construct a sense of identity for themselves in those spaces. That self-induced sense of identity is responsive to their marginal circumstances. This view is premised on Itkonen's (2009: 9) argument that, "[t]he marginality of a person may be the result of exclusion from the society by its other members, or it may be a choice made by the individual. Being marginal may form an essential part of a person's identity, for this makes it possible to differentiate oneself from the values of the wider society". As such, the chapter also traces the formulation of identities constructed in spaces of marginality through characters who exist in the aftermath of their failed dreams. These characters' self-definition in the face of constant stigmatization by their communities in those marginal spaces will be engaged with as the section traces the post-1994 South African understanding of blackness.

The sense of self-marginalisation is first understood from the fact that *Jozi* is written by a black author whose conscious negation of black characters and their dwelling spaces in Johannesburg exposes the socio-economic inequalities of a rainbow nation. From the opening of the novel to its end, the reader is subjected to dreadful experiences of black characters whose lives and their sense of optimism gradually deteriorate because of the demands of their urban space. The opening paragraph of the novel formulates these demands through negative imaging of Johannesburg as the narrator says:

> Jozi, the Johannesburg we know, […] is a monster that swallows people whole. A place that chews them up and spits them out as lifeless mince. An unforgiving fire turning bones into ash; a furnace whose flames lick hungrily at the particles of humanity as they dance, lost, in the wind. I remember once, in 1991, hearing Jozi described by a newly arrived jobseeker as 'the city of dreams'. To this day the description rings true, for the Jozi I have come to know is a place where dreams come to die (Hlongwane 1).

The image that is used to define Johannesburg in the above quotation is crucial to note because it depicts that space as atrocious and unforgiving to its dwellers. The opening words of the 2010 documentary film *The Battle for Johannesburg* echoes similar sentiments with exactitude when the narrator describes Johannesburg as a city mothered by money/gold, and prostituted to crime. The voice concludes with a death knell when it says, "dreams come here to die", and this statement is repeated twice for emphasis. The "inner city" that motivates the sense of hope for the future of black characters becomes a space of overwhelming despair that pushes some black characters into marginal spaces. As such, I view depicted Johannesburg as a marginalising space that constantly retains the colonial patronising representations of black race as non-progressive. Self-marginalisation is here constructed through the depiction of Johannesburg as a monster that chews its black dwellers "and spits them out as lifeless mince". In other words, the characters in *Jozi* exist in an urban space that both marginalises and figuratively degrades the lives of its dwellers through such devastating diseases as AIDS and lack of economic opportunities. Post-apartheid Johannesburg resembles colonially constructed black spaces that became sites of breeding diseases that were formulated to demean the black race. This view speaks to Mercis (in Nuttall and Mbembe 2008: 170) argument that the AIDS epidemic has increased by twenty percent in South African urban spaces since 1990 and the devastating result of that disease leaves traces of certain marginalised black subjects in the novel's depicted urban space. The sense of marginalisation constructed in *Jozi'*s Johannesburg manifest in the failures of the black-led

government to deal with overwhelming crime and characters' wayward decisions that lead to their distress and death. Consequently, black characters are stuck in degrading marginal spaces that still define them as people of inferior race. Ironically, their depiction in post-apartheid South Africa resonates with denigrating colonial negations that constructed black identity as a negative space.

Prostitution also constructs a certain sense of self-marginality that is crucial to unravel. The decision by young female characters to pursue economic support through prostitution despite its degrading and marginalising nature is a pellucid reflection of self-marginality. The perspective given to prostitution is degrading in that female prostitutes are both stigmatised and victimised by black urban communities. Reflecting on the denigrating nature of prostitution, Vickerman (2013: 2) argues that in South Africa "female sex workers […] are vulnerable to rape; violence, HIV prevalence, and police brutality, yet these factors should not be definitive of who these women are in essence as it perpetuates a stereotype". The quotation constructs South Africa as a space that constantly marginalises and dehumanises prostitution through rape, violence, and police brutality. Vickerman challenges this understanding of prostitutes and prostitution, and avers that such stereotypes should never define prostitutes. These prostitutes are made aware of their degrading positions through instances of rape, violence and police brutality in the urban space. This has the consequent effect of self-marginalisation that to some extent reflects power relations between the prostitutes and the urban black communities that marginalise them. I read prostitution as a space of marginality because of the constant stigmatization by urban communities. It endures social exclusion on a daily basis. That understanding finds context in Benoit et al. (2017: 2) who argue that "[s]tigmas […] have a negative impact on self-concept and identity formation, resulting in degrees of social exclusion that ranges from difficulty to engage in normal social interactions because of secrecy or shame to complete discrediting or exclusion by others". Thus, by stigmatising prostitutes, urban spaces formulate a marginal space that dehumanises prostitutes who are sometimes raped or brutalised in their communities. According to Link and Phelan (2001: 375) "stigma is entirely dependent on social, economic, and political power—it takes power to stigmatise". Through the stigmas that are formulated around prostitutes, the novel forms permanent binaries that depict prostitutes as the 'other' of depicted black urban communities who constantly endure social, economic and political deprivation. That sense of self-marginalisation is traced through the conversation between Frank and the poet, wherein the poet says:

> I spend a lot of time with these girls. They know what they're doing, and they know what it makes them. If you try to give them the impression that what they're doing is not so bad they will never trust you, because they know just how much it sucks; they don't imagine the degradation of their occupation, they experience it. Anyway, listen; over time I've noticed that many of these girls buy the cheapest clothes, cell phones, food … you know, that kind of thing […] You know what I found out? […] with most of them, nearly all of what they make is sent home to KwaZulu, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, and so on. That money is feeding and burying grandmothers, fathers, aunties […] its raising and schooling brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews […] So you see, many of them are never going to get out. Most likely, they'll die of Aids (Hlongwane 1–2).

The impression created here is that of prostitutes who reflect a certain sense of acquiescent acceptance of their existence in socially constructed marginal spaces that dehumanise them. That acceptance is traced through the understanding that they are aware of the degrading and marginalising nature of a profession that economically sustains them and are reluctant to abandon. In South Africa, such demeaning positions are always defined through such derogatory terms as "magosha or izifebe" that invoke notions of "shame to complete discrediting or exclusion" (Link and Phelan 2001: 375) for prostitutes. One crucial note that the poet makes in the above quotation is that these young women do not only imagine but also experience dehumanizing and degrading instances of their profession. Thus, their experience of prostitution has physical and health implications that the novel reflects through their illnesses and possibilities of death that permanently tuck them within marginal spaces of the urban community. Those marginal spaces are undoubtedly dangerous for the marginalised because they are inclined on destroying both their lives and identities as Vickerman (2013: 5) argues that "in a country such as South Africa, where a culture of violence exists, and sex work is prohibited, sex workers are forced to work in a dangerous environment concerning their safety". Their commitment to operate within such dangerous spaces reflect a post-apartheid South Africa that deprives them of economic opportunities. It also makes them heroes and heroines of their time who, in spite of the incessant dangers, confront the violence and death on a daily basis in order to fend for families back in their homes of origin. As an exposé of the economic inequalities, these prostitutes cannot afford the affluent urban life. As such, it is worth arguing that, through such constructions of self-marginalisation, black young women are permanently trapped in marginal spaces where they die of AIDS. This makes Johannesburg a tragic space where black characters and black identity are constituted and constructed as negative space.

The negative spaces that underpin our understanding of blackness are also projected through the horrific Johannesburg nightfall that prompts brutal murders of many black people. Lack of economic opportunities push young people to a life of crime. They sprawl the dreadful Johannesburg nights committing crimes and murders. Accordingly, in the words of Harrison (2006:3), Johannesburg is an urban space that is perceived by its "residents and visitors alike to have high rates of violence and crime". Putter (2012: 16) describes it "as disaster-stricken, a space where criminals can strike at any second and where residents need to be ready to defend themselves at any moment". This image of Johannesburg is traceable in such novels as Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* (2006) and Holland and Roberts's (2010) collection of short stories in *From Jo'burg to Jozi* that portray the dwellers' sense of fear of becoming victims of crime through the use of security devices around their residential areas. Narrating horrific instances of that nightfall, Frank offers an imagination of unsafe Johannesburg, which does guarantee its dwellers with chances of survival. He says:

> The lights are out in Hillbrow, Out on Quartz Street. The knives are out in Hillbrow. Out in Joubert Park. Power cut. No, load-shedding. At the head of Pretorius Street there is a sound. A sound like someone falling down. Sound of footsteps fleeing the scene towards the morgue, down then across the road, like horses charging into the fray. Somewhere in Langa or Mpumalanga, in Manzini or Maputo, a mother, if she could see her bleeding son thus, would pray. The body fallen down struggles to get up. He will not die without a fight, having fought so hard to get here. City of gold […] They caught him by surprise. He has been here, walked this corner in the night a hundred, a thousand times […] Ah, this city knows neither hunter nor the hunted (Hlongwane 6-7).

The Johannesburg that the author imagines in the above quotation is a dungeon that partly defines itself through literal and metaphoric darkness. Projected through Frank's expression, "the lights are out" the pun statement captures a two-fold connotations of darkness. The first entails literal darkness that camouflages the performance of that urban space's tragic moments and the second, figuratively initiates dreadful moments of that night. That darkness does not only construct a view of a depraved urban space that is deprived of basic services such as lighting but also reflects the constant exploitation of urban dwellers who live in the traumatising margins of the urban space. What captures attention in relation to the view of the city as a tragic space is the dreadful expression, "the knives are out in Hillbrow", which constructs margins within Johannesburg by distinguishing Hillbrow as the most dangerous and dreaded space in that urban space. It poses as a space of uncontrollable bloodthirsty murderers and inhuman dwellers and as such, it is on one hand, operating on the margins of the city and on the other, it marginalises urban dwellers through crime. The victim of crime

noted above is testament of Hillbrow as a characteristic marginal space. The dreadful experiences of the victims of nightfall in Johannesburg entwined with Frank's imagining of the victim's parents in their unknown locations depict Hillbrow as a cosmopolitan space that however rejects foreigners. The death of the victims in that urban space figuratively connects Johannesburg and its surrounding spaces that can be traced through Frank's imagined distress of the victims' parents. That distress emphasises the spiritual connectivity of parents with the victims in two ways. Firstly, through the economic support that the victims give back home secondly, because of parents/children relations. The connectivity gets complex when it links Johannesburg to other cities of South Africa and beyond. The link is economic and related to crime. Although these communities are defined by varying cultural backgrounds, Johannesburg poses as the first destination or a port of entry into South Africa that seeks to unify locals and non-locals. This view is shared by the narrator in the documentary film *Hillbrow Between Heaven and Hell* who avers that whenever there is strife anywhere in Africa, the tremor is felt in Hillbrow. As such, the urban dwellers' connections with and allegiance to home while living in Hillbrow, does not only trace Johannesburg's connections with other spaces but also unifies local and non-local black communities.

4.2.1 Reading Self-marginality through Male Chauvinism

The murder of ill-fated Matilda by her ex-boyfriend speaks to the second pandemic in South Africa – gender based violence as an expression of toxic masculinities. It also portrays the urban space as masculine, a view and attitude that betrays a certain sense of self-marginality. This toxic masculinity and male chauvinism are expressed as violence in its diverse forms of rape, ridicule, murder, verbal violence among others. Bonino and Szil (2006: 13) consider these in their definition of male chauvinism. They further argue that if women do not deal with these aspects in time "their compound and repeated use creates a more or less poisonous atmosphere that undermines women's life" (Bonino and Szil 2006: 14). In this novel, aspects that define male chauvinistic attitude, construct social binaries that categorise female characters as inferior subjects in the urban space. To start with, apart from the understanding that *Jozi* is narrated through male lenses of representation, the novel projects a negated sense of femininity that patronises female characters and ultimately seeks to find their position on the margins of the urban space. Similar delineations are rooted in colonial narratives where "women were judged primarily responsible for the perceived depravity of African society. Missionary and colonial officials blamed African women for adultery, venereal disease, and unhygienic conditions" (Schmidt 1999: 101). What is interesting to note is that *Jozi* is

counted among black authored novels that perpetuate this stereotyping of women. For instance, the Zulu man in Moele's *Room 207* (2006) dies after contracting HIV from a woman. Dingz in *Dog Eat Dog* is infected with a venereal disease after his sexual encounters with Nkanyi. The representation of female characters in the novel *Jozi*, as repressed and silenced subjects is deliberately designed for their objectification and to depict urban spaces that push them to the margins of society. More seen than heard, and more acted upon than acting, women are good for sex and its attendant forms of violence. Senzo's sexual exploits with the Danish female journalist ignore his HIV status, placing the life of the female journalist at the risk of contracting the virus. Equally so, Matilda is subjected to house chores and has to take care of her son out of her ex-boyfriend's support. Although the novel depict Matilda as a hardworking single mother, her struggles with her son, paralleled with her ex-boyfriend's exploitation highlights traces of constructed spaces of marginality that undermine the dignity of female characters in the urban space and posits Johannesburg as a tragic space especially for women.

In typical fashion of an absentee father, Matilda's ex-boyfriend's misguided sense of male chauvinism undermines and defines Matilda as an inferior subject of the urban space. He "showed up on Matilda's kitchen doorsteps, drunk and demanded to see his son" (Hlongwane 4). He is the father whose fathering skills are limited to insemination. What captures attention is that even though she tries to establish herself as a strong woman with resistance sensibility, she consciously or unconsciously conforms to patronising social/partriarchal-constructed margins that relegate her to the periphery. Her expressive voice and protestations when she requests Frank to take her son to the park show a woman with the potential to take a stand. She says, "do I look like I'm able to do those kinds of things with him? […] There'll be mnqushu ready when you come back" (Hlongwane 4). The mere mention of food "mnqushu" calms the storm. She uses her effeminate strength, food, to win the argument and control the situation. Her inclination to contest male dominance and exploitation suffers still birth when she entrenches herself within condescending patriarchal-constructed female roles that include house chores and misogynistic views that women are generally weaker in strength in relation to their male counterparts. Commenting on the binaries that are defined by male/female strength Yusuf and Yusufu (2014: 155) argue, "the greater physical strength of men and the fact that women bear children leads together roles out of sheer practically […] while childbearing and Nursing tied women to the home, her physique made her limited to less strenuous tasks". These "natural" forms of marginalisation defined by biology are shown

through Matilda's struggles on the streets of Johannesburg. The marginal spaces in the streets of Johannesburg lack sanity and are characterised by abject poverty. They turn Johannesburg into a jungle where survival of the fittest is the norm. *Hillbrow Between Heaven and Hell* claims through the metaphor of a boxing ring that life in Johannesburg is a dog-eat-dog culture. Survival depends on enduring multiple forms of discrimination. Such marginal spaces are aptly captured by Madondo's (2010: 159) description of Johannesburg as rotten and dirty with "spilling sewage, drug-infested needles, piles of vegetables and fruit composting on street corners". These are the marginal spaces that, Matilda negotiates, trading second-hand products "regardless of descriptions of fear, crime, and [poverty], dirty streets, [creates] a sense of acceptance" (Putter 2009: 17) and belonging while undermining her resistance. In conversation with her female counterparts in Frank's presence, Matilda expressly shows her revulsion and contempt for black African men whom she describes as cowardly good-for-nothing creatures who define and assert their manhood through sex. She invokes the history of colonisation to ridicule the male phallic organ, which is misused by men as a symbol of manhood when she says:

> [t]hey are just like their forefathers who were defeated by the white men. They were too cowardly or stupid to prevent the theft of our land, so now they try to affirm themselves daily by destroying the dignity of black women. It is the only way – desperate and foolish things that they are – that they can feel like men in the land that was taken under their noses. Why do you women waste your time with them? These are not men, my sisters. These are mere boys that you are wasting your time on. The only grown thing about them is that marauding thing dangling between their legs. Sies! Useless (Hlongwane 5).

Matilda's ridicule of men in the above quotation constructs experiences of a character whose existence is located within excruciating patriarchal-formulated marginal space. Her hatred for men may be attributed to her rejected pregnancy and struggles with her son whose father hardly offers economic support. It may be a case of hell having no fury like a woman scorned. The presence of Frank adds to the theatricality of the conversation because it constructs a feminine interrogation and confrontation of a hostile patriarchal power that is depicted through Frank's silence. With his presence and what he refers to as Matilda's "bristling form" (Hlongwane 6) in that conversation, the quotation reimages Matilda as an independent, new breed of African women who is imbued with the boldness to confront patriarchy. Matilda embraces this newness until her death. Her death, through murder pushes her to the margins of the urban space. However, Matilda's formulation of resistance sensibility against both the economic challenges by trading on the streets and the traditional

patriarchy shows strong desire to move from the margins to the centre in a quest for enjoyment of the urban space. Thus, Matilda does not only exist on the fringes of physical marginal spaces of the urban space that is defined by her township degraded house that accommodates other poor women and children and her trading of second hand clothes on the streets of Johannesburg but through an urban community that insists on perceiving her as an inferior subject.

By resisting male dominance, Matilda constructs a conflict that defines black identity as both self-marginalising and a tragic space. Her death as narrated by Frank reflects this:

> One day, a few months into my acquaintance with Thapelo and his mother, daddy-long-legs showed on Matilda's kitchen doorsteps, […] Some sort of scuffle ensued, and daddy-long-legs stabbed Matilda in the neck. Fatally. The boy, who was at crèche when this happened, still lives at the house on Popo Street, I suppose. I went to see him a few times after his mother was killed. The only thing that he ever said about his father, once, was: 'I'm going to kill him when I grow up' (Hlongwane 4).

Matilda's violent death points to maintained permanent margins that define women as subjects and objects to patriarchal dominance in South African black communities in general. That Matilda is murdered when she attempts to resist the oppressive male dominance shows toxic masculinities, and a rigid and callous environment with permanent margins that suffocate women. However, a sense of resistance can be traced through her "scuffle", which suggests South African women's on-going struggle against excruciating male dominance in an attempt to re-define themselves. Thus, though female characters operate within male dominated spaces that oppress them, they constantly seek to "imagine and live in the oppressed space in a different way from the intentions of those who defined it" (Manase 2007: 14). They try to carve a path antithetical to the one designed by their erstwhile oppressors. This is premised on Matilda refusal to be "tied by ideas of 'good womanhood' which entail forbearance of men's violence […] particularly in the name of keeping a home and family together" (Mathews 2014: 3). As a symbol of resistance, Matilda is a threat to the patriarchal urban space. However, the paradox of Matilda's resistance sensibility is that it does more harm than good to those it seeks to liberate, especially when it is met with the counter force of toxic masculinities. It is used to justify masculine toxicity. The "casting of the Black woman as a threat to […] Black […] patriarchy still benefits contemporary South African Black masculinity construction, and legitimate violence, femicide and perpetual infantilisation of women in the society and the home" (Dlamini 2018: 11395). In other words, it motivates and perpetuates marginalisation through violence and maintains dominant

masculinity in the urban community. Thus, though reluctant to shift from some socially constructed notions that degrade feminine subjects in urban spaces, Matilda's determination to resist her ex-boyfriend, creates an understanding of a black community whose constructed permanent marginalisation is traceable through her murder.

4.3 Black Identity and Performances of Racial Attitude

The motif of race and vestiges of colonial race symbolisms are used to inscribe and identify the spaces inhabited by characters. 'Black' deaths and black as death bound subjects define the condition of being a black urban dweller in a historical context characterised by unyielding racial stereotypes, attitudes and relations bearing the footprint of Apartheid. The novel constructs these tenacious racial identities and their reflection on the state of being black through the racially motivated shooting of black people by a white young man. The shooting has the racial connotations reminiscent of historical shootings during Apartheid such as the 16th of June 1976 killings. The killings were performed on the backdrop of denigrating perceptions about black people that frame blackness as a negative space and unworth of life. Fanon (1963: 41) echoes the negations that motivated such brutality when he says, "the native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is [...] in this sense ... the absolute evil". As such, acts of genocide against black people are justified by racial stereotypes of black identity as inferior. Hence, Ramphele (2008: 74) argues, "racist culture asserts its dominance by humiliating its victims and denying their humanity". Foster (2007: 224) who argues, "the twinning of Blackness and inferiority was the accomplishment of Western Modernity with stories that rationalized the slave trade on the basis of skin colour alone" exhibits the same reading of historical negation of blackness. Therefore, I consider the shooting of black people as motivated by such constructed notions of blacks as people of inferior race and as strategy of maintaining the superiority of whiteness. That understanding also finds context in Goodman's (2012: 109) argument that, "[t]he spectre that haunts so many attempts to vanquish racist practices is the insistence on appearance alone as the criterion for judging human value, with blackness automatically at the lower end of the scale". Reflecting on racially motivated black genocide, the narrator says:

> [s]omewhere in the North West Province, in a little place called Skierlik on 14th January 2008, a white youth drove to a nearby shantytown and started shooting black folks like he was at target practice. He shot and killed thirty-five-year-old Anna Moiphiti, as well as the baby on her back – three-month-old Elizabeth. He also shot ten-year-old Tshepo Enoch Motshelanoka, and Sivuyile Banani, thirty-five

> years old. In addition to these lives, the smiling gunman injured another eight people as they fled from the killing. He also shot at, and missed, three other people (Hlongwane 8-9).

The quotation traces one of the scenes that motivates an urge to define blackness as continuously defined by negative conceptions as reflected by Goodman's argument above. That understanding is premised on the realisation that the targeting of blackness goes beyond verbal censure and ridicule. They are targets for what the narrator parallels with shooting practice. The novel traces negated blackness in ways that retain negative colonial/apartheid perceptions of dehumanization of black subjects as "the people dismissed by the nineteenth century" (Mudimbe-Boyi 2002: 17). As such, the racial attitudes depicted in urban spaces perpetuate the imaging of black identity as permanently locked and yoked in marginal degrading spaces decades after the end of apartheid. The thought of blackness as permanently positioned on marginal spaces through racial conflicts finds context in Goodman's (2012: 110) argument that racism always "speaks of its increasing necessity to preserve those oppressive boundaries which become more fiercely defended in response to the blurring of these lines by more progressive structures". Ironically, the persistent racism that marginalises blackness is facilitated by the black-led government's failures to deal with it since 1994. Thus, according to Goodman (2012), though "old boundaries have been breached […] more creative boundaries have not yet been fully formed, to nourish and contain the forms of cultural fusion which have been emerging". In other words, with the existence of racism in a country that is ironically defined as a rainbow nation, one sees black people's continued struggle within denigrating apartheid formulated margins that constantly re-define and maintain negations of black identity. With the victimisation of both young and old blacks in the act of genocide, one sees an urban space that does not only eclipse present and future identities of depicted urban black communities but also locates black communities on the degrading margins of whiteness.

4.4 Contemporary Shifting Identities and Self-Marginality

I analyse shifting identities and self-marginality through young black characters' attempts to identify themselves with whiteness while abandoning their black identity. In other words, while they aspire for whiteness, these characters, consciously or unconsciously, push blackness to the whites-formulated margins. Understanding the self-hate demands understanding the strategy of racial profiling that birthed the context for whiteness to be constructed as superior while formulating its 'other' that is inferior to it. Blackness became

that ‘other’ that mirrored how white people constructed their identity. Efforts by young black characters to adopt whiteness that, in some way rejects them, facilitates hybridisation of blackness that, though echoing Hall’s (1990: 392) sense of identity as “never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”, still locates black identity on the margins of whiteness. Such attempts to reject black identity are formulated through defined influences of globalisation on young characters who relentlessly seek to fit into an ever-changing globalised contemporary world that seem to emphasise the narrative of white civilisation.

Writers like Yankuzo, have denounced narratives of globalisation and civilisation as Westernised instruments that perpetually maintain blackness on the margins of whiteness. Yankuzo (2013: 45) argues:

> many Africans have it somewhere at the back of their minds that; the more their buildings, music, dressing and even food appear western, the more civilized they think they are. To be civilized then will mean to be able to think, eat, walk and speak like Europeans and Americans which is simply cultural imperialism and globalization.

Besides created self-hate and self-denigration, the western ideology of civilization reinforces the arguments that globalisation and notions of civilisation are guarantors of continued imperialism set to downplay black identity by entraping it in its shell of assumed inferiority. Other forms of conquest like education, religion, the media and market economy are the instruments used to glorify whiteness by inferiorizing blackness as savage and ugly. Therefore, attempts by young black people to shift their connections from black identity are reflective of their acceptance of blackness as unprogressive space that still lives on the margins that are constantly re-imagined and maintained by neo-imperialism.

My engagement with blackness within the biased discourse of globalisation should be understood through William’s (2009) argument that post-colonial identity is an “endangered concept”. He argues: “the existence and demands of a globalizing world order makes identity a precarious and an endangered concept. In the world today, it is less fashionable to talk of identity but rather identities, since an individual is not and cannot be known only by reference to one point of entry. Multiplicity defines each person in the world today” (426). In other words, with the narrative of globalisation, black identity is fluid and shifting from local cultures and traditions, merging with Western cultures whose overbearing and overpowering effects overshadow it. Consequently, black characters attempt to shift their connections with

black identity by westernizing the pronunciation of their indigenous names as the narrator says:

> I am very annoyed. Some person has just called into a radio station and identified as 'Jah-Boo'! The caller's name is, of course, 'Jabu'. Tumi, who had called minutes earlier, announced herself as 'Too-me'! How deep does the self-hate go that makes you mispronounce your own name in order to conform to some white person's distortion of it? […] The other day I walked in on a heated discussion, in which the participants were around eight or nine years of age. The issue in dispute was which of the two schools attended by this group of five children was the better one. Suddenly, one pretty little voice piped […] 'Our school is better coz we've only got one black teacher' (Hlongwane 20-1).

Frank's frustration on both instances in the above quotation, constructs a sense of resistance that is aimed at denouncing black characters' self-marginalisation. As a black subject, Frank seems determined to revive his black identity by disputing mispronounced indigenous names. Most young black characters consciously or unconsciously undergo self-marginalisation by "inhabit[ing] multiple social worlds at the same time" (Calhoun, 1995: 46). This results in double-consciousness and confusion.

Similar to young characters in Mantlwa's *Coconut*, the young characters in *Jozi* reflect a revulsion and hatred for blackness by westernising the mispronunciation of their indigenous names. They do not only show their hatred for blackness, but they strive to dissociate themselves from it with the hope of fitting into a globalised world whose cultural propaganda blurs the cultural and traditional boundaries. This blurring of boundaries is, echoed by Leildé (2008: 1) who argues that: "people throughout the world are becoming increasingly similar as they partake in shared cultural forms, norms and values which characterise our global village". The tragic consequence of the ideology and propaganda of cultural imperialism is that it overshadows the existence of black identity by relegating it to the cultural margins of the global village. Cultures and traditions held by 'Other' races and tribes are swallowed by a western culture that the young characters in *Jozi* are keen to adopt. Their efforts to fit into a globalised world by adopting whiteness, construct a sense of self-marginalisation that can be read through Kaul's (2012: 341) argument that globalisation "permeates cultural boundaries and in the process results in the spread of Western ideologies and values across the world". Thus, these characters reflect young South Africans who constantly shift blackness into marginal positions by consciously and/or unconsciously undermining their black identity. A combination of the traditional Frank and modernised young characters who attempt to adopt

both black and white identities in urban spaces finds relevance in Manase's (2007: 19) argument that "Johannesburg's transition into a democratised space has resulted in the formation of hybrid and ambivalent spaces that are marked by the existence of totally different social […] worlds". Those social worlds are characterised by dominating Western cultures that from the colonial era have facilitated the marginalisation of black identities. The notable mark of difference is that, during colonialism, white colonialists facilitated the marginalisation of black identities while in contemporary South Africa, black people have re-imagined the margins and consciously and/or unconsciously push their identities into those spaces of marginality by mimicking whiteness. What is worth noting is that the understanding of self-marginalisation is also projected through black school kids who strongly perceive blackness as a sign of inferior category. Their perceptions of black teachers as incompetent and white teachers as proficient re-imagine and maintain colonially constructed negations of blackness. The negation and rejection of black identity by young black characters, blackness poses as a self-marginalising and tragic space that those who are defined through it continuously denigrate themselves and wish to dissociate themselves from their black identity.

Added to attempts by young characters to westernise their names is the urban space that embraces western cultures. The urban space that Hlongwane recreates in his novel is inclined on silencing local traditions while embracing western cultures. Put in context, Pwiti and Ndoro (1999: 143) argue, "some of the current problems facing these countries are Africa's own creation, resulting from bad government, bad economic management, and outright corruption". At the level of material culture, the disregard for local cultures by Africans in urban spaces facilitates the loss of African identities in post-independence eras. The disregard for black identities is shown through the narrator's comments on the celebration of heritage day on SABC2. He says:

> I notice distractedly that the presenter is in an exquisite burgundy and khaki African shirt … then I'm reminded by the wearer himself that the occasion is Heritage Day. Well, thanks and all hail to the powers-that-be for putting aside one special day when we can recall our heritage and be set loose from the bondage of suits and ties! […] I reflect, with pessimism […] that it will be another year, another Heritage Day, before I again see this same African man reading me the morning news in anything resembling indigenous African attire. Is it any wonder that others despise us, when we despise ourselves? Is it possible to look upon these realities of 'new South Africa' with anything less than confusion and outrage (Hlongwane 22).

The narrator's outrage at the level of disregard of indigenous cultures and traditions demonstrated by a public broadcaster, SABC2 shows the failure of African media to promote local African cultures and traditions. What is worth noting at this point is that culture and traditions of any community form a crucial basis through which identities of those communities are defined and understood. For Idang (2015: 97) "the culture of people is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity". Etuk (2002: 13) states that "an entire way of life would embody, among other things, what the people think of themselves and the universe in which they live − their world view − in other words, how they organise their lives in order to ensure their survival". Etuk's articulation above calls for a deliberate and sustained recognition of black cultures and traditions. The destruction or marginalisation of such cultures culminates in confused identities and the failure of communities to identify the self. Such cultural marginalisation forms part of an African history that was facilitated by colonial states and, since then, those cultures have not been recovered.

Pwiti and Ndoro (1999: 143) reflect this when they argue that, "[i]t has of course been frequently noted that African cultural values suffered and continue to suffer as the colonizing powers forced Africans to abandon their religious beliefs, governmental systems, and a host of other traditional ways of doing things". Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 10) condemns this form of marginalisation and suggests that, "[w]hat Africans must be vigilant against is the trap of ending up normalising and universalising coloniality as a natural state of the world. It must be unmasked, resisted and destroyed" yet, the narrator's censure of SABC 2 and its presenter shows that the media has drifted from its role of promoting local indigenous cultures. The failure of African cultures to recover from colonially constructed marginality owes much to the understanding that local cultures continue on the path of inferiority in pursuit of Eurocentric cultures as shown through the dressing of the local television presenters. What is crucial to note in the above quotation is the constant attempt by the urban space to re-define itself by undermining local and embracing Eurocentric cultures. Thus, the arrival of migrants from traditional spaces such as rural South Africa to this urban space, for instance, "means that they [find] themselves in new areas, resulting in a break in cultural [practises such as] rainmaking ceremonies, honouring the ancestors, and other traditional cultural practices" (Pwiti and Ndoro 1999: 147). With this understanding, the study is not giving the impression that culture must only be perceived through rituals of honouring ancestors and other related ceremonies. Instead, I draw on Ugbam et. al's (2014: 64) view of culture as the "the

programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another [...] the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human groups response to its environment". What remains interesting in the SABC 2 cultural moment are the thought provoking rhetorical questions that highlight a deep understanding of self-marginalisation. In one of the questions, the narrator perceives the recognition of local cultures as crucial in contemporary urban South Africa as he notes that the dignity of any identity and community is solely dependent on that community's regard for its cultures. Thus, without that regard for cultures, especially in black urban communities, blackness will remain stuck in marginal spaces of Eurocentric cultures.

4.5 Post-Apartheid Black Community Failures and Self-Marginality

Equally important in understanding self-marginalisation and its attendant construct of blackness as negative space is the author's portrayal of a black-led government's failures to serve post-apartheid black communities. Some scholars attribute the failure to the black leaders' lack of vision to govern their nations – an idea widely noted in colonial and post/colonial/apartheid discourses. According to Okune and Timothy (2017: 48), African leadership is:

> not only incompetent and corrupt; [but lacks] vision and patriotism. Clearly, most of these leaders do not have the interest of their countries at heart. Their pre-occupation is in lining up their pockets with loots. Thus, the masses of Africa are now worse for it being governed by their own people than they were under colonial masters.

Okune and Timothy concur with Fanon in their disputation of claims of freedom in post-independent African countries. The purported freedom faces betrayal by African leaders whose cargo cult sees them amassing wealth for themselves at the expense of ordinary citizens who are poorer and worse than they were under colonial rule. The ordinary poor citizens remain stuck under continued oppression and marginalisation. The novel *Jozi* captures moments of dissatisfaction with poor governance through black demonstrators who demand free houses that were promised during the campaigns of the first democratic elections in 1994. The narrator says:

> Frank was watching the news on SABC, and on the screen some shantytown community was marching to demand that the houses they had long ago been promised should become a material reality. The reporter on location […] had managed to pull one of the incensed marchers aside for a quick tête-á-tête. She asked the gap-toothed, dreadlocked man if he felt they really understood the

> sheer number of houses the government was having to build for communities like theirs all around the country […] 'We have been waiting for thirteen years …' the man had just begun to say, when the bulleting cut back to the studio and began to air instead the Housing Minister's response to what she 'regretted was really becoming a worryingly frequent phenomenon' (Hlongwane 52).

Here, the writer goes back thirteen years into history in order to create a vivid sense of self-marginalisation and betrayal by a government that has deprived ordinary citizens of basic services. Their continued existence in slums re-traces persisting lines of segregation formulated during apartheid; an era that did not only force black people to the peripheries of urban spaces but also deprived them of decent housing. Alliance's (2006) definition of slums as "neglected parts of cities where housing and living conditions are appallingly poor" resonates with the depicted shantytown and highlights the segregatory binaries that persist even in post-apartheid South Africa.

For thirteen years, the black government has maintained apartheid structures and systems and perpetuated the plight of black people without finding solutions to it. The spatial contrast between the shantytown and the easy walking inner city of Johannesburg gives us diametrically opposing spaces – one that supports an improved life and the other defined by the presence of slums and a people entangled in abject poverty. The appearance of the representative of the demonstrators – gap-toothed and dreadlocked man – reflects conscious self-marginality formulated by post-apartheid government, and underpins the conscious placement of poor black people in those spaces. That marginalisation is also traced through the SABC that silences the representative of the demonstrators by switching back to the studio. Switching back to the studio is an act of silencing, erasure and palimpsest, which ensures that black people remain an invisible footnote in the scheme of things. The irony is that a black government is now the architect of silencing. The fact that the SABC shields the demonstrators' attempts to raise their concerns against their post-aparthied failing government, demonstrates the government's determination to permanently keep the poor blacks on the margins of the urban space. Through the SABC's suppression of the demonstrators' concerns, one almost thinks of the black-led government retaining urban binaries that were constructed by the apartheid government to racially marginalise non-whites. For instance, the glaring binaries manifest when the minister refuses to acknowledge the concerns of black communities and instead, refers to the people's demonstrations as "a worryingly frequent phenomenon". Such comments, coming from a government representative, smacks of arrogance that borders on deliberate refusal to acknowledge the

existence of a problem. It also shows power relations that define the poor as inferior subjects whose existence is defined and controlled by their community leaders who find it politically convenient to ignore the needs of the poor. South Africa reflects these marginal spaces through the existence of shacks that have defined blackness from the time of apartheid. Existing on the margins that are defined by abject poverty, poor blacks are destined to die with their unfulfilled dreams. As such, it is worth arguing that blackness is not only posed as a tragic space in the reading of *Jozi* but as a permanent negative space that continuously struggles to shift from colonially/apartheid-formulated margins.

The squalid spaces occupied by black dwellers in dilapidated inner-Johannesburg are also worth engaging with in order to enhance our understanding of the sense of self-marginality that runs through the novel. Frisby (2001: 6) argues that urban identities and cities are "embedded in landscape, as landscape, streets-scape or within streets themselves". As such, reading the dilapidation of inner-Johannesburg forces one to think of blackness as a negative space. The dilapidated part of inner-Johannesburg also traces the post-1994 urban binaries that define the "other" of that urban space within black communities. Apartheid negations defined blacks by placing them on the peripheries of apartheid cities. Similarly, the black urban dwellers who occupy the dilapidated part of inner-Johannesburg are constantly negated and defined through their strong sense of despair. For instance, Frank's friend Duma whose years of existence in dilapidated Hillbrow have formed a strong sense of his belonging to that space he hardly imagines himself existing beyond its parameters is defined through despair and as existing on the margins of Johannesburg. He forms part of the 'other' of the urban black community because of his hostile defeatism and fatalism towards any shift from such degraded spaces of the city. While he might sound strong and a creature of habit, the tone of his voice shows a character who has resigned to fate. His hopelessness betrays a sense of acceptance of his life of shattered dreams. His life is paradoxically an uphill climb to the bottom. Duma has been down for so long that down does not bother him anymore. Narrating Duma's experience in Hillbrow, Frank says:

> Duma has been living in Hillbrow's Highpoint forever. In 1990 when having an apartment in Highpoint meant you had truly arrived as a darkie in the city, Duma was here, though we were not really friends back then. Now when living in Highpoint means you've got nowhere else to go because you can't afford anything better, Duma is still here. I point this out to him. He smiles wryly and says: 'In a strange kind of way I feel like I belong here now. Besides, we're headed in the same direction, Highpoint and me. Downhill.' (Hlongwane 16).

The contrasting depiction of the distinction between the 1990 and post-2000 Hillbrow interrogates both the post-apartheid urban black communities that immediately occupied urban spaces after the end of apartheid and their government for the failures to maintain those spaces after 1994. In that sense, the reading of post-2000 Hillbrow significantly traces notions of self-marginalisation that are partly understood through irresponsible black urban dwellers who have degraded it, and the government's failure to maintain that part of Johannesburg. This is premised on the context that in 1990, occupying such former whites-only designated urban spaces as Hillbrow meant that one "had truly arrived as a darkie in the city" and "now when living in Highpoint means you've got nowhere else to go because you can't afford anything better". The degraded state of Hillbrow exposes irresponsible black urban communities. This speaks to McNulty's argument that: "[t]he symbolic and representational image of the city is dependent on who dominates the image of the city and this relates to real geographic strategies as different groups battle for access to the centre of the city and the symbolic representations in that centre" (2005: 26). In other words, the image of dilapidated inner-Johannesburg is constructed as a consequence of anti-progressive attitudes of black communities that have dominated that urban space since the country attained its independence. McNulty (2005: 28) also argues that because the inner South African cities have become African, "[t]he city, and in particular the inner-city, has moved in the popular consciousness from a modernist vision of man's progress to a site of degradation and crime". Despite its deterioration and that it is a dangerous space, Hillbrow has become home for such characters as Duma who, although presented with many opportunities to move from it, prefer to identify themselves with it. For Duma and other urban dwellers, to construct the sense of home in such a space and to claim that they permanently belong to Hillbrow is to accept marginal positions that they have created for themselves as part of that black community. Duma's lived experience is, to some degree, tragic in that, he is determined to die in that dangerous marginal space that he defines as home. It is through the view of such constructed self-marginalisation that the study argues that blackness is not only self-marginalising and a tragic space but also ought to be read as an accepted permanent negative space.

The sense of self-marginality is also traced through representations of young black people' uncontrolled alcoholism. What one notes is that the constructed sense of alcoholism in *Jozi* contrasts in many respects with that depicted in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and *Dog Eat Dog* in that, it is almost suicidal. It leads to most characters' mental breakdown and in the worst of

cases, death. The experiences of Frank, Senzo and their friends are telling. Senzo is consistent in pursuing his low-paying self-employment (Hlongwane 7). He is also persistent and consistent in spending all his hard-earned income on alcohol. As a creature of habit, after every drinking occasion, Frank "advance[s him] fifty bucks [for] taxi fare and food" (Hlongwane 7). The characterisation of Senzo as an irresponsible urban dweller constructs a sense of self-marginalisation that forms part of black subjects and pushes them into marginal spaces of the urban space through poverty. He is entangled by a vicious circle of poverty and irresponsible behaviour that leaves him on the margins. The novel vividly traces this through Frank's narration of their manner of alcohol consumption where he says:

> [a] Danish woman once asked us, at Nikki's, why heavy drinking seemed to be quite acceptable in Jozi. Senzo cleared his throat, and the table fell silent. 'It's true, we drink like there's no tomorrow. No, let me correct that; we drink to erase tomorrow. There is a mass impulse toward suicide in this city that operates, most of the time, at low intensity. It appears in the guise of alcoholism, risky sex, sudden violence, road rage, and daring acts of crime. This kind of behaviour is just the early ghost of self-destruction' (Hlongwane 8).

Senzo's response creates an image of a haunted, cursed and haunting urban space whose spectre can be traced through a series of suicidal performances that are centred on uncontrolled alcoholism as noted in Sipho's expression: "we drink to erase tomorrow". Their alcoholism defines what I refer to as suicidal performances that they project through "risky sex, sudden violence, road rage and daring acts of crime" as widely represented throughout the novel. Such performances are not only oriented towards overshadowing their present and future but they also dismantle their sense of identity. This is evident when the poet becomes psychologically disoriented and disappears from the urban space. Their involvement in "risky sex", that one traces through Senzo and Frank whose HIV status is not revealed to their sexual partners does not only facilitate the spread of HIV but also defines a tragic space similar to the Johannesburg recreated in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. For instance, after expressing his tiredness at sexual involvement with locals, Senzo prays on a Danish journalist. However, he is determined not to reveal his HIV status during their sexual relations. Thus, apart from the understanding that Hlongwane's Johannesburg poses as an HIV-infested urban space, it is also worth mentioning that it is a hostile space for such tourists as the Danish female journalist who are infected with HIV and financially exploited by local young black men.

4.6 Post-Hope and (Re)-imagining Urban Blackness

The narrative thrust adopted by Hlongwane in this novel constructs a black community that operates within a 'post-hope' phase. This section refers to post-hope as the characters' lived experiences after their failed dreams in a decaying and violent urban space (Putter 2012: 3). While their efforts to strive for survival vary in that state, what is discernible is that, the period is widely defined by tragic experiences. How these characters attempt to deal with excruciating experiences as they strive to survive in an urban space that failed and crashed their dreams is the focus of this section. The endeavour is to enhance our understanding of post-2000 black identity because the novel's construction of such experiences forms varying identities that problematize the understanding of black identity. The problematization of black identity hinges on Simone's (2004: 9) argument that "the nature of the cities is that they are endlessly remade". With that understanding, I consider contemporary South African urban identities as constantly being re-made and re-imagined along with evolving cities. As such, engaging with the sense of post-hope through ever-shifting urban spaces is crucial to understanding black identity. The idea of post-hope in the novel is defined by young black characters' failure to adapt to notions of globalisation. In the moment of 'post-hope', most characters' attempts to eke a living out of the urban space result in the projections of the city as a negative space whose changeability is a source of constant shifting of the meaning of black identities.

4.6.1 Post-Hope and the Motif of Mob-justice

The idea of mob-justice has been adopted by South African black communities to deal with crime through ruthless public punishment of criminals. Mob-justice is traceable back to apartheid where those suspected of being traitors faced similar punishment. Nel (2016: 1) states that "at the height of the struggle against apartheid, many people were killed in what was termed necklacing – putting a tyre around a person's neck and setting it alight". Monyela (2017: 7) states that mob-justice "is undeniably the most ferocious way in which a human being can be killed. [It] is usually done by stoning to death or severely assaulting the victim until they are unconscious". What is crucial to note is that mob-justice goes beyond the mere punishment of criminals because it has previously formed the basis for xenophobic attacks that affected numerous foreign nationals. What is interesting in Monyela's (2017: 7) engagement with mob-justice is the argument that "[s]uch ruthlessness is contrary to Constitutional [dictates of] the right to human life" and that, it projects a chaotic urban space.

In the novel *Jozi*, mob-justice constructs a certain sense of despair in two distinct ways. Firstly, through the victims who are entangled in poverty after their failed dreams and constant struggles for survival through their involvement in crime. Secondly, through the community ravished and terrorised by criminals while their government fails to provide security. The public murder of the thief in Hillbrow and its harrowing recounting by Frank resembles some kind of lynching through mob-justice:

> I took part in a murder in Hillbrow the other day […] So there I am waiting for a taxi back to Yeoville at the busy mouth of Abe Road, when urgent cries of 'Thief! Thief!' suddenly slice through the rush-hour din. A guy in white shorts and with bare chest comes flying down from the tail end of Pretorius Street. He's tearing in my direction, a brown leather handbag clutched under one arm. I stick out a leg just as he is hurtling past me, and this sends the thief spinning through the air, landing spectacularly on his back as a steel pole checks his flight […] Vicious kicks rain down on the man from all sides, justice armed with shoes, *takkies*, boots and stilettos. From all around the cry echoes to high heaven: 'We are tired, tired of you people!' […] Just as a police van, siren singing, arrives on the scene, the old man raises his knobkerrie and lands a resolute blow on the thief's head (Hlongwane 26-7).

Intriguingly, this highlights the theatricality associated with the idleness of young characters who are deprived of economic opportunities in the urban space. Unemployed Frank and other young and old people who are involved in the public execution of a thief are products of idleness that facilitates the crimes in the novel. Their sense of despair creates platforms through which haunting tragedies are staged in black urban community. A sense of "post-hope" can be noted through the terror of thieves as expressed by the mob in: "we are tired, tired of you people!". The expression is reflective of the sense of 'post-hope' in that, it brings out the despair of dwellers whose existence is defined by insecurities and uncertainties that are formed by constant and untimely robberies, stealing and murders. That insecurity is echoed by Putter's (2012: 16) argument that "Johannesburg [is] a disaster-stricken space […] where criminals can strike at any second and where residents need to be ready to defend themselves at any given moment". One therefore sees black characters who exist beyond the understanding of Johanneburg as a "city of gold" and security that is promised before their arrival.

I also read that sense of post hope through the thief as a representation of a series of failures in the urban space and whose attempts to survive through crime shortens his lived experiences. Tshabalala (2014: 519) states that "unemployment is considered to be the root cause of many problems South Africa is facing today such as crime, poverty and suicide".

Therefore, it is worth arguing that for young people, the urban space becomes a "space of deprivation and oppression in which characters desire and need to […] deal with and escape the pain and suffering that they experience" (Putter 2012: 14). The urban space poses as a trap for its dwellers who are in constant struggle to escape destruction and permanent marginalisation. However, we also note that mob-justice constructs a negative image of the urban space in that it embraces lawlessness and defines desensitized black urban dwellers who resort to murder as the only way of dealing with their social frustrations. I refer to mob-justice as a narrative of lawlessness because it disregards the rights of the accused individuals who are murdered before the arrival of the police. Such lawlessness in perceived by Tshabalala (2014: 527) as an expression of lack of adequate security from the police who are "unable to combat crime". Thus, one realises that mob-justice constructs an insecure and despairing urban space that is arguably defined by lack of economic opportunities hence, the understanding of the city as a tragic and negative space.

The sense of "post-hope" in the novel also surfaces through the poet's unrecognised creativity that perishes with his disappearance. From the beginning of the novel, the writer follows the splendid creativeness of this character but the lack of economic provisions and social support for his innovativeness depresses him. Sadly, he seeks to escape that depression through extreme alcoholism, a choice that tolls a death knell to his dream of becoming a writer. The poet represents one of the disillusioned young black characters whose expectations of Johannesburg rarely become a reality. As such, he finds himself struggling under the overwhelming sense of failed dreams. Frank narrates:

> I got a call from Senzo, who was worried about my friend the poet. According to Senzo, my friend has finally lost it. 'He's totally incoherent. He's always been drunk but now he's dirty as well. That's unusual. I think he may need serious help. Frank, I think the guy is completely crazy,' […] I decided to go looking for him. The poet's landlady tells me she locked his room because of unpaid rent. I spend that afternoon combing the bars, the streets, the parks of Hillbrow. No luck. My friend the poet has disappeared into thin air (Hlongwane 26).

Dirt as a symbol of poverty reflects lived experiences of the poet. It also establishes the extent to which black urban dwellers' identities have been reduced to familiar colonial negations that sought to define and denigrate black people. The poet and other characters' economic failure, which drive them into alcoholism and filthiness arguably, highlight the post-apartheid government's inability to govern and serve its people. The novel attests to this where it says that, "the truly tragic thing, of course, is that the government of liberation has,

indeed, been a monumental disappointment thus far. Just thinking about it makes Frank's blood begin to boil. He sympathises with the poet MacManaka, who talks about sometimes wanting to grab this freedom by the throat and strangle it" (Hlongwane 51). The metaphor of boiling blood unveils deep-seated anger and bitterness at the betrayal of the people by a black government. As such, the devastating, tragic urban space re-images and re-imagines the black identities through the sense of poverty that positions black identity as negative space. The novel affirms that sense of poverty through the poet who finds himself in the streets because of unpaid rent. The urban space is not only constructed by lived experiences of its dwellers but it also re-constructs their identities as shown through the poet's double tragedy of homelessness and alcoholism, which fashion him as a character in despair. Read through the failed dreams of the poet and other characters in urban spaces, blackness poses as a permanent tragic and negative space that struggles to escape denigrating colonially constructed negations and marginalisation.

Although the widespread tragic incidences that unfold in the novel construct characters who struggle to survive in the aftermath of their failed dreams, the writer creates a sense of resistance and resilience that instils optimism in urban communities through such characters as Senzo. Notwithstanding the fact that he is defined through extreme alcoholism and has HIV, Senzo's response to the death of his friends raises hope in an otherwise hopeless urban space "where dreams come to die" (Hlongwane 1). One of his fascinating responses follows the death of his friend Sipho; the "former Umkhonto weSizwe cadre" (Hlongwane 18) who, after "failing to secure a place in the new, integrated South African army" (Hlongwane 18), decided to make "his living as a nightclub bouncer" (Hlongwane 18). The death of Sipho that Senzo undoubtedly relates to HIV places Senzo in a position that Frank and other young characters seem reluctant to accept as shown when Frank says:

> Senzo left during the 'after tears' session of the funeral when we usually drink to the good health of the deceased. I noticed that Senzo had hardly touched a drop […] 'I'm tired, Frank. I'm tired of this life' Senzo said […] 'I'm tired of being a well-read, street-smart Jozi *kleva*. Look at our lives, man. Look at our friends […] We are just alcoholics of varying degrees. What are we doing, burying our gifts and qualifications in the sand and dancing on the graves? Why do we give up? Why have we given up? […] Look, it took Europe eight centuries and two world wars to forge a union; who can say there is no hope for Africa? Where do we get this specially reserved prerogative for despair? I've had enough, Frank! Our lives are poison […] Aids is decimating our nation and we have chosen to be part of the problem, not the solution. What kind of men ARE we? No, man, a man must do something' (Hlongwane 18-9).

Understanding Johannesburg through the above quotation offers a contradictory sense that reflects complexities within which that space is defined. Even though the novel depicts the city as a space of despair because of unachieved dreams of young dwellers, it also traces a sense of hope that arguably reflects black people's constant attempts to shift from degrading marginal positions. In typical fashion of the metaphor of a grain of wheat and the philosophy that in death lies life, it takes the death of a friend for Senzo's disillusionment and the revival of hope, which pit him as determined to retract from the negated life. The presence of HIV, extreme alcoholism and young people's failure to establish themsleves because of wayward decisions, construct a sense of despair that Senzo decides to escape. Embracing such a decision makes Senzo optimistic that, not only his black community but the whole African continent can move from traceable colonially formulated margins. He attempts to re-establish his conscience and hope by refusing to attend Sipho's after tears; a moment that is defined by extreme drunkenness. Dissociating himself from alcoholism marks him as a representative of hope that emerges from a hopeless urban space. Senzo's strong sense of hope is depicted through his reference to the union of Europe that defines the possibilities of his black community and the whole African continent to shift from spaces of marginalism to adopting a people centred development. His reference to Europe arguably counters the colonially constructed binary notions of the "us' and "them" by constructing Africa as capable of shifting itself and colonially constructed denigrating margins. According to Voster (2017: 67) "usually [the] 'us' are clothed in a cloud of uniqueness and 'them' in a cloud of otherness. 'Us' forms the in-group and 'them' the out group. This demarcation is then followed by idolising the 'us' and demonising the 'them'". On that note, notions of the 'us' and 'them' and their degrading characterisation of black people versus European civilisation are the basis for the marginalisation of Africa. This is the unfair history of futures past and present that Senzo seeks to challenge and change by making a difference because a real man 'must do something'.

The notion of Africa as a hopeless continent is to some degree traced through the novel's constructed dialogues of xenophobia in South African urban spaces. The narrative of xenophobia projects South Africa and the whole continent as spaces of defined barbarism that is widely traced in colonial discourses that have to be engaged through what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 11) refers to as the "decoloniality project". In South Africa, that discourse of black-on-black massacre remains a dreadful moment that continuously haunts urban spaces as noted by Theuns (2017:1-2) who writes, "South Africa is suffering from many ailments

and some of the most difficult of these to address are racism, xenophobia, sexism and economic inequality". What is fascinating to note is that *Jozi* constructs dialogues that seek to undermine notions of xenophobia and as such, construct a sense of black communites that seek to shift themselves from hopelessness. This is traced through Senzo whose arguments, in his debate with friends, discourages the motive for xenophobia as he downplays his friends' arguments and constructs thoughts that address the need to unify black African communities. Through Senzo, the author turns to writivism when he says:

> I don't give a damn what reasons are given for this hostility and violence , or whether you feel that the Zimbabweans or the West Africans or our brothers from the Congo are taking your jobs or your girlfriends. I'm saying that on a social level, when you encounter your fellow African, he or she doesn't come with a sticker that says 'legal immigrant' or 'illegal immigrant'. And if they did what prevents you from treating your brother or sister with hospitality, respect and, yes, even warmth. Have we really moved so far away from the practice of *ubuntu*? It seems we have very short memories in South Africa. It was yesterday , when we were fighting against racial discrimination in this country, that we were welcomed all across Africa, always at the expense and peril of our hosts (Hlongwane 60).

The argument that is raised by "Mr Expensively-dressed" (Hlongwane 60) prior to Senzo's interjection reinforces permanent binaries between African black communities through the discourse of xenophobia. Such arguments that seek to maintain binaries within black African communities reflect Africa as chaotic and a space of barbarism. In South Africa, notions of xenophobia have not only been defined though such dialogues but through various attrocities for instance, the 2008 attacks where "bodies of two Somalis were found burnt to death in their shops, and additional Somali shops were attacked" (Beetar 2019: 125). Against the backdrop of that barbarism and chaos that is reflected through xenophobia, the novel constructs the sense of hope that is brought about by the writer's attempt to unify African black communities in urban spaces through Senzo who refers to non-locals as his brothers and sisters. His determination to embrace non-locals is an attempt to unify and construct hope for the continent that has, for a long time, been labelled as the heart of darkness by the former colonisers. Senzo's attempt to construct that unification is partly reinforced by his interrogations of contemporary constructions of *ubuntu*; a term that has been used to construct the basis for that unification and rainbowism in South Africa. When the definition of *ubuntu* is paralleled with notions of xenophobia reflected in urban spaces, its meaning becomes fraught with contraditions. In other words, it takes away the understanding that a progressive community ought to be founded on certain notions of unity between its members

because each community member's existence depends on the support of another member. Tutu (2004: 25) states that *ubuntu* means, "[a] person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human". Thus, Senzo's arguments that denounce the discourses of xenophobia are aligned to this understanding that seeks to recognise the significance of unifying black people of varying national and cultural backgrounds who find themselves in South Africa.

What notably forms the narrative of despair or "post-hope" is Senzo's realisation of the disregarded sense of *ubuntu* that the novel reflects through motivations of xenophobia. When the principle of *ubuntu* is adhered to, Senzo sees an optimistic and civilised African continent that will be founded on the realisation of the worthiness of human dignity. Eliastam (2015: 2) states that "[t]he principles of *ubuntu* resonate with universal values of human worth and dignity". Louw (2001: 15) adds, "[t]he maxim 'ubuntu ngumumntu ngabantu' articulates a basic respect and compassion for others ... As such, it is both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic. It not only describes human being as 'being-with-others', but also prescribes how we should relate to others". The writer's endeavour to draw the urban black community to the narrative of *ubuntu* is crucial in that it does not only unify black Africans but also the universal communities. As such, it is worth mentioning that though the novel constructs a sense of tragedy that is partly contextualised through xenophobia, it is inadequate to define blackness through such denigrating representations of the urban space only. Rather, blackness can also be viewed as a space that continuously attempts to re-position itself through the narratives of hope and out of colonially constructed margins.

4.7 Engaging Johannesburg's City-ness and Constructions of Black Identity

One of the crucial points raised in this section is that Johannesburg's city-ness is a contested terrain in relation to western cities. Robinson (2002: 532) argues that the "understanding of city-ness have come to rest on the (usually unstated) experiences of a relatively small group of (mostly western) cities, and cities outside are assessed in terms of this pre-given standard of (world) city-ness or urban economic dynamism". According to O'Shaughnessy (2008), such methods of representation depict Africa as the 'other' especially of the Western or European cities. Putter (2012: 13) adds that, "in comparison to European and other Western cities, African cities such as […] Johannesburg among others, always come to be criticised

and perceived in terms of destabilisation with regard to the state of their economies, war, crime, poverty, and diseases; problems that European and Western cities appear to have greater control over". As such, this section adopts a global developmentalist city view point as noted by Hamilton (2006: 3) to engage Johannesburg's city-ness and how through that understanding blackness ought to be understood. Hamilton (2006: 3) argues that Johannesburg "remains geographically isolated, and is dissimilar in many ways to global cities of the core but also stands out as one of Africa's most economic hubs and a centre for specialised services". Furthermore, Robinson's comparative study of western and African cities is fascinating in that he traces the sense of segregation of African cities through the notion of 'developmentalism' and stresses that those cities "are not yet cities" (532). Similar observations were noted by King (1990: 78) who postulates:

> [t]he question is whether the real development of London or Manchester can be understood without reference to India, Africa, and Latin America any more than can the development of Kingstone (Jamaica) or Bombay be understood without the former. Nevertheless, the real division of scholarship, as the ideological underpinnings that help to keep them alive, ensure that histories of 'First', 'Second' and 'Third'-World cities are still kept tidily apart.

When perceived through King's view, African cities, despite certain noted elements of Western cities in them, are way off the mark of "global cities". The line of thought followed by this section in understanding the urban space as "non-city" is motivated by its connections with rural spaces and dilapidated townships as part of what defines a city. To some extent, that urban space defies the characteristics that define what Castells (1996: 411), and Short and Kim 1999: 4) refer to as a city. They argue that a city is a space that is reflective of capital flows, flowing people, flowing information, flowing technology, sounds, images, and symbols. The Johannesburg that Hlongwane depicts in *Jozi* does not wholly construct that city as reflective of the characteristics of a typical global city as defined by the above writers. For instance, the flow of technology and information in Johannesburg spaces such as Hillbrow and townships can hardly be traced in depicted urban spaces. The fact that the Johannesburg that Hlongwane depicts is deprived of such services as technology places Johannesburg city at the margins of global cities hence, the understanding of blackness a negative and marginalised space.

In this section, I read Johannesburg as non-city by exploring how the novel connects Johannesburg and its surrounding deteriorated townships and other unknown spaces. When reading the novel's Johannesburg, it becomes difficult to draw the line between the urban

space, rural and other unknown spaces (Gmelch and Zenner 2002: 61). The depictions of Johannesburg include underdeveloped townships such as Soweto and others that steal away all elements of a global city. For instance, the space that is occupied by Matilda and other dwellers in Johannesburg is characterised by abject poverty and deterioration that run against the grain of what such writers as Hamilton (2006) define as a global city. Describing the house where Matilda stays, the narrator says:

> The sprawling house has a touch of Tuscany about it, a rambling underline its current dilapidation. The sickly paint, peeling off the outside walls, almost prepared one for the utter ruin to be encountered within; almost, but not quite. Over time, I calculated that Matilda shared the four-bedroom house with five other women and more children than I was able to determine (Hlongwane 4).

The disease imagery is "sickly" and the diction of ruin and ruination denote squalor, dilapidation and overcrowding very much at variance with Castells (1996: 411), and Short and Kim's (1999: 4) definition of a typical contemporary global city. Hlongwane portrays the urban space that recollects the race and class binaries similar to those reflected by the apartheid city yet, that space is located in post-apartheid Johannesburg. On the same note, the chaos reflected through Hillbrow that is located in the inner Johannesburg sets Johannesburg's city-ness in question. The chaos is shown through similar and confusing Hillbrow flats whose dwellers constantly struggle to navigate as shown through Frank and his friend who mistakenly find themslves fighting with their neighbours for a flat that they thought as theirs (Hlongwane 16–7). Robberies, drug dealing, prostitution, and murder characterise this inner part of Johannesburg. These make Johannesburg a dengerous urban space that runs contrary to a typical global city. Arguably, understanding Johannesburg through the lens of the sophistications of the global city reflects black identity in continuous entanglement with the negative spaces of quasi-city spaces that are equally entangled in township and rural statuses.

The urban/rural connections depicted in this novel are also crucial to note in interrogating the city-ness of Johannesburg. The rural/urban connections are read through Harrison's (2006) argument that Johannesburg is urbanised yet, it has a "rurally linked context". For Manase (2007: 19), connecting urban and rural spaces especially in representing Johannesburg, renders both identities and such spaces as ambiguous. Elsewhere, the novel focuses the reader's attention to a small village where the depiction of rural young and old characters who reside in Johannesburg formulates that sense of urban/rural connection. That connection

is arguably traced through a symbolic encounter of a cat and dove in Mathe's rural homestead that maintains his connection with rural space while he visits Johannesburg. That encounter remains in his imagination while he wanders the streets of Johannesburg in search of his daughter. The encounter does not only reflect a series of tragedies that unfold during his search but figuratively maintains his connections with the urban space where he traces his lost daughter. That metaphoric urban/rural connection is first shown through Mathe's arrival in Johannesburg. He is familiar with that space as he easily finds his friend's house. However, that sense of rural/urban connection is at some point blurred by the tragic death of Khoza, his friend, before their re-union as the narrator says:

> Mathe was asked to lead the family in song and prayer before bedtime. As he prepared to pray, he wondered why throughout the dinner he had kept thinking about the disappearing black cat […] He could not find the words with which to pray and asked to be excused for a moment to compose himself […] Returning, he began to pray, but his prayer was interrupted when one of the grandchildren suddenly shouted '*Ha mkhulu*'. Sy opened his eyes to identify the offender and saw his friend Mangaliso Khoza standing in the doorway. 'My old friend!' […] Mathe could not get hold of his old friend in time […] By the time the ambulance arrived, Mangaliso Khoza was dead (Hlongwane 89).

The tragic death of Khoza is among a series of tragedies that unfold during Mathe's stay in Johannesburg. He interprets these tragedies through the symbolic encounter that he witnesses in his rural home and the more he encounters these tragedies the more that rural encounter plays in his mind. With that experience, his imagination figuratively wanders the streets of Johannesburg in search of his daughter that the novel closes before she is found. I therefore, argue that rural/urban connections are here defined by rural and urban traditions that are shown through that encounter and that the interpretation of it makes the urban space an ambivalent space. Mathe's prayer at his friend's house is also fascinating to follow because it is interrupted at many points. The interruptions from his friend's children are a form of problematizing the rural/urban connections in ways that manifest the duality and ambivalence of the urban space and in turn the in-betweenness of black identity. Mathe's initial failure to pray is interestingly defined by the encounter that he continuously imagines. The superstitions that define the black community negate the urban space because they stage horrific tragedies that are overwhelming to urban and rural dwellers. Seemingly, the rural/urban connections rob Johannesburg of its global city status, which translates to making blackness an inferior identity defined as a negative space through rural/urban connections that live the urban space in a state of ambivalence, and equally so, black identity.

4.8 Conclusion

The novel *Jozi* constructs a perspective that negates black people and their dwelling spaces in Johannesburg. This chapter has relied heavily on perceiving such negations as perpetuating colonial negations in that they continuously project blackness as a negative space. That understanding of blackness is reflected through what I referred to as self-marginalisation. This emanates from the understanding that urban spaces create marginal spaces for black subjects that are perceived as the other of those communities, for instance prostitutes. Prostitutes are stigmatized and dehumanized through rape and sometimes horrific death in urban spaces. The chapter also noted self-marginalisation as constructed through black-led government's failure to provide economic opportunities for its black communities. As a result, most black urban dwellers languish in poverty that forces young people to engage in crime. Both the former and the later reflect a certain sense of self-marginalisation that positions some urban dwellers in permanent margins of the city where they die before their dreams are fulfilled. On the same vein, the terror of crime maintains a certain marginal position for those that are always victimized by criminals and as such, one realizes that the urban space poses as a tragic space where the survival of its dwellers is not always guaranteed. That self-marginality is always traced through male chauvinism that is inclined on forcing female characters to the margins of the urban space. This is first noted through the author's negative representations of female characters. Those that seem to resist male dominance such as Matilda are silenced through murder. The Danish female journalist is infected with HIV without her knowledge. The urban space constructed in *Jozi* is a space that disregards female characters. They are always represented as subject to male dominance and as such, this chapter points to male chauvinism and toxic masculinities as projecting notions of self-marginalisation that reflect Johannesburg as a tragic space.

Blackness as a negative space is also understood through characters' lived experiences after their failed dreams. I refer to the aftermath of failed dreams as the post-hope period. Their experiences after failed dreams in urban spaces are clearly tragic. They resign to extreme alcoholism that further plunges them into hopelessness. The city is a space that does not offer any economic support to intelligent and creative characters as the poet who finds himself living on the streets of Johannesburg because of unpaid rent. The poet does not only stay on the streets where his creativity is recognized but he eventually disappears from that urban space after his supposed mental derangement. Also notable is the deteriorating state of inner Johannesburg that robs it of its status as a global city. In comparison to Western or European

cities, Johannesburg's city-ness as portrayed in *Jozi* is a figment of a city. It sits on the margins of imaginary cities as a rural cum urban space. One argues therefore, that this understanding of Johannesburg traces the African cities as existing on the margins of Eurocentric urban spaces hence, the view that through some parts of Johannesburg constructed through slums, black identity permanently poses as a negative space that has rarely shifted from colonially constructed margins since the attainment of independence.

Chapter 5

Blackness and the Crisis of Toxic Masculinities

5.1 Introduction

This chapter engages black identity through toxic masculinities in Songeziwe Mahlangu's *Penumbra* (2013). Masculine identity is a social construct. As such, with diverse cultural

backgrounds that define black communities, its meaning cannot be universalized. Cultures vary from one community to another and even in a community with shared cultural traditions; inequalities among males make it difficult to universalize its meaning. Morrell (1998: 607) argues that, "[m]asculinity is a collective gender identity and not a natural attribute. It is socially constructed and fluid. There is not one universal masculinity, but much masculinity". In their engagement with the diversity of masculine identity, Hearn and Morgan (1990: 14) argue that these are "not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships". Evidently, varying cultural backgrounds and histories inform the changeability of identity and its meaning. This is the thrust taken by this chapter in its exploration of post-apartheid blackness. It engages progressive masculinities as a way of unpacking toxic masculine identity in the novel *Penumbra*.

Progressive masculinity refutes traditional masculinity that defines feminine subjects as inferior. In its seemingly romanticized nature, it entails men's realization and embrace of gender equality. In their study on critical self-reflections and the search for progressive black masculinities, McGuire et al. (2014: 254) state that men who are "non-sexist, anti-homophobia and anti-patriarchal" characterize progressive masculinity. Unlike traditional masculinity, which expresses "the privilege men collectively have over women" (Connell, 2002: 17), progressive masculinity does not seek to establish such dominance. To some extent, progressive masculinity is also characterized by economic success and stability. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that although not all men can perform progressive masculinity, it is gradually becoming a normative means that defines the "real man" status. Mfundo in *Penumbra* is economically stable. However, the control he sets around his male friends, and his perception of female subjects, exemplify what this chapter refers to as toxic masculinities. Mfundo's relations with both male and female characters establish post-2000 blackness as a space of anxieties and insecurities. His domineering personality among male peers and his exploitation of female subjects define his toxic masculine identity.

In considering toxic masculinities characterized by destructive traits that result in negative masculine identity, I draw on Kupers (2005) and Gramme (2019). Kupers defines toxic masculinity as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (714). Kupers' view suggests that, like other masculinities, toxic masculinity is another patriarchal

constituent socially constructed to subordinate women and other men. Giving context to Kupers' definition, Gramme notes that toxic masculinities "can be described using the more negative traits in masculinity [such as] violent verbal, physical, or sexual acts performed to assert dominance over females or other men, homophobic actions and verbal phrases used to assert dominance over other men, and the 'real men don't cry' mentality" (2019: 2). The character traits described by Kupers and Gramme are traceable in lived experiences of young characters in *Penumbra*. Notable, though, is that such toxic masculinities seem to be precarious to both its perpetrators and their victims. Consequently, there is also need to read black identity through Grant and MacDonald's (2018: 1) view that "toxic masculinity is also a key factor in understanding men's violence(s) directed at self". For instance, excessive use of drugs and alcohol consumption by some male characters compromises their lives and renders them vulnerable to failure.

In his study of South African masculinities, Morrell (1998: 627) argues that young people who "emerged as a new and anti-social force" persistently form and maintain a violent masculinity especial in urban South Africa. In order to ascertain their masculinities, argues Morrell, these young people became 'tsotsis' and affiliated themselves with gangs thus, "the more stabbings they did, the bigger they were" (627). Reflecting on similar toxic masculinities in the *Drum Magazine* (2007: 21), Henry Nxumalo writes, "Our heroes were the boys who could steal and stab. The more stabbings they did, the bigger they were. The "biggest shot" of all was the one who had killed somebody – either with a knife or a gun". The violent diction of guns and knives, tsotsis, stealing and stabbings, points to a sick and diseased society with a warped and toxic understanding and construction of what it means to be a man. It also reflects the nightmare of violence and abuse associated with South African society and culture. This has compromised the lives and identities of most young people who have placed themselves in such unsavory and toxic social positions. At the centre of the discourse of violence by young people in the novel *Penumbra* is poverty, which drives young characters to resort to crime and violence as survival strategies in Cape Town. In analysing the discourse of violence in the novel, the chapter focuses on characters who struggle to "live up to the expectations of masculinism and the narrow masculinities that remain dominant in [their] society" (Grant and MacDonald 2018: 12). In their scrutiny of toxic masculinities, Grant and MacDonald engage military philosophies of violence and argue that, "the underlying philosophy and action of the military are fundamentally constituted by an ideology of male toughness and establishment and maintenance of manhood through

dominance and/or conquest" (2018: 11). Their argument suggests that the military philosophies of violence are products of societies in which ideologies of male toughness are prevalent. In other words, society constitutes and constructs military violence and its attendant jargon of hardness, hardening and insensitivity to define manhood. This illustration of military training can be juxtaposed with the ritual and practice of initiation depicted in the novel as symbolic spaces that construct similar traits of violence or as "spaces of idealized masculinity" to borrow from Haider (2016: 557). With all its flaws, the initiation practice seeks to maintain the masculine dominance over feminine subjects and those men who are stereotyped "weak" during the initiation process. While Grant and MacDonald perceive "male toughness" as an essential part of the structure of military ideology of violence, Anolain et al (2013: 130) state that this penchant for violence excites toxic masculinities. They point out that "once the official conflict ends, men who have acted militarily and the (generally) male political elite are deeply enmeshed in this culture of manhood" (130). Interestingly, the initiates project the same character and attitude. Therefore, it is my argument that initiation schools are symbolic spaces and platforms for performances of violence and toxic masculinities. They are havens for the formation of post-2000 blackness as a space of gendered violence.

Through the experiences of urban poor blacks and their struggle for economic stability, the novel constructs blackness as a perpetual "symbol of […] desire for [a better] life" (Mbembe 2017: 6). That 'desire for a better life' dates back to colonial and apartheid eras when black people longed and fought for social and economic freedom. Even though the Cape Town captured in the novel is obviously out of that oppressive colonial and apartheid context, the 'desire for a better life' still defines most post-apartheid young blacks. The main character Mangaliso and his friends are University of Cape Town graduates driven by the 'desire for a better life'. This desire and eagerness for a better life characterized by economic stability creates characters set on constructing toxic masculinities. Mfecane's (2016: 205) definition of masculinity as a "practice [that is] associated with being a real man" and Ougzane's (2006: 2) view that "men are not born; they are made", to some extent, relate to the narrative of the initiation tradition that is constructed in *Penumbra*. In this tradition, Manga and Ndlela undergo character metamorphosis from boys to what their instructors and the initiates call 'real men'. This 'real man' narrative channels socially constructed characteristics that endorse and spur some males into superior positions of privilege while inferiorizing women and other supposedly "weak" men. As such, my analysis of toxic masculinities engages the

experiences of young male characters "who suffer pangs of emasculation [and seek to] symbolically reaffirm their status as real men through compensatory consumption" (Holt and Thompson 2004: 425). This sense of emasculation mushrooms because of absent father figures in the childhood of the protagonists, the failure of single mothers to raise them into responsible men and the wayward decisions they make after graduation. It is my argument that the absence of fathers and the irresponsible roles played by mothers in their childhood foster dangerous masculinities throughout the novel. The risky behaviour of Manga, Tongai, Nhlakanipho and their peers when they engage in alcoholism, drug use and multiple sexual relations compromises their lives. The 'real man' status they seek to attain by endowing themselves with a sense of aggressive dominance (Kimmel 1994, Connell's 1995) against what they consider their subordinates smacks of toxic masculinities. Their behaviour and actions echo what Smith et al (2015: 2) refer to as "normative ideology that to be a man is to be dominant in society". Therefore, I seek to analyse how the notion of "real man" lays fertile ground for the formation of toxic masculinities, which define blackness in fictionalised post-apartheid Cape Town.

The lived experiences of Manga, Nhlakanipho Mfundo and Tongai formulate forms of toxic masculine identities that are crucial to my reading of black identity. Their failure to economically establish themselves in Cape Town, involvement in petty crimes and 'gang' affiliation lead to operations that haunt their black urban communities. Their actions construct Cape Town as a space of contesting identities that unfold as dwellers "act out their daily survival routines" (Reyes 2016: 201). Such contestations partly emanate from the vulnerable and restless young characters whose existence in Cape Town fosters elements of competition for success. Mfundo typifies young characters whose economic stability hinges on affiliation to a 'gang'. Ironically, he influences his graduate peers to reconsider their decision to attain success through education by joining a syndicate. My approach to issues of vulnerability in this novel transcends the mere thought of exposure to violence and looks through issues of, "childhood trauma, sexual violence […] indignity and self-loathing" (Bost et al 2019: 1). By looking at and analysing the irresponsible behaviour of single mothers who invite various men to their homes and engage in sexual relations in the presence of their children, I argue that the novel *Penumbra* constructs a sense of child trauma that this chapter follows to establish how toxic masculinities are formulated and internalised from childhood. Childhood experiences form complex adulthood for such young characters as Tongai whose irresponsible sexual relations and violence highlight the recurring haunting toxic

masculinities they internalised growing up. In order to explore the discourses of vulnerability in *Penumbra*, I draw on Bost et al's (2019: 2) approach to "vulnerability as not only constituted in the not-yet, but also in the not-yet-past" trauma of young black characters. The 'not-yet-past' phenomenon should be read in the context of the recurring trauma of some characters traceable back from their childhood through to adulthood experiences. By re-playing Manga's traumatic childhood events at the point of his encounter with one of his sexual partners who resemble his irresponsible mother, the novel, underpins elements of permanent trauma that motivate the formation of dangerous masculine identities.

Approaching black identity through toxic masculinities is premised on the understanding that toxic masculinity is a contested post-colonial phenomenon, especially by post-colonial feminist writers who resist "to inhabit the world passively and reject the myriad of ways in which [they] are defined under […] patriarchy" (Gqola 2001: 12-3). The fluidity of identity makes it worth engaging blackness through such post-colonial phenomena. Feminist discourses in South Africa have emerged to confront toxic masculinities that, for centuries have deprived both women and children a dignified existence. In a country that still "has the highest levels of rape and violence against women in the world" (Frenkel 2008: 1), it is worth arguing that South African women are "both empowered and victimised, seen and unseen, included and excluded" (Frenkel 2008: 2). Issues of victimhood, subjectivity, and silencing of feminine subjects attached to toxic masculinity, form part of this chapter's engagement with the novel. Therefore, I introduce post-2000 women's voices through Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* to analyse how they seek to deal with patriarchal victimisation and oppression against female representation in such narratives as *Penumbra*. I argue that the adoption of toxic femininities by members of the Black Widow Society in the novel constructs an imagined feminine world that seeks to challenge and resist patriarchal control while constructing the dominance of female characters. That world overshadows the presents of almost all male characters through the BWS' organised assassinations of the members' husbands. Thus, shifting the "narrative lenses from women as victims of oppression to women as actors in history" (Ibinga 2007: 15). Makholwa's characters construct that resistance "by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their history" (hooks in Hill-Collins 1990: 34). Through the meetings of BWS members who open up on their emotional experiences at the hands of their oppressive husbands, and devise solutions to foster their resistance and establish their identities, the novel creates women who are prime movers and shakers of history. In order to

re-establish, re-define and re-assert their identities, members of the BWS assassinate their husbands as an emancipatory exercise from the "contexts where misogyny is rampant and explicit" (Murray 2016: 16). However, some members who are torn between the lines of regret and their loyalty to the BWS sometimes compromise the identities they wish to reflect. By analysing *Penumbra* and *Black Widow Society* in the same chapter, I seek to draw the reader's attention to the zones of conflict that are formulated around post-apartheid masculine and feminine toxic clashes and suggest that blackness is perpetually a contested and conflicted space.

In *Penumbra*, the chapter considers childhood experiences as crucial in understanding and analysing the motivations of involvement in petty crimes and gang operations by the protagonists in adulthood. Engaging in crime and gang operations are ways adopted by characters in negotiating their dominance against feminine subjects and other men in the urban space. However, their sense of self and that of others are compromised as they execute gang operations. For instance, sex is used as a symbol of domination. The novel depicts instances of sexual and physical abuse emanating from Mfundo as he seeks to establish his dominance within the urban community. While in *Penumbra*, Mfundo victimises young female characters without facing resistance, Lloyd Mthembu is murdered for infidelity in *Black Widow Society*. In fact, there is violent confrontation and resistance of any form of oppression wedged against feminine characters in Makholwa's novel. Mfundo's aggressive behaviour is more visible when he stabs his girlfriend and uses his gun to threaten Mpumelelo and some of his peers. For Mfundo, a gun is a symbol of dominance and, possessing it establishes his narcissistic sense of self and manhood. His behaviour strikes a familiar note when one considers that narratives of a gun form part of African liberation struggles that ended the colonial dominance and re-established the freedom and dominance of the indigenes in former colonised spaces.

In my discussion of toxic masculinities, I will also consider Cornwall and Lindisfarne's (1994: 37) view that, "not only 'being a male', but 'being male' can be interpreted differently in different circumstances […] masculinities are performed or enacted in specific settings […] ethnographic descriptions of masculinity need to be located squarely with respect to contested interpretations of power". This view is important because it allows reading masculine identity through various circumstances of the characters in order to understand the dynamic nature of masculinity seen in how the writers "stress fluidity and multiple identities"

(Morrell 1998: 3) in their approach. For instance, there is stark contrast between the masculinities reflected by successful characters like Ntaba and those constructed by struggling characters like Manga. Therefore, I engage toxic masculinities through various discourses of power that are enacted by male characters in the novel. I analyse lived experiences of both unemployed graduates who constantly strive for societal success and recognition but fail to attain it, and their employed, successful and powerful peers who respect their female peer. These experiences expose the vulnerabilities of some characters who end up perpetrating violence. Kahn (2009) and Adamson (2017) reflect on the shifting identities and roles of male subjects from 'traditional masculinities' as a result of discourses of gender equality that constantly interrogate male and female social responsibilities. However, this view does not intend to suggest that traditional masculinity is non-existent in post-apartheid South Africa. In fact, the novel widely reflects it as the source of toxic masculinities. Characters who regard traditional masculinity as "an important resource through which to contest marginalisation and disempowerment", to borrow from van den Berg et al. 2013: 122), resist any signs of shifting from it. As such, in his study of masculinities, Adamson (2017: 23) argues that, "the change in the division of labour has now created a resistant traditional masculinity, a threatened masculinity and a more egalitarian masculinity". Adamson offers an interesting argument that motivates the chapter to analyse experiences of male characters as they relate with female characters that resist their control.

Penumbra follows three young black male characters who studied at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and now live and work in Cape Town. Two of them, Mangaliso Zolo who graduated with a BCom degree, and Nhlakanipho are from the Eastern Cape's King Williams Town. Tongai, who graduated with a Master of Arts in African Studies, is from Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. What is fascinating about these characters is their orientation towards acquiring wealth and making a name for themselves immediately after their graduation. When the novel opens, Mangaliso is struggling with mental instability triggered by his use of drugs, alcoholism and constant depression as a consequence of his failure to get stable employment. Like his friends, Tongai and Nhlakanipho, a single mother who, at some point, decides to leave him under his maternal grandmother's guardianship, hence, their distant relationship, raised Mangaliso. The lack of father figures in their childhood propels these young male characters into an identity crisis that they struggle to deal with throughout the novel. For instance, the consequence of the absence of Manga's father during his

childhood is the manifestation of what I regard as unstable and toxic masculine identity in the young man.

Similarly, Tongai's characterisation projects the tragedy caused by absentee father figure experiences. Focusing on Tongai's characterisation enables us to reflect on the sense of masculine crisis that prompts the formation of toxic masculinities. Besides his father's abusive nature, Tongai grows up in a broken family that migrates from Zimbabwe to South Africa's Cape Town because of economic and political instability in that country. Therefore, the individual, family and nation are broken. In the face of economic challenges, he has to balance his studies with his internship that is offered by Cape Town's bohemian lifestyle. Ironically, the economic instability that defines the existence of his family in Zimbabwe continues to haunt and define his existence in a country that he hoped to find greener pastures. He is thus compelled to deal with his masculine crisis throughout his existence in the city of Cape Town. The novel also introduces Nhlakanipho, Manga's childhood friend who shares the same mother with Mpumelelo but have different fathers. Nhlakanipho and Manga's friendship has its roots in King William's Town where they acquired their formal colonial education and traditional initiation schooling. These two schooling systems combine to produce and influence ideas and young man with toxic masculinities. The initiation school, for instance, forms binaries between the initiates at the end of the process. Such characters as Nhlakanipho manage to endure the pain of the initiation without using western medicine and consequently attain a 'real man's status. On the other end, though Manga and other initiates go through the same process, they use the western medicine and as such, fail to attain "manly" status as defined by the initiation school. Consequently, Manga finds himself labelled through such negative labelling as *ilulwane* (Bat) even at his adulthood. Such negations complicate and influence Manga's life and toxic masculine identity. Equally so, the formal colonial education system breaks Nhlakanipho and Manga whose poor rural background motivates them to strive for economic success in Cape Town. It gives them hope in a hopeless situation. Their failure to secure stable jobs regardless of their education shows that education is a gigantic myth-making machine, which serves to legitimise and justify inequality. Nhlakanipho's disillusionment makes him realise that his education is compromising his pursuit for success. The lack of economic opportunities pushes him to affiliate with a gang to rescue his plummeting masculine identity. His involvement in gangsterism comes after the realisation that Mfundo is making a better living out of criminal activities than the graduated population. Ultimately, as they permanently move from their

dream of success that they wish to attain through academic success, Nhlakanipho and his friends become petty thieves and drug runners as a way of cushioning themselves from the urban poverty.

5.2 Absent Father, Man Child and Toxic Masculinities

The notion of absent fathers has a twofold meaning in *Penumbra*. In its literal sense, it speaks of father figures whose absence in the lives of their sons sows an identity crisis that culminates in toxic masculinities as events unfold in the novel. This section explores how the absence of fathers in the childhoods of some characters motivates toxic masculine identities in their adulthood, and how this shapes post-apartheid black identity. The focus is on Manga's struggle with complex identities as he remembers meeting his father as a child. His flashback to what is ultimately the first and last meeting with him, brings back memories of an abusive father, dressed in Zulu regalia, and who assaulted him. Therefore, he assumes that he belongs to the Zulu ethnic group. However, this uncertainty and ambivalence about his identity create a life constantly shifting between Christianity and the Zulu tradition. As such, Manga's character is located within Bhabha's (1994) narrative of in-between spaces. My engagement with such spaces will establish the dialectic relationship between toxic masculinities and blackness in this section. This section aims to show how by negotiating various in-between spaces in order to establish themselves in Cape Town, Manga and other characters end up having distasteful masculine identities. The in-between spaces constructed by absent fathers combined with what Morrell and Ritcher (2004: 36) refer to as the "social father" who assumes the position of an absent biological father are crucial to our analysis and understanding of toxic masculinities and their attendant effects on black identity.

Post-apartheid economic opportunities and their lack thereof, are equally significant in carving how young people formulate their identity in ways that entrench toxic masculinities. My argument here is informed by Gee's (2006: 166) argument that for young people, employment, also referred to as 'self-fashioning and shape-shifting', contributes to identity formation in an ever-changing world where they are constantly forced to adopt new identities and abandon others. I also draw on Connell's (1995: 33) argument that the "cultural function of masculine identity is to motivate men to work". Consequently, economic opportunities and the success of these young men constitute and are a measure of what their rural and urban communities define as 'real men', a status that they struggle to attain in Cape Town. Mpumelelo himself declares, "everything depends on money. You know, the chicks look at

what the guy is drinking" (Mahlangu 46). Parallels also exist in Manga's struggle with the realities of his father's absence and his childhood traumatic experiences caused by his irresponsible mother who engages in sexual relations with several men in his presence. These enable what this section highlights as toxic masculinities. Expressly, toxic masculinities are traced through masculine/feminine binaries as well as formulated through the relations of masculine subjects. Additionally, apart from the literal and physical absence of the father, I also pose a figurative reading of the notion 'absent father'. In this, the presence of father figures is recognisable. However, an argument is put forward that their violent and irresponsible behaviour projects strained and distant father/son relations that equate to their absence. The presence of Tongai and Mfundo's fathers, whose violence haunt their sons' childhood experiences, constructs distant father/son relations that cultivate elements of violence, which surface later in their adulthood. Thus, Mfundo finds a home and comfort in affiliating to a gang that terrorises urban communities and sexually abuses women, while Tongai struggles with alcoholism from teenage-hood.

Also interesting in *Penumbra* is the use of the motif of child innocence and how it is compromised and corrupted by father figures in black urban communities. Child innocence, in my discussion, is premised on child naivety that exhibits characteristics untainted by either deceit or immoral experiences. Engaging child innocence in his article, Duschinsky (2013: 763) posits that, "innocence can be understood as a discourse constructing a relationship between subjectivities and their essence, whilst at the same time effacing the signs of this process of construction". Duschinsky further argues that childhood innocence is a social construct frequently subjected to the compromise of social elements like corruption and violence. The childhood experiences of Manga, Tongai and Nhlakanipho are characterised and complicated by subjection to irresponsible parental guardianship. With childhoods nurtured around irresponsible and violent parents, these young characters grow into adulthood shaped by historical recurrence. The villain they saw and learned as children, they execute in adulthood to demonstrate "manly" behaviour. The initial compromise of child innocence is shown in the disturbing instances that are constructed through Manga's father. Manga says:

> [m]y father I saw only once dressed in his Zulu outfit. I did not really see him. I only saw a photo. I was in his parents' home in Soweto. One morning he kept on beating me for spilling food while I was eating. His mother shouted at him to stop. I did not want to cry, but tears streamed down my cheeks.

> Tongai is the only person I've told that the last time I saw my father, he wanted us to take a blood test. I was fourteen years old then. I refused to go for the test (Mahlangu 32).

The above passage establishes the toxic nature of distant strained father/son relations constructed through violence and mutual distrust and hatred. It reflects Manga's complex identity that emanates from lack of attachment to his tradition. Three incidents trigger a faint memory of the father, namely a photograph, the beating incident and when the father demands a blood test, which in essence means that he doubts and wants to challenge paternity. Thus, Manga struggles with his identity crisis from this point to his adulthood in Cape Town. That identity crisis incites complex and dangerous masculine identity. This is compounded by the fact that he suffers from double consciousness wherein he attempts to establish his identity between Christianity and the Zulu culture that he has no clue about. Through his struggles, the novel almost rehearses the dilemma encountered by most South Africans whose struggles to trace their identities are shown through South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) "Khumbulekhaya" programme. The programme narrates restless searches by siblings, relatives and even parents, of their origins in order to deal with and bring closure to their identity crisis. Understanding such dilemmas in both the novel and contemporary South Africa invites one to view toxic masculinities through strained and disoriented father-son relations.

Interestingly, Soweto[3] is the home of Manga's father. The negative characterisation of the urban space is traceable to the apartheid era. Soweto is synonymous with violence and the murder of many innocent young black people during and after apartheid. Lives of deprivation and violence project Soweto as an urban space with the propensity to debase child innocence. The abusive nature of Manga's father, despite grandmother intervention, expresses a dangerous masculine identity that sees both women and children as inferior subjects. Manga's father has a strange way of establishing, asserting and re-affirming his masculine control and superiority against his inferior subjects as shown in the way he cruelly disowns his child. His behaviour positions black identity as a space established within patriarchal ideologies of dominance and violence.

The DNA test requested by Manga's father symbolises the dilemmas around Manga's characterisation. The request connotes a sense of denunciation by one's culture especially on the part of young Manga. It also highlights problematised feminine/masculine relations. For

the reader, the request for DNA does not only imply the assumed infidelity of Manga's mother but also denigrates this female subject. At the same time, the novel constructs the dilemmas around the existence of Manga who, while referring to the male who assaulted him as his father, still has to contend with the possibility that the same man he calls father might not be his biological father. . The name Mangaliso (miracle) is also crucial, especially in relation to our understanding of that dilemma. According to Nyambi (2016: 60), "naming and nicknaming are forms of identity-making speech acts". For Hansen (2012: 203) a name signifies and supports the identity of the individual who bears that name. Drawing from these arguments, the name Mangaliso reflects complex and undesirable relations of his parents, and the complex and toxic identity he assumes in his adulthood. With a childhood marked by rejection by a father who disowns him, an irresponsible alcoholic mother, and a social father, who orients him into manhood, his journey to adulthood resembles a miracle. Through the complex and strained relationship of his parents, Manga becomes a symbol of masculine dilemma in that he represents a complex identity position that stems from unresolved tension and clashes between his parents. For instance, the DNA request made by his father is a degrading male-constructed discourse that shows his desperate attempt to establish and maintain his toxic masculine control over his female subject. Therefore, blackness is a space that is fraught with uncertainties, especially when looked at through the behaviour and experiences of post-2000 young characters like Manga who struggle to define and establish themselves and their identities in post-apartheid South African urban spaces.

Arguably, the irresponsible fatherhood that surfaces through Manga's father motivates Manga's toxic life in Cape Town. From his childhood, Manga is mentored by what Morrell and Ritcher (2004: 36) refer to as a "social father" who further complicates Manga's masculine identity. A 'social father' is a representative of a biological father who offers certain father roles to influence positive experiences to abandoned children. Ndlela's father is that representative and, Manga's praises for his involvement in his life is echoed in his comment "Ndlela's father is the only black man who has ever shown me love. He came to my award ceremony in high school. After I had come down from the stage, he shook my hand. Remembering this makes me cry" (Mahlangu 204). The presence of Ndlela's father at an award ceremony for Manga in a formal schooling system, and his admission of Manga into the initiation school complicates black identity resulting in the confusion about the duality of Manga's identity. What fascinates the reader though is Ndlela's father's preference of the western medicine in healing sustained by Manga and other initiates during initiation. While

the initiation tradition is an important tradition in his community, he compromises it in his process of mentoring Manga. Ndlela is Manga's friend whose childhood, under the presence of his biological father, has shaped his character into a strong and responsible young man. What is also interesting to note is the contrast between Manga and Ndlela's masculinities that are fostered by a similar father figure. Ndlela leads a progressive masculine identity while Manga's masculinity – from their initiation moment – is complex, toxic and dangerous. The role of Ndlela's father as a 'social father' begins when he admits Manga into an initiation school:

> Ndlela's father allowed me to join Ndlela at the initiation school. I was doing my first year then. When we were preparing to return home, having been made men, a relative of mine poured oil over my head in a river, anointing me. Ndlela is one of my dearest friends. Though he works in Joburg, we still keep in contact (Mahlangu 22).

One notes here that the male initiation school poses as a platform that seeks to maintain binaries between feminine and masculine subjects. Firstly, it defines Manga's mother as weak by relegating her from the responsibility of orienting her son to manhood. It also shows the resistance of a patriarchal community to recognise the capabilities of feminine characters. She is contrasted with Ndlela's father who, supposedly is fit to orient her son into manhood. The antithesis exposes existing feminine/masculine clashes in post-apartheid South Africa that deny the initiation of progressive masculine identity. By precluding Manga's mother from men's rigorous test that transforms boys into 'men', the prejudiced society depicts her as a weaker subject. This highlights the toxicity of masculinity in that it places feminine subjects in patronising positions that deprive them of their responsibilities to orient their sons into the kind of man they want them to be. As such, to maintain male superiority, Ndlela's father positions himself as a gatekeeper who evaluates the initiates and figuratively maintains the "invisibilization" (Gqola 2007: 116) of femininities. "Invisibilisation", as employed by Gqola, reflects post-apartheid patriarchal suppression of women's empowerment and the marginalisation of their identities. Making Ndlela's father a gatekeeper of the patriarchal tradition of dominance projects blackness as a space of anxieties and insecurities that are formulated on narratives of transforming boys into real and strong men to deal with feminine subjects.

Besides constructing superior/inferior binaries between male and female characters in the novel, the initiation/circumcision tradition also constructs toxic masculinities. I am aware that

in the South African context, "the ritual of circumcision [is] part of a rite that admits [a] boy to manhood" (Vincent 2008: 79) or as "the gateway to manhood in the same way that baptism is the gateway to Christianity" (Mthuze 2004: 48). Pauw (1994: 321) and Weiss (1966: 68) view it as a process that seeks to instil positive moral values to the initiates by transforming them into responsible men before returning to their communities. However, the contentious issue remains the definition and impartation of the concept and identity of 'real man' or 'responsible men' to the initiates considering the violence that accompanies this tradition. To begin with, this traditional practice is done in secluded areas such as the bush or mountain (Venter, 2013; Vincent, 2013), where the initiates are exposed to violent cultural and life orientations. Most importantly, they are taught how to relate with feminine subjects. Their orientation on manly relations with feminine subject consolidates and demonstrates the exposure and subjection to violence during their initiation. Ntombana (2016: 631) offers an interesting thought on contemporary initiation practice as a means through which dangerous characters and masculinities are socialised, instilled and consolidated in the characters of the initiates. She states that, "in recent years, the initiation practice has been characterised by an increasing number of fatalities among the initiates, criminal activities, drug abuse and inhuman behaviour involving the newly emerged men" (631–2). Ntombana argues that contemporary initiation schools hardly instil positive character in young men because they seem to form characters that are dangerous to their communities. The process of transforming a boy to a 'real man' through violence and the emphasis on individualism, influence such characters as Manga to either make positive or wayward decisions. This is premised on the understanding that the initiation tradition forms identities that follow these characters through adulthood. For instance, Manga is identified as *ilulwane* (bat), which for the initiates, means an individual who failed at the initiation school. Violence becomes part of the characterisation of young people upon leaving the initiation school. The characterisation of Mfundo reflects this thought in that, he demonstrates violence against his girlfriends and regards them as inferior subjects. However, environment shapes character. Besides the initiation school, the wayward decisions of initiates like Manga is also a product of the urban community that partly influences toxic masculinities because of its lack of economic opportunities. Manga's use of drugs leads to temporary insanity and invites one to think of blackness as an expression of the desperation of post-apartheid young people trapped in discourses of freedom that fail to transform their conditions in urban spaces.

The initiation school that orients Manga and his peers into manhood is a platform that maintains male/female binaries while forming binaries within and between male subjects. It constructs inferior men who are considered as less masculine and a disgrace to the community, from men who attain a 'real man status'. Initiates who fail to endure the initiation pain are victims of scorn made to bear negations of their failure throughout their lived experiences. The novel shows this through Manga who is referred to as *ilulwane*; "one who failed at initiation school and used Western medicines" (129). The term *ilulwane* forms part of demeaning discourses that seek to establish an inferior position for weak young men who fail to attain the status of 'real man'. What is crucial to note is that both uncircumcised and those that have used western medicine to heal their wounds are regarded as inferior men. Mfecane (2016: 204) highlights this in his argument:

> [u]ncircumcised […] males are generally referred to as boys, amakhwenkwe, irrespective of their age or social status. They are not allowed to marry or perform rituals. Medically circumcised men are equally viewed as being inferior to traditionally circumcised men and given negative labels.

Such delineation brings to mind *Things Fall Apart*'s Okonkwo's denigration of a man without a title during a village meeting, wherein he said "this meeting is for men" in his dismissal of the man's contribution during a meeting. Masculine identity is therefore a social construct whose definition is characterised by traditions such as the initiation of men that foster an understanding that blackness ought to be perceived as a space that also defines its "other" within black communities. Among 'inferior' characters in the novel is Manga whose failure to endure the initiation pain deprives him of an opportunity to attain a 'real man' status. The metaphoric reference to *ilulwane* (Bat) presents these characters as both weak and unmanly. This view of their strangeness emanates from the fact that *ilulwane* is characterised by animal, bird features that confuse its categorisation. By identifying a man who fails at the initiation school as *ilulwane*, the novel suggests an in-between space that is created between the traditional and progressive masculinity. Unlike Manga, Ndlela's characterisation is different in many ways. Firstly, he endures the initiation pain without using the western medicine and attains his "real man" status and secondly, the novel does not show this character as aggressive towards feminine subjects like Mfundo. While Manga and his other friends find pleasure in involving themselves in sexual relations with various female characters, Ndlela does not define his feminine peers in negative sexual connotation. It seems Ndlela, has nothing else to prove to the community after the milestones he has achieved in his life. Contrastingly, and at many points, Manga and his friends use sexist and degrading

language when referring to feminine characters as he, for instance says, "Rasun wants us to hunt for women" (Mahlangu 72). Thus, hunting for women does not only characterise Manga as a sexual predator but also positions feminine subjects that exist for his sexual gratification and at the same time, projecting blackness as male gendered and a jungle where only the hunter lives to tell his story.

The contrast between present and absent father figures in childhood experiences of young characters in this novel is crucial to the formation of toxic masculinities. For instance, although Mfundo's father is a rich and influential South African businessman (Mahlangu 99), his relationship with his sons – Mfundo and Mpumelelo – fails the test of a father and son relationship. In fact, as an influential businessman, his existence seems to be marred by his exploitation of both young female and male characters. His toxic behaviour highlights strained relations between post-apartheid and apartheid generations reflected through Mpumelelo's criticism of his sexual relations with young women of the "same age as [him] and Nhlakanipho" (Mahlangu 99). His characterisation constructs a dangerous masculine identity that threatens the existence of both women and other men. To some extent, it is worth thinking of Mfundo's father as a middle-aged man who uses his economic gains to re-define his relevance in the new dispensation through his sexual relations with young females. One could also read the strained father/son relationship as a reflection of the novel's attempt to lambast the tendencies by older generation to deliberately economically deprive in order to exploit the post-apartheid young generation. As a result, young people struggle to establish their black identities against their everyday frustrating "encounters with unemployment, poverty, inequality and hopelessness" (Adonis 2018: 54).

The post-apartheid disempowerment of, especially young women can be read through exploitative males who masquerade as "sugar daddies and/or blessers". Though the blesser/blessed relations are underpinned by economic agreements between the blesser and blessed, the dignity of feminine subjects is usually compromised. As such, Mpumelelo's father represents a post-apartheid toxic father whose masculine identity exploits both the sexuality and identities of young post-apartheid feminine subjects. Characters like Mfundo, whose lived experiences are partly influenced by his irresponsible father, also exhibit similar traces of toxic masculinities formed through their exploitation of feminine subjects in the urban space. Mfundo notes this in his comments: "[m]y father is the richest man in Langa. Everyone knows him […] He has never given me anything. He only took notice when people

started speaking about me struggling. In that period, I only had two pairs of trousers. He called me again when they heard that I was part of a syndicate" (Mahlangu 100). Evidently, toxic masculine identity is socially constructed. The failure by Mfundo's father to offer economic support to his son forces him to affiliate to and embrace a syndicate in order to find economic stability in Cape Town. Similar traits manifest in contemporary South Africa where young people's involvement in crime finds justification in the lack of economic support from the government.

However, the fact that Mfundo's father is rich in the urban space captures the demise of apartheid and a deliberate drive by blacks to re-establish themselves and their black identity. The inequalities that exist within black communities sometimes compromise and complicate the re-establishment of a new black identity. Set through hostile relations between parent/son generations, these inequalities project alienating post-apartheid experiences for young blacks like Manga. Their disillusionment and development of realisation about their economic deprivation in the urban space push them to go for dangerous survival strategies and ways of making names for themselves. For instance, Mfundo affiliates with a 'syndicate' that defines his economic stability as a mark of his identity in the urban space. This is shown when he brags around his friends that he has become rich (Mahlangu 100). The economic stability he establishes for himself through his affiliation with a 'gang' incites events that establish his toxic masculinities. At some point, the narrator mentions that, "Mfundo pushes up the volume and dances" (Mahlangu 100) and that, "[t]he night he stabbed his girlfriend started like this" (Mahlangu 100). What I find striking about the characterisation of Mfundo here is the symbolic joviality and carefree attitude prior to exhibiting cruelty. His dance seems to parade masculine dominance against the 'other' or inferior feminine identity. Though narrated without much detail, the event establishes the dominance of masculine identity defines Mfundo's toxic masculinity against his inferior male peers when he threatens them at gunpoint.

Manga reflects on Mfundo's flashes of violent behaviour when he says, "Mpumelelo walks to the kitchen with the plate. In a flash Mfundo takes out his gun and points at Mpumelelo" (Mahlangu 100). At some point, he also grabs "a glass from the table and smashed Mpumelelo behind the head" (Mahlangu 139) for talking to his girlfriend. Evidently, Mfundo derives his power and authority from a weapon in hand. From guns to domestic objects, all are potential weapons that give the power he thinks he possesses. The irony vested in the

name Mfundo, which means education, projects itself through his disregard of education as an inadequate weapon in his pursuit of success in post-apartheid South Africa (Mahlangu 60). This is premised on the understanding that when all else has failed, the better to arm oneself with a gun. Hence, his affiliation with a 'gang' offers him the instant economic stability that the education attained at UCT by Manga and his friends fails to offer them stable jobs in the city. Mfundo's instant riches contrast vastly with the continuous struggle of his educated peers like Manga and his friends whose paying jobs fail to secure them economic freedom. This constructs the dilemmas faced by young South Africans as they struggle to navigate their identities in urban spaces. Hence, post-apartheid black identity is defined by perpetual dilemmas. These dilemmas are shown through Manga, Ndlela and Tongai who are torn between their education and Mfundo's lavish thug life as he constantly attempts to convince them to abandon their reliance on education, which they regard as the only way to success. He gives the illustration of his young and educated accountant but unemployed brother in the city. He remarks, "these degrees don't mean anything because he's now working for someone […] what really matters is being able to read people" (Mahlangu 60). The contrast between his failed accountant brother and his lavish thug life pictures an urban space with socio-economic and moral life that deteriorates under excruciating toxic masculinities that pry on both masculine and feminine subjects in *Penumbra*'s urban space.

Nhlakanipho's disconcerting and fragmented childhood experience constructed through the absence of his father is also interesting to follow. Unlike his friends, Nhlakanipho does not know his father. This deprives him of a firm masculine orientation into manhood. Consequently, he constantly falters as he attempts to establish himself in Cape Town. His exposure to the glaring flaws of characters such as Mfundo and Mpumelelo whom he regards as role models compromises his attempts to establish an identity of his own. The seemingly responsible Mpumelelo has failures that are detrimental to Nhlakanipho's masculine identity, especially as an elder brother who struggles to offer economic provisions for their survival in the urban space. The song they sing is an expression of their poor embarrassing conditions. What is fascinating is that their song contrasts with Nhlakanipho's dream of becoming a rich young man who wishes to lead a lavish life that will afford him the pleasure of alternating alcohol beverages (Mahlangu 59). Such thoughts figuratively capture the post-apartheid experience of young people who strive but fail to achieve alternative and comfortable ways of survival in Cape Town. What I find ironic is that these young people are constantly reminded

of South Africa's freedom yet, that freedom fails to provide economic opportunities for them to survive.

Tracing the formations of young people's post-apartheid identities, Lundgren and Scheckle (2019) argue that "post-apartheid South Africa has […] promised much but has not always been able to deliver, such that the material conditions of many people's lives have remained unchanged in the twenty or so years of freedom". That Nhlakanipho and Mpumelelo continue to wallow in poverty regardless of the freedom echoes this thought. In engaging the relations between young people and post-apartheid South Africa, Mattes (2012: 135), posits that they hardly see a need to identify themselves with the so-called democracy of their country. Their song provocatively challenges the hopes offered by the post-apartheid freedom as Mpumelelo sings:

> I get embarrassed when people come in here, look at how untidy this flat is, not having money sucks, look at how we live drinking the same beer, we should alternate, have cocktails on some occasions, I haven't given up on making it. Nhlakanipho echoed Mpumelelo, leavening the song with anecdotes of the embarrassment of being broke. Mpumelelo's screen saver on his computer was a Range Rover. It was the car he aspired to drive once he had made it. The brothers disregarded those who did not share their ambitions (Mahlangu 59).

Mpumelelo and Nhlakanipho express the devastating economic struggles for most young black people in post-apartheid South Africa. The song portrays blackness as a cursed space fraught with stringent economic conditions that thwart the dreams of young people. This is reflected through Mpumelelo's symbolic screen saver that points to constant clashes between young people's aspirations and the post-apartheid reality that suppresses their dreams. Such conflict is at the centre of what seems to be the writer's criticism of the post-apartheid South African urban space and the novel's construction of post-apartheid young people's toxic masculinities. For instance, with his aspiration of becoming a rich young man who owns a Range Rover, Nhlakanipho is involved in petty crime. His excitement after Mfundo buys them tickets to watch a rugby game at Newlands Stadium also brings to light numerous young people's overwhelming unfulfilled dreams that are influenced by the absence of father figures during their childhood. Manga says:

> [a]fter the game, Nhlakanipho hugged Mfundo, thanking him for getting us tickets. Later, Nhlakanipho confided to me that he wanted to cry; no one had ever done that for him. He said he felt like Tupac, who cried after attending an NBA game for the first time (Mahlangu 95).

The above passage figuratively represents Nhlakanipho's identity crisis that follows him from childhood to adulthood. If one thinks of the cultivation of Ndlela's progressive masculinity through a father who orients him through the initiation tradition and assists him with school assignments until he becomes a successful young character, the antithetical Nhlakanipho's identity crisis can be attributed to the absence of his father from childhood. This crisis is noted through the understanding that, for long, rugby and soccer have been regarded as masculine sports. However, women's involvement in such sporting activities has invalidated such parochialism. Therefore, Nhlakanipho's desire to watch rugby, an opportunity that could have come through his father had he been there, creates a masculine crisis that forces him into crime as a way for seeking economic stability. This is consolidated by his glorification and admiration of violence when he refers to Tupac Shakur, the celebrated African American hip-hop singer who was shot dead in 1996. Such references make social commentary on compromised young black people's sense of self by universalising the struggles encountered by black young people as if to lament the universal black on black suppression of economic freedom.

That a rich artist like Tupac dies violently at age twenty-six and at a point where his music career was thriving reflects the violence that is directed at rich black young men by other blacks and suggests that black communities are dangerous spaces for black dwellers. At the same time, Nhlakanipho's wish to own a Range Rover that he cannot afford, forces him into crime as a way of fulfilling that dream. Its ultimate effect is the construction of his toxic masculine identity.

5.3 Fragmented Masculinities and the Perspective of Toxic Masculinities

My understanding of fragmented masculinities is, in this section, contextualised through contrasting characterisation and experiences of male characters in this novel. These characters form part of the community of males that constitutes contrasting masculine identities. Characters in this novel make decisions that constitute the thin line between toxic masculinities and progressive masculinity. The varying identities shown through these young characters form fragmented masculine identities in the urban space. Srivastava's (2010: 835) argument that "urban masculine identities are constructed through strategies of the fragmented – or split – self" inspire this view. Thus, the novel projects three masculine representatives in the urban space. The first is Mfundo, a sexist who is violent against women. The second is Manga – sexist but fails to fit the label and image of 'real men' as

defined by their peers. The third masculine representative is Ndlela whose upbringing and the presence of his father influence his progressive masculinity. I argue, therefore, that fragmented post-apartheid masculinity influences fragmented black identity. Attention will be drawn to Srivastava's (2010: 835) notion of "the fragmentary politics of self", to reflect how the novel forms a dominant masculinity that seeks to establish its superiority against "other' inferior masculinity.

The novel sets Ndlela's progressive masculinity as a measure to stabilise the masculinities of such characters as Manga who adopt flawed identities in the urban space. In spite of a clear contrast with other characters, Ndlela seeks to fix broken and compromised masculine identity. This is highlighted when he warns Manga against his toxic life where he says, "I told Ndlela of my dealings with Mfundo and of taking cocaine on a weekend of drug bingeing. I felt I needed a sober person to talk to. Ndlela was shocked. He said I should guard against turning into someone I will hate" (Mahlangu 124). The contrast between these characters depicts Ndlela playing a saviour-like role to Manga, whose shattered identity needs revival and restoration. The fact that Manga describes him as a sober person catapults this character onto a pedestal where his progressive masculinity is visible. His advice, that Manga "should guard against turning into" an undesirable character, denounces both the degrading lifestyle of his friend and the dangerous masculine identity that he has attained in the urban space. Contrary to Manga and his friends' undesirable life, the novel portrays Ndlela's glamorous lifestyle through Manga's eye, thus; "I walked over to Ndlela. He is with some fast-looking brothers. They look like the sort who drive new cars and are into parties. Ndlela seems conscious of the beer he's holding […] the people in here are stylish, the women made-up and in high heels" (Mahlangu 126). Manga walks into an experience that illustrates his failure in democratic South Africa. This instance describes a life that Manga and his friends wish to lead in the urban space. Thus, through the contrast, I argue that blackness poses as a space that reflects the desire for life especially for young people who wish to establish a comfortable economic life in urban spaces. Ndlela's lavish life reminds Manga of his failure. Therefore, Manga leaves a life of regret upon realising that he has failed himself. He says:

> I woke up sweaty, my chest and back wet. The sun outside the window was sad. I had violated my spirit. It was in tatters. This is not how I wanted to grow old. In an ocean of black shells, my feet were septic, becoming volcanic. This is not how I wanted to grow old (Mahlangu 119).

Manga invokes natural images to express negative feelings of regret and disappointment with self. His disillusionment is depicted through the dreadful imagery that sees him captured in "an ocean of black shells" and the repeated expression "that is not how he wanted to grow old".

Engaging toxic masculinities through the Orlando shooting, Haider (2016: 559) argues that, "disillusionment […] transforms into something toxic, producing rage as the praxis of toxic masculinities". Thus, through their disappointment with self in the city, Manga and his peers constantly express their devastation and rage with their post-apartheid situation. Haider further argues that whenever rage is performed, "what is thought to remain always […] is the masculinity beneath the act" (2016: 559). In this novel, the rage shown through Mfundo, constructs dangerous masculine identity. The experiences of drug dealing and alcoholism associate the failure of post-apartheid freedom. For Ndlela, freedom means re-defining one's identity by acquiring what was impossible to acquire during apartheid South Africa. His lived experiences are characterised by a sense of consciousness that enforce an urge to shift his identity from the zones of oppression. For Manga, on the other end, freedom seems to be a symbolic inconvenience that overshadows black identities. This is premised on the understanding that as apartheid sought to destroy the identities of black people, Manga and his peers' in the post-apartheid era, fail to comprehend the essence of their freedom in their efforts to remove black identities from zones of oppression. Thus, post-apartheid freedom can be thought of as enabling what I perceive as post-apartheid fragmented masculine identity in that, for some young men it poses a platform for identity re-formation and for others it remains a hindrance as they struggle to re-establish themselves. This is demonstrated through Manga's temporary insanity that leads to an overwhelming feeling of claustrophobia as he walks through the streets of Cape Town. Cape Town's streets are representatives of a despairing black community, despite the claimed post-apartheid freedom. The infrastructure of such institutes and companies as the "Claremont BMW dealership" (Mahlangu 1), Edgars, ABSA, Wimpy, and Pick n Pay that offer economic support to the country, strategically juxtapose the economic power of rich people and the misery and woe that Manga observes on the faces of poor blacks. For instance, near the "Claremont BMW dealership" he passes "a disabled man [sitting] in his wheelchair", "people who are perishing from lack of knowledge" (Mahlangu 10), and prostitutes who are peddling death on the streets (Mahlangu 12). This visual delineation is reminiscent of William Blake's poem "London". The characterisation of post-apartheid blacks throws light to maintained urban binaries that construct fragmented

black identity. As characters walk through the streets of Cape Town one realises the figurative hostility of the city towards black communities that still struggle to negotiate their identities decades after the demise of apartheid.

Manga acknowledges the character metamorphosis of Ndlela when he refers to his past relations with women. He says, "before being born-again, Ndlela had been known as an infamous womaniser at our sister school" (Mahlangu 130). However, the adulthood of Ndlela that the novel captures shows a completely different and changed character. On the other hand, Manga is the exact opposite of Ndlela. He, at some point, is involved in sexual relations with a young woman who is on her menstrual period. With other women, his intentions are clear as he says, "we took a cab to my residence in Observatory. But she did not want to have sex. I had to coax her. When I did pound her, I realised afterwards that the condom had split. I had semen on my pubic hair" (Mahlangu 19). Manga's use of the terms "coax' and "pound" affirms his dominant masculine identity in a community that perceives feminine subjects through their sexuality. Consequently, Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* is a crucial read for this chapter because of the way it spins and censors the traditional way of representing feminine subjects. In fact, characters like Talullah use sexualised language to refer to men that they use for sexual gratification.

In referring to the same women as above, Manga says, "When we slept together I became one with her and all the men she'd known" (Mahlangu 18). Such a discourse portrays Manga as a sexual animal who views women as objects to be conquered by men, and thus should be judged by the number of men they have sex with. Manga's narration highlights the tendencies of urban men to view women through sexual connotations that place them into animal like zones of damnation where they almost become illegitimate beings. Manga's recollection of this incident is not less than degrading for this female character but also reminds us of colonial narratives such as *King Solomon's Mines* where black women characters are disgraced in that fictitious part of Africa. In this colonial narrative, Gagool is demonised and projected as a greedy and blood thirst female character that motivates the slaughter of rich men in her community. The same novel also depicts one of the mountains in the shape of a woman who is lying and facing upwards and symbolically waiting to be penetrated by white male voyagers. Schmidt's (1992) comment is fascinating; especially with its argument, that such patriarchal misogyny turned both white and black masculinities into toxic identities. Schmidt (1999: 101) points out that:

> [w]omen were judged primarily responsible for the perceived depravity of African society. Missionary and colonial officials blamed African women for adultery, venereal disease, and unhygienic conditions in the home, and for their men's refusal to enter wage employment and to become otherwise civilised.

Similarly, in post-apartheid South Africa, women suffer ridicule and negative labelling as prostitutes by society, particularly by masculine subjects. They are perceived as carriers of venereal diseases, worth to be hunted and enticed for sexual relations.

5.4 Navigating Single-Mother Parenting and Toxic Masculinities

Single-mother parenting poses as one of the crucial issues that motivate the formation of toxic masculinities. The understanding of single-mother parenting is not generalised to mean that all single-mother parenting influence toxic masculinities. My focus is on single-mothers whose undesirable lived experiences influence negative demeanours to their sons as they grow into adulthood. The novel demonises and gives a negative account of the experiences of these single mothers. Single-mother parenting is ironically given the responsibility for modelling such irresponsible young characters as Manga, Tongai and Nhlakanipho. The struggle faced by single mothers in finding a balance between motherhood and fatherhood while raising their sons adversely compromises their efforts to nurture responsible young men. As a result, they struggle to survive in Cape Town. For instance, the novel follows the reckless conduct of Tongai's mother whose major flaw is alcoholism, which compromises her parenting of her son's childhood. Commenting on Tongai's mother, Manga says, "Tongai's mother [like Tongai's father] also drank heavily" (Mahlangu 163). Their excessive consumption of alcohol always ends in conflict even in the presence of Tongai. Their conflicts persist even after their separation as shown where Manga says, "while his [Tongai] mother had a restraining order against him [Tongai's father], he would show up in the elevator when there was no one around and say: 'did you think you could escape from me'" (Mahlagu 163). The threat manifests the violent conduct associated with toxic masculinities, especially when challenged by the law. Tongai's father is not only a control freak but a serious threat to the security of women. He lives under the impression that he has power and control over women, and the law cannot rob him of such power.

Manga also recalls that whenever he visited Tongai's family, his mother was always drunk (Mahlangu 164). Perpetual drunkenness points towards her failure to guide Tongai who, as Manga says, started "binge drinking since he was fourteen, [as] His mother drank and often

brought men into their house" (Mahlangu 120). Manga's comments exhibit a certain sense of child reckless identity crisis that emanates from conflicted and irresponsible parenting. Tongai's life symbolises that crisis in that, the neglect he suffers at the hands of his mother, resurfaces as he also struggles with alcoholism from a young age. As such, his mother, among others, becomes a feminine social misfit. What fascinates the reader in the novel's portrayal of this character is that her failure to raise a responsible son seems to be attached to the absence of a masculine subject in her life. In other words, the novel locates her failure to raise a responsible son in her failure to retain her husband. This is similar to the initiation process, which attaches the obligation of raising boys into responsible men to masculine subjects – an idea that alienates women in post-apartheid South Africa. The deliberate negative portrayal of Tongai's mother creates the image of Tongai as a character shaped by exposure to permanent toxic masculine identity that becomes ingrained in his DNA at a very young age. Tongai's toxic masculinity further complicates his character through his vague and toxic relations with his sexual partners in Cape Town. Despite advice against multiple sexual relations and alcoholism by his friend Manga, Tongai chooses the path to and life of self-destruction.

Looked at closely, the characterisation of Tongai, Manga, and other young characters echoes Balcom's (1998: 287) argument that men who were abandoned by their parents at childhood "have relationship difficulties with their parents, siblings, chosen partners, and their children". In his study of the effects of absent fathers to their sons, Balcom observes that the absence of fathers in the childhood of most males influences the formation of undesirable masculinities especially when they reach adulthood. Balcom's thoughts on complex relations that are formed thereafter, surface through Manga's struggle to reconcile his relationship with his irresponsible mother who at some point, left him in the guardianship of his grandmother. At the same time, the novel is silent about Tongai's relations with his mother when he moves to Cape Town.

The clashes between Tongai and his grandmother, and Manga and his mother significantly offer crucial experiences to engage with in relation to the novel's reflection of toxic masculinities. Characters like Tongai and his father consciously and deliberately maintain toxic masculinity as an identity that gives meaning and gravitas to their life such that when Manga's mother and Tongai's grandmother become a threat to that identity, these male characters are unyielding to the threat by jealously guarding their masculine territory through

violence. Tongai is averse to grandmother's advice against following in his father's footsteps. Consequently, his life spirals into similar undesirable traits of his father. Additionally, notwithstanding attempts by Manga's mother to reconcile with Manga as she has lunch with him "on Sunday afternoons" (Mahlangu 106) and the request she makes through her Christian friend, brother Paul to invite Manga to church services, he remains stuck within toxic experiences. Manga recounts:

> Tongai said he was a disappointment to his grandmother. He did not speak to her; when she called, he refused to talk to her. His grandmother had warned Tongai not to be anything like his father. Tongai said his father was a terrible man. 'But you are not violent. You are calm, aside from the fact that you drink a lot and hurt yourself,' I said. 'My father was also like that. He had a calm side but was also very violent (Mahlangu 163).

Tongai's refusal to follow his grandmother's advice suggests the fragmented nature of black identity constructed in the post-apartheid city. The fragmented blackness emanates from attempts by the young generation to formulate identities that are independent to their elderly generation. Nevertheless, by regretting not following his grandmother's advice, Tongai points to her significance in fostering progressive masculinities. Thus, the significance of the old generation lies in constructing post-apartheid black identity.

The decision by Tongai to cut ties with his grandmother maps his attempt to disconnect with the post-apartheid elderly generation and reflects his hatred for self that forces him into extreme alcoholism and multi-sexual relations. His conversation with Manga in the above quotation constructs dangerous masculinities in two notable ways. The first relates to self-destruction that comes from excess alcoholism as mentioned by Manga. The other relates to his father's violence that the novel also associates with extreme alcohol consumption as Manga comments, "Tongai's father had magical abilities. While his mother had a restraining order against him, he would show up in the elevator when there was no one around and say: 'Did think you could escape from me?'" (Mahlangu 163). Evidently, masculine identity seeks to maintain its control over the feminine 'other' by threatening its existence. Although the novel does not depict Tongai as a violent character like his father, his sexual exploitation of female characters with Manga seems to follow his father's toxic traits that undermine the feminine identity in the city.

5.5 Imagining Toxic Masculinities through Urban Connections/Disconnections

Read through experiences of characters who struggle to find formal jobs in alienating Cape Town, urban connections incite disillusionment and consequently foster toxic masculinities. Through persisting binaries of urban spaces and the protagonists' lack of connections with the executives of economic sectors, Cape Town becomes a fitting urban space that fosters a better understanding of masculine identities. Connections in the city seem crucial for young characters who are keen to strive for economic stability and stable masculinities. Hailing from the small King William's town, characters like Manga have to establish connections that will earn them formal jobs and establish their economic stability in Cape Town. Failure to establish connections is detrimental to their efforts to make names for themselves in that city. This section traces the connections these characters have with their urban spaces in contrast with those spaces that alienate them. Here, I grapple with conditions of their dwelling spaces, and how their struggles to establish connections face constant frustrations that motivate toxic masculinities. My view of Cape Town as an alienating urban space settles on what I perceive to be its disconnections of infrastructure, especially in relation to reflections of economic viability that trigger discourses of the powerless whose envy towards the wealth of the powerful constructs toxic experiences. Even though *Penumbra* seems to capture the inner city Cape Town, there is a trail of binary formations that the writer shows through the mapping of infrastructure as if to lament the failure of South African cities to deal decisively with colonial/apartheid impositions. The novel's juxtaposition of the infrastructure of Cape Town through the binaries of poverty on one part and wealth on the other retains urban disconnections that force characters who are failing to establish themselves economically, to venture into crime. This section argues that the characters' failures to establish connections in Cape Town, and the infrastructure that since apartheid has failed to connect and harmonise black communities; instigate elements of toxic masculinities.

Mfundo's constant struggle for success is crucial to note in relation to how it brings about his economic connections in the city. As a member of a syndicate, Mfundo establishes connections with the city's law enforcement representatives to reinforce his economic stability and guarantee his security and safety. In other words, the connections that he establishes in this city are defined by his manipulation of the law. They essentially highlight the complexities of post-2000 black identity in South Africa. These complexities and uncertainties of blackness are formulated through the relations between criminals like

Mfundo and the urban law enforcement representatives. Mfundo's encounter with the policeman and the judge is telling:

> Mfundo lowered the tinted window and smiled at the officer. 'Oh, Mr Mnyamana, it's you,' the policeman remarked. Mfundo laughed, squeaking through his throat, nodding. The officer left after an exchange of pleasantries with Mfundo. 'This one… he really understands protocol,' Mfundo said. 'I once had a case. When I walked into court, the magistrate started laughing. When they asked him why he was laughing he told them that I used to teach him maths. I got off that case scot-free. So you never know when you will need someone (Mahlangu 61).

The first sentence of the quote captures the actual connections that Mfundo has with his urban space. By lowering his tinted window, he significantly and strategically establishes his capabilities of manipulating the post-apartheid authority for his benefits. Two crucial connections that establish Mfundo's economic stability are defined in the above quote. As a gang member whose life is characterised through crime and violence, his relationship with the police officer who leaves after they exchange 'pleasantries', is suspicious especially in the South African context, where such relations between police officers and criminals reinforce the crime that haunts the country.

The judge surprisingly dismisses his case after recognising Mfundo as his former maths pupils. The novel does not give details of Mfundo's case in the above quote or anywhere in the novel yet, the understanding that the verdict of Mfundo's case is overridden by his relationship with the judge captures my interest. The name "Mnyamana" (referring to Mfundo), in this context does not only refer to this character as identified after his dark skin colour but also connotes a sense of hero-worshiping that simultaneously constructs and sustains both his economic stability and toxic masculine identity. Also interesting is Mfundo's mention that the police officer "knows how to follow the protocol". One wonders whether Mfundo's reference to protocol means that he is immune to the inevitabilities of post-apartheid law, as he seems to position himself as the mastermind behind the manipulation of the law of the city as a gang affiliate. The manipulation is figuratively entrenched in the term "maths" that the judge uses. For me, the term 'maths' suggests Mfundo's complex manipulation of the post-apartheid justice system that acquits him before any trial despite that he is one of the dangerous members of the urban community. The urban connections reflected by Mfundo foster a sense of economic stability that attracts the interest of many young characters who are keen to make names for themselves in the city. It sows the seeds for the construction of permanent dangerous masculine identities in the city.

Equally interesting to note is the act of walking that maps the connections and disconnections of urban spaces of Cape Town. I find De Certeau's (1984: 98) definition of the act of walking as appropriate to consider here. He views the act of walking as "a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies relations among differentiated positions" (98). The process of walking through the streets of Cape Town shown through Manga establishes connections or relations between spaces of the city that influence toxic masculinities. Manga's movements (in his state of insanity) within the streets of the city are metaphoric connotations of two distinct spaces that emerge in post-apartheid South Africa. For a moment, we are taken through the streets that are "shadowy, with a yellow cast from the lighting" (Mahlangu 10) as we follow Manga walking on Cape Town streets. Manga also says, "I blow past the dark-brown walls of Bush Radio, leave the Caltex garage behind me. Salt River has a blueness about it from all the dilapidated buildings" (Mahlangu 19). These spaces are constructed through images of sadness, poverty, marks of death that Manga traces on some human faces, and dilapidated infrastructure that the writer positions on almost every turn that this character makes as he moves along. As an antithesis, Mfundo's visit to Bra Menzi is an opportunity to witness his house and successful lifestyle, which trigger Manga and his peers' longing for success. Narrating their visit, Manga says:

> [w]e parked outside a double-storey facebrick house. There was a Mercedes-Benz sandwiched between two trucks in the yard. The gentleman we had come to see, Bra Menzi, came out wearing a T-shirt and jeans. His skin was taut and his well-built upper body clearly suggested he worked out […] We introduced ourselves and went upstairs to Bra Menzi's bedroom. It was spacious, with a furry brown carpet. We watched football on the 102cm plasma screen. Bra Menzi brought us a bottle of Veuve Clicquot champagne. Nhlakanipho filled his glass, showing great excitement (Mahlangu 62).

Characterizing Menzi as a gang affiliate whose house and family in the city are distinguished from the space of dilapidated flats occupied by Manga and his peers is strategic. It glorifies crime as an identity worth of pursuit. In fact, they move from their urban space that is clearly characterised by their unachievable hopes as Mpumelelo aspire for and cannot afford a "Range Rover" (Mahlangu 59), to Bra Menzi's urban space that projects an admirable big townhouse. Menzi's lifestyle relates to that reflected in the aspirations of Mpumelelo when he wishes to alternate alcohol beverages (Mahlangu 59). I argued earlier that the protagonists' wish for success that will afford them an opportunity to alternate alcohol beverages significantly and figuratively define their enthusiasm for alternative and better ways of

survival in post-apartheid South African city. Nhlakanipho's excitement when they are offered 'Veuve Clicquot champagne' by Bra Menzi shows how the novel seems to focus the interest of young black men who envy the success of post-apartheid characters like Menzi. There is no doubting that when promised the same lifestyle, they will unquestioningly jump into crime. Thus, Nhlakanipho's excitement becomes a motivating factor for these young men to affiliate with the gang. They immediately reconsider accepting Mfundo's recruitment to gangsterism. Crime is their quick means of attaining economic stability and a new black identity that comes with existing alongside flashy lifestyles as shown through Menzi yet, even with such connections, their fear downplays their efforts and wishes to make names for themselves in that city.

5.6 Blackness, Female Voices and the interrogation of restrictive constructions of femininities in *Black Widow Society*

The post-apartheid urban South Africa has experienced enormous gender transformations that necessitate analysing blackness through female voices. In other words, it is a space where traditional projections of men as superior and females as inferior subjects face vigorous and constant interrogation. As such, perceiving blackness through the dominance of men and the marginalisation of women as shown through previously analysed texts (particularly *Penumbra*) will be to construct it as a male-gendered space. In a post-2000 South Africa where such male gendered spaces are constantly interrogated by quests for gender balance, it remains crucial to define blackness through masculine/feminine relations. I therefore, introduce Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* (2014) to formulate a balanced analysis of post-2000 blackness. The novel offers a perfect start when looking through interrogations of male-gendered space because it presents violent femininities that seek various ways to deal with violent patriarchal power. It is as if the characters of this novel operate along Ernst's (2003: 105) thoughts that, "as long as male behaviour is taken to be the norm, there can be no serious questioning of male traits and behaviour". Makholwa's characters determinately and violently question almost all male dominated spaces in their quest to re-structure feminine identities against urban spaces that do not favour their presents. Based on this view, I find relevance in Flax's (1999: 10) argument that the goals of feminist theories include understanding "power differentials between men and women".

Initially, the novel reflects power imbalances that result in unprecedented oppression of female subjects and immediately ushers a shift that re-construct that power to liberate

feminine identities from the oppressive margins. In *Black Widow Society*, issues of male infidelity and violence against female subjects are confronted with violence by the very victimised female characters in urban spaces. My interest in this novel lies in the way it captures the lived experiences of oppressed female characters and follows their transformations as they realise and resist the oppressive nature of patriarchal power around them. How that transformation is defined through their response against toxic masculinities forms one of the questions that will be answered in this section.

Worth noting are their attempts to foster transformations of power relations through toxic femininities. Thus, by confronting toxic masculinities through toxic femininities, the novel formulates blackness as a toxic space where clashes between masculinities and femininities trace identity contestations and the quest for dwellers' survival. On that note, the three business women Tallular Ntuli, Edna Whitehead and Nkosazana Khumalo formulate a feminine organisation called Black Widow Society as a space of violence because of its nature. Violence has always been a way through which dominant identities are constructed. For instance, the colonial project and the dominance of white colonial identity were formulated through discourses of violence. As Fanon (1963: 36) argues, "the exploitation of the native by the settler – was carried on by dint of great array of bayonets and cannons". Of course, Fanon's focus is on the relations between the coloniser and the colonised, and how violence forms the basis for the coloniser to establish his colonial agenda and identity against the colonised. Similarly, for the colonised to effect decolonisation and re-instate his identity, violence must be deployed. The researcher is aware however, that Fanon "has been seen exclusively as an apostle of violence" (Nayar 2011: 21) with such writers as Arendt accusing him of "glofying violence for violence's sake" (1970: 65). The same can be said about the author of this novel because of the nature of violence that is perpetrated against male characters. However, that violence enables the reconstruction of feminine identities in urban spaces that are patriarchal.

I am tempted to consider Fanon's idea of "collective catharsis" that he formulates in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated from Greek, "catharsis", according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2010: 78-79), means "to purify, cleanse or purge". For the sake of the argument that is made in this section, I regard violence as the "intervening event" that liberates female characters from "their feelings of self-loathing, which have been internalised after constant repetition" from the patriarchal power. Viewed through continued feminine

struggles to liberate themselves against toxic masculinities, I argue that blackness remains a space of struggle for freedom, decades after the end of colonial and apartheid oppression. This chapter and the previous ones noted how male characters through violence, seek to establish their masculine identities against their female peers who are constantly undermined and marginalised in South African urban spaces. On a similar note, I argue that in *Black Widow Society*, Makholwa employs violence to interrogate restrictive constructions of femininities and to "negate and question gendered power relations in their societies and as a symbolic representation of their day-to-day experiences" (Dlamini 2009: 133). However, by attempting to deviate from patriarchal misogynies, female characters fall into the same trap of male control as they create discourses that sometimes fail to interrogate "a social structure that is male-centred, male-identified, [and] male-dominated" (Becker 1999: 22). Although female violence and resistance are always considered as abnormal by patriarchal societies, Banyard (2010: 107) refuses to perceive such violence as abnormalities and argues, "look beneath the surface and you find roots of all these individual acts connected in a tangle of gender inequality that is firmly planted in the heart of normal, everyday society". Against the patriarchal thought that such characterisation of feminine subjects defines them as social deviants, NtamboNtambo (2018: 30) argues that such feminine attitudes "should not be perceived as deviant sexual attitudes because it is an expression of their empowerment and their resistance vis-à-vis the bondage that some men have subjected them to and a way to live a self-fulfilled existence". Thus, through dealing with such issues as violence and infidelity from patriarchal society, I argue that these female characters engage in a post-apartheid feminine struggle against inequalities that, since time immemorial, have defined black femininities.

However, the representation of female characters in this novel has constant compromises that undermine the resistance it claims. The male hired assassin Mzwakhe Khuzwayo is celebrated for his qualities that embrace the Black Widow Society's agenda to liberate its members from emotional and physical abusive relationships yet, he ironically and unconsciously remain entrenched in patriarchal ideologies that define women through sexual connotations. Of course, he "had always been something of a feminist, though he would never refer to himself as such" (Makholwa 45) but his feminism is constantly questionable as shown through his role in the BWS. Towards the end of the novel, he mentions that he does "not want to end up as a pawn in a game that merely involved bloodsucking women who were just out to eliminate his entire gender" (Makholwa 63). What is fascinating about this

male character who claims to embrace the liberation of female characters from their 'physical and emotional abusive relationships', is that he resorts to discourses that suggest women's hatred for men. Murray (2016: 18) regards this as a "misrepresentation that has long been used to discredit a political movement that aims to achieve gender justice". Thus, a character who claims to defend post-apartheid women from patriarchal oppression is evidently less of a feminist. This makes us question and point to his role in BWS as a compromise to the agenda of liberating post-2000 women from patriarchal oppression. The captivating narrative constructed here is that despite such compromises, the founding members of the BWS remain resilient in their aim to liberate themselves from patriarchal oppression. Their sense of liberation does not only emanate from the fact that they eliminate their husbands but also through their dominance in urban spaces that were once defined through male dominance. For instance, they employ Mzwakhe as their hit man and for the greater part of the novel, he complies with any assigned duty. Sometimes his duties are accompanied by threats from The Triumvirate that construct a thought of feminine resistance against and dominance over their post-apartheid male peers. One is drawn to representational challenges between female characters that invite the reader to look through the loopholes that problematise the feminine characters' attempts to establish rigorous interrogations of post-2000 oppressive patriarchal societies.

Some feminist writers have noted the contrast and contradictions and argue that they sometimes compromise the efforts to downplay patriarchal oppression. For Wyman and Dionisopoulos (2000: 209) the compromise that lies on the representation of women's sexuality is always projected in "in terms of the virgin/ whore or angel/ demon dichotomies". Whelehan (2009: 75) adds, "when it comes to the portrayal of women in the popular consciousness we tend to be stuck in the virgin/whore, angel/demon dichotomy, despite the best efforts of feminist academics to offer more subtle interrogations". On that note, I find Hanson's (1990: 157) argument that "the virgin/whore dichotomy is the most fundamental and oppressive polarization in the depiction of women" as crucial to engage in character analysis. Such characterisation of Marie (Mzwakhe's girlfriend) that Mzwakhe describes as "so delicate, like a little flower" and mentions that "it was her vulnerability that captivated him" (Makholwa 23) in contrast with the Edna, Nkosazana and Talullah, will form fascinating basis for my analysis at this point. Against the characterisation of Marie and others, is the projection of Talullah, Edna and Nkosazana whose agendas range from a need to liberate oppressed women, to crime and are represented as "unethical, dangerous and

erotic" (Wyman and Dionisopoulos 209). This section engages such contrasts and compromises of feminine resistance and argues that blackness is a space that is defined by unsettling contestations around gender equality

Black Widow Society follows female characters, Telullah, Edna and Nkosazana (referred to as The Triumvirate), the co-founders of Black Widow Society whose agenda is to liberate women from "physical and emotional abusive relationships" by assassinating their husbands. The members of this organisation host an annual meeting wherein the account of each member's activity is presented and any meeting or associations thereafter are strictly prohibited. This allows the organisation to operate secretly and clandestinely deal with the patriarchal oppressive power. What captures attention in this pursuit for the liberation of women is that this organisation hires a male ex-convict Mzwakhe Khuzwayo for assassination operations against "his entire gender" (Makholwa 63). As the organisation's recruitment follows certain procedures such as assassinating all the husbands of its members, it also claims a portion from the estate of the deceased to maintain its operations. Although, at some point, Nkosazana almost forgets the objectives behind claiming portions of the inheritance, as she sees an opportunity to enrich herself, Talullah reminds her that the main aim of the claims is to start a "Young Women's Academy" (Makholwa 16). This Academy is aimed at "producing a new breed of woman who would be given the type of education that would empower her to avoid the kinds of decisions that had led most of the black widows to their ill-fated marriages and partnerships" (Makholwa 17). I engage the formation of this space and the BWS, and argue that like the initiation tradition in *Penumbra,* BWS initiates young women through the process of emancipating themselves from patriarchal power that dehumanises them. In my analysis of these spaces, I also argue that although the novel formulates these spaces as gendered and thus, projecting attempts to liberate feminine characters, it rarely "explore[s] the extent to which a much more radical reconstruction of both femininity and masculinity is needed to achieve substantive gender justice" (Murray 2016: 21).

5.7 Confronting Toxic Masculinities and Interrogating Patriarchal Gendered Spaces

Black Widow Society is a novel that confronts toxic masculinities and gendered spaces through depictions of "institutionalized, endemic character of violence against women' (Tomc 51)". Such masculine toxicities as the physical and emotional abuse that can be traced in *Penumbra,* are strongly and violently interrogated in this novel to re-construct feminine

identities. Pumla Gqola (2001: 17) sees this as an opportunity for post-apartheid feminine subjects to redefine the self that for a long time was defined by the centre (masculine power). The success of that feminine identity re-imagining can only thrive through creation of a "new identity that transgresses the boundaries set by those in the centre. It would require dismantling the logic either/or and adhering to a different logic; it could involve conforming to the logic neither/both" (Lebaddy, 2001:5). My approach to the novel's interrogations of gendered spaces is informed by the fact that female characters are determined to confront and interrogate the long held cultures of patriarchal dominance that dehumanise them. They do so by constructing female gendered spaces aimed at motivating the conscience of female characters while, at the same time, shifting their identities from marginal spaces of societies that glorify masculine power. Almost all the husbands of female characters and members of the Black Widow Society (BWS) are assassinated for their oppressive nature. This motivates an urge to establish the marginal spaces within which female characters are initially positioned in urban spaces and how they navigate those spaces to liberate themselves or "engineer a new social order in which [they] are in control of their common destiny" (Adjei 2009: 49). On that note, this section responds to the question of how the confrontations of toxic masculinities and interrogations of male gender spaces formulate the understanding of black identity. My approach is focused by Löw and Lawrence-Zúñiga's (2001: 7) definition of gendered space as "particular locales that cultures invest with gender meanings, sites in which differentiated-practice occur or settings that are used strategically to inform identity and produce and reproduce asymmetrical gender relations". Several locales defined by gender meanings can be noted in the novel. For instance, as a man, Khaya feels entitled to sexual control over all the females that he is involved in sexual relations with. However, Talullah who only calls him for paid sexual relations and refuses to be sexually controlled by Khaya quickly checks his entitlement to that control. Additionally, Talullah who, apart from the BWS, owns several businesses in the city space also challenges the domination of male characters in the business spaces in the novel.

The opening of the novel introduces us to a gruesome scene of Talullah who is physically and mentally abused by her husband, who thus, sets her as an inferior subject. The novel introduces us to this scene to prepare the reader for what is captured on the cover page. The Triumvirate; Talullah, Edna and Nkosazana in black costumes around what can be viewed as the representation of the novel's bloody climax prepares the reader for the violent female responses against male gendered spaces that are maintained by characters like Mphikeleli

(Talullah's husband). Mphikeleli's oppressive nature is informed by old patriarchal ideologies that define women as inferior subjects who belong to the margins of male controlled society. His, is a "male centred world-view wherein male activities are evaluated positively and female activities negatively" (Simpson 2005: 148). Various aspects inform Mphikeleli's degrading perceptions about Talullah. For instance, the discourse of 'lobola' (the bride price) that qualifies his control over Talullah as, "he used to call her his child bride, and treated her like a precious gem … until he paid lobola and set her up in her dream house" (Makholwa 2). The discourse of "lobola" is used here to construct marriage as a space that qualifies this male character's sense of control while depriving Talullah of her existence in post-apartheid South Africa. In this context, I concur with Matope et al. (2013: 192) who view "lobola as a gendered constructs which constrain […] woman by stripping her of her human rights" because in the case of Talullah, *lobola* inferiorises and deprives her of her sense of self and entitlement to their home. With such masculine toxicities that are reinforced through the discourses of *Lobola*, Lorentzen's (1998: 88) argument that, "domestic violence has to do with men who have internalised the feeling of supremacy the patriarchal culture gives to men and who put it into practice in concrete actions against those who are nearest to them" is evidently substantial. This understanding is also evident where the narrative of 'lobola' is settled along Mphikeleli provision of a home for his wife and thus, sets his dominance and inferiority against his wife who, for a while, is made to endure constant masculine victimisation. For Talullah, this home is a gendered and oppressive space that she need to navigate and escape if possible. Narrating an incident where Mphikeleli locks her outside their house during one extremely cold evening and her pleading until he opens the door, the narrator says:

> [s]he continues begging and pleading until the door suddenly springs open, and a furious Mphikeleli drags her by the arm back into the house. He slams the door shut after her and butts her head with the gun. 'Why the racket now? Why this noise? Am I living in *hoerhuis* or what? What is it? Must my neighbours know what a useless wife I have? Is that what you want?' No. Mphikeleli … please, please stop it!' she begs, as blood gushes from her scalp and trickles down her face (Makholwa 3).

The home represented here traces the dominance and subjugating patriarchal power and the evident repression of femininities. This comes out through Talullah's pleading for herself after she forgot to prepare a family dinner. What captures attention here is that Talullah is expected to do all the house chores despite that she also comes back home tired from managing family businesses. One almost sees Mphikeleli's characterisation centred on the

notion of the "breadwinner code of conduct" that Wood (2009: 237) perceives as, "[p]erhaps no other stereotype so strongly defines men in our society as does that of breadwinner. Men are expected to be the primary or exclusive wage earners for their families and achieving this is central to how society views men's success". Thus, being a medical Doctor places Mphikeleli into breadwinner position that he seeks to maintain around his neighbours.

The notable images that run through the above excerpt such as the door that "springs open" and slammed, Talullah's head being butted with the head of the gun and the blood gushing from "her scalp" portray a life replete with violence. These gross images create a fast paced horrific life characterised by the violence of an emotionally unstable husband and the physical and emotional violation of Talullah who is turned into a worthless feminine character before she establishes the BWS. Of interest, is Mphikeleli's use of the term *hoerhuis* (brothel or whorehouse) which suggests Mphikeleli's degrading perception of Talullah's sexuality as the mother superior of whoredom. Sexuality is important in projecting a sense of self. As such, whenever it is degraded, the individual's sense of self becomes insignificant. Coward (1983) argues, "[s]exuality is the innate attributes of an individual, including sexual desires, roles and identities, which finds expression in sexual relationships and sexual activities with others". By subjecting Talullah to sexual degradation, Mphikeleli objectifies her as some form of rehearsal of patriarchal ideologies that are set to dehumanise women. The oppressive experiences she endures at the hands of men rob Talullah her significant identity as a mother. We are told, "she was not much of a mother. In fact, she could very well be classified as a 'bad mother'; she knew it – it was her cross to bear. Which is why the BWS had come to mean everything to her; it was the only thing of any value she had achieved in all these years" (Mahlangu 136). Her surgeon husband makes it his objective to instil in her the belief that she is worthless. However, Talullah transcends this demeaning male constructed gaze and establishes herself as a capable business woman who re-defines her identity through BWS.

The re-establishment of Talullah's degraded self and identity comes at a point when she realises the importance of liberating herself and re-establishing her voice through the BWS. Along with the fact that the BWS has become everything to her as shown in the above passage, Talullah manages to resist and retain her sense of self. She manages to control her violent husband which, to some extent, "suspend […] hierarchical distinctions and barriers

[...] and of the prohibitions of usual life' (Bakhtin 1968: 15). Pointing to what seem to be her rediscovery of her sense of self, the narrator says:

> [s]he examined her face in her gold-encrusted bedroom mirror and wondering aloud where the years had gone. Adjusting the stylish bronze turban adorning her head, she applied a dab of foundation on her cocoa skin and pursed her lips, while slowly applying the rouge lipstick she had taken to of late (Makholwa 136).

While the first page of the novel shows Mphikeleli's violence against Talullah, the above quote poses as a transition of Talullah's characterisation as she "emerges eventually with a sense of self-assertion, identity and self-knowledge" (Safi-Eddine 1994: 48). The sense of self is figuratively constructed through the process of examining her face on the mirror thus, affording her an opportunity to engage with her old and new self. Safi-Eddine (1994: 49) argues, "the mirror reflection […] serves as the form that in-forms the subject and guides its development". I regard her mirror as symbolic of her confrontation and interrogation of her gruesome past that disfigured her feminine identity and an attempt to reconstruct the destroyed self through a symbolic process of adorning her hair and fixing her face. Thus, by confronting her past, Talullah constructs blackness as an identity settled on perpetual negotiations between masculine and feminine identities and projects its transformation as entrenched within constant quests for gender equality. Talullah's emancipation and reclamation of her feminine voice from the oppressive patriarchal power, plays out through exposure of Mphikeleli's unsatisfying sexual relations. The narrator says, "sex with Mphikeleli had always seemed quite perfunctory and mechanical; she'd married him when she was twenty years old and barely out of her school tunic so she'd merely gone along with whatever he wanted in the bedroom, which was usually just the boring old missionary position" (Makholwa 107). For a moment, one would think of Talullah as a character who, at some point, represented a silenced voice and sexually objectified woman. Her silence could be understood through Dlamini's (2009: 142) argument that a woman "who talks about her sexual (dis)pleasure is seen as a slut". By claiming sexual power through her sexual partners after her husband's death, Talullah figuratively and evidently re-traces the power of her language. She claims that power through her control of sexual partners like Khaya (during their sexual relations) whom she constantly refers to as 'boys'. Re-claiming the power of her language is crucial in the process of re-defining her identity because, as Fanon (1952) says, "[a person] who has language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. Mastery of Language affords remarkable power". The process of reclaiming

the power of her language is settled on the understanding that Talullah enjoys sexual relations with multiple partners and constantly avoids those that fail to satisfy her sexually to eke her self-empowerment. By controlling her sexual male partners, Talullah wades herself into parameters that define her as a deviant feminine subject. Commenting on Talullah's character, Ntambontambo (2018: 30) argues that in her attempt to re-define herself as a feminine subject Talullah can rarely be imagined as deviant feminine character but as advocating her empowerment against the society that has subjugated and marginalised her on the basis of her sex.

What I find fascinating about this novel is the way it challenges and defies convention by disrupting established male gendered spaces and resisting them in order to re-establish the worthiness of female characters. Traditionally, female characters are undermined and marginalised in these male gendered spaces. The marriage of Scott O'Leary and Salome speaks to this. Even when O'Leary infects Salome with HIV, he shows no remorse and continues with his irresponsible multiple sexual relations. The novel states that "this man was a piece of scum who routinely slept with women without using a condom and all he was doing was happily infecting as many women around the world as possible" (Makholwa 93). For O'Lear, multiple sexual relations with various women is his patriarchal way of strengthening his masculinity that he first establishes through his local and non-local horse race businesses. However, that emotional abusive behaviour against Salome is swiftly confronted and interrogated by the BWS as shown where Talullah says:

> 'Can you believe that bastard actually infected her with that dreaded disease and had the gall to ask her to pretend that the whole thing is not even happening? The cold-hearted brute! And you know his last wife committed suicide. Can you blame her?' Fumed a furious Talullah. Edna Whithead concurred 'I met them once or twice at the July handicap […] A pretty little thing. I thought she was a mulatto from Mozambique. Gorgeous, gorgeous girl. He kept prancing around her like one of his prized animals. A totally despicable fellow that Scott O'Leary. He deserves what's coming for him' (Makholwa 52).

The first sentence of this passage draws the reader's attention to the silenced feminine subject who, despite her commitment to her husband, is left to endure the consequences of the pandemic. The silenced feminine voice is the basis through which patriarchal power marginalises feminine identities and overshadows their existence as shown by his former wife who commits suicide. This speaks to Gqola's (2005) argument that, "rather than being a mere tool, the body acts as both a site and language through which positioning is negotiated" (3).

Through his sexual relations, O'Leary constructs the feminine bodies as "site[s] and language through which positioning" of female subjects as inferior subjects is established. When Edna interjects, she uses imagery that suggests the abusive nature of oppressive masculine identity that is constructed through O'Lear. The fact that "[h]e kept prancing around her like one of his prized animals" (Makholwa 25), suggests the extent to which female characters have been dehumanised and subjected to degrading animalistic qualities that guarantee men's control over them. This is intensified by the contrast between the emphasis on Salome's beauty that is described through the repetition of the term 'gorgeous' while at the same time she is almost thought in relation to "prized animals". The novel projects this contrast as a symbolic reflection of the attitudes of feminine characters towards the toxic masculine perspectives that disgrace their appearances and seek to distort their significance in urban space.

However, my interest lies in the resistance wedged by Talullah and Edna in the above excerpt. The use of the term "gall" is clearly interrogative of the long held dominance of patriarchy against feminine subjects and re-establishes the feminine voice against patriarchal oppression. By mentioning O'Lear former wife who committed suicide as a result of his toxic masculinity while describing him as having the "gall" to suppress Salome's voice, the novel constructs the shift between the historical struggles of feminine identity and its transition as it liberates itself from the patriarchal oppression. That shift is projected through his former wife who, along his supressed voice, commits suicide and the Salome's affiliation with the BWS as she seeks to revive her voice against his oppressive husband. Suicide, when looked at in relation to the Japanese Harakiri Kamikaze behaviour, is a weapon of empowering the self by taking one's own life in order to escape and disempower the enemy. Thus, by committing suicide, O'Lear former wife takes control of her body and robs O'Lear of the object of his oppressive pleasure. The last sentence undoubtedly reinforces that understanding in that it shows the resilience of these female characters in their confrontation of toxic masculinities and that through the assassination of O'Lear, establishes violence as the only option they have to deal with patriarchal oppression. Therefore, blackness, to some extent, exists within overlapping meanings of contesting urban feminine and masculine identities.

This sense of black identity can also be followed through Lloyd and Thami's marriage. Their marriage is reflective of Johannesburg as a male gendered space in that Lloyd constantly seeks to establish his control over Thami despite that their union is marked by the fact that Lloyd is not economically and materially stable. However, he uses the terms of their marriage

(in community of property) to establish his control over part of the property that Thami inherited from her deceased father. To reinforce his control, Lloyd settles for the best male lawyer in the urban space before Thami. Apart from the realisation that "in community of property" terms of their marriage qualifies him to claim part of Thami's inheritance, Lloyd ventures into negative labelling of Thami that suggests thoughts of her as less human and inferior to him as the novel says:

> Lloyd had indeed secured the powerful Billy Golden and had managed to paint her as mentally unstable. The picture he'd painted of her was that of a cloying, controlling and unbearable nut who was slowly peeling away Lloyd's own stability and his ability to perform at work. Her lawyer, someone who was referred by one of her colleagues had proved absolutely useless and incompetent. He just made her feel helpless, always emphasising that her marriage was in community of property, therefore she should expect to share half of her wealth with him (Makholwa 124-5).

By insinuating that Thami is "mentally unstable […] controlling and unbearable nut", Lloyd is treading on the lines that dehumanise her as he gives the impression that feminine resistance against the patriarchal power is unnecessary and "that gender equality assaults [his] sense of manhood" (Sutnner 2005: 73). Her incompetent male lawyer who accelerates her despair as she faces her politically influential husband in court reinforces this view. My interest is captured by Lloyd's perception of Thami that the novel parallels with his position in the South African political arena. The fact that he is the African National Congress' "Director General of Foreign Affairs" (Makholwa 43) does not only reflect his social influence and power but also constructs this factitious ANC as a patriarchal power machinery that hinders the construction of feminine identities outside its repressive parameters. This ANC, is a "male terrain" (Sutnner 2005: 71), and has no place for feminine characters as both Thami and Nomhle fail to secure their positions after the Polokwane conference.

In his study of masculinities in the "ANC-led liberation movement", Sutnner argues that ANC continues to be a "male terrain" that undermines the significance of its feminine members. While the Polokwane conference witnessed the power transition from Thabo Mbeki to Jacob Zuma, Nomhle, who remains loyal to Mbeki's faction, fails to secure her position when Zuma rises to power. Interestingly, Lloyd, through Thami who "worked on placing him in all the right circles" (Makholwa 28) is promoted to the position of the general, is characterised around what Unterhalter (2000) refers to as the "heroic masculinity". According to Suttner (2005: 72) heroic masculinity "refers to men being representatives of heroic projects, whose success is contingent on women being at home, often waving men

goodbye as they depart to face danger". I view this narrative of heroic masculinity, in relation to Lloyd's characterisation and his ANC, as serving [this man's] personal and political control over women" (Peiss 1998: 261). A sense of that heroic masculinity constructed around Lloyd is evident in the fact that when Thami's "clique' had been speedily dwarfed into political nonentities, Lloyd clearly had no use for her any more" (Makholwa 28) and thus, files for divorce. Moving to Nomhle, reinforces his heroic masculinity through Nomhle who relies on him for economic stability. The novel interrogates such degrading positioning of feminine subjects in various ways. Firstly, it interrogates and denounces young female characters' patronising relations with their male peers through Mam'Kheswa (Thami's grandmother). Responding to Thami's suspicions that Lloyd might be having an affair, Mam'Kheswa says, "you see wena Thami, these boys see through you girls' vulnerability. I don't know why you decide to take leave of your senses every time you meet someone who makes you look good when you step outside with your peers or who's some kind of a champion in bed" (Makholwa 57). Mam'Kheswa belongs to the apartheid generation that one might expect to submit to patriarchal power. However, she motivates young characters to resist that power. She epitomises characters inclined on confronting and interrogating that power's historical and contemporary nature.

The view of Mam'Kheswa as a voice belonging to the apartheid generation of revolutionaries who endured and resisted the double tragedy of the intensity of patriarchal power and colonial power is premised on Afasi's (2010: 230) argument that:

> [t]he face of African society on gender equality changed owing to the influence of colonialism. Women began to suffer oppression from men. The shackles imposed by law, custom, religion and attitudes forced women to play the second fiddle. In fact, women mostly remained relegated to the last rung of the social and political ladder. Women no longer were giving the opportunity to exercise any power except those supervised by men.

Afasi offers an understanding of how colonial and apartheid eras constructed platforms through which the masculine superiority and feminine inferiority were entrenched. In contrast with contemporary South Africa, the apartheid patriarchal power dominated and controlled almost all political structures like the ANC, "Umkhonto Wesizwe" (its armed wing) and even the households. As such, characterising Mam'Kheswa around the responsibility of re-constructing the consciousness of post-apartheid young female characters against the exploitative patriarchal power is significant in relation to these characters' attempt to address and deal with historical and contemporary patriarchal oppression as they seek new ways to

establish and liberate their identities and voices. Thami's friends warned her that "Lloyd was too much of a pretty boy thereby insinuating that he was a Casanova" (Makholwa 28-9). Gqola's (2005: 3)view is crucial to consider here when she argues, "rather than being a mere tool, the body acts as both a site and language through which positioning is negotiated". In other words, Mam'Kheswa is a female character who raises the realisation of the importance of young female bodies by reminding them how easily swayed they are, by their men's good sexual relations. Mam'Kheswa is conscious of the vulnerability and frailty of the young female generation who lack the economic stability that could set them as independent women. Through Talullah, Edna and Nkosazana whose social and economic stability liberates them from the control of their male counterparts, the novel shows the importance of economic liberation in re-constructing feminine identities. As a result, Talullah's economic stability traces an emancipated feminine character that does not only control her destiny but also her sexual partners like Khaya who are only summoned whenever she needs sexual satisfaction gratification (Makholwa 230). She, therefore, treads within parameters that would have previously evoked the patriarchal power to see her as a social deviant deserving restraint. However, for Ntambontambo (2018: 30), Talullah's "sexual liberty […] should not be perceived as deviant sexual attitudes because it is an expression of [her] empowerment and their resistance vis-à-vis the bondage that some men have subjected [women] to and a way to live a self-fulfilled existence". Through her economic empowerment and what the patriarchal society defines as deviant, Talullah sets herself against relying on men to construct a feminine identity anchored on free will.

Thami moves beyond enduring patriarchal oppression as she finds an opportunity to emancipate herself through interrogating masculine toxic spaces that are constructed around her husband. Of course, the decision to eliminate her husband sets reasons to define this novel as a crime urban narrative that constructs "gender violence" (Murray 2016: 14). Nevertheless, crime or "gender violence" is employed here as a response against the subjugating patriarchal power thus, prompting one to think that the placement of feminine characters "at the centre of a crime novel can be seen as a feminist act" (Fletcher 2013: 197) that is aimed at raising feminine concerns to reconstruct feminine identities. To subvert the subjugating power of patriarchy, Thami seeks the BWS's private investigative services. She hires, "Private Detective Sam Pienaar" to follow Lloyd for "close to three weeks" (Makholwa 153). The investigation discovers Lloyd's relationship with Nomhle. The efforts by Thami to seek private investigating services suggest the various hideous and new ways through which

feminine subjects are determined to pursue strategies to simultaneously undermine the oppressive patriarchal power and establish themselves in contemporary South Africa as free and powerful human beings. Upon discovering that Lloyd's divorce filing is motivated by his new relationship with Nomhle, Thami affiliates with the BWS as a way to liberate herself from the distressing experiences of Lloyd's infidelity. Narrating Lloyd and Nomhle's travelling plan that offers an opportunity for Mzwakhe to act on his execution plan, the narrator says:

> [t]hese two fools were all packed up and ready to go to Magoebaskoof in Limpopo for the weekend. He knew the terrain there presented some opportunities for an unexpected accident […] He'd already fiddled with the car's brakes, but not enough to deter them from using the car for the trip. The idea was to follow till he could get to a quiet part of the road where he could engineer the type of accident that would make their bodies unrecognisable from the damage (Makholwa 168).

What captures attention here is that the execution strategy also targets Nomhle. Her relationship with Lloyd is a betrayal of her cousin Thami and it compromises the feminine hostility against masculine power that undermines Thami's dignity as a woman. Nomhle fails to realise the oppressive and manipulative nature of masculine power as she "willingly participate[s] in a culture that objectifies women" (Zaslow 2017: 48). As such, she exposes herself to and reinforces masculine views that define women as sexual objects. With both Lloyd and Nomhle labelled as "fools" in the opening sentence, the BWS evidently regards them as a hindrance to its agenda of liberating post-apartheid women. Therefore, their elimination foster feminine confrontations that are crucial in re-instating feminine dignity and identity.

Also striking is that this organisation operates clandestinely (Makholwa 165) in its mission of liberating women. Before Mzwakhe fulfils his mission of leading Lloyd and Nomhle into a fatal accident, Talullah emphasises that he must facilitate the execution without any suspicions from the public or police. Implied here is the suggestion that the interrogation and confrontation of masculine oppressive power must be strategic in its attempt to undermine the long held masculine ideologies about feminine subjects. This also manifests in that, the BWS uses a male hit man to further their resistance against masculine oppressive power. Mzwakhe's bitter reflection against all cheating men and, against Lloyd and Nomhle's betrayal of Thami when he says, "all these lying, cheating fools. They all deserved what was coming to them" (Makholwa 167), shows that he has entrenched himself under the control of the BWS. However, the BWS' strategy to confront the oppressive masculine power and

liberate female characters is, to some degree, problematized by the fact that it only caters for those who are willing to affiliate with that organisation. At the same time, it is also compromised by Mzwakhe, who at some point, says that, "he did not want to end up as a pawn in a game that merely involved bloodsucking women who were just out to eliminate his entire gender" (Makholwa 63). Thus, Murray (2016: 18) argues, "the notion that feminism involves a hatred of men and a desire to get rid of them altogether is a very dated, yet surprisingly persistent, misrepresentation that has long been used to discredit a political movement that aims to achieve gender justice". Therefore, the novel's approach to gender equality through the discourses of crime is, to some extent, compromised by male characters like Mzwakhe who, despite being hired by the BWS, kills most of its members towards the end. This reinforces blackness as male gendered space that perpetually undermines feminine presence and identities.

5.8 Spaces of Violence and Subverting Patriarchal Subjugation

The study of post-apartheid female subjects and their navigations in patriarchal urban communities has always been set alongside male violence with most studies inclined on showing women as victims of those communities. For instance, exploring relations between urbanisation and gender based violence with a focus on the cities of Global South, Mcllwaine (2013: 3) argues,"[m]ore specifically, and with the focus squarely on physical and sexual violence […] there is evidence to suggest that violence against women by male partners is prevalent in cities". This section defines violence as the use of physical force to define one's control of another. Mcllwaine (1999:455) defines it as "the use of physical force which both causes hurt to other(s) in order to impose one's wishes". What is central in these studies is the engagement with the oppressive nature of masculine identity. Here, I seek to offer a different approach by analysing female characters projecting violence against their male counterparts to liberate themselves from their oppression. Through their BWS, female characters project violence as the only strategy for establishing their dignity and redefining their identities against their oppressive and violent male peers. Therefore, Fanon's notion of violence is crucial to engage as it reinforces the argument that violence forms the basis through which the oppressed liberate themselves and re-define their identities.

However, for the sake of my analysis of *Black Widow Society* where violence is the basis for re-imagining and re-imaging the identities of feminine characters in the face of their oppressive male counterparts, I find Fanon relevant. Therefore, I engage spaces of violence

that are constructed by the novel and show how these spaces of violence formulate resistance against toxic masculinities and informs our understanding of black identity. Focus is on the BWS as a space of violence that does seeks to raise consciousness around its members and other women by forming perpetual hatred for masculine subjects. I argue, however, that it ironically forms itself as a space of uncertainties especially when some female characters regret affiliating with the BWS towards the end of the novel and are eventually assassinated by the man who for a long time operated as the gunman of their organisation.

The first meeting of the BWS surfaces several instances that centralise violence as crucial to its operations against the oppressive patriarchal power. Reference is made to the incident of "Phindile Chauke, a tough psychologist whose husband was eliminated five years ago after his penchant for high-class prostitutes [that] nearly drove them to bankruptcy" (Makholwa 20). At the same time, The Triumvirate discusses an urgent issue around the assassination mission of the day that has gone wrong. While Mzwakhe is out on a mission to assassinate Gumede, Gumede's wife, who has already been declared a new member of the BWS and a widow before the death of her husband, is also murdered. In response to whether Mzwakhe must proceed with the mission, Talullah says, "why ever not? If the bastard had his wife killed because his floozy is expecting a child with him, then he deserves a punishment worse than death" (Makholwa 21). A "punishment worse than death" is death reloaded and tells of extreme violence that is embedded in this feminine space and its subsequent missions. The instances noted above construct the BWS as a space defined by and that defines violence. What captures one's attention here is the irony in that this violence is aimed at curbing masculine violence that is perpetrated against the members of the BWS. Phindile, like Thami, signed an agreement for the assassination of her husband because of his infidelity; in the eyes of most male characters, this idea exemplifies manliness. The delineation of Gumede as a "bastard" is similar to such stereotypes as 'whore or prostitute' that are usually directed towards feminine subjects by masculine subjects. Thus, in the process of resisting toxic male behaviour as a way of re-defining their identities, the members of the BWS also seek to dismantle the stereotypes that, for a long time, have been used to define them. Nevertheless, they end up showing the same levels of toxicity that they are trying to dismantle. On that note, blackness poses as a space that constantly seeks to deal with a dark and violent history that negated it which can almost be read similar to the post-colonial writers' processes of writing back to former colonial states against the negations of indigenous identities.

By referring to Gumede as a bastard, one's thoughts drift to the use of the term by the colonialists as it suggested that the colonised blacks were strange and people of questionable origins. The use of such terms in this novel traces the uncertainties of male characters. Gumede, for instance, is married to Phindile but he pays for sexual gratification and wants to have children with one of the prostitutes. At the same time, even though Mzwakhe evidently reflects his hatred for male oppressors that he assassinates, he later shows his discontentment with the BWS's operations of eliminating his gender. The use of negative imagery to describe male characters is also projected through Edna's presentation during one of the BWS meetings:

> Sisters […] as much as I bemoan the escalating numbers of our kind, a part of me applauds the fierceness, and sheer willpower that has brought all of you earth mothers to this room. For many years, others like us endured pain, trauma, and torture at the hands of unappreciative dogs who badgered and bludgeoned us. Pelted us with vitriolic words, and violent beatings until one day, we stopped and listened. We listened to what our souls told us (Makholwa 19).

The opening sentence of this quote is crucial to note because of its reference to the discourse of sisterhood that "questions the disciplines and practices of femininity and develop individual and collective resistance to them" (McLaren 2002: 65). By referring to her peer members as "sisters", the novel constructs their sense and feeling of closeness and solidarity against a common cause that Edna narrates in the whole passage. This is contrary to Lord's (1984: 112) expression that, "as women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than forces for change". The quotation shows Edna's concern on how, especially her fellow members, have been struggling and still struggle under the patriarchal oppression as she "bemoan the escalating numbers" of the BWS members. For this organisation and its founders, this is a thrilling sign of their success in liberating their fellows and can also be understood as an attempt by the novel to reflect on how the voices are gradually being recovered along feminine identities. This is also read through Edna's reference to her peers as "earth mothers" which forms the notion of feminine superiority; the social position that, for a long time, defined masculine identity. The view also suggests that the earth with all its provisions, nurturing aspects is referred to as the mother earth and has to be protected, in the same way the green revolution seeks to protect mother earth. In other words, it is worth arguing here that the reflection of these female characters as mothers, sets them outside the perspectives and parameters that were constructed by patriarchy to define them as inferior. Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*

(1958) argues that mother is supreme. In the context of the above excerpt, motherhood is evidently celebrated. Although being mothers has been associated with docility and taking care of children, reference to them as earth mothers defines their role as providers and nurturers thus, projecting their positions above that of their male peers. With that view, one almost finds relevance in Kauer's (2003: 109) argument that the "future is Feminine" because "women function as saviours – [even] of men, of the community". Kauer's argument is constructed within the notion of how the contemporary societies are fast recognising the important of emancipating women from previous oppressive structures of patriarchal societies. This superior positioning of feminine identities is also constructed through Edna's reference to men as "unappreciative dogs". By suggesting that their husbands or male peers are unappreciative and that all they have done is to dehumanise them, these females create narratives that highlight the toxicity of patriarchal power that post-apartheid feminine subjects as the members of the BWS have subverted through its employment of violence. As such, blackness ought to be understood as a space that is permanently entrenched within constant discourses that seek to deal with stereotypes that have been formulated around it by history and tradition.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter argued that Penumbra formulates various toxic masculinities that are fostered by absent fathers, mothers who fail to raise responsible sons resulting in the formation of toxic masculinities in their adulthood. The chapter noted that absent fathers deprive sons of their orientation into progressive masculinity that is noted through Ndlela and Ntaba. I argued that such spaces as the initiation traditions that Manga attends through a "social father" formulate blackness as a gendered space in the way they reinforce the stereotypes of women as inferior subjects that exist for males' sexual gratification. This has also been shown through fathers who perpetrate violence against their wives to establish the superior toxic masculinities against feminine subjects who are silenced throughout the novel. I also reinforced that understanding through Mfundo's assault of his girlfriends and the threats that he directs to some of his male friends at gunpoint. The chapter's introduction of the analysis of *Black Widow Society* has shown how post-apartheid feminine characters deal with gendered spaces and attempt to dismantle them through violence. However, attempts to dismantle black identity as a male gendered space is problematised by Mzwakhe who, towards the end of the novel, realises that the BWS is aimed at eliminating his gender and assassinates some members of this organisation.

The chapter also noted *Penumbra*'s initiation tradition as a space inclined towards formulating binaries between the initiates. It formulates stereotypes around those who fail to endure the pain and use of traditional medicine as inferior and those who endure the same pain and consistently rely on traditional medicine as superior and sometime characterised around progressive masculinities. The chapter, therefore, argued that through such discourses blackness is projected as a space that also define the "other" within black communities. Some initiates' failure to endure the pain as they use the western medicine in defiance of what their tradition entails, marks the beginning of the struggle for characters like Manga and his friends who decide to migrate to Cape Town. Manga and his friends successfully pursue their university studies but fail to secure permanent employment thereafter and present the unfavourable nervous conditions of blackness as they engage in drug and alcohol abuse. Such conditions gradually become worse for post-apartheid characters as they are explored in the next chapter (through *Room 207*) to establish how they inform the understanding of black identity. In *Penumbra* conditions that are accompanied by lack of employment for young characters, force them to affiliate with a gang to make a name for themselves in the city. In the face of struggles to establish themselves in the city, the chapter argued that the novel constructs blackness as a "symbol of a conscious desire for life" (Mbembe 2017: 6) because of young people who constantly seek to establish a better and prosperous life in Cape Town. A series of instances of irresponsible behaviour by mothers, especially their involvement in sexual relations in the presents of their sons and extreme alcohol consumption, leads to the protagonists' compromised adulthood. Their adulthood becomes an embodiment of violence, violation of women's sexuality and undermining of their dignity. The chapter also noted that, male subjects who have formulated their dominance over feminine characters inhabit post-apartheid urban spaces. As such, the introduction of Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* was deliberately strategic in that it interrogates toxic masculinities or gendered urban spaces in ways that seek to understand blackness as an identity that strives for gender equality. The chapter argued that this novel confronts and interrogates male gendered urban spaces through the violence of toxic femininities to re-define post-apartheid femininities. It presents blackness entrenched within constant masculine and feminine clashes. I analysed spaces such as the BWS as spaces that construct violence and seek to confront toxic masculinities by establishing feminine resistance against a long history of patriarchal and colonial oppression. Such spaces, I argued, construct opportunities for female characters to deal with stereotypes that are created by patriarchal power around feminine subjects through the use of almost similar stereotypes like "bastards" and "unappreciative dogs" to show their resistance to and

reverse those feminine stereotypes. This chapter argued that through such confrontations, the novel constructs blackness as a space that seeks to deal with and confront the discourses that historically have negated it.

Chapter 6

Un-inhabitable Spaces and Un-rootedness: Reading Blackness through Sad Black Stories of *Room 207*

6.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a reading of Moele's *Room 207*, through the perspective of 'un-rootedness', drawing from Arefi's definition of rootedness to explore blackness as un-rooted identity in post-apartheid Johannesburg. According to Arefi (1999: 182), rootedness is an "unconscious sense of place and the most natural and unmediated kind of people place tie". In other words, understanding rootedness calls attention to discourses of connections or attachment between characters and places. Thus, with connections and/or attachment to certain spaces, I argue that characters in *Room 207* formulate their sense of belonging and identity rootedness. For Ujang and Zakariya (2015: 713) "[r]ootedness together with care for a place is often associated with a close attachment and a high degree of familiarity". The argument made here is crucial for my perspective of blackness as an identity un-rooted in the city; more so when we consider the temporariness of room 207 and how its dwellers are unfazed by the life threatening conditions of neither their room nor the possibilities and/or impossibilities of surviving the following day. This lack of strong connections and attachment to a particular space, the undesirable lived experiences and the failure to satisfy one's goals in urban spaces develop a sense of alienation and (un)belonging to South African urban spaces in most characters. My analysis of *Room 207* seeks to draw attention to 'black sad stories' that form part of the characters' lived experiences throughout their stay in represented Hillbrow's room 207. The narrator's use of the phrase 'sad story' reflects the unfortunate and undesirable circumstances that he and his peers have encountered; leading to several existential failures in Johannesburg. My argument takes into consideration Simone's (2014: 135) notion of 'un-inhabitable spaces' to engage symbolic spaces that constitute room 207, and Demir's (2017) 'un-rootedness' to engage the struggles by black characters to establish their identities in Johannesburg. As such, this final analytical chapter shows how represented black urban communities perpetually struggle to establish rooted black identities despite the constant claims of freedom from apartheid oppression.

In his discussion of 'un-rootedness', Demir juxtaposes the apartheid and post-apartheid black generations. He argues that the rootedness of the apartheid generation's black identity was founded on its common goal and solidarity against apartheid while the rootedness of the post-

apartheid generation is blurry because of ethnic binaries, cultural complexities and differences, poverty and xenophobia. The fact that characters in *Room 207* "are struggling, and [have] no help […] from anywhere […] [hence, appear] lost in Hillbrow" (Dlamini 2008), shows post-apartheid cities as spaces where black identity struggles to establish its roots.

The chapter analyses conflicting apartheid and post-apartheid black generations' formation of alienating relations that raise questions around the rootedness of blackness in the city. Commenting on the post-apartheid generation, Peterson (2003) invokes popular culture and refers to the 'kwaito generation' in relation to 'kwaito music' that became popular in the early1990s and to new cultures that emerged and were formulated in connection with that kind of music. He posits that the 'kwaito generation' is, "an eloquent testimony of the agency of young blacks, especially their desires to create their own narratives and meanings in response to the harsh and hostile urban landscape in which they find themselves" (197). By seeking new ways to confront post-apartheid realities, young people are perceived as the rebellious generation that incites violence by the black apartheid generation. According to Demir (2017: 5), "kwaito is a special South African music genre – a mixture of jazz, African gospel, hip-hop, house, bubblegum and various local sub-genres". The identities of young characters in this novel figuratively assumes the thought of this blendeness in that they are constructed through the impacts of unreliable self-employment, temporary and dangerous spaces such as room 207. By deliberately setting themselves to occupy Hillbrow (a former and underdeveloped apartheid space), the protagonists of this novel entrench themselves within, and some become stuck in, the history that is continually denounced by the black apartheid generation. For more than a decade, room 207 is an uncomfortable space for six black young protagonists who, through their characterization, construct sad post-apartheid black stories. For the reasons that will be noted below, I consider room 207 a microcosm of the city Johannesburg. Its conditions undermine the rootedness of black identity since the end of apartheid.

From the outset, room 207 (a former hotel room) is overcrowded, dilapidated and hardly provides privacy for these young characters. It is evidently 'un-inhabitable' in spite of the fact that its occupants frequently attempt to transform it to a habitable space. Their actions, which are "much ado about nothing", to borrow from William Shakespeare, resemble the Greek mythology curse of Sisyphus. We see a never-ending process through which characters

struggle and fail to establish their identities in the city. Simone's (2014: 135) argument that "African and Asian cities and urban regions are considered bastions of the uninhabitable" and that those who inhabit them are constantly striving for comfort in them, captures with exactitude what unfolds in room 207. For Simone (2014: 136), uninhabitable spaces are characterised by the "relationships among dispossessions, the expropriation of resourcefulness, the constitution of property, the dissolution of collective solidarities, the circumscription of manoeuvrability, the imposition of law, and the autonomy of the market". The greater part of the novel reflects characters who struggle against 'the expropriation of resourcefulness' by powerful people, 'the dissolution of collective solidarity' (that one sees through the fight against apartheid) as characters are defined by dismantling individualism that fail to unify a sense of home in room 207. For instance, the way they deal with such encounters as their eviction from the room because of unpaid rent, and the challenges of load shedding or 'blackouts', by forming relations with external spaces like streets as temporary abodes, and their daily search for economic opportunities, are central to my contextual discussion of the un-rootedness of blackness in this chapter.

Attempts to transform room 207 into a comfortable urban space by characters, whose departure from their rural homes to Johannesburg is attributed to poverty, partly form the focus of this chapter. These attempts and failures to transform room 207, figuratively construct an unsettling and unsettled, a troubled and troubling post-apartheid blackness. Their failure to transform the room parallels the failures of Noko and Zulu-boy to transform their lives in that city. It also signifies the failed transformation agenda of the new black post-apartheid government. Through Noko, who is the last roommate to vacate room 207, the readers realise the parallels that are set between his failures and the unredeemable state of room 207. Room 207 is more dilapidated than when he arrived and, Noko has to return with nothing, to his rural home and to relatives that he has not seen in fourteen years. Hence, my analysis engages with family relations between urban bound characters or been-to-characters and their relatives in rural homes. Such precarious relations show how the narrative of self-imposed alienation facilitates post-apartheid black identity as an un-rooted space.

The novel constructs a captivating notion of 'invisible racial power' that does not only define the characters' racial discrimination but also unsettles their black identity. The colonial and apartheid eras are characterised by their visible white racial power that boldly demonised black people and their identities. Colonial and apartheid system and culture set out to

permanently marginalise the identities of black people. Tragically, this marginalisation has continued in subtle ways unrealised by black characters in this novel. The post-apartheid era, though constructed on notions of freedom, is also characterised by failures to realise racial power relations that dismantle black identities. Commenting on *Room 207*, Milazzo (2013: 40) argues that, "room 207 speaks powerfully to the difficulties that can arise in deciphering the workings of racial power in the present. In contrast with the explicit white supremacy of the apartheid era, racism has become a nearly invisible taken-for-granted, commonsense […] feature of everyday life". Worth noting in Malazzo's argument is the subtlety of racial power in post-apartheid South Africa that in spite of its invisibility, continues to determine the socio-economic life of most black South Africans. However, with the shift from capturing visible racial power of apartheid to representing black social struggles to redefine their identities in the face of a government system that fails to provide basic service delivery, black communities have consciously or unconsciously downplayed the existence of racial power and its effects. Ibinga (2010: 58) states, "the end of apartheid has opened doors for new imaginings in South African literature as well as for novel perspectives in its literary criticism in order to claim a place in the global imaginary". With the focus on claiming 'a place in the global imaginary', post-apartheid writers seem to ignore the invisible racial power that they claimed to debunk for a long time and as such, persistently destabilize black identity.

Notable though is that although *Room 207* does not capture visible instances of racial discrimination because, as Milazzo (2013: 41) puts it, "the battle between good and evil has left the stage", there is a strong trace of the "subtle force of racial power" that has, since apartheid, maintained the 'un-rootedness' of black identity. This, notwithstanding the fact that "some white people feel that policies such as affirmative action and broad-based black economic empowerment are racist as they seek to exclude white people from benefitting from job and business opportunities" (Matolino 2013; 53). Therefore, I argue, in relation to traces of that elusive racial power, that blackness remains disrupted and fails to root itself in the South African city. Reflections are made on how the deliberate use of such phrases as "back in the days" (Moele 90) or "those days which the rulers of this land do not want you to forget" (Moele 13) in place of the term apartheid, shows the systematic presence of it. The phrases show how the novel's eclipse of the realities of racial power that is evidently raised in Kopano Mantlwa's *Coconut* where "the wealthy suburbs remain predominantly white and […] blacks struggle to fit into white dominated schools and social circuits" (Milazzo 42), threatens the existence and rootedness of black identity. This speaks to the argument by Jolly

(2005: 22) that, the unrealised embracement of post-apartheid racial power is detrimental because it fosters hindrances against the abilities to "triumph over the histories of apartheid" while simultaneously "limit(ing) unnecessarily the variety of resources available for the struggle". Thus, silencing that history, by the novel, is a mechanism that persistently maintains apartheid-established racial structures that are set to destabilise post-apartheid black identity.

My perspective on identity un-rootedness also draws attention to new post-apartheid cultures. Since South Africa claimed its independence in 1994, most literary works have focused on re-imagining new cultures that have emerged in post-apartheid South Africa. My analysis of culture in this novel draws on the notions of 'transition' and 'translation'. My analysis is centred through these terms because they seem to construct a historical passage within which cultures develop. In the context of my focus, my reference to 'translation' adopts an understanding of the historical culture that is located in the apartheid era, for instance, and how historical cultures have been transformed to assume a sense of newness in post-apartheid South Africa through literary representations. Of course, translation refers to changing words from one language to another, yet, it also seems credible to consider the processes of interpreting the cultures from the past to present as engagement in 'cultural translation'. Woodsworth (1996: 235) argues that "[t]ranslation is a means of strengthening the minority language and culture, of helping to ensure its survival, and hence of promoting national identity, or a new vision of nationhood". Significant in Woodworth's argument is how she emphasises the importance of re-translating and re-imagining cultures in establishing new cultural formations. Elsewhere, Naudé (2005: 38) traces processes of cultural translation back to the colonial period as he argues that "translation has served as an important imperialist tool in the colonisation of people, [and] the survival of colonial attitudes […] Europe was perceived as the original with the colonies as copies or *translations* of the original". This thinking is rested on the colonial understanding that "the indigenous people were regarded as closer to the animal kingdom than to humankind, or at least among the most primitive of human types" (Martins, 1996: 9)". Responding to such colonial denigrations, former colonised states have been in the process of re-translating their cultures by subverting colonial translation that Ashcroft et al theoretically engage in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). In this process of re-translating, as Devaki (2018: 118) elaborates, "the marginalised begins to write with an analysis of re-constructing European realities in postcolonial terms, not just merely inverting the hierarchal order but to cross-examining/questioning the truth-

seeking statements on which that order was based". The processes of translation characterised by "cross-examining/questioning" previous cultures motivate new cultures and, in the case of *Room 207*, the new cultures are presented with inconsistences that manifest the un-rootedness of black identity in city spaces.

The end of apartheid in South Africa set the tone for writers to translate and re-imagine black identity by juxtaposing apartheid and post-apartheid eras to determine the sense of newness in post-apartheid cultures. Hostová (2017: 2) argues that "[t]o write about translations of identities […] means to create the "grey language" that is able to trace the trajectories of cultures, texts, and moving subjects […] without the comforting belief in equivalence". Hostová's argument points to the understanding that cultures transcend each other, are marked by differences and are also formed through a historical passage that exists between the past and the present. By employing a new language in representing post-apartheid black communities, it is worth arguing that *Room 207* assumes the position of translating the cultures of black people from their historical to their contemporary contexts. For instance, by using (with inconsistencies) the informal and/or language to present the contemporary culture of young South Africans, the novel charts new ways of cultural representation erased by apartheid representation to, as Sachs (1991: 20) warns, liberate itself from "ghettoes of apartheid imaginations". Thus, the novel re-defines the element of black identity that the apartheid era supressed.

Additionally, I use the term 'transition' to engage claims that cultures of the formerly colonised black people have shifted from their demonised historical contexts that were constructed by colonial and apartheid perpetrators. I employ 'transition' here to suggest the construction of new cultures in this novel and that are "often unfettered to the past in the way that much apartheid [culture] was, but may still reconsider it in new ways" (Frenkel and McKenzie (2010: 2). By focusing the analysis through these terms, the study seeks to engage how the claimed new cultures of post-apartheid black communities render black identity un-rooted in post-apartheid urban spaces. What motivates my perspective here is the narrator's comment that, "the British had their time here and it passed. The Afrikaners had their time; they enjoyed it and then it too passed by. Now Johannesburg is under the control of the black man" (Moele 69). The demography projected in the quote, recollects a complex colonial history of South Africa that creates some kind of identity labyrinth. We are not only presented with how the cultures have transcended one another over time, but that new and

sometimes complex cultures have emerged in the process. Thus, from colonial and apartheid eras to the post-apartheid epoch, we see a cultural passage that is characterised by transition from past to the present.

Worth noting is that transition and translation cannot be confined within a particular time in history because they are a continuous process. This view is premised on the understanding that contemporary South African cities have "become a multiracial, multi-ethnic, multinational space reflecting the new socio-political environment" (Ibinga 2010: 60). Thus, from apartheid to post-2000, the South African terrain is continuously operating within discourses of cultural transition and constant cultural translation that facilitate the formation of new cultures. In the case of *Room 207*, issues of relations between "ethnicities, gender and class" (Ibinga 2010: 66) are (re)defined thus, projecting new relations that subvert historical cultural trajectories. The complex relations between ethnic groups that Moele presents through a character like S'busiso (Zulu-boy), who regards his Zulu tribe as superior to other South African ethnic groups construct an urban space that other characters find difficult to fit in. It also offers alternative ways of re-imagining ethnicity in post-2000 South African cities. In the novel *Room 207*, "cultural difference is […] viewed through stereotypes" (Ibinga 2010: 66), especially those created by characters like Zulu-boy, which have the potential to surface an identity crisis that reflects the un-rootedness of black identity in Johannesburg. The fact that Zulu-boy is caught between the claws of tribalism among his roommates who are from different ethnic groups and a fear of xenophobia (as he carries his ID around Johannesburg for fear of being suspected as a Zimbabwean) constructs compromised relations that undermine the rootedness of post-apartheid black identity. Consequently, I will reflect on how Zulu-boy's tribalism and xenophobia operate as mechanisms that threaten the sense of national identity defined by the notion of 'rainbow nation' hence, projecting blackness as a *condition* of abnormality that defines the existence of black people. Reading blackness as a *condition* stems from the novel's representation "of the culture of poverty myth, which avers that destitution as the result of the behaviour of the poor, the product of some cultural deficiency" (Kelly 2000: 16). Reference will also be made to colonial and apartheid constructions that formed and associated poverty with black communities; the stereotype that is also advanced in the way contemporary narratives like *Room 207* depict characters who wallow in poverty.

Room 207 follows lived experiences of six protagonists and friends Noko, S'busiso (Zulu-boy), Matome, D'nice, Modishi, and Molobedu who meet in Johannesburg, and end up staying together for more than a decade in Hillbrow's room 207. Noko, the narrator, has a rural background. He frequently finds himself pondering his father's decision to stop supporting him economically because of his age. Thus, Noko fends for himself as an artist in Johannesburg and cut ties with his rural home until the closing chapter of the novel when he decides to return to his rural home, after coming to terms with the reality of his failure to fulfil his dream in the city. The novel constructs a sense of disconnection between its characters and their rural homes. For some unstated reasons, a character like Molamo, for instance, avoids talking about his history. The novel is also silent about characters' relations with their rural families. As such, it is not surprising that when Molamo invites Noko to accompany him for his rural home visit, Noko discovers on arrival that he has been invited for the funeral of Molamo's mother. My argument on the un-rootedness of blackness in the urban space is informed by these characters' uncertainties of their attachment to both rural and urban spaces. Similar to their uncertain attachment to their rural homes, they are clearly unattached to the city as shown through their existence in room 207 where they always long for their 'out-of-Hillbrow' party (a reference to the party that they plan to host on their last day in Hillbrow). Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001: 275) perceive place attachment as "the development of an affective bond or link between people or individuals and specific places". Characters in *Room 207* fail to establish attachment in represented Room 207. This is evident where the narrator says, "we stay there, although we don't really say we stay there: it's been a temporary setting, since and until… I can't tell. What I do know is that we have spent eleven years not really staying there" (Makholwa 34). For these protagonists, room 207 is not a place that motivates attachment and an urge for one to construct their post-apartheid identity. Their constant conversation about the need to escape Hillbrow through hosting a party, becomes a reminder of their struggle to establish black identity in that city.

When the novel opens, Noko invites the reader into room 207. Though the reader is welcomed with an expression, "come in, come in" (Moele 15). Room 207 does not offer a feeling of ease for the reader. Traces of dilapidation are visible around this former hotel room. Rats, as the narrator warns the reader, frequently make untimely haunting appearances especially when there are female visitors yet, for these characters, these rats have become friends. As the narrator orients the reader around the haphazardly positioned items in the room, there is a further sense of discomfort that prompts a thought of room 207 as an un-

inhabitable place. Through such representations, the novel constructs the uncertainties of the characters' identities, and pictures the "invincible hugeness of a culturally alien Hillbrow culture" (Rafapa 2018: 94). The narrator significantly introduces us to the old and dysfunctional radio and television positioned at some corner of the room that figuratively suggest these characters' disconnectedness with their contemporary outside world. The squalid conditions of their bathroom, which fails to provide enough warm water for bathing is one of the captivating places in their room that influences the fate of these dwellers. The geyser is hanging precariously, almost falling and its description by the writer makes their bathroom one of the dangerous spaces in room 207. We are also made aware of single and double beds in the room. This immediately creates the impression of characters desperately searching for comfort in uncomfortable post-apartheid urban spaces. However, it is easy to realise that that urge for comfort is thwarted by the fact of overcrowding in that room. In its overcrowded state, room 207 problematises these characters' boundaries of intimacy. Their sexual relations with their partners are sometimes interrupted by either the untimely arrival of other roommates or the thought that the room is shared. This makes room 207 a symbolic reflection of un-inhabitable urban space that projects the un-rootedness of blackness in post-apartheid South Africa.

Several pictures of anti-colonial heroes such as the 'Maasai warriors" and fighters like "Che Guevara" are pasted on what these characters refer to as "the wall of inspiration" (Moele 18). The wall of inspiration highlights the temporariness of these characters' stay in Hillbrow in that, like their inspirational successful figures, they will have to find a way to escape Hillbrow forever. However, there is irony in the way the wall of inspiration downplays the significance of some South African freedom fighters and legends, and gives the spotlight to unknown white individuals through their visibility on the novel's cover page. The reader's attention is also directed by the novel to the constant reference to most characters as 'sad stories' because of their backgrounds. Whenever the narrator introduces his friends or those of his roommates, he describes them as 'sad stories' because of their previous and present academic, social and economic failures. For these roommates, the label 'sad story' is attributed to the fact that, except for D'nice, other protagonists are school dropouts. The novel further follows their lived experiences, which project 'sad stories'. A combination of these characters' eviction from their room because of unpaid rents, Molamo's stabbing , constant load shedding or 'blackouts' as they refer to it and economic challenges that sometimes forces them to spend some days and nights without meals, further construct sad

black stories. The label ‘sad story’ also creates a feeling of inferiority for these characters, especially when they are paralleled with learned female peers. For instance, Molamo’s relationship with his female medical doctor girlfriend exposes his insecurity and intimidation. In spite of the fact that his partner always expresses respect and love for him, Molamo decides to end the relationship. Such relations, among others, project post-apartheid young men that are defined through oppressive patriarchy that alienates black women and foster a complex and un-rooted blackness.

Of interest in Molamo’s decision to jilt his girlfriend is that it comes after their involvement in sexual relations, an opportunity that he, could not miss. Even as she sends messages through her phone to express her heartbreak, Molamo ridicules them. By so doing, Molamo confirms the skewed thinking that at “the crossroads of sexuality and ideology, [a post-apartheid] woman stands constituted as an object” of conquest (Spivak 1990: 141). I engage with these male-female relations in order to draw attention to constructed ‘sad stories’ and how through their reference to female characters as “whores” despite their relations with them, the novel formulates an unsettling post-apartheid blackness. Notably, Modishi assaults Lerato (his girlfriend) to an extent that she is hospitalised. This tendency to negate feminine subjects betrays a strong sense of insecurity that undermines the identity rootedness of male characters. The failure of male characters to establish a firm economic foundation for themselves in Johannesburg is a setback in establishing a firmly rooted black identity. Worse still, the protagonists live under the threat of eviction at the end of each month as they struggle to pay their rent through unstable jobs as artists. The inconsistences of their lived experiences in room 207 construct blackness as un-rooted in post-apartheid South Africa. With the departure of Matome from room 207, the experiences of those who are left behind nosedive into boredom because the association that kept them together has been compromised. The sad stories of the death of Zulu-boy and Noko’s return to his rural home mark the final departure from room 207 and are the final definition of their economic failures.

6.2 Room 207: the Microcosm of Post-apartheid Inconsistences

This section unravels the setting in room 207 and the events that unfold therein as microcosms of the realities of post-apartheid and the inconsistences that hinder the rootedness of black identity in South African cities. A haphazardly set of old assets define room 207 as an un-inhabitable space. However, the protagonists’ drive to create comfort in the room is fascinating. Through the imagery of this room and the experiences of its dwellers, the novel

affords the reader an opportunity to witness "a different form of urban life, one that is constantly lived under specific threats and incompletion" (Simone's 2014). The circumstances that the writer captures through room 207, figuratively replicate the realities of uncomfortable circumstances of post-apartheid South Africa. For instance, the dilapidated room 207 simultaneously exhibits the symbolic emotional degradation of black characters and represents the uncomfortable circumstances of black urban communities in post-apartheid South Africa. My argument is premised on the view that Hillbrow "is the epitome of conundrum with its simultaneous intimations of cosmopolitanism on the one hand, and the spreading shadow of third-world poverty and violence on the other" (Ngara 2011: 40). In that sense, I perceive represented Hillbrow as designed and built to represent a kind of apartheid modernity.

The front cover of the novel offers a point of departure for my analysis because it captures a crucial part of room 207. It formulates an imagery that suggests that South African cities persistently operate alongside narratives of racial inequalities. Evidently visible on the cover page is the 'wall of inspiration' (Moele 18) that constructs racial divide by ironically paralleling conditions of black and white people. This "wall of inspiration" defines the physical urban spaces as a reflection of that racial divide. In *Changing Space, Changing City: Johannesburg after Apartheid*, Malazzo (2014: 557) argues that to "re-imagine non-racial cities" urban planners should "confront […] race in the first instance". Her work establishes how "black urban" (557) matters in post-apartheid South Africa "because people are still navigating through a mire of meanings and tensions as they attempt to claim space in the city with pride and dignity" (Samson 2016: 3). Therefore, the wall of inspiration's representation of a dreadful and sobbing black female captioned, "stop abuse against women", juxtaposed with the sensual and jovial white and few overshadowed black women who pose on the greater part of the wall, projects a captivating view of room 207 roommates. The 'wall of inspiration' dominated by sensual and flamboyant young white figures, betrays the protagonists' inclination towards, and admiration and aspiration for whiteness with its economic stability; a post-apartheid situation that has motivated the likes of Njabulo Ndebele (2016: 20) to perceive "blackness as an unresolvable tragedy". The greater part of the wall captures an 'easy-going world' of white young people and their economic and social vibrancy shown through their model cars, the exhibition of young white men's physical bodies and sexy female models. This echoes Frankenberg's (1993: 37) view that "whiteness has traditionally been considered normative, and that it offers a stable identity to those considered

white". With such representations of post-apartheid black and white people, Ndebele finds it difficult to move beyond perceiving blackness as a "fabrication, a figment of history". Ndebele is crucial here in that his view of blackness dismantles the envy to become like a white man and suggest that blacks should identify with and be satisfied with themselves to be at ease with their selves (Ndebele 2016: 28). The pictorial representation of what looks like the South African soccer legend Lucas Radebe overshadowed by illuminated images of unknown young white models, significantly constructs the crisis of post-apartheid blackness. In what supposedly looks like a disorderly set room 207 with its projections of poverty, a man (that I take to be one of the roommates) is set before the 'wall of inspiration" ironically, assumes a marginal positioning against his white counterparts on the 'wall of inspiration'. The contrast of post-apartheid lives of these protagonist that spans for over a decade and the flamboyant ones of young white figures on the 'wall of inspiration' construct economic and racial margins that continue to unsettle blackness.

To some degree, the 'wall of inspiration' that is portrayed on the cover page seems to construct the *coconutness* of black characters. In other words, viewing white people's world as inspirational almost replays Fikile's perspective, in Kopano Mantlwa's *Coconut* (2007) that criticizes blackness and applauds whiteness. This also echoes Sunanda's (1994: 2439) view that the:

> tendency of the colonised to imitate the colonisers and to evaluate themselves from the colonisers' viewpoint seems to last much after attaining freedom. The inclination to validate our thoughts and ideas with reference to Western ideology reveals a need to reassess ourselves and to reclaim our own heritage and culture.

Thus, *Room 207* (through its cover page and some instance), like *Coconut* seeks to show the effects of "aspirational identity" (Spencer 2009: 68) by locating black characters on the opposite side of whiteness and "struggling to negotiate self-identity in post-apartheid South Africa" (Spencer 68). We see this through the declaration by the narrator that he "loved Mandela the freedom fighter and" that he "miss[es] that Mandela (Moele 18)" as if to denounce the unfavourable state of black-led post-apartheid South Africa. The irony of regarding whites as their inspiration is that "no [white man] would want to be a Black Man or to be treated as one" (Mbembe 2017: 2). Thus, with the unfavourable post-apartheid South Africa, young protagonists struggle with their black identities in an urban space that offers less economic opportunities while their inspirational whiteness furnish discourses of hope

that will shape their identities. As such, they find themselves tucked between the poles of blackness and whiteness in that while they aspire for the flaunting world of white people, they struggle in the entrapment of their black world that unfolds in their room 207.

The absence of the only photo that they have of themselves on what they refer to as the wall of inspiration is crucial to note because it constructs their overshadowed histories, existence and experiences in the urban space. The only photo that they have of themselves is located somewhere in the room and evidently out of site from the wall of inspiration that is shown on the novel's cover picture. Explaining how it was captured at Park Station, the narrator says:

> [t]his is the only photo of us, which we had taken in this city at Park Station – Parkie as it is known by the masses. It was Matome's idea as we were walking out of his office. It was taken by one of those camera men who hang around Parkie to capture one's first moments in this dream city (Moele 18).

By excluding their photo from the wall of inspiration, where they can possibly be reminded of their conditions and social position in post-apartheid South Africa, and how urgent they need to move from such margins, these characters choose instead to erode their past, present and possibly their future identities. In other words, even with claims of freedom, these black characters resist reminding themselves about their past or histories to assert their present black identities in post-apartheid South Africa. For instance, at many points of the novel, Matome maintains that stance. When Noko attempts to remind him of his previous incident, where he took groceries in a shop and went out without paying, Matome responds, "[n]o! I have forgotten about it, baba, forget it too, that was a long time ago" (Moele 170). He also insists that he does not want to talk about his background and where he was raised. The understanding that it was Matome's idea to take a photo seems to suggest these young characters' lack of urgency in collectively tolerating their histories and re-defining their identities. What fascinates me is that their photo captures the background of Johannesburg's Park Station. Park Station is a space that shows the temporariness of South African urban spaces because it poses as a permanent point of entry and exit for local and non-locals. For Gotz and Simone (2003: 129) such spaces "represents a veritable vacuum of belonging, where almost no one presently living there can claim an overarching sense of origin […] or profess a real wish to stay". As such, when set along the existence of these characters, their identities are posed as un-rooted and their sense of belonging is compromised in the city. This confirms the view by such writers as Samuelson (2007: 250) that Johannesburg is "fluid" or as no man's land with the possibility that anything can happen in it (Nuttall 2004: 732).

Johannesburg has always assumed this position then and now as noted in the first chapter. Park Station like, Hillbrow, captures the temporariness of South African urban spaces whose existence is marked by the transitory stay of locals and non-locals in those spaces. As such, when memories and histories (that are captured through their photo) are formed around the temporariness of urban spaces, the identities that are formulated therein are complex and un-rooted in particular time and space.

Positioning the histories of these characters within the temporariness of the urban space, the novel reminds the reader that these protagonists are literally and metaphorically temporary Johannesburg dwellers as they frequently discuss the "out-of-Hillbrow party" (Moele 187) without details of where they are going. That these characters are in transit, also shows the difficulties that they encounter in their futile search for a sense of belonging in post-apartheid South Africa especially Noko who, besides admitting that he has economically failed himself in the city, is left struggling with the decision of whether to return to his rural home or remain in Johannesburg. This character positioning gets complex in that, in his keenness to leave Johannesburg, he also realises that his rural home has nothing to offer for his economic stability. He points out that the last time he was there, he spent time with his un-employed friends (Moele 233), and that before his departure, his father, had told him that he will not offer him any economic support. Thus, his sense of belonging in the urban space is, to some extent, dismantled by his relations with his father. That these characters are sojourners in transit can be read in many instances. For instance, even after his departure from Hillbrow, Molamo is still "dreaming that dream till its restful end is dream-heaven' (Moele 220). He, like his roommates, wishes to fulfil his dream of becoming successful in Johannesburg. As a result he becomes an unsettled urban dweller who has not figuratively arrived at his destination of economic stability. This is not surprising considering that these characters regard Johannesburg as a "city of dreams, where one could transform oneself from a poor peasant to a wealthy sophisticate" (Mandela 1994: 56). For those like Molamo who are yet to fulfil their dreams in Johannesburg, pursuing their dreams of economic stability places them into a state of unrest. That destination of economic stability that they are eager to reach is summed through the reference to the wall of inspiration when Noko says:

> "[t]his, as you can see, is the wall of inspiration. To us, to me, they are not role models at all but people just like me and you, who, in their very own ways and byways, made it to the top. We put them up on the wall so that when one of us is down he can look at them, because some of them have lived through this Hillbrow, lived it to get out of it" (Moele 16-7).

What is fascinating to note here is that the novel shows Hillbrow as a symbolic space of hindrance to the progress of Johannesburg's black dwellers and that it has to be escaped. Notably, that Hillbrow is an "un-inhabitable space" (Simone 2014: 135) (because it hinders these characters' progress), further projects the un-rootedness of their black identity. In other words, unlike in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, where the characters seem to be captured in perpetual dangers of that space, *Room 207* suggests that Hillbrow cannot only be escaped but can also remain a point of reference in not only yearning for a better future but also urging a need to establish new identities. From the beginning of the novel, the writer shows that the dangers of Hillbrow keep its dwellers in constant eagerness to shift to other better spaces within Johannesburg. We, therefore, see such characters as Matome moving to the suburbs of Johannesburg to re-define their identities towards the end of the novel. On that note, it is worth defining Hillbrow as a temporary and precarious urban space that does not construct rooted black identity. As shown through lived experiences of the characters in this novel, Hillbrow suppresses the character and identity development for roommates like Noko and Zulu-boy while at the same time, Molamo and others remain stuck in unfulfilled dreams of artistic profession. The understanding that such characters as Molamo are constantly dreaming, establishes a thought of post-apartheid young people who are in, not only metaphoric transit, but also struggle to fix their identities in a post-apartheid South Africa. More so, the image of a room creates the match-box mentality of entrapment that keeps young black people in their confined spaces of poverty and lives of lack.

The significance of the opening subtitle, "Refuge" is crucial to note in relation to my arguments on temporariness of these characters' identities not only in their room but also in post-apartheid South Africa. In fact, their stay that spans over a decade is fraught with uncertainties (that poses that subtitle as ironic), as their artistic professions are not well defined and paying. The temporariness of these characters in the room, pictures Johannesburg as a city that has failed to provide permanent sense of belonging and perceptible identities for blacks since the end of apartheid. Room 207, the temporary home for these protagonists that "used to be a hotel" (Moele 13) is, as Noko narrates:

> The place isrotting. Some of the tiles have cracked and some have lost their grip entirely and fallen off. The cream-white paint is cracking, showing the old underneath and the bad paintwork done over the years. The air is humid and heavy because the small window is rarely opened and, if you do open it, you will lose your soap or maybe your toothpaste (Moele 13-14).

The imagery of ‘rotting’ in the opening sentence of the above passage moves beyond the unpleasant conditions of room 207 and pictures the chaotic and un-inhabitable state of some parts of inner Johannesburg. When the imagery of ‘rotting’ in room 207 is paralleled with chaos and filthy and smelly streets of Johannesburg that these protagonists highlight in their debate around the state of apartheid and filthy conditions of post-apartheid Hillbrow, this city becomes unsuited for human habitation. To define room 207 as the microcosm of Johannesburg, the novel creates symbolic connections between that room and the streets that define the inner parts of that city. This is done by mapping the protagonists’ daily navigations between room 207 and the streets where they struggle for survival. Their eviction from their room for more than two days after their unpaid rent, for instance, is marked by their eagerness to regain its access. The connections between their room and various inner spaces of Johannesburg significantly projects a frail strip that is shown through a failure to establish their artistic careers and make ends meet in the city. At the same time, I perceive violence, crime, dirty street kids, dilapidated infrastructure that highlights the economic instability of the city and activities of street vendors who sell their products in dirty and smelling environment, as magnified images of the ‘rotting’ room 207. Thus, with the image of the ‘decaying door” (Moele 226) and other parts of room 207 at the end of the novel, show that blackness remains a spectacle of perpetual marginality despite the ever-celebrated independence.

Imagined through the symbolically metaphoric representation of room 207, one realises that the writer captures Johannesburg’s sense of degradation through economic instability that forces most of its dwellers into crime, and the continuously dilapidated infrastructure that is not given attention by the post-apartheid government. Lerato notes that deterioration when responding to Molamo where she says, “[s]weetie, look at this rotting Hillbrow of ours. The first time I came here it was beautiful and very clean. Then we moved in, black people moved in, and so the rotting came” (Moele 89). With the description of ‘rotting’, and the cracking of the walls of that room, one almost thinks of the place as a symbol of a compromised black urban social fibre that the novel projects through the experiences of the protagonists. The black urban social fibre is here understood as a form of unifying factor that anchors the rootedness of black identity and that can be thought in terms of the solidarity of black people’s struggle against colonialism and apartheid. When representing Room 207, the writer shows a fractured social fibre through a symbolic “cream-white paint [that] is cracking, showing the old underneath and the bad paintwork done over the years”. The fact that the

narrator likes ‘Mandela the freedom fighter’ and not the post-apartheid one, is not surprising especially under speculations are later subscribed by such young politicians as Julius Malema and his political party that the same political icon disguisedly collaborated with apartheid perpetrators and as such, maintained the oppression of blacks by the white minority. Similar sentiments are also echoed in the novel when Noko responds to Molamo, “[y]ou’re thinking like Mandela caught in a web of lies and imposed pride, made by some international chequebook politician in the name of democracy, which was just a good way to keep the masses forever suffering” (Moele 144). As such, I argue that the new dispensation becomes a mechanism through which the black urban social fibre is fractured by camouflaged operatives of the apartheid system that seems to shape the post-apartheid social and economic life. On a social level, the social fibre that unifies black communities is compromised by discourses of peer pressure from protagonists that encourage multiple sexual relations thus leading to the death of Zulu-boy.

A closer reading of the above passage will also show that the lives of some of the protagonists are defined through the description of room 207. Their lived experiences find expression in the imagery of the ‘tiles that have cracked [with] some that have lost their grip [and are] entirely fallen off’; prompting one to think about the inequalities of these characters that the writer introduces at the end of the novel. To some degree, the imagery of ‘cracking’ highlights moments of devastation and despair of these roommates as they strive and fail to establish themselves in Johannesburg. Noko loses his grip on the hopes of post-apartheid South Africa by giving up on his artistic career in the city and is left deciding whether to return to his rural home or to remain in Johannesburg while Zulu-boy dies of AIDS. For a moment, one thinks of this as suggesting uncertainties of young black people’s identities in post-apartheid South Africa that are triggered by their irresponsible demeanours. I also view the placement of these protagonists in a complex and dilapidated room 207 as critically lambasting black communities that still operate under unrealised and degrading confinements of the apartheid system while claiming that they have attained freedom. The option to stay in this Hillbrow flat, is also a form of resisting transition and metaphorically remaining stuck within a subjugating history. From its description, their room is almost a replica of apartheid mine workers’ hostels of Johannesburg in that there is only one window that is located in the bathroom. Although they are surrounded by echoes of freedom in the outside world, these characters, as shown through ‘humid and heavy air’ in their room, replicate physical and

psychological imprisonment that allegorically construct a setback on the claimed transition and progression of post-apartheid black communities.

Black identities formulated in this urban space project a certain sense of temporariness that speaks to the un-rootedness of black people in the city that ironically is supposedly the golden archipelago of South Africa. This finds conformation in that the reader is constantly reminded about the characters' "out-of-Hillbrow party" (Moele 14). On welcoming the reader in room 207, the narrator says:

> [t]his is our home, as you can see for yourself. This, our cum everything room, and that is our kitchen. That is the hotplate. As you can see there's no refrigerator. That, sink, is always like that. The dishes are washed only when we are about to have our last meal of the day, which, sometimes, is our first meal of the day but the last anyway. We once had a television set, it was old but it was a television […] One day […] Modishi just picked it up like it was a weightless thing and threw it out of the balcony door (Moele 15).

What urges one to think of room 207 as a temporary space that shows the uncertainties of blackness in that city is that we are introduced to what appears like temporary property that only sustains these characters for a period of their existence in Hillbrow. They clearly form a part of the post-apartheid black community that, because of poverty, still struggle to establish themselves. In the above quotation, the writer constructs poverty as a space and character encountered by these protagonists beyond taking their meals once or twice a day and underpins the lack of property and economy to show their failure to thrive in a new dispensation. By positioning these protagonists in such nervous conditions, the novel adopts a style that almost comes close to the "Western writing, whose metaphors have often worked, deeply, subtly and invisibly, to caricature, conquer and colonise, through belittling the cultures it encounters" (Cooper 2008: 19). Milazzo (2013: 42) argues that, "room 207 and Hillbrow represent more than simple settings in the novel. They are signifiers of a larger condition of poverty and decay, metaphors for the unfulfilled hope and the shattered dreams of millions of South Africans who continue to live in abject conditions". Scholars like Gqola have attributed such conditions to the continued effects of the apartheid legacy. She argues that, "the legacy of apartheid continues to be felt by the vast majority of the Black poor, who are written out of capital and most victimised. Although now free from state racism, they feel the effects of a mutating oppressive, capitalist system" (2007: 115). Gqola's view persuasively pictures an understanding of post-apartheid black communities that continuously struggle to deal with the subjugating and stifling apartheid legacy. At the same time, her

arguments suggest disconnections of such people with the post-apartheid South Africa that they claim as theirs. In *Room 207,* characters are metaphorically disconnected from the outside world and trapped in Hillbrow – a space that continuously reminds us of the presence of apartheid as shown through their old and dysfunctional radio and television. When Modishi decides to destroy their only radio and television without purchasing new ones, he highlights their permanent unwillingness to find connections with their post-apartheid environment, hence resisting to be part of a post-apartheid black community that projects and emphasises the narratives of and from agonising apartheid.

Through this former hotel room 207, the novel constructs a sense of psychological imprisonment that compromises the existence of main characters in the urban space. The description of the room almost echoes Johannesburg that is captured by Serote in the poem "City Johannesburg". The lines "Jo'burg City, Johannesburg, /Listen when I tell you, /There is no fun, nothing, in it, […] Jo'burg City, you are dry like death," (37-39, 42), paralleled with the description of room 207, project the city as "restrictive, hostile and exclusive" (Samson 2016: 6). A place that captures attention is the bathroom because it is depicted as the most dangerous part of the room. As such, for the protagonists, bathing, is always accompanied by anxiety that compromises their existence especially when one considers that the sense of belonging is "physical as well as psychological" (Ujang and Zakariya 2015: 710). In other words, with a physical space that constantly triggers fear, and that has motivated most writers to view it as "territorially stigmatised" (Murray 2011: 149) – an "outcast ghetto" (Murray 2011: 153), these characters are alienated from either their city or post-apartheid South Africa. Describing their bathroom, the narrator says:

> [r]ight above the back of the bath is the geyser – rusty, leaking, with exposed electric cables. Sometimes I feel sorry in advance for whoever is in the bath the day it decides it has had enough. Though, sometimes, I wish it would happen to me and I could take the landlord to court and have the out-of-Hillbrow party that Matome says we are going to have the day we move out of Hillbrow for good (Moele 14).

The first sentence of the quote above suggests several thoughts about these protagonists. It projects their resilience against a repressive post-apartheid South Africa that perpetuates their nervous conditions. What is fascinating is that these protagonists remain in that room for over a decade despite the life threatening conditions that are motivated by the bathroom and their post-apartheid city. In fact, one is captivated by the narrator's sarcasm around the conditions of that bathroom as he mentions that he will be apologetic on the instance where one of his

roommates become a victim in that bathroom and that in the case of him becoming one, he would sue his landlord. Noko's sarcasm highlights the tensions between post-apartheid poor and rich black people. The poor, as shown in the quote, figuratively and constantly pursue opportunities to undermine their rich counterparts while the wealthy also continue to supress and exploit poor people. With such complex relations that define post-apartheid black communities, blackness' rootedness in the urban space, becomes a myth. This is in view of the images of rich young white people on the wall of inspiration that highlights blackness occupying spaces defined by processes of "social exclusion, ethno-racial marginalisation, and spatial isolation" (Murray 2011: 149).

Notable in the novel, is the writer's construction of the characters around the recurring motif of a 'sad story'. For me, this motif suggests that post-apartheid blacks and their independence are defined by irrepressible miseries that compromise the establishment and rootedness of black identity. What is also crucial to understand is that these sad stories construct the image of the present and therefore are to be read as mnemonics and monuments that reflect the trajectory of the past to the present. In other words, these stories move with these characters from their history and fail to deal with them even in the present. When the protagonists initially enter room 207, they are depicted and constructed around a 'sad story' narrative through their backgrounds and their lived experiences in Hillbrow. By narrating their sad stories around the historical context of apartheid, the novel seeks to highlight complexities that these young blacks encounter in their attempts to deal with their agonising past despite their existence in a new dispensation. However, unlike in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, some characters in *Room 207* do not remain stuck in their excruciating histories as shown through Matome. Matome, to some extent, develops into an interesting and focused post-apartheid young man who understands the essence of escaping Hillbrow to re-imagine his identity in a country that still struggles with apartheid legacies. For him, Hillbrow creates a series of sad stories for its dwellers as some die before escaping its dangers and as such, he is keen to host an 'out-of-Hillbrow party'. Sad stories are, nevertheless, perpetual for Noko whose failure to make a living in Johannesburg forces him to consider returning to his rural home, and Zulu-boy dying of AIDS indicates his undesirable post-apartheid lived experiences. What is captivating about the 'sad story' motif that defines the representation of characters and some places in Johannesburg is that it lacks details of the mentioned stories as if to deter and protect these young characters from their tormenting and miserable past. We are in a way forced to picture the narratives of reconciliation between blacks and white

apartheid perpetrators that, to some degree, suggest the necessity of forgetting about the brutal apartheid history. For instance, when introducing Moloko to the reader, the narrator says, "[t]his is Moloko, he's a sad story" (Moele 159) and the details of that 'sad story' are not given. When he, again, introduced us to Johannesburg's Windybrow Arts Centre, he says, "[y]ou're now looking at the Windybrow Arts Centre. It used to be called the Windybrow Theatre… it's a sad story too" (Moele 158), as if to avoid attaching it to the history of apartheid as it remains one of the apartheid monuments rooted in Johannesburg despite its renaming. Thus, in other words, we are shown the reluctance of these young characters to confront, not only their excruciating histories, but also the present that seems to permeate the process of establishing their black identities in post-apartheid South Africa.

Surprisingly, when Noko talks about his Zairian friend Joseph, he says "[h]e is a sad story all on his own". His stance almost seeks to show that for foreign nationals, sad stories are a permanent condition that follows them within the borders of South Africa. When his focus turns to Matome, that 'sad story' narrative is constantly negotiated by a sense of forgetfulness as if to show that he is conscious of his agonising histories and deliberately opts for new ways of re-imagining his identity out of tortuous histories. Thus, one sees characters whose tendency to forget disheartening histories as representing a generation of post-apartheid young blacks that seek to re-construct their identities out of inescapable history against apartheid. This is premised on the understanding that some of these characters still identify themselves with the freedom of that struggle as they acknowledge Mandela the freedom fighter yet, denounces the post-apartheid one. Noko establishes a thought that indicates why the reader is deprived of the details of these characters' 'sad stories when he argues, "I thought I could handle it but the world's ways and the world's history will make your heart heavy, make you think things that can make you hate your blackness. Sorry to say it, but we are as black as…" (Moele 145). By deliberately silencing the sad histories of black people and those of some urban spaces, the novel pictures the ever-present apartheid and suggests that it continues to unsettle post-apartheid black identity. Blackness appears to be a cursed identity condemned by history.

Towards the end, the novel significantly reverts to the "207" of the title as we follow the departure and the farewell of the narrator from room 207. By reverting to that subtitle, the novel seems to emphasise the unfavourable conditions of contemporary urban South Africa that entrenches the rootlessness of blackness in the city space. As the last character to leave

room 207, Noko gives an impression that their former room is a physically and psychologically imprisoning urban space. The double bed that they find in that room on their first arrival constructs unsettling feelings for Modishi, especially after realising that "some girl had slept in it, leaving her passionate odours in it" (25). Although Modishi clearly expresses his uncomfortable feelings around this instance, his roommates continue to use the same bed for sexual relations with their partners. Thus, the post-apartheid urban South Africa is here shown as a distressing space that undermines the construction of self that forms part of the identities of these young urban dwellers. The novel further constructs the unsettling post-apartheid blackness by juxtaposing the symbolic names, 'Lucifer' and 'Satan' that the roommates use to refer to each other. Although the reference to these biblical figures is set in a playful context, their context constructs complexities of these characters' black identities. These symbolic figures share different characteristics despite that they identify the same individual. While in Heaven this particular biblical figure was known as Lucifer and since committing sin and his expulsion from that place to earth, he became known as Satan. The simultaneous use of these contrasting and symbolic names by these characters tells of the clashes between the narratives of decency and deceit within black communities that impede the establishment of black identity. What fascinates me about Noko before his departure from room 207, is the sentimentalism that he places on the key of their former room that he wants to take with him. There is a sense of attachment with room 207 that we see through this narrator that is contrary to some of his roommates like Matome who proclaims, "I don't want to miss anything Hillbrow because there is nothing to miss. Missing something about Hillbrow would be a step backwards into slavery" (Moele 196). By noting Hillbrow as a symbol of 'a step backwards to slavery', Noko represents those post-apartheid blacks who hardly realise that their agonising histories continue to compromise attempts to reconstruct their identities. Noko keeps the key rings of room 207 despite his permanent departure from that room as he says, "I group the five keys on the table, taking the key rings. I will need them. Then I close the decaying door very gentle for the last time" (Moele 226). This quote, however, construct an interesting mark of departure from room 207 that suggests the beginning of a new life for some roommates and the end for others like Zulu-boy. Closing the door is a symbolic gesture of shattered dreams and hopes. The narrator's departure with the key-rings might be a celebratory note of escaping Hillbrow; one of the most dangerous South African urban spaces, thus figuratively suggesting a protest against the remains of the apartheid system that continuously shape the economic and social lives of black

communities. It is also ironic in the sense that he collects keys that have failed to unlock opportunities in the urban space.

6.3 The Apartheid Spectre: Denying Closure in the New Dispensation

In its representation of post-apartheid urban black communities, the novel *Room 207* denies closure with the agonising apartheid past. I refer to such modes of representation as dangerously rejuvenating the apartheid ghost that continues to haunt South Africa by entrenching its racial power and setting the rootlessness of blackness in urban spaces. On that note, the claims of South African literary transition from the bleak distressing past to a post-apartheid South Africa, from protest to crisis literature that grapples with new concerns of the era, seems to be blurred in the novel. One almost senses an attempt to obliterate the apartheid history within black communities through the narrator's reluctance to mentioning the term. Instead of 'apartheid', the narrator uses phrases like 'back in the days' (Moele 90). It is on the basis of this that, Frenkel and McKenzie conclude that room 207 "disavows the past altogether" (2010: 2). Similarly, I argue that *Room 207* opens a platform through which the spectre of the apartheid system re-introduces its racial power in post-apartheid South African urban spaces. I also argue that post-apartheid South Africa is hardly an inhabitable space for black communities. This runs contrary to what Njabulo Ndebele (2000: 188) subscribes to in his argument:

> I think the South African hegemony of whiteness is on a slippery slope. Whatever it was, it has lost its coherence, or credibility, or its power, if I might call it that […] I think that globally white power, led first by the British, the French, the Germans, and other colonial powers, then later in the twentieth century by the Americans, is on the retreat […] There is a reordering in the world and the prominence of whiteness at a global level is on the retreat, in the same way that it's happening closer to home.

On the thought that Ndebele's argument captures the realities of post-apartheid South Africa and the former colonised states in general, *Room 207* will therefore be operating contrary to post-independence claims of freedom that are established by such writers as Ndebele and others. Landmarks that seem to have remained as reminders of that brutal system such as Hillbrow with their constant threats to black urban dwellers in the novel seem to run contrary to claims made by Ndebele. However, I find it difficult to subscribe to Ndebele's argument here because of various post-apartheid South African realities such as one noted by Milazzo above, unresolved issues of land and the infiltrations of the discourses of globalisation that some writers regard as instrumental in retaining the superiority of whiteness. The novel's

reluctance to confront the continued apartheid system and its racial power fails to project post-apartheid identities in transition but entrenches them in the marginal spaces and defines the rootlessness of black identity.

The novel opens with a fascinating sentence in relation to the novel's reluctance to confront the neo-apartheid system and forming a desire "to re-inscribe its presence" (Milazzo 41). When describing room 207, the narrator says, "[i]t used to be a hotel, back in the days of… you know, those days which the rulers of this land don't want you to forget" (Moele 13). The omission, elision and erasure of the term 'apartheid' in the above quote, despite its association with the history of black communities, constructs a narrative of forgetfulness that the post-apartheid South Africa emphasises through such discourses as 'the rainbow nation' that are aimed at motivating reconciliation between apartheid perpetrators and the South African blacks. With reference to the constant omission of the term 'apartheid' in the novel, Milazzo argues that, "its deliberate silencing […] directs the reader's attention towards locating the discursive presence of apartheid in the gaps that inform the narrative" (42). By omitting the term 'apartheid' and presenting a contemporary Hillbrow where "the rain is the only thing that cleans up after black brothers bleed to their death on the streets" (Moele 163) the novel suggests circumstances that resemble the brutality of apartheid. With the embracement of "conditions that make possible the existence of a place such as Hillbrow' (Milazzo 42), the city is posed as an un-inhabitable platform for blackness' rootlessness.

One will also realise that there are little if any moments of interaction between black and white people in presented urban spaces, notwithstanding the fact that in reality there are white people that have remained in Hillbrow to this day. Al Jazeera's film documentary titled *Hillbrow Between Heaven and Hell* shows the journey through the dangerous Hillbrow and despite that the majority of the dwellers are black, it is occupied by one of old white women whose only old dog has become her companion. When interviewed, she says, "I was going through the park and he grabbed my bag, this chap – this black man". With her poverty that is evidently shown through her flat, this white old woman has become insignificant in post-apartheid South Africa but still viewed as rich by some blacks. Her insignificance that is overshadowed by the majority of black people in that urban space talks to the silence of interactions with blacks that is evidently shown throughout the novel. The novel follows black protagonists as they interact with their black friends, girlfriends, security guards and does not show any presence of any white people in Hillbrow. The novel's silence on the

interactions between black and white people in Hillbrow significantly maps discourses of segregation and racial power that the country still struggles to deal with. This surfaces when one looks at the contrast between Hillbrow and the surrounding white-occupied suburbs in Johannesburg that define the ever-presence of white economic power that strategically and systematically maintains the margins for contemporary black communities. Matlwa's *Coconut* and Vladislavic's *Portrait with Keys* represent these binaries in contemporary South Africa by noting suburbs that are predominantly white while blacks, despite their economic viability, hardly fit into those urban spaces. Tracing similar binaries and failures and distresses that are encountered by black students in universities, the narrator inquires, "[h]ave you ever been at a tertiary institution of education and witnessed what the black students are going through?" (Moele 35). The thought provoking rhetoric question brings to mind the culture shock experienced by black students the first time they enter institutions of higher learning. Culture shock because the institutions are and continue to manufacture colonial and imperial ideologies. Such instances and the binaries are clearly indicative of the understanding that racial power still defines the existence of both black and white post-apartheid communities and with such binaries, the claims of transition the from apartheid system remain a myth hence, the difficulty of establishing the rootedness of blackness in that urban space.

Apart from mapping continued segregation and racial power through the representations of room 207 and Hillbrow, the novel seems to normalise the post-apartheid racial power. This is premised on way young characters embrace and normalise the stereotypes formed around black people, which position them as inferior to their white counterparts; a perception that has, since colonialism, denigrated black identity. Responding to Lerato's optimism around the situation of black people, D'nice says;

> [t]here is nothing we have to be happy about, Lerato. Because, in the only Book God has on His Green earth, it says that we are the tail of this life. Why do you think where we are living always turns into dirt? The Bible says we are the tail right after the anus. Ours is a dead life that we are living (Moele 95).

With their emphasis on biblical perspectives utilised by the colonialists to re-define blacks and justify colonialism, black characters are stuck in a pessimistic bubble that places black people and their identities into eternal condemnation. Those who are listening to D'nice's 'preaching' (Moele 95), as the narrator claims, do not contest the imageries used to formulate

their black identity. They seem to be comfortable in accepting their inferiority in post-apartheid South Africa defined through their black neighbourhood. Even after the attainment of independence that promises a better socio-economic compensation through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programmes, for instance, the writer plunges these characters into an unredeemable state that is defined by the pulpit declaration that theirs 'is a dead life that [they] are living'. D'nice continues:

> [t]he scientists too can tell you that the ancestors of humans originated in Africa, but they can't tell you that they were black, because that would be like an admission that black people are the base of all life. And let me tell you a secret that no scientist will tell you: black is the primary colour in this life. Burn anything – it turns black because that is its primary state (Moele 96).

The above quote reflects the depraved colonially constructed stereotypes that have continued to dehumanise black people and to deconstruct their identities yet, such post-apartheid young people as D'nice have reluctantly accepted them. With the acceptance of their inferiority, these characters lack the motivation to transform their lives beyond what Hillbrow offers them. As such, it is worth arguing that, in its attempt to represent lived experiences of young black people in Hillbrow, the novel reproduces whiteness and shows how its racial power is constantly re-negotiated and entrenched in that urban space. Although these characters exist in a country that claims transition from brutal white apartheid to post-apartheid black leadership, they remain stuck in their agonising past and as such, fail to identify with new post-apartheid identities that downplay colonial negations in post-apartheid South Africa.

Molamo's life significantly represents similar discourses of the past that encroach into the present and cannot be purged in an urban space that reflects the uncertainties of blackness. Molamo's lived experiences map a symbolic plight of black communities in their attempt to deal with their dreadful histories that eclipse the meaning of post-apartheid black identity. Molamo's relations with his girlfriend Basedi, for instance, constructs the discourse of the past constantly compromising the present. Their relationship is at some point interrupted by a flashback to a disturbing incident that they fail to deal with until the end of their short-lived relationship. As Basedi proclaims, "Molamo, I can't live without you" (Moele 131), Molamo's thoughts drift to his previous relationship with Petunia who, before committing suicide, addressed a letter to him with similar proclamation. For Basedi, this utterance sums her expression of her commitment to Molamo, yet, for Molamo it forms part of his agonising past that, though he seeks to avoid, constantly violates his quest for a new identity in the

present with Basedi. Noko interestingly mentions that, by unknowingly recalling that statement, Basedi "had woken up the ghost in Molamo's past" (Moele 131). This similarly urges one to think that, by re-imagining the discourses of the apartheid system in attempts to show its oppressive nature in the present without dealing with its consequences only serves to revive its psychological effects that cripple the efforts by blacks to transcend its subjugating boundaries. That agonising moment, though its physical visibility remains eclipsed by the claims of independence, when revamped in the present, becomes a symbolic 'haunting ghost' that, like neo-colonialism, continuously supresses efforts by black communities to establish rooted black identities in their urban spaces.

A similar understanding can be traced within contemporary South African black communities whose failure to progress is always attributed to the long history of apartheid. Even as Molamo fails to deal with the compromised past, Basedi promises to offer love, respect and economic support for him. However, by avoiding to deal with Basedi who will constantly remind him of his past, Molamo compromises the opportunity to form his rooted black identity in the city. His life and identity nosedive into uncertain spaces after his separation with Basedi. When Molamo argues that the relationship of a hustler like himself and a medical doctor like Basedi cannot be sustained, Basedi responds "you're not a hustler, you are a poet and I didn't make myself a doctor as you didn't make yourself a poet and that doesn't mean we cannot be together" (Moele 134). The attempts to transcend the boundaries of class in this passage are crucial to note in that, they seek to tease out the differences within black communities and form a rooted blackness in that urban space. To some degree, it seeks to define rootedness through the empowerment of female characters like Basedi but that empowerment encounters hostility from male characters. By establishing Basedi as a despairing female medical doctor who follows Molamo despite his refusal to continue with that relationship, the author portrays a flawed sense of post-apartheid women empowerment linked to what Gqola (2007: 116) calls:

> a completely different set of rules, framed in direct contradiction to the ostensible 'women's empowerment' discourse continues to govern the 'private' world of the home, and other spaces […] Outside of work, the dominant gender-talk is that women must adhere to very limiting notions of femininity.

Thus, we see a novel that reflects a satirical narrative of women empowerment especially with characters like Modishi whose exploitation of their female partners seem to suggest that

female characters must remain silent. The novel arguably captures the "painful subaltern position of women and the debilitating voicelessness that they suffer" (Ndlovu 2013: 87) and how their alienating urban space dismantles attempts to form a rooted blackness in the city. The depiction of Basedi and other females fits well into what Quayson refer to as "symbolization" (2004: 82). Quayson describes 'symbolization' as "an insistent metaphorical register even when this register does not help to develop [… a] character" (82). Despite the status of the female characters such as Basedi, they remain the subjects of their male counterparts who only need them for sexual relations. This echoes a colonial school of thought that "women are the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and above all owned" (McClintock 1995: 31). At the same time, when Molamo insists that Basedi has a "bigger status than [his]" (Moele 134), he does not only articulate the uncertainties of post-apartheid masculinities under the feminine threats of female progression, but he also shows a black identity that metaphorically struggles to root itself upon something that allows it to flourish in post-apartheid South Africa.

6.4 Ethnic Heterogeneity and Black Identity Un-rootedness

Although the urban spaces represented in the novel are defined by trans-national and trans-cultural encounters that have "opened doors for new [identity] imaginings in South Africa[n]" (Ibinga 2010: 57) cities, the issues of ethnic heterogeneity brings to question the issues of blackness and its (un)rootedness. I argue in this section that the un-rootedness of blackness is underpinned by ethnic heterogeneity in that in such a trans-cultural urban community, heterogeneity highlights black communities' resistance to post-apartheid cultural transformations. I use the term 'culture' here to draw the reader's attention to new ways of life in urban spaces that, through such discourses as the 'rainbow nation' and to some extent, 'globalisation', denounce the traditional ethnic boundaries that sought to position the superiority of some ethnic groups over others. *Room 207* intriguingly captures the encounter between ethnicities in room 207 that addresses issues of cultural diversity and at the same time problematising that diversity when striving for a rooted black identity. In the South African context, though several discourses that attempt to unify black communities are continuously raised, issues of ethnic heterogeneity remain at the core of mapping binaries within those communities. Such binaries do not only defy the national identity that is vested in such notions as the 'rainbow nation', but they also betray attempts to establish rooted blackness in the post-apartheid South African city. Although the search for greener pastures brings young dwellers of room 207 in Johannesburg, they remain defined by their diverse

ethnicities for over a decade in Hillbrow. In this section, I point to binaries that are formulated on the realisation of differences between these characters' ethnicities as also reinforced by their shaky social relations, and which the writer partly uses to highlight the uncertainties vested within black South African communities and their identities. Though diverse, some ethnic groups are keen to present and maintain the status of superiority that was conferred them by white colonial and apartheid power structures.

Diverse ethnic groups whose relations do not capture a not-so-homogenous black identity are used to define the state of post-apartheid South Africa in *Room 207*. Despite the fact that the ethnic divide that stems from colonialism and apartheid has been resisted, it remains in post-apartheid South Africa. Pointing to that resistance, Francis (2007: 57) states, "apartheid also reshaped ethnicity by its gross categorisation of peoples, but more influential was the resistance to it as Black Consciousness and Black Power movements arose". In the novel, the relations of ethnic groups represented by room 207 dwellers are marked by distinct differences constructed through discourses of tribalism thus, motivating such writers as Scheepers (2010: 161) to conclude that, "ethnic and cultural intolerance is still alive and well in post-apartheid South Africa". On the same note, Ryan (1999: 179) states, "ethnic difference persists most palpably as economic difference, since race was often connected in the past to the economic exploitation of one group by another". To some degree, these differences and/or binaries can be traced back to the colonial and apartheid histories where certain ethnic groups were assigned a superior status over others and such, ethnic groups as the Zulu have assumed that position since that time. The view of some ethnic groups as superior by the colonialists was considered through noted physical resilience of, especially, men of particular ethnic groups. The white voyagers of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), for instance, use similar criteria to define the superiority of the Zulu tribe through Umbopa who is characterised as a physically strong and fearless man that is allowed to join the group of black servants that accompany them on their journey to the African interior. In *Room 207*, though Zulu-boy is not as strong as this character, he firmly and constantly subscribes to the understanding that out of all South African tribes, his Zulu tribe remains superior and Noko quickly suggests that, "he inherited that [mentality] somewhere in our past" (Moele 65). The characters in this novel are from different ethnic backgrounds. Zulu-boy as the name suggests, is from the Zulu tribe, Noko is Sotho, Matome is Pedi while Modishi is Tswana. Thus, room 207 partly captures the ethnic diversity of post-apartheid South Africa and how such diversity sometimes compromises the rootedness of post-

apartheid blackness. As such, the novel presents room 207 as a post-apartheid platform through which the reader sees the Zulu ethnic group as constantly seeking to establish and maintain its superiority over other South African ethnic groups. Despite constant contestations from his roommates, Zulu-boy resolutely perceives other South African tribes as inferior as reflected elsewhere by the narrator:

> [t]hough he didn't like *makwerekwere*[4], he hated the Pedis even more. He associated every individual with their tribe or the land that they were from. For him, the Zulus were the supreme race and after that everybody was subhuman, "lamaPedi" (Moele 65).

The sentiments of hatred for other tribes that Zulu-boy shows here trace the realities of black communities that are formed on permanent binaries that seem to be far from ending in post-apartheid South African. He uses an interesting phrase 'lamaPedi' to set other ethnic groups under a collective degrading stereotype that determines their worthless existence in post-apartheid South Africa. It is ironic though that when he construct a negative view of other ethnic groups, some of his roommates manage to escape room 207 and Hillbrow to re-imagine their identities in less dangerous spaces while he dies of AIDS before making a name for himself in the entertainment industry in Johannesburg.

Instances of xenophobia that are claimed to be instigated by the Zulu ethnic group and affecting some local ethnic groups such as those from Limpopo province have always worked around cementing hatred. Zulu-boy further establishes that form of strong oppositional thinking and hatred through his wish that every Johannesburg dweller was from a Zulu ethnic group. Citing his perceptions in relation to that thought, Noko says, "he loved the city and understood every soul in it. The only thing that he would have changed about it would have been to make everybody in it Zulu. If he had had the chance, he would have made everyone in Johannesburg a Zulu" (Moele 65). While this perception constructs the image of a superior Zulu ethnic group, it contrastingly invokes critical questions of other ethnic groups' sense of belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, with such binaries, South African black communities problematise the attempts to create a rooted black identity that is claimed under such unifying post-apartheid discourses as 'rainbow nation'. While such discourses are meant to consolidate mutual relations between South African ethnic and racial groups, one might also think of them as creating platforms that seek to construct the rootedness of post-apartheid identities. At the same time, the violence associated with Zulu people in this novel

also compromises the relations of South African ethnic groups, and destabilise the rootedness of post-apartheid black identity. At some point, Noko also subscribes to that stereotype as he says "[a]ll Zulu men are violent, always talking hard and commanding" (Moele 62). In most instances such violence is always thought of as inherited from this ethnic group's king 'Shaka' who, as the narrator says', "killed his own child, tore apart his own genes" (Moele 62). According to Wylie (2000: 58) "the image of Shaka as a barbarous and violent ruler was used by segregationists and later Apartheid ideologies to explain the inmate violence and the inevitability of inter-tribal conflict". Although Noko attaches all these stereotypes around Zulu-boy, there are less instances where Zulu-boy shows such violence as shown through the Zulu former king. In fact, if he assumes that identity, he can be regarded as echoing Golan's (1994: 15) sentiments that, "the images of Shaka were used by Zulu nationalists to invoke a powerful leader and to show that he, and by implication all Zulu, are unrelenting against their foes". In fact, Noko says Zulu-boy, "had been mugged a dozen times and he had mugged others a dozen times. Not that he went out with an intention of robbing someone. No. That someone just presented himself to be robbed" (Moele 62). However, some of the instances that are captured through Zulu political leaders have undoubtedly cemented the thought of violence that is usually attached to this ethnic group. For instance, Goodwill Zwelithini an influential Zulu King was accused of inciting xenophobia that resulted in the death of many foreign nationals in KwaZulu Natal province. Jacob Zuma the former South African president and of Zulu ethnic group, became synonymous with the symbolic song "awuleth' umshini wami" (bring my machine gun or AK47) that undoubtedly reflected elements of violence. The song became his trademark during his rape trail and election campaigns, as he rehearsed and constantly invoked the war-like nature of violence that the post-apartheid communities have come to associate with the Zulu ethnic group. With such instances of ethnic divisions that form the realities of post-apartheid South Africa, one sees blackness' rootedness as constantly compromised in post-apartheid urban South Africa.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter argued that through the representation of room 207 and the characters that occupy it, black identity is projected with uncertainties that raises questions about its (un)rootedness in city spaces. The former hotel room 207 in Hillbrow forms a platform for the unfolding of lived experiences of six post-apartheid protagonists and through it, the novel charts their struggles to establish themselves and their identities in the city. Room 207 poses as a microcosm of Johannesburg that fosters difficulties for protagonists to establish

themselves in the city. The writer pictures a bathroom of this room as the most dangerous place that creates anxieties for black protagonists. I argued that bathing, to some degree, construct a sense of self awareness for presented black roommates. However, the conditions of their bathroom with uninsulated electric cables and the geyser that is almost falling compromises their attempts to formulate their sense of self and as such, problematises black identity rootedness in the city. The chapter also argued that these characters reflect notions of disconnection with their urban space in many ways. For instance, they possess the old dysfunctional radio and television that at some point one of the roommates decides to dispose. By so doing, these characters figuratively rehearse their unwillingness to connect with and form part of post-apartheid new dispensation. They are not only detached from that urban space but also from their rural homes. As such, characters like Matome decide to detach themselves from their histories and backgrounds. I argued that while these characters strive to detach themselves from their histories and backgrounds, they formulate blackness through post-apartheid uncertainties.

The chapter also argued that there is racial power that exists and continues to compromise black identities in post-apartheid urban South Africa. The understanding that the narrator replaces the term 'apartheid' with related but less revealing expressions, suggests the presence of that agonising system in post-apartheid black communities. The chapter's argument around the understanding of blackness and its un-rootedness in urban spaces is also constructed around the inconsistences of new cultures that are shown through the colloquial language that is adopted by some characters and downplayed by other. Such cultures, I argued, pose as defiance against previous apartheid cultures and reflect new identities of black young people. However, the apologies that are given by the narrator whenever that language is used by his peers, seem to suggest the discomfort of some post-colonial young people to adapt to new cultures of representing black communities. That we have characters who despise that language, constructs binaries that continue to haunt black urban communities and project their struggles to establish blackness in the post-apartheid city. This chapter's focus on the notions transition and translation in establishing the understanding of blackness differs from the perspectives that are given in previous chapters. Although issues around South African transition are briefly mentioned in some previous chapters, they are rarely engaged along side cultural translation which, in my view, makes this chapter a crucial final analytical chapter. Unlike in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* where the writer formulate clear binaries between locals and non-locals, *Room 207* formulates its binaries through permanent

ethnic rivalries, cultural clashes and racial structures that hinder the rootedness of post-apartheid blackness.

Chapter 7

7.1 Conclusion

This thesis set out to analyse how blackness can be understood through black authored South African urban novels, with a view to establishing alternative ways of reading post-2000

blackness through artistic and creative representations of urban dwellers and the spaces they occupy in South African cities. The underlying premise in this study has been that since colonialism, blackness has been perceived and imagined through negative stereotypes that overtime, created an imperial ideology of Blackness as a negative space. The colonial process, as the study noted, facilitated negative imaginings of the colonised subjects and their identities. Derogatory and (un)humaning terms such as "negro" that the coloniser used to refer to the colonised sought to dehumanise and position the colonised as "uncivilised" inferior subjects. The study argued that such perceptions of blacks based on physical appearances have not only pathologized black people but also created permanence of negative, racial colonial stereotypes. The same physiologically driven images of blacks justified the need for the imperial mission enslaving and colonizing people of black race under the guise of "civilizing" them. However, the post-apartheid/colonial period, with writers like Curry cited in Utley (2016) sought to define blackness outside such colonial patronising definitions by establishing positive constructions of black identity. I argued that Curry, among other writers, confronted and challenged ideology of white superiority with the object view of nullifying it in similar terms with blackness. I noted, for instance, Curry's argument that for a long time whiteness has been associated with humanity, which consequently saw some black people aspiring for whiteness. What I found fascinating in this writer's view on blackness is its definition both blackness and whiteness in common and equal terms associated with humanity. Unlike colonial writers who defined black people as less human, Curry, followed other post-colonial writers in resisting colonial stereotypical definitions of black identity. My concerns in this thesis lay on the quest to establish how, with claims such as Curry's, and the narratives of transition from colonial and apartheid perspectives to post-apartheid ways of seeing and telling, blackness has been defined through the reading of black authored narratives.

In the first chapter, I analysed complex but interrelated issues of xenophobia, afrophobia and urban ambiguities among others, to flesh out their relatedness to blackness as a fragmented identity. Beyond the Johannesburg that is represented as an ambiguous space, black identity is defined by the simultaneous existence of the oppositions of rural and urban identities. Such existences have also formulated fragmented urban blackness. At the same time, the discussion noted that when existence is defined by discourses of xenophobia, black identity in the city assume precarious spaces that expose black people as the precariate in post-apartheid South Africa that claims to be a rainbow nation. With the understanding of the alternative

ways through which identity is now defined in South Africa, the study argued through Hall's (1990) view that identity evolves with time resulting in the changeability of the meaning of blackness since colonial and apartheid eras. The study also made reference to creative works from Africa, like Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1998) that delineate the city metaphorically as the mouth of a crocodile that swallows everything that comes its way. However, through transformation, it has assumed a cosmopolitan status that makes it a space and place where cultures intersect. Therefore, I engaged urban spaces as continuously moulded, made and re-made through the interaction of dwellers of various cultural and traditional backgrounds and nationalities, all of whom are in search of economic opportunities. As a result, I defined Johannesburg for instance, as a temporary urban space that has, since colonialism, been seen and defined through temporary dwellers.

In the second chapter, blackness was engaged through various urban ambiguities formulated in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. This chapter argued that urban ambiguities are constructed by clashes between rural and urban identities in Johannesburg. Of interest, and noted in this chapter, were rural characters like Refentše whose migration to Johannesburg from their rural home in Tiragalong in search of economic opportunities is later marked by a sense of alienation that is fostered by the resistant rural communities. Their stay in urban spaces introduces them to new modern identities that face rejection when they meet their rural people. This explains the existence of permanent binaries between rural and urban identities in Johannesburg. Such binaries, concluded the chapter, project blackness as an ambiguous space. This is premised by the representation of the inner Johannesburg with an easy-going CBD compared to its peripheries that are defined as chaotic city spaces. Chaotic spaces like Hillbrow, in the eyes of people from Tiragalong, brew HIV, teem with prostitutes and criminals and foreign nationals, contrast sharply with the easy going CBD that reflects the presence of rich and powerful people. It is when Cousin advises Refentše against greeting a homeless man that the novel traces permanent binaries that inform the ambiguities of black identity in black urban communities. I argued, through Bhabha's (1994) notion of "third space" that the clashes between the rural and urban identities formulate identity negotiations that constantly foster the formation of new identities in Johannesburg.

Rural and urban encounters formulate new identities that transcend cultural boundaries of those that define themselves as locals, thus reflecting the "in-between space or a border zone" that is formulated through interactions between rural and urban identities but also "allow[ing]

particular spaces of meaning to emerge" (Kalua 2009: 23). Among such new spaces of meaning is the view of blackness as a space that seeks to integrate black communities in Johannesburg. There are attempts to merge identities of rural and urban spaces in Johannesburg. This, I argued, shows that integrating black communities transcends local boundaries to accepting the presence of foreign nationals in Johannesburg despite xenophobic tendencies. The research also focused its analysis through thoughts by such writer as Hall (1990) that the meaning of identity is not fixed as it is constructed through the development of various cultures and time. This is also noted through the claims of transition from apartheid to post-apartheid eras that transformed the ways through which black people are perceived.

The study also noted that through *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*'s representation of the insecurities and intolerance in Hillbrow, blackness poses as a precarious space. Hillbrow is characterised by reckless driving that claims the life of children and New Year celebrations, murders, robberies, drug abuses and prostitution that threaten the existence of its dwellers. Hillbrow's insecurity is also reinforced by the police who have found economic opportunities in accepting bribes from both locals and non-locals. Thus the rot associated with blackness speaks to an identity that sits on the edges of precarity as a result of insecurities of both the locals and foreign nationals.

The study analysed blackness through the lens of black entitlement in *Dog Eat Dog*. I argued that the end of apartheid constructed discourses of black entitlement as black people, sought to resist the neo-apartheid system by laying claims on resources and urban spaces that were formerly owned by white people. I noted that through the violence of young black characters, *Dog Eat Dog* constructs a narrative of the dialectics of black entitlement culture and black identity in South Africa, through Dingz who violently challenges white characters in a space that they still dominate; thus setting blackness as a confrontational space. However, black entitlement finds equal force and resistance when confronted by apartheid institutions represented by the white personnel in the finance office who, in turn, undermine black sense of entitlement through attaching a flood of negative images. Black entitlement is also undermined by the priest's rules in the residences of Wits University that project blackness as figuratively and continuously confined by the dominance of whiteness in urban space.

The study also argued that the reading of *Dog Eat Dog* offers the impression that blackness is still under the shadow of whiteness. Existence of black subjects relies entirely on the salaries

from white owned companies in Johannesburg. As a result, most of them avoid any conflicts and confrontation with their white superiors. This is also reinforced by the fact that some young black characters like Dingz are keen to criticise and reject black traditions, while consciously or unconsciously embracing whiteness. Furthermore, young black characters struggle to identify with their cultural and historical heroes. They criticise former black kings like Dingane and in the process overshadowing the black people's historical struggle against colonialism and apartheid. The study also noted that black communities are defined by poverty and on-going struggles of black people. Through such representations of black communities, blackness also poses as a burden for black people who are imagined through dehumanising terms. However, what is interesting to understand is that the sloganeering that reflects their sense of entitlement to South African land and resources is compromised at many points. Entitlement is also problematised by the fact that the powerful blacks in government use apartheid institutions like the police to stop demonstrations, and to serve their interests. This manifests the paradoxes and contradictions that manifest in the construction of black identities. The paradoxes leave blackness and its claim to entitlement to South African spaces in a state of ambivalence.

Noting how black entitlement is compromised by racism and the continued state of poverty in post-apartheid communities, the study also sought to analyse blackness through urban negations in *Jozi* to show how blackness has remained a negative space since colonial and apartheid eras. The study engaged blackness as a negative space through discourses of self-marginalisation. I argued that despite the end of apartheid, which marginalised black communities, the post-apartheid blacks are marginalising themselves and others thus, constructing their own negative images about self. For instance, prostitutes are dehumanized through rape and sometimes-horrific death in the urban spaces. The study also noted that self-marginalisation is facilitated by the black-led government's failures to provide economic opportunities for black communities. As a result, most black urban dwellers languish in poverty where they die before their dreams are fulfilled. Thus, the terror of crime that is presented in this novel maintains a certain marginal position for those that are always victimized by criminals. Consequently, the urban space poses as a tragic space where the survival of its dwellers is not always guaranteed. The study also engaged blackness through post-hope experiences of the characters that define post-apartheid blackness as a negative space. I referred to the aftermath of failed dreams as the post-hope period, and noted that the characters' experiences after failed dreams in urban spaces are clearly tragic. For instance,

the poet remains trapped in the streets of Johannesburg and his creativity is not recognized in that urban space until he mysteriously disappears. Also notable is the deteriorating state of inner Johannesburg that robs it of its status as a global economic city. In comparison to Western or European cities, Johannesburg's city-ness as portrayed in Jozi is a figment of a city. It sits on the margins of imaginary cities as a rural cum urban space. I argued, therefore, that this understanding of Johannesburg traces the African cities as existing on the margins of Eurocentric urban spaces hence, the view that through some parts of Johannesburg constructed through slums, black identity permanently poses as a negative space that has failed to shift from colonially constructed margins since the attainment of independence.

In *Penumbra*, the study analysed blackness through toxic masculinities, and argued that spaces such as the initiation tradition construct toxic masculinities that project blackness as a gendered space. Such spaces are fraught with orientations of violence that the initiates continue to embrace in their communities. I pointed out that such spaces have been regarded by some writers as Ntombana, as dangerous spaces that are defined by alcohol and drug abuse. Initiates embrace the negations that they learn from the initiation school and find themselves stuck in alcohol and drug abuse. These adopted toxic masculinities result in the undermining of feminine identities. Thus the initiation tradition projects an ambiguous black identity. The initiates that successfully endure the pain and consistently use the traditional medicine are regarded as real men. While those that use the western medicine are depicted as inferior. The study also analysed the struggles that black young graduates face in the city spaces. I argued that, their struggle for survival in Cape Town fails to offer them respite in the form of economic opportunities until they join the gang. Blackness is thus shown as a "symbol of a conscious desire for life" (Mbembe 2017: 6).

Exposure of young characters to the behaviour of irresponsible mothers such as their involvement in sexual relations in the presents of their sons and extreme alcohol consumption, leads to compromised adulthood. Adulthood becomes an embodiment of violence, deprivation of women's sexuality and undermining of their dignity. This defines blackness as a gendered space that upholds the constant assault of women, while encouraging multiple, irresponsible sexual relations that seek to establish male dominance against feminine subjects. However, male toxicities within black societies are violently confronted in Makholwa's *Black Widow Society*. The study's analysis of *Black Widow Society* has shown how post-apartheid feminine characters seek to deal with urban gendered spaces and

masculine toxicities. This book, is a response to a long history of women subjugation within black-white communities. The study argued that *Black Widow Society* confronts and interrogates male gendered urban spaces through the violence of toxic femininities to re-define post-apartheid femininities thus, presenting blackness as entrenched within constant masculine and feminine clashes. The chapter also noted that the novel seeks to reverse stereotypes that have been formulated by patriarchal societies by thoughtfully setting female characters like Talullah, Nkosazana and Ednas on the pedestal of multi-sexual relations without condemning it as prostitution. Their use of such terms as "unappreciative dogs" in reference to men also reverses masculine stereotypes around women thus, attempting to dismantle masculine dominance and re-imagine their feminine identities. By confronting the past and on-going stereotypes that were and are still created by their male counterparts, the novel figuratively defines blackness as a space that seeks to deal with discourses that have negated it since colonialism.

The study also sought to define post-2000 blackness through the representation of un-inhabitable urban spaces in *Room 207*. Through Room 207 in Hillbrow, blackness remains un-rooted in post-apartheid city spaces. The bathroom in Room 207 is the most dangerous space because of the exposed electric cables and semi-attached geyser that can fall at any time. With such exposure to threats of the city the roommates of Room 207 are constantly deprived of their sense of self that in turn portrays the un-rootedness of blackness. I also conceptualised blackness' un-rootedness through these roommates' figurative disconnectedness with post-apartheid South Africa that is shown through their dysfunctional radio and television. By so doing, these characters figuratively rehearse their unwillingness to be part of post-apartheid new dispensation. While these characters strive to detach themselves from their histories and backgrounds, the novel suggests that post-apartheid blackness is a space fraught with uncertainties. This is also established through the use of *tsotsitaal* that, though spoken by these roommates, is chastised by most young and old people in urban spaces.

The urban novels that have been analysed in this study represent black communities in negative terms. Most black young people struggle in cities that are closed, rigid and fixed for any economic opportunities. As a result, they end up surviving through unorthodox means leading to death before fulfilling their dreams. Murders, robberies, reckless driving, infidelity among other misdemeanors, define both South African cities and blackness as precarious

spaces where the survival of those that are viewed as black is not always guaranteed. At the same time, power relations within black communities perpetually construct blackness as an ambiguous space. For a long time, blackness has projected itself as a male gendered space, especially because of the masculine dominance that defined women as inferior subjects. However, the post-apartheid era through feminism has confronted that understanding and reversed the stereotypes that have been constructed around feminine subjects thus, forming the meaning of blackness as constantly underpinned by clashes between feminine and masculine identities. While my study talked about toxic femininities as a counter revolutionary strategy used in the fight against traditional gender based violence and abuse of women; I feel that more needs to be done in this field to explore to great length, ways of fighting against masculine violence on women. I make this proposal hoping that other scholars will find a niche in studying toxic femininities in ways that address the gender based violence that has been declared a pandemic, with the same effect as covid-19. Studying toxic femininities as counter strategies can be done simultaneously with toxic childhoods and how they result in toxic adulthoods. This, I have no doubt will mark the beginning of a long struggle in the fight against gender based violence in South Africa. It will also result in the redefinition of blackness and black identity, which to date can be described in one word violent.

This study offered a crucial body of knowledge around South African black urban identity. Most works on urban studies tend to offer brief analytical views on urban black identities, and such works focus on white authored urban novels. Most white authored novels that are studied in these works, as noted in the study, negate black communities and as such, focusing on black authored novels has capture fascinating thoughts of black people's self-representation in post-apartheid South African city spaces. By focusing on black authored novels, the study aimed at engaging claims of South African transition and highlighted black people's struggles to establish clear cultural, political and social structures against the legacies of the apartheid system of domination that negates black identity. My perspective on that engagement is crucial because it points to black communities as re-imagining identities that remain stuck in colonial and apartheid representational formations. The study reflects on how crime, poverty, murders and lack of economic opportunities in South African city spaces continue to shape the existence of black people and how such representations permanently maintain the colonial negation of black identity. I, therefore, find it relevant to argue that despite the claims of independence, young black people's attempts to construct their

identities through modernised ways of life, South African urban blackness is still represented within complex colonial and apartheid views that perpetually maintain blackness as negative space.

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