

# **Considering Coloureds: Detangling Representations of Coloured Women in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

by  
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## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third-party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

## Abstract

Coloured identity remains a contentious and complex topic in contemporary South African conversations. As an academic area of study, topics based on coloured identity and culture have been written since the 19th century, with historiographies and descriptions progressing from essentialist configurations to postcolonial explorations. Prior to the 1980s, ‘common knowledge’ posited coloured people primarily as products of miscegenation, and arguments for ‘coloured’ to be conceived of as a cultural identity is a recent framework of consideration. A surge in academic and public interests regarding coloured cultural history and identity has grown alongside South African literary traditions that focus on narrative modes linked to autobiography and confessional writing, with a market for ‘coloured’ stories having swelled in the last decade. Authors have provided a burst in texts that document, index and revise historical narratives attached to colouredness. This research sets out to explore the value of texts that pivot on coloured stories, with specific attention to coloured femininities and representations thereof, through reading the novels *Eve* and *What Will People Say?*, along with the film *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies*. Spurred on by the current social moment where bold retellings of painful pasts are encouraged, this study charts the intersections of intimacy that underpin hidden histories and repressed topics, notions of shame and dignity in coloured self-identification, as well as the value of memory studies in writing, reading and sharing stories entangled with living coloured.

## Opsomming

Gekleurde identiteit bly 'n omstrede en ingewikkelde onderwerp in kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse gesprekke. As akademiese studieveld is onderwerpe gebaseer op gekleurde identiteit en kultuur sedert die 19de eeu van belang, met historiografieë en beskrywings wat van essensialistiese konfigurasies tot postkoloniale ondersoeke vorder. Voor die 1980s het 'algemene kennis' bruin mense hoofsaaklik as produkte van bloedvermenging geposisioneer, en argumente vir 'gekleurde' as 'n kulturele identiteit is 'n onlangse raamwerk van oorweging. Namate Suid-Afrikaanse literêre tradisies ontwikkel, maar steeds gefokus is op outobiografie en konfessionele skryfwerk, het die afgelope dekade die belangstelling in die uitsending van 'gekleurde' verhale geswel. Daar is nou 'n aantal tekste wat hersiening doen oor historiese narratiewe wat op kleur gefokus is. Met hierdie navorsing word ondersoek ingestel na die waarde van tekste wat op gekleurde verhale draai. Daar is spesifieke aandag gegee aan gekleurde vroulikheid deur op te let hoe en waarom stereotipes groei en voortduur. Hier word die romans *Eve* en *What Will People Say?* saam met die film *Ellen: Die verhaal van Ellen Pakkies* gelees. Hierdie studie word aangespoor deur die huidige sosiale oomblik, waar gewaagde hervertellings van pynlike tydperke aangemoedig word. Die studie ondersoek die snypunte van intimiteit wat die versteekte geskiedenis en onderdrukte onderwerpe onderlê, asook idees van skaamte en waardigheid in gekleurde selfidentifikasie, sowel as die waarde van geheue-studies in die skryf, lees en deel van verhale van kleurling lewe.

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## Contents

Declaration .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Opsomming .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
List of Figures .....	viii
Chapter One - Introduction .....	10
Background information.....	11
Theoretical frameworks.....	14
Departures: Locating colouredness .....	19
A note on terminology.....	25
Chapter outlines.....	26
Chapter Two - <i>Eve</i> .....	28
Introduction: Using fiction to recover hidden histories.....	28
Sex in <i>ordentlike</i> coloured communities: Emerging sexualities .....	30
Sex in <i>ordentlike</i> coloured communities: Predatory behaviours .....	33
Sex in <i>ordentlike</i> coloured communities: Rape.....	35
Sexuality: Subversions of respectable femininities .....	39
Sexuality: Performance and concealment .....	42
Narrative silences and selections.....	44
Conclusion.....	48
Chapter Three – <i>What Will People Say?</i> .....	49
Introduction: Using fiction to impart intimacy.....	49
Looking at the title .....	53
Writing interiority.....	57
Ghosts, mirrors and portraits .....	59
Habitus and cultural capital.....	61
Looking at Nicky.....	63
Looking at Suzette.....	64
Conclusion.....	66
Chapter 4 – <i>Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies</i> .....	68
Introduction: Using non/fiction narratives to read truth and memory.....	68
Part One:.....	71
‘Between the Spaces’ – <i>Moeders</i> in media.....	71
‘Between the Spaces’ – Considering Cape Flats’ stories .....	74

Part Two: .....	79
Ellen vs. Pakkies - Religion, Rape and Interiority.....	79
Regarding religion .....	80
Regarding rape.....	84
Regarding interiority.....	89
Conclusion.....	91
Chapter Five – <i>Melanie's Ghost</i> .....	92
Introduction .....	92
A starting point: Rape through time .....	94
Repositioning the unspeakable: Rape in context.....	96
Representations of rape .....	98
Representations of rape: Revisiting <i>What Will People Say?</i> .....	99
Rape beyond the physical.....	102
Conclusion.....	103
Works Cited .....	105

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Still from Joshua, <i>Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies</i> (00:22:08).....	81
Figure 2. Still from Joshua, <i>Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies</i> (00:14:45).....	88
Figure 3. Clark, Erin. <i>Crime scene photo courtesy of South African Police Services</i> . Vice.com. 2 Jan. 2010. Web. 18 October 2019. ....	90



## Chapter One - Introduction

What does it mean to be “coloured” and woman in a post-apartheid South Africa? Readings of colouredness as a constructed identity have a long history, and the racial signifier continues to be contested twenty-five years into democracy. Questions around who coloureds<sup>1</sup> are, why and when they came into existence, and how they factor into a national South African identity, are points of conversation that appear to still dominate public discourse on identity. The comments section of any online think piece<sup>2</sup> that centres on the coloured debate will undoubtedly reveal heated conversations about what it means to be coloured today. Social dialogue shows divergent re-articulations of colouredness; there are those who deny the existence of a “coloured” group of people; those who admonish the term itself; others claim the racial signifier and fill it with their own meaning; some claim allegiance to slave or Khoi heritage, and more still do away completely with racial markers, preferring to be classed simply as African.

In South Africa, where the national history has been shaped by racial segregation and white supremacist ‘common sense’, grappling with topics of race and identity has always been a sensitive matter. Much of the ideological structures of the past remain intact, and while individuals are now more free than ever to construct their identities beyond the scaffolding of apartheid thinking, essentialist rhetoric continues to guide definitions. Or, as Zoë Wicomb has stated, “the New South Africa is too much like the old and is therefore necessarily a racial affair” (“Culture Beyond Colour” 59). It would be irresponsible to ignore the weight of race as a marker of identity, and in the case of coloureds, it is especially prevalent to unpack. When adding variables such as sex, femininity and morality, the identity debate becomes ensnared in complexities that point to historical, psychological and material factors at play in the shaping of individual personhoods. The challenge here – particularly regarding my study – lies in disentangling history and memory, race and intimacy, as well as power, agency and performance. Here, I have opted to ground my study in the notion of “detangling” rather than “disentangling”, despite the latter term being arguably more appropriate. Disentanglement gestures towards a careful undoing, unwinding or a freeing from entanglement, whereas detangle denotes disentangling but semantically is more closely associated with the untangling of hair. Removing knots from hair and the importance of straightening, smoothing out and taming coarse or kinky hair can be considered as a beautification practice that is prevalent to coloured cultural groups, which I unpack in Chapter Two. With knotty hair, the process

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “coloured” because the term is filled with cultural meaning that is relevant in context of my research questions. Additionally, I identify as a “coloured” person, which has configured in my decision to structure my research project around coloured people and the culture. See my section “A note on terminology” for more detail.

<sup>2</sup> With print media in decline, public conversations and commentary have become more easily accessible in online spaces.

of detangling can be uncomfortable and a bit destructive, but necessary to preserve the integrity of one's hair. Detangling is an activity that requires plenty of creams or oils to soften the knots, and different combs or detangling brushes to pull through the hair to make the process manageable but it can still be painful. Sometimes we rip out chunks of hair and cause split-ends in the process, but removing all of the knots is essential. Like the act of smoothing out tangled hair, the activity of disentangling the entanglement present in coloured cultural topics can be rough, unpleasant and painful but necessary. "Detangle" as the operative verb for untangling hair also links to memory and is useful as a characterisation point for coloured female literary characters, as well as a tool for destabilising conceptions of coloured femininity. Arguably, Black females' relationship with their hair can be an ambivalent topic, and as Kelly-Eve Koopman states in *Because I Couldn't Kill You*, "If you're a black or brown woman one of your earliest memories probably has something to with your hair and it's probably not positive" (22). Koopman highlights the prevalence of hair in Black female lives, its negative associations and the role memory plays therein. While "disentangle" and "detangle" are closely related in meaning, I have chosen to focus on detangling because it ties in with my personal female experiences, coloured cultural history, as well as the overarching theories of entanglement and intimacy.

## Background information

The project to map out coloured identity and the cultural history attached has been in progress since the 19th century. In the introduction to *Burdened by Race: Coloured identities in southern Africa* (2013) edited by Mohamed Adhikari, the late 1880s is identified as the period in local history where the term "coloured" became commonly used and recognised as a separate racial identity (xi). Multiple texts contributing to this cartographic project, including *Burdened by Race*, have in the last decade showcased a range of innovative work that has focused on coloured identities, such as *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities* (2001), edited by Zimtiri Erasmus. More racially and culturally inclusive studies such as *Writing South Africa: Literature, apartheid, and democracy, 1970-1995* (1998) and *Categories of Persons* (2013) cover a wider range of themes, and central to each collection is an idea, which I borrow from Hedley Twidle, regarding usable and unusable pasts<sup>3</sup>. The body of existing literature which attempts to historically locate coloureds and explain the existence of coloureds' identities is relatively extensive, and as I show later, this field of research has moved through various schools of thought. The progression in critical writing on this subject illustrates important shifts in thinking for academics and coloured people themselves, which magnify the prevalence of historical elements

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<sup>3</sup> This concept was discussed at a research seminar hosted by Stellenbosch University's English Department titled "Usable Pasts: Life Writing, literary biography and the limits of research", presented by Hedley Twidle.

that were once usable, becoming unusable and vice versa. According to Twidle, difficulties can emerge when pasts that were once considered as usable, authoritative, and trustworthy, become uncertain, inappropriate or unusable when revisited. Twidle cites Ghandi's autobiography as a non-fictional text that has increasingly been received with suspicion as more information and critical investigations of Ghandi come to light, thereby casting his text as an uncertain, perhaps unusable, element of the past. The notion of certain pasts growing into or out of usability is evocative to me, especially when considered alongside the progression of studies concerned with coloured identities.

Gabeba Baderoon, in *Regarding Muslims: From slavery to post-apartheid* (2014), has noted the prevalence of South Africa's history of slavery in the making of identities. Prior to the 1980s, local historical studies depicted slavery at the Cape as minor and "mild" in character (10), as well as picturesque (84), which minimises the far-reaching effects that the processes of slavery has had on people descended from slaves. In this way, the historical archive of slavery is being re-engaged and unpacked in efforts to shift the ways that slavery is remembered in South Africa (10). For Baderoon, drawing on the official archive of slave pasts is used to address how Muslim or Cape Malay identities fit into South Africa, with an exploration of concepts of race, sexuality and belonging. Pumla Dineo Gqola's *What is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/slave memory in post-apartheid South Africa* (2010) studies the role of slave memory in post-apartheid South Africa, with attention to contemporary gendered and racialised identities. Works like *Regarding Muslims* and *What is Slavery to Me?* reposition South Africa's history of slavery as a usable past in the toolkit for identity investigations. Gqola identifies how slave memory matters for various racialised communities in contemporary South Africa (7), and discussing identities enclosed in the logics of race requires a tracing of the origins of race ideologies. Achille Mbembe, in *Critique of Black Reason* (2017), locates the formation of racist states to the period stretching from the 15th to 19th centuries, where processes of slavery and colonisation ensured the successful partitioning of the world (56-57). In South Africa, slavery existed for close to two hundred years (Baderoon 83) and largely shaped all social relations in the Cape Colony between 1658 until slave emancipation in 1834, where slaves formed the majority of the population (8). Understandings of race, with Black bodies being conceived of as sub-human and therefore inferior to European whites (Mbembe 17), emerged alongside slave systems and growing imperialist impulses. As Baderoon points out, sexuality was a major element which blurred the boundaries between the realms of coloniser and colonised, which was spurred on by the gender imbalance at the Cape (83). The day-to-day relations and social interactions among Cape residents and the intimacy attached to those relations were, prior to the 1980s, considered as peripheral to daily life (10). The cultural character of the Cape relied, to some extent, on the sexual encounters that took place between the colonisers and

colonised, and this developed into normalised sexual aggression and violence. Blacks, capitalised here to encompass all black and brown South Africans of “African and South Asian descent” (Gqola *Rape* 4) then, were methodically institutionalised to absorb Eurocentric beliefs around the differentiation of people and hierarchy of race, and understanding their inferiority was foundational to maintaining hostile relations (Mbembe 56). Culturally, residents at the Cape were forced to co-exist under the violent control that underpinned white supremacist ideology, and during slave-holding and colonial times, sexual relations between Europeans and Blacks contributed towards fears around racial purity. These fears had the effect of reinforcing Eurocentric logic that Black women were licentious and sexually available (Baderoon 85), but also impossible to rape – meaning that sexually assaulting or violating Black women did not legally and philosophically count as instances of rape because Black women were conceived of as hypersexual (Gqola 4-5). According to Baderoon, this period of history serves as “the primal scene for understanding racial and sexual codes in South Africa” and states that “it is unsurprising that black bodies in South Africa have been imbued with unsettling sexualised meanings since colonial times” (86). In Chapter Five I discuss the ‘language of rape’ (Gqola, *Rape* 22) in detail, with attention to slavery as a seminal South African moment.

Discussions of race and sexual violence are central to my study; these are historical factors that make my research questions possible. Slavery, perhaps, may not be the genesis of coloured identity, but I argue that it is a significant historical moment to scrutinize. Finding the genesis is a complex task that many have focused on, and Cheryl Hendricks has noted that many authors become detained in theorisation surrounding the ontology of colouredness (118). For Hendricks, reading into coloureds as an ethnic group with a separate identity is not progressive, and alludes to Adhikari’s warning to avoid the allure of arguments based on coloured exceptionality (Gqola, *Slavery* 34). Hendricks calls for social dialogue among all South Africans, arguing that transformative change in the perceptions and understandings of colouredness is only possible when unpacking historical, psychological and material factors (119). Inside and outside of coloured groups, it is still possible to find confusion around the roots of the coloured people, to find debate about whether or not the term ‘coloured’ is valid and authentic, and feelings of displacement, shame, and marginality continue to pervade colouredness. Erasmus, in her introduction essay to *Coloured By History, Shaped by Place*, titled “Re-imagining coloured identities in post-Apartheid South Africa”, captures the intermediary essence attached to colouredness (her italics); “For me, growing up coloured meant knowing that I was *not only* not white, but *less than white*; *not only* not black, but *better than black*” (13). This liminality, as enforced by extreme white supremacism, ties into notions of rootlessness that extends into culture, history and identity. These three facets are

undoubtedly linked and dependent on one another, and in tackling these areas, it is often deemed necessary to historically locate colouredness. In this regard, Hendricks' call to action is important and necessary to consider in projects focused on coloured identities, despite social dialogue perhaps not yet being mature enough to move beyond essentialist readings.

As current academic study on this subject evolves, we find postcolonial and post-apartheid investigations taking the lead in generating new and fruitful insights, such as Gqola's first full-scale study into the history and effects of slavery in South Africa with *What is Slavery to Me?*, as well as Baderoon's *Regarding Muslims*, as another example of a complete study that traces Malay cultural history and identity. These two texts, while being thoroughly academic in structure and rigour, also indicate a turn towards the intimate and personal, where private pasts and the questions that emerge from lived experiences become a usable element in projects that destabilises accepted histories, decolonises academic study, and de-males the archive. Supplementing these academic texts into cultural histories are non-fictional narratives that address themes linked to identity, like *Sorry, Not Sorry: Experiences of a Brown Woman in White South Africa* (2018) from Haji Mohamed Dawjee and *Because I Couldn't Kill You* (2019) by Kelly-Eve Koopman. This shift in academic study of cultural history invites the intimate and personal as appropriate inclusions into the archive. For my own research, coloured by the now and my own experiences as a child of the 'New South Africa', my research questions pivot on a facet of colouredness that concerns gendered productions of identity, and specifically femininities, through frameworks of intimacy and entanglement. The questions I am asking and my research focus is interdisciplinary in nature, as it fits within postcolonial cultural studies but on the backdrop of South African history, with post-apartheid departures.

### **Theoretical frameworks**

In contemporary, post-apartheid South Africa, we are experiencing a freedom to self-identify in new and exciting ways, where individuals are (in theory) free to carve out their own identities as they see fit. This is also, of course, tempered by the historical and social moment that South Africa is currently experiencing, where people are emboldened to tell their stories and have the freedom and access to broadcast their stories, whereas previous generations have not been privy to such privileges. Based on the successful memoir industry which Twidle, in *Experiments with Truth: Narratives of Non-fiction and the Coming of Democracy in South Africa* (2019), identifies as a cornerstone of South African literature, the upswing in autobiographical texts has been enormous but also requested – the public wants the everyperson's story. Gqola, in *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (2016), speaks to the significance of this local literary tradition,

The importance of telling our stories – whatever they may be – was central to nation-building efforts, crystallised in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but also finding echo in anti-rape and domestic abuse campaigns that reiterated the importance of breaking silence as a key to accessing freedom (169).

Gqola speaks specifically in reference to rape culture – a topic which I grapple with repeatedly throughout this thesis – but the underlying sentiment can be applied wholesale to Twidle’s assertion. In the scheme of memoirs and autobiography, there is often a call-back to racial, ethnic or cultural identification as the significance of one’s racial or cultural grouping remains embedded in the social fabric of societies.

On the scholarly and literary side of things, important work into mapping coloured cultural history on the backdrops of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, provides re-articulations of what it means to be coloured in contemporary South Africa. These entry points, moments in the history of the colonial world, are usable parts that can be readdressed and revised. The thrust of postcolonialism has been developed around attempts to shift dominant ways of thinking about the world (Young 2), and present alternative perspectives to the vast majority of knowledges that have been produced by the western world. Postcolonial writing is built on the need to disrupt, update and remap thinking behaviours structured on notions borne from colonisers, and texts like *Regarding Muslims* update the colonial archive. In short, my thesis is a postcolonial attempt to contribute to those archive updates, which is a project that requires constant renovation. As Robert Young states in *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, “Above all, postcolonialism seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledges into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west” (7). With my research questions grounded in postcolonialism, a useful concept to underpin my arguments is the idea of “entanglement”. The complex location of coloured as an identity, overlaid with subjective perspectives shaped by inherited knowledges from the colony and apartheid, is quite evocative to me as an ‘elder born-free’ that can be positioned at the transitional intersection located in blurry margin of 1990s South Africa. “Entanglement” was initially suggested by Edouard Glissant in works like *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1989), and was used in reference to creole identities and the processes that converged and blurred the “point of difficulty” (26). Glissant’s proposal here refers to looking for the points where cultural identities of varying kinds became entangled through contact, the conditions which facilitated that contact, and the resulting cultural identities thereof. “Entanglement” as a framework of study applied within a South African context can be credited to Sarah Nuttall, as introduced in *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-apartheid* (2009) and in earlier works dating back to 2000. Working with entanglement requires an unravelling of these connections and collisions; the task is to unpack the



historical, social and cultural conditions, which contributed to the making of identities. For Erasmus, colouredness can be conceived of as a creolised cultural identity, which has opened up discussions that expand essentialist thinking of coloured as ‘mixed-race’ identities. Erasmus states that,

Coloured identities were constructed out of fragmented cultural material available in the contexts of slavery, colonialism and cultural dispossession. This leaves their constructed and composite historical nature always evident and their dislocation always present. These are identities produced and re-produced in the place of the margin (22-23).

By using creolisation theory, Erasmus repositions colouredness into a realm that focuses less on the racial power structures which have dominantly underpinned understandings of this identity, towards an inquiry that emphasises the social construction of cultural identities. This, of course, raises the assertion that coloureds have no culture because in essentialist readings, we lack an ‘essence’ in the ways that European or African identities do. This argument is fallacious and stems from dated ideas linked to ‘miscegenation’ and degenerate racial mixing, iterations of which can be found in Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *God’s Stepchildren* (1924), H. P. Cruse’s *Die Opheffing van die Kleurlingbevolking* (1947), and Al J. Venter’s *Coloured: A Profile of Two Million South Africans* (1974). Many authors, especially women of colour, have contributed in debunking essentialist arguments, including works by Danielle Bowler, Barbara Boswell and Desiree Lewis<sup>4</sup>. Erasmus argues that a cultural identity relies on shared practices and traditions, and points out the wide range of ‘cultural possessions’ that characterise coloured culture (22). In this way, I have approached my study on the basis that coloured identity is primarily cultural, with race as a secondary, unavoidable, facet of the culture.

I find readings within creolisation theory to be helpful in my investigation of coloured femininities, especially in context of foregrounding the cultural elements responsible for generating a shared identity among a group of people. Hendricks, in line with Erasmus’s claim that all social identities involve borrowing, states that “[w]hat is important is whether a sufficient number of people feel themselves to be distinct and/or are ‘othered’ by the dominant groups of society. This is true of coloureds in the Western Cape” (118). Working from the concept of coloureds as people of a liminal, cultural identity that can be traced within creole and hybridity parameters, the framework of entanglement proves to be particularly useful in unpacking notions of race, gender and cultural

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<sup>4</sup> See Bowler’s co-authored essay titled “Contested constructions of coloured in the Kuli Roberts saga” (2011), Boswell’s impactful petition against a problematic article published in early 2019 concerning cognitive functioning of coloured South African women, as well as Lewis’ “Writing Hybrid Selves: Richard Rive and Zoë Wicomb” (2001), published in *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*.

traditions and practices. My study is grounded in the historical moments that have had significant impacts on conceptions of colouredness, with slavery, apartheid and post-apartheid being key eras of interest. To successfully investigate colouredness as a cultural identity involves scrutinising each era with attention to these points of difficulty, which I identify as including race, gender, sex, community (space) and memory.

With these “points of difficulty” forming the backbone of my study, slavery emerges as the most significant era central to the development of cultural codes that pivot on concepts of shame, dignity and respectability. Through the works of Baderoon and Gqola in regard to slavery, I trace the historical backdrops for the cultural codes that have been produced and re-produced within coloured groups. By looking at the kinds of cultural codes that underpin colouredness, senses of intimacy converge in contemporary representations of coloured femininities. Given that I identify as a coloured woman of the Western Cape, my research focus indubitably stems from my own feelings of rootlessness and marginality. In this way, using entanglement as my overarching rubric, my research questions address the functions of race and history in constructions of colouredness, while also addressing the intimacy implicit in studying my own cultural identity, and the value of memory studies in doing so.

Sarah Nuttall expanded upon the use of entanglement as a framework for local study and in the introduction to *Entanglement*, explains the interdisciplinary functions of employing this concept when reading the literary and cultural post-apartheid landscape. I find two types of entanglement, which Nuttall calls “rubrics”, as pertinent to my study; historical entanglement (2) and racial entanglement (9) are frameworks that I will continue to revisit in my aims to explore the traces of gendered productions of coloured identity. Nuttall defines entanglement as,

a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or a set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness (1).

Working from this, intimacy and memory studies configure heavily into my aims of unravelling coloured cultural history, which I approach via literary representations of coloured women figures. Revisiting fragments of the past as presented in both fictional and non-fictional texts and finding the traces of historical entanglement allow for an imaginative engagement with identity constructions – which includes revisiting my own history and memories.



Gqola, in *What is Slavery to Me?*, has argued that the dismantling of apartheid, the onset of democracy, and the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) were national invitations for all South Africans to “imagine ourselves anew” (3). That “invitation” to make new identities in a renewed South Africa has inspired discourses on the nature of memory, as the TRC was an “explicitly mnemonic exercise” which jumpstarted interrogations into the making of memory. Gqola reiterates and expands on this notion in *Rape* (2015), drawing attention to the importance of “telling our stories – whatever they may be” as being not only a central tenet to the TRC efforts, but also a signification that breaking silence is “a key to accessing freedom” (169). For Gqola, memory studies and its links to storytelling, confessionals and shared discourse, can be used as a tool for negotiating post-apartheid identities.

For the purposes of my thesis, *What is Slavery to Me?* prompts lines of inquiry that connect memory to the concepts of entanglement and intimacy. The value of memory is noted as a condition that, while intimately intertwined with the past, goes beyond the exercise of historiography, which I explore in detail in Chapter Three. I am particularly concerned with Gqola’s insights and use of Toni Morrison’s theorisations of memory, specifically in the essay “The Site of Memory”, where employing memory to ferret out the interiority of persons is referred to as a kind of ‘literary archaeology’ (Gqola, *Slavery* 8). Since memory resists erasure, its importance in community or folk memory fills a symbolic function as a link through which communities invent themselves. In analysing community (and by extension, individuals’) identity, a more interrogative engagement with the past is required, and Morrison’s range of wordplay act as ‘archaeological’ tools for unpacking memory. In reassembling the past, Morrison plays with ‘re-memory’ or ‘memorying’, and evokes concepts of ‘memoried’ or ‘re-memoried’ in relation to events and knowledge. Gqola neatly encapsulates the usefulness of “The Site of Memory”:

Morrison’s word range implies a much wider field than simply collection, recollection and recalling, and is itself a commentary on the (dis)junctures between memory and history, working as it does not only against forgetting but also what I call ‘unremembering’.

Whereas forgetting and unremembering are inscribed by power hierarchies, unremembering is a calculated act of exclusion and erasure (8).

Within the South African context, there are vibrant discourses addressing the relationship between history and memory, which was observed by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee in their edited collection, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (1998). In the realm of studies related to coloured identity, drawing on Morrison’s idea of memorying – or filling in – the spaces between the fragments of historiography allows for re-imaginings and re-articulations of “a

kind of truth” (Morrison 92). The memory industry, as described by Nuttall and Coetzee, opens up alternative ways of exploring accepted histories. The creativity inherent in rememory, where imagination and invention work hand in hand in the fleshing out of interior persons, is a useful project for generating revisionist cultural work. Postcolonial memory works as vehicle for recasting and filling out the inner lives of people who are disremembered. This is especially pertinent when re-looking at the historiography and memory of coloureds, which I address in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

In *Burdened by Race*, Adhikari outlines how crucial it is to elucidate the history attached to colouredness in order to shake free of essentialist readings of race and culture, of the kind that purports colouredness as a product of racial intermixing. Adhikari’s own essay contribution to this collection titled, “From narratives of miscegenation to post-modernist re-imagining: towards a historiography of coloured identity in South Africa”, provides a detailed mapping of the academic progression relating to coloured identity studies. Adhikari explicitly notes that, “In nearly all general histories of South Africa, coloured people have effectively been written out of the narrative and marginalised to a few throw-away comments scattered through the text” (1). This historiographic circumstance of disremembering a group of people illustrates the need for Morrison’s re-memorying, to keep the historical consciousness alive and to build links to a past that has suffered from being forgotten or unremembered, and in line with Gqola, to access freedom.

### **Departures: Locating colouredness**

For the purposes of investigating my research questions, it is necessary to locate my study within the current, existing body of literature. As outlined by Adhikari, most writings on the historiography and formations of coloured identity can be categorized as falling within one of four dominant paradigms. These schools of thought are characterised by a number of variables, such as the historical conditions of the time and authorial self-perceptions of colouredness, which contribute to differing interpretations of the past. The first school of thought, essentialism, is a broad paradigm of interpretation which stretches back to the late 19th century, with the beginnings of European settlement. This school focuses on coloured people as being the products of miscegenation, having resulted from the intermixed sexual encounters of the settlers and native inhabitants. Essentialist readings focus on colouredness being characterised by racial hybridity and represents the ‘traditional’ understandings of colouredness which had, up until the 1970s, been considered as conventional wisdom, as there was a consensus both within and outside of the coloured groupings which prescribed to this way of thinking (2).

Essentialist understandings have been pervasive until quite recently, with their impact stretching back to slave-holding times, this reading of colouredness configures prominently in historical disentangling. Contributions to the essentialist school are primarily from white authors, and the writings within this paradigm are largely Eurocentric and racist, with three branches of essentialism emerging throughout the century. Adhikari identifies “traditional” essentialism as a branch of study that categorises “black people as racially inferior and assumes that congruities of blood and race have automatically been passed down the generations” (8). “Traditionalist” works, Adhikari notes, are largely comprised of authors occupied with imperial, settler and Afrikaner viewpoints. A recent work in this branch of essentialism includes *From van Riebeeck to Vorster* (1975) by Floors van Jaarsveld. The second branch, called the “liberal essentialists” was an attempt to diverge from the racist views of the “traditionalists” by being sympathetic to coloured people, but it still ultimately defined coloured history within parameters of miscegenation. This branch argued that coloureds were not inherently inferior on the basis of their blood lines, but were seen as “relatively uncivilised and in need of white tutelage” (9). Adhikari lists the best known works within this genre as *The Cape Colour Question* (1927) by William Miller MacMillan, *The Cape Coloured People* (1939) by J.S. Marais, and *Rise and Decline of Apartheid* (1986) by Richard van der Ross being noted as a prominent coloured writer in favour of liberal viewpoints. These works represented the most trustworthy iterations of coloured history prior to the mid-1980s. The third branch of essentialism, which Adhikari terms as “progressionist”, was most prevalent during the majority of the twentieth century, being mostly comprised of the educated sector of the coloured community. “Progressionists” maintained a traditional view of racial difference but combined with the liberal values of freedom and inter-racial co-operation (9) and was underpinned by optimism and assimilationist hopes (10). Adhikari lists Christian’s Zivovogel’s *Brown South Africa* (1938) as an example of work that fits in this branch, and also notes it to essentially be “the first formal history of coloured people written by a coloured person” (10).

It is particularly useful to look at post-apartheid texts set during an essentialist milieu, which I explore in Chapter Two. Vestiges of this way of thinking appear to still exist when the question of coloured identity is examined today – particularly in social media dialogue – where the bearers of coloured identity are assumed to be inheritors of hybrid, racial identities, and therefore their stake to South Africanness is challenged on an inherent, ontological level. In this way, without an apparent direct claim to settler or colonial histories, or an indigenous, native history, coloured identities are delegitimized based on rootlessness. The essentialist school holds an extensive amount of documentation and the intellectual progression of this school, while simplistic in ideology, has had remarkable staying power over the years. As a paradigm of study, essentialism has largely been

discredited, but public opinions propagating this kind of thinking can still be found in online spaces<sup>5</sup>. Adhikari limits this traditionalist perspective to existing only “within a fringe receptive to white supremacist ideologies” (8), which may be the case in the academic sphere, but in social media and day-to-day spaces, these opinions are still alarmingly pervasive and continue to be regurgitated in public discourse when individuals are claimed as belonging to the coloured cultural group or identify as coloured.

The second school, instrumentalism, emerged in the 1980s partly as a response to race driven essentialist interpretations, but also in the upswing of the Black Consciousness Movement. This paradigm argues that the racial signifier of ‘coloured’ was an artificial construct created by white supremacists, which was impressed upon a marginal, vulnerable group of people in order to reinforce their own white dominance (11-12). This revision to historical writing is known to focus on the political aspects of coloured identity, as the Black Consciousness Movement swelled with solidarity among non-whites. This deviant, instrumentalist way of thinking is also known to have manifested in day-to-day living during this historical moment, with people referring to themselves as ‘so-called coloured’ in openly defiant stances to the apartheid bureaucratic regime. Writings within this school are most closely associated with anti-apartheid discourses and can perhaps be linked to the non-racialism rhetoric which was popular following the arrival of democracy in the mid-1990s. In some groupings, self-identifications developed from ‘so-called coloureds’ to more inclusive, tolerant understandings of race across the board. As mentioned previously, the post-apartheid South African space allows for re-imaginings and revisions of self-identifications, and staking claim to “Khoisan” roots, as articulated by Adhikari, is arguably one way that people have chosen to stage their identities to others in the ultimate performance of personhood. Adhikari states that the growing movement to affirm “Khoisan” heritage is instrumentalist “in that its followers reject colouredness as the colonisers’ caricature of the colonised” (13). While Adhikari’s point is significant it is also a problematic articulation, with recent understandings arguing that the term “Khoisan” is a reductive and offensive description that truncates distinct indigenous identities into an essentially fictitious category of person. Michael Besten explains this in “‘We are the original inhabitants of this land:’ Khoe-San identity in post-apartheid South Africa”, stating that ‘Khoe-San’ is preferred because ‘Khoekhoe’ is a “more appropriate linguistic rendering” and when hyphenated as ‘Khoe-San’ both cultural groups are acknowledged for their unique differences (135). In contrast to Adhikari’s views on claiming Khoi ancestry, Gqola provides an alternative reading by evoking slave memory, and argues that coloureds that identify with Khoi slave heritage do so wilfully, not

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<sup>5</sup> One need not look further than the comments sections of *Coloured Mentality*’s Facebook and YouTube videos, where people of various races argue in essentialist rhetoric.

necessarily in a reaction of protest but as a choice to affirm their connections to a displaced, enslaved and disremembered people (49).

An additional and pertinent example of Gqola's claim can be found in the progressive work carried out by the creators of *Coloured Mentality*, Kelly-Eve Koopman and Sarah Summers. This web series addressed common queries, debates and opinions around colouredness. The first phase of the *Coloured Mentality* project, which unfolded in 2017, included a documented Khoi trek undertaken by Koopman and Summers, which was presented as a personal undertaking into understanding their private heritages, histories and ancestries. *Coloured Mentality* can arguably be located within a fourth school of thought, rooted in postcolonial studies, which I will discuss shortly. In Koopman and Summers' personal capacities, affiliations with instrumentalist thinking appear frequently, but the production of this study is undoubtedly postcolonial. They (re)address uncomfortable questions (such as 'are coloured people racist?') in an interview format, with participants who identify as coloured and can be considered as public facing figures in South Africa, being actors, radio personalities and musicians, to name a few. In 2017, this project received praise and criticism in equal parts, with the latter noticeably comprised of complaints about the study not being inclusive enough, not engaging with subjects at a grass-roots level and only showcasing the opinions of people living in relative privilege. The backlash received prompted a Part Two of the web series, which was released in 2018. Koopman and Summers framed this extension as being a more inclusive follow up to their previous work; however, the participants were again criticised for being bearers of relative privilege. The overall criticism that *Coloured Mentality* received illustrates the ongoing tensions within the coloured community when it comes to class divisions, as well as a broader discussion pertaining to authority and eligibility in terms of speaking about colouredness, which is a topic I return to in Chapter Four. As Adam Haupt, who participated in Part Two remarked when considering the question about whether or not coloureds are racist, "it's economic apartheid, it continues to this day" ("Are Coloured People Racist" 3:57). Haupt's point signals questions and debates around class within coloured groupings that have seemingly always manifested in a 'here' versus 'there' dichotomy. In Steffen Jensen's *Gangs, Politics & Dignity in Cape Town* (2008), he identifies how invisible boundaries exist in Heideveld<sup>6</sup> to delineate between different classes of coloureds, with community members themselves reinforcing abstract perceptions of colouredness as found on either side of an enforced boundary<sup>7</sup>. The reactions to post-

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<sup>6</sup> Heideveld is a predominantly coloured area located in the Cape Flats. Jensen conducted two years of fieldwork in this area and it is relevant to my study insofar as being the site for the insights produced pertaining to coloured cultural identity.

<sup>7</sup> Jensen refers to community members as applying a spatial argument when locating seemingly lower-class coloureds elsewhere, on the other side of the boundary where they find themselves. See pp. 56-57, and p. 163.

apartheid works such as *Coloured Mentality* have also prompted the direction of my own research, which I would position as falling within the fourth paradigm of conceptualising coloured identities.

The intellectual progression of coloured studies germinated with essentialism, moved on to reactionary works under instrumentalism, and in opposition to instrumentalist thinking, is a third school of thought which emerged in the late 1980s and is referred to as social constructionism. This paradigm, in which Adhikari locates his own research, stresses the complexities of identity formation and argues for the importance of considering the intersectional variables at play in the determination of coloured identities. This school identifies the gaps in the preceding literature on this subject, by challenging both essentialist and instrumentalist thinking that positions colouredness as either purely biological, or as a device imposed by white power (Adhikari 13). Rather, social constructionists claim that identity formation is to be understood as fluid and dynamic, and that coloured people themselves are integral in the makings of their own identities (14). This line of investigation, which moved beyond the simplistic interpretations of preceding literature, opened up new and creative avenues for analysis, where scholars engaged with concepts around coloured identity beyond biological or extrinsic factors, thereby moving forward with an understanding that coloured people infuse their own meanings into colouredness. Adhikari's own work, such as *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough* (2005) and specifically "Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration: Continuity and Change in the Expression of Coloured Identity in White Supremacist South Africa, 1910-1994", details at length the complexities at play in the construction of coloured identities. Adhikari identifies factors such as the race logic applied by the white supremacist state (*Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration* 469-470), the negative racial stereotyping endured by coloured people, as well as how this group reacted to racism from other racial groups (472). With this, classism within coloured communities is also highlighted, as well as other factors such as aspirations of assimilation into the folds of white South African spaces and ideologies (475). For the most part, I have remained outside of factors that include class and the resulting effects on identity, as I have focused primarily on representation in the literary, but it is an element that warrants mentioning and I approach classism in Chapter Three, through concepts of "gam" and "sturvie". The major contribution of works within constructionist discourse is the move away from simplified interrogations that pivoted on intrinsic or external factors, to considerations that focused squarely on the bearers of coloured identity themselves, focusing on coloured peoples' agency in the constructions of their own identities. The ethnographic works of Elaine Salo and Steffen Jensen can be considered as a type of social constructionism, and Salo's framework of *ordentlikheid* has been particularly useful in my research. Salo's posthumous book, *Respectable Mothers, Tough Men and Good Daughters: Producing persons in Manenberg township South Africa* (2018), has been



deeply instructive in unpacking coloured forms of femininity. Jensen makes use of the concept of *ordentlikheid*, and also provides key insights into the makings of identity. Salo's work regarding gendered productions of identity and Jensen's theorisations regarding dignity in Cape Flats communities, present nuanced studies into the complexities of how history, space, power and gender converge in the makings of coloured identity.

Adhikari lists the fourth school of thought as postmodern and postcolonial in texture, citing creolisation theory as the specific framework underpinning this school of thought. This observation though is limited to its time of publication, and considering that Adhikari's historiography was published over a decade ago, it is important to consider how this fourth paradigm has grown since then. Adhikari's mention of creolisation refers exclusively to Erasmus's pioneering work, which arguably has prompted additional approaches to the identity debate that draws on frameworks like slave memory. Erasmus situates creolisation in the post-apartheid imagination, and proposes that coloured identity is shaped through cultural creativity in the face of marginalisation, complicity with white supremacy and dissociation with Black or African identities. Erasmus also insists that the relative privilege coloured groupings experienced under white supremacist laws ought to be considered in the construction of identity ("Re-imagining coloured identities" 24). Acknowledging coloured complicity in maintaining white supremacy and their disassociation from African heritages is argued as necessary in producing revisionist work in this field.

The four paradigms outlined here represent the intellectual progression within the study of coloured identity, and my project would appear to contribute to the fourth paradigm of study, where postcolonialism and post-apartheid revisionist works reside. My work represents an intersection between theories of entanglement, intimacy, memory studies, and how these framework co-operate in post-apartheid productions of identity. These theoretical frameworks act as scaffolding for my line of inquiry, as I trace the development of coloured, female identities from marginalised, apartheid-specified zones to narrative spaces that include fictive and non-fictive stories. With Erasmus's proposal of focusing on cultural identities, Baderoon's study of Black bodies in cultural parameters, Gqola's work into memory studies and Nuttall's rubric of entanglement, I am concerned with following an investigation that considers history, remembrance, intimacy and how these touch points rub up against one another within a framework of entanglement. In turning to novels, film and poetry where coloured identities are represented, readings of Black female bodies and femininities form the subsoil of my work. My aims are broadly directed towards uncovering literary representations of coloured femininities, using texts that are set in or speak to an apartheid timeline, while being produced in the post-apartheid space. My selection of texts undoubtedly

positions my project within the ambit of cultural history studies, and large parts are dedicated to tracing the historical moments which have influenced or shaped different femininities.

### **A note on terminology**

This research project deals with a number of key problematics that touch on race, gender and sex. Each signifier represents concepts that cannot be considered as linear and the meanings attached are better understood when imagined on a continuum. I draw on Cheryl Hendricks' assertion of race as a marker of identity that is meaningless when based on matters of authenticity or purity, but useful as a category to explore on its basis of imbued social and material meanings (118). This is similar to Mbembe's line of inquiry in *Critique of Black Reason*, where he asserts that "race does not exist as a physical, anthropological, or genetic fact" (11). I think it is important to clarify the definitions of race in relation to my study, and how "coloured" as a racial category configures into my project. Up until now, I have used the term without quotation marks for two reasons. First, using quotation marks would prescribe to essentialist or instructionist schools of thought, where colouredness is thought of as either a product of miscegenation or as an artificial construction motivated by white supremacist rule. While these schools of thought have largely been debunked in academic spaces, they still carry weight in social dialogues and for all intents and purposes, my personal opinion as a coloured person defers from the essentialist rhetoric still prevalent today. As Hendricks has identified, "coloured" as a race is meaningless, but "coloured" as a term of identification carries social, cultural and material meaning (118). My study is concerned with the latter implications.

Second, my choice to forgo quotation marks but continue to liberally use the term is motivated by Gqola's postulation that race continues to matter in South African contexts, stating that:

Part of the anti-racist and postcolonialist critical project needs to take these meanings seriously rather than placing them under erasure and denying the agency with which they were invested with new, conflicting meanings by subjects thus classified, and self-identifying, over 350 years (What is slavery to me? 16).

Similar to this, I find Gqola's use of the term 'Black' as a useful formulation that I borrow for my own interrogative purposes. The capitalisation here encompasses all non-white racial signifiers and Gqola's definition of Black is rooted in the ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement (16). For my project here, Black refers to 'coloured', 'black', 'Indian' and 'Asian'; the racial signifiers located in slavery, colonialism and apartheid. This is not to erase or deny each racial group of agency, but for cohesion in my discussions around enslaved or colonised people. Since my intent is to analyse gendered productions of coloureds through entanglement and memory, dedicating



attention to the different historical inflections of each term would undermine both frameworks. Related to this is the question of distinguishing between definitions of ‘slave’, ‘Khoi’, ‘native’ and ‘indigenous.’ While these categories were distinct in definition in the past, readings of enslaved or colonised subjects today blur the lines and the memories evoked tend to group non-whites as people treated as ‘other’ in Eurocentric race logic. In this way, ‘Black’ is used to also include ‘slave’, ‘Khoi’, ‘native’ and ‘indigenous’ people.

In the vibrant discussions around ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ in contemporary South Africa, it is necessary that I clarify my use of these terms. I follow the World Health Organisation’s definition and it is stated on their website that:

Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places (“Gender, equality and human rights”).

In addressing my questions related to coloured femininity, sex and sexuality, gender roles, and the value of personal or autobiographical narratives, I am concerned with the biological sex of individuals that denote a female identity. When I use the terms ‘woman’ or ‘girl’, I am referring to biologically female human beings. When I use the term ‘feminine’ (and ‘masculine’), I am referring to the sorts of social expectations attached to female or male individuals. Exploring non-binary gender identities is beyond the scope of my project, but certainly presents alternative avenues for research that would contribute rich insights towards to the coloured identity debate.

## **Chapter outlines**

For the kinds of arguments I am looking to make, postcolonial theorisations on race, entanglement and intimacy provide the necessary frameworks that are useful to my project, which is underscored by feminist readings of race, culture and female bodies. In Chapter Two, I focus on the novel *Eve* (2011) by Sandra Charles, which explores coloured femininities shaped during apartheid. Using Elaine Salo’s framework of *ordentlikheid*, or respectability, I trace the making of identity as it unfolds on the Black girl body of Eve. In looking at themes of shame and respectability against sex and sexuality, my investigation of *Eve* leads to Chapter Three, where notions of dignity and intimacy configure into readings of *ordentlikheid*. The novel *What Will People Say?* (2015) by Rehana Rossouw locates coloured femininity in the transitional, 1980s phase of apartheid, where

moral codes and expectations could be boldly contested and rewritten. In this chapter, I focus on the significance of Pierre Boudieu's work on *habitus* and Toni Morrison's theorisations of memory, with attention to the intersections between memory, experience and invention. Where Chapter Three argues for the mnemonics of post-apartheid published texts that catalogue coloured culture as both a window and mirror for South African culture, Chapter Four diverges into the limits and boundaries of shared cultural capital. Through the film *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies* (2018), I address themes related to South African literary traditions with specific focus on how narratives grow, evolve and function in public discourses. Chapter Five, my conclusion, pivots on rape, as it is a constant presence throughout the texts I have selected to investigate, and is prominently featured in Chapters Two and Four. In the context of intimacy, Chapter Five, titled "Melanie's Ghost", is derived from my private experience as a coloured woman in academia, and is framed as a partly creative exercise intended to map out the haunting locales of a forgotten, but important, character from modern literature: Melanie Isaacs, the student who presaged J. M. Coetzee's David Lurie to a life of disgrace.

## Chapter Two - *Eve*

### Introduction: Using fiction to recover hidden histories

The story of *Eve* offers a revisionist look at coloured femininity in Cape Town during the mid-20th century. Written by Sandra Charles, *Eve* (2011) provides an account of a young, coloured girl's life and is set in the community of Kensington<sup>1</sup>. Elaine Salo's *Respectable Mothers, Tough Men and Good Daughters: Producing persons in Manenberg Township South Africa*, and Steffen Jensen's *Gangs, Politics & Dignity in Cape Town*, offer ethnographic studies into the community life of coloured townships<sup>2</sup>, and particularly in Salo's work we are provided with insight into the moral system that underpins living a respectable, or *ordentlike*, life. According to Salo, motherhood became valorised as the epitome of femininity ("Negotiating gender" 350). This, coupled with the traces of slavery that marked coloured bodies as sexually accessible and steeped in shame through association with concepts of miscegenation (Baderoon 88), shaped a modest and domestic form of femininity as a respectable trajectory for coloured women to follow. With *Eve*'s story located during a time where the moral economy of Kensington reflected Salo's findings, Charles' literary interpretation reveals a divergent path where, in spite of moral traditions being flouted, it was still possible for young coloured girls to create respectable identities for themselves.

Literary texts like *Eve* provide useful entry points into repressed topics speaking to slavery, colonialism and racism, and can assist in the broader project to remember, record and revise historical archives. In *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*, Zimitri Erasmus contends that it is necessary to remember the past with all its wounds and contradictions, in order for coloureds to wield any power in the shaping of their present and future (17). What this means, in terms of identity and personhood, is the idea of exploring painful histories in order to illuminate repressed topics that have contributed towards different forms of coloured femininity. Zoë Wicomb, Gabea Baderoon and Pumla Dineo Gqola have each looked to South Africa's history of slavery as a starting point to trace the position of coloured identities within a national context. In *Regarding Muslims*, Baderoon explains a tenet of Wicomb's argument in "Shame and Identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa", stating, "For the descendants of enslaved people, the memory of surviving slavery is burdened by an almost ontological shame – because of the accusation that black women were complicit with their own sexual violation" (88).

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<sup>1</sup> Kensington is an area located between the Northern and Southern suburbs of Cape Town, within the Goodwood area. It is not grouped within the Cape Flats. However, within cultural parameters, Kensington reflects much of the coloured "township" life and moral economy associated with Cape Flats areas.

<sup>2</sup> The term "township" is somewhat contentious and is not widely agreed upon in reference to coloured suburbs or areas.

For Wicomb, shame is a pervasive part of coloured identities, which Baderoon further relates to notions of sexual exploitation, hypersexual stereotypes attached to coloured girl bodies, and rampant sexual aggression which has been directly inherited from slave-holding and colonial times (87). This inheritance points to an entangled history that upheld the devaluation of Black bodies, and contributed to fostering senses of degradation and non-belonging (Gqola, *Slavery* 21). In *What is Slavery to Me?*, Gqola expands on Wicomb's assertions regarding shame as a constituent part of coloured identities by stating that historical discourses of inferiority, debased African ancestry and notions of miscegenation (22), have produced unstable post-apartheid definitions of "coloured" (24). These post-apartheid readings include shame as a co-ordinate which repositions coloureds within historical thought. However, attempts to remap coloured identities within positive parameters require acknowledgment of the "contradictions that characterised the identity 'coloured' in colonial and public discourse" (36). This echoes Erasmus's assertion, that based on the historical conditions of different eras, coloureds have contributed to the maintenance of a racial hierarchy in efforts to aspire to whiteness and reject Africanity, ascribing to Eurocentric thought— which ultimately highlights their complicity in maintaining violent and traumatic societal conditions (16). Based on these insights, *Eve* provides a window into the lived experiences of a coloured girl growing up during apartheid, where ideologies around shame, miscegenation, sexual aggression and stereotypes of hypersexuality prevailed. These topics that feature throughout *Eve* and coloured community life, as it unfolded against the backdrop of historical discourses that pivoted on notions of inferiority, can be investigated.

Eve's story is set in the period of the 1950s to 1970s and follows her coming-of-age narrative. Her childhood follows her experiences growing up in a household filled with several siblings and her strict, often violent, parents. Together, they live in a small shack located in the backyard of Eve's grandparents' house. From the ages of four to sixteen years old, Eve's growth into a South African Lolita is traced and her discoveries related to sexuality and femininity highlight defining factors in the making of coloured femininities. *Eve* offers a first-person insider view into the limits and excesses of budding sexuality during apartheid, providing insight into repressed topics like sexual violation, rape and access to Black female bodies with impunity. Additionally, the core experiences of Eve's life contribute to her understanding of sex and sexuality, gender roles and the policing of coloured girls' bodies in coloured communities.

In this chapter, I position *Eve* as a text through which hidden histories can be explored. Through close readings of choice scenes and themes, my investigation pivots on notions of *ordentlikheid*, as I trace the role of sex within an ideology of respectability. Connected to the subject of sex, I make use of Judith Butler's theorisations of gender and the body as explored in *Bodies That Matter: on*

*the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), as the story of *Eve* can be read as charted against her body. I pay attention to shame and Wicomb's argument regarding its origins and pervasiveness, as well as its function in the representations of rape. In reading rape through the lens of *ordentlikheid*, I draw on Lucy Graham's *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature* (2012), as well as *Rape and Representation* (1991) by Linda A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver. Underpinning my engagement with topics that converge around sexual violation and Black bodies, I draw on Baderoon's cultural study of slavery, race and sexual violence. By looking at the characters around Eve and how she absorbs and interprets information through observation, I will discuss how her views concerning silence, shame and concealment mature and culminate on an individual level that conflict with the coloured moral economy<sup>3</sup>. Finally, in my critical reading of *Eve*, I unpack Charles' narrative form by looking at silences and selections, and how this fits into notions of the speakable and unspeakable.

### **Sex in *ordentlike* coloured communities: Emerging sexualities**

Eve's relationship with sex and sexuality is explored from the opening pages. Her story begins with her as a four-year-old child, enjoying the company of her father and the grandmother's boarders known as the "uncles," one Sunday after church. The grown-ups are chatting about one of the uncles' sexual violation of Pampoentjie, "a girl who had stayed overnight at Nana's house" (*Eve* 13). The men laugh as they recall her "stifled screams" in the middle of the night. Eve, as a child without comprehension of their discussion, laughs along with them and is promptly beaten by her father for participating. Her laughter is regarded as disobedient as a good child ought to be quiet and behave according to social and moral codes. This encounter is arguably pivotal in shaping her relation to sex, her father, and to men in general. While her father whips her with his belt, he says, "I never want to see you in the company of grown-ups again" (14), which teaches her the unspoken system of appeasing adults (and those around her) through quietness and invisibility, aligning with respectful behavioural practices that are expected of good daughters (Salo, "Negotiating gender" 352). Without understanding her apparent transgression and her punishment thereof, it is possible that she internalises and formulates a tacit agreement between sex and silence; a notion that echoes South African cultural history and the sexual violation of Black female and feminised bodies. Baderoon notes how sexual aggression during slavery has suffered from "the problem of silence" (84) where the erasure of sexual violence has contributed to sexual violation as a major but hidden social problem. Interestingly, *Eve* highlights the dual properties of silence in

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<sup>3</sup> I draw on Elaine Salo's framework of *ordentlikheid*, or respectability, and how it was infused with certain practices regarding the ways in which *ordentlike* women were expected to behave. This included confining oneself to the domestic arena, dressing modestly and caring for younger household members ("Negotiating gender", 352-353).

relation to sex, in that Eve conceals the sexual violations she both receives and commits. As a girl child, Eve's understanding that sexual matters be kept quiet also speaks to the social dynamics of avoiding talk of sex, sexual abuse and rape. In a way, she learns how to leverage her reticence to her benefit by not telling of her learned tactics of sexual manipulation. This interconnection of silence, concealment and sexual exploitation, however, comes with both a light and dark side. On the one hand, Eve's discovery of sexual manipulation opens her worldview of obtaining favours and material goods for herself and her family. On the other hand, practicing concealment and silence leads her to dangerous situations such as long-term rape, forbidden sex and encounters with the apartheid police. As Eve grows along with her interest in sex, her observations and experiences reveal a perceptibly sharp inner world.

What is immediately noticeable and disturbing is the language Eve uses as a young girl. At eight years old, her internal thoughts reflect the diction of someone much older. She frequently uses words one would assume are beyond her range; words like "pussy" and "dick" (Charles 39) are constantly uttered to a jarring effect. She grows up in a family that is poor, who do not own a television, and there is no mention of media consumption beyond the radio stories the women in the neighbourhood listen to (55), which seems like an unlikely source for her explicit vocabulary. Secondly, the adults in her family are careful with the topics they discuss around children, opting to conceal with fairytales or punish for eavesdropping; therefore learning words like "dick" from the adults around her is also unlikely. For example, when Eve's mother, Magdalena, gives birth to John (28), Nana tells the children that babies are collected from Table Mountain and the word "pregnant" is not mentioned around them, illustrating how guarded children are from picking up terminology beyond their mental and emotional range. This out-of-place vocabulary raises questions about the problematics of Eve's first-person narration and highlights the reality of Charles's adult authorial voice, which creates a tension between the supposed inner world of a child and the mature experiences of the adult scripting these experiences. While Eve is not particularly exposed to sexual language, she does encounter sexualised behaviour when witnessing her Aunt Lynette having sex (34) which sparks her sexual inquisitiveness and feelings of arousal, called her "warm feeling" (38). In playing a forbidden game called "house house" with her neighbourhood friend, Ivan, she simulates sex by "chok(ing) his little dick hard between (her) thighs, rubbing it against (her) pussy" (39). Her exposure is seemingly minimal, but it has profound effects on her inclinations towards sex and sexuality from a young age, despite punishment and marginalisation from her family. In fact, the treatment she receives from her parents and siblings when her sexual behaviours are exposed only serve to reinforce her inclination to keep her activities hidden. When she is caught in a

sexually alarming activity with eight-year-old Ivan, her mother physically assaults her for her wrong-doing. She says,

““You’re a cheap little bitch, you’re a disgrace. If you think you’re going to put us all in the eyes you’re mistaken. This yard doesn’t need another slut. Lynette is more than enough.’

She had hissed at me like a poisonous snake. Her last words were to my sisters. ‘Don’t ever let this little bitch out of your sight.’ That day she threw me out of her nest, whereas Tina and Sarah got the guarantee that they could stay forever.

I realised I must have done something terribly, terribly bad” (39-40).

Her experiences of punishment as a result of sexual curiosity can be considered as significant childhood moments in the shaping of her understanding of sex, gender relations and the policing of female bodies. Her mother’s condemnation of her sexually curious mind, coupled with the beating she received in an attempt to discipline her, reinforces Eve’s desire to explore her sexuality. Notably, there is a narrative gap in this encounter where the conditions that lead up to Eve and Ivan’s sexual play is not divulged; the reader is not told whether Eve consented to Ivan pulling up her skirt and pressing himself against her, given that prior to this encounter Eve had expressed her hate of Ivan and the disgust she felt in seeing him (38).

Her mother’s reaction is indicative of Baderoon’s argument around the idea that Black bodies are “responsible for their own violation”. Drawing on Wicomb’s assertions of Black female bodies being associated with sexual shame, Baderoon argues that Black women, by virtue of their race, “symbolise *both violation and culpability*” (88). Magdalena blames her daughter for the possible violation she experienced by Ivan. In Baderoon’s poem “The Word”, published in *The History of Intimacy* (2018), this binary is expressed as “collusion, evidence that turned/ my body into what it is” (lines 19-20), which captures notions of shame and the taboo history of sexual violence and coloured girl bodies.

By calling her a “disgrace”, Magdalena assumes Eve’s complicity without considering the possibility that Ivan forced himself on her daughter. If this encounter was indeed an act of sexual violation, Eve is made to feel responsible for that by realising she had done something “terribly bad”. Further to this, given the response from her mother and the punishment received for being “another slut” in the yard, questions around agency are highlighted. Her mother treats Eve as though she is an adult with the knowledge and insight to ‘know better’, but she is only six-years-old at this point, and is being taught to internalise marginalisation and punishment in connection with sexual curiosity and violation. Magdalena’s choice to ostracize Eve also suggests the type of



thinking she has internalised as a result of her own upbringing, and the patriarchal power structures she had been reared to operate within. Eve describes later in the novel when she is sixteen and pregnant, that her mother believed it “was God’s will that she had to suffer through her entire married life for not obeying her mother ... and all other women’s warning words: ‘Don’t mess around with boys’” (Charles 320). This advice, coupled with church teachings that sex was sinful, arguably shaped Magdalena’s view of sex and based on her own experiences of disobeying her mother, the reasons behind her reaction towards Eve becomes clearer. This encounter between mother and daughter speaks to what Gqola, in *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, calls the ‘female fear factory’ that concerns the regulations of girl bodies, their sexualities, their movements and behaviours (92). Eve is being pulled into the fold of the factory that produces female fear and codified in a language of respectability. Essentially, Magdalena teaches Eve to fear the repercussions that could result from not ‘keeping herself in check’ (80).

Eve understands that her interest in sex makes her an outcast and her exploration thereof is cause for her to be monitored. Again, there is a slippage in Eve’s characterisation in terms of vocabulary; it appears that she does not have a word to process her feelings for being thrown out of her mother’s nest, or a term to capture the nightmares inspired by her mother’s rebuke and attack (Charles 39). In a word, Eve is experiencing shame: the shame of being caught, of being reprimanded, and of being humiliated. At six years old she can *feel* shame but not *express* it, which contrasts starkly to her vocabulary of sexually explicit terms.

### **Sex in *ordentlike* coloured communities: Predatory behaviours**

While Eve investigates her sexual curiosity with her peers, other children, she also realises her appeal to adult men. With the local shopkeepers, she is exposed to their paedophilic interests and recognises how to use their gaze to her advantage. She exploits Bookie in attaining free groceries (65). Similarly, Mr Stern’s sexual interest is leveraged for discounts on items (76). Through these shopkeeper characters, Charles touches on a problem that can be considered as familiar to coloured culture, where adult men – in varying degrees of sexual aggression and violence – exploit young girls. However, by positioning Eve as a cunning child who is willing to lie, cheat and hoodwink the grown-ups around her, Charles also highlights the potential for children to willingly engage in sexually suggestive scenarios as a means to an end. Eve views her relationship with Bookie and Mr Stern as transactional; by allowing them to pass “stupid, horny remarks” (63) or masturbate while she changes clothes (76), Eve acquires discounts and free goods. These relationships illuminate the vulnerability of girl bodies in coloured communities as well as the predatory behaviours that can be enacted by the seemingly vulnerable. This paradox is explored in Eve’s encounter with Tommy, the



local dressmaker's mentally-handicapped son. When twelve year-old Eve and her older sisters visit Tommy's mother Mrs Manuel for dress fittings, he exposes his naked body to them which elicits reactions of shock from Tina and Sarah, but Eve is intrigued (100). She is aroused and fascinated by Tommy's erect penis, and continues to visit their household unnecessarily with hope of seeing Tommy naked. At one such visit, Mrs Manuel is not home and Eve is opportunistic in her insistence to enter their home. She takes the moment to explore Tommy's erection, as well as her own feelings of arousal, by removing her underwear and rubbing up against Tommy's naked penis (103). When Tommy reacts sexually by making "funny sounds," she hastily runs home with a flushed face. Her reaction and the effects of this encounter is largely left unexplored; except for Charles describing Eve as taking a detour home because she "had to wait till (her) face stopped burning" (103). It is not confirmed whether this response is a result of shame and embarrassment, or if she blushes with excitement and pleasure.

Eve's interaction with Tommy opens up interesting questions with regard to consent and sexual experimentation. Since Tommy's mental faculties are underdeveloped and his diction too, he could not say no to Eve or comprehend the potential results of exposing his naked body to her. This interaction could be considered as an instance of sexual violation, given that Eve took advantage of a disabled man without his explicit consent. Eve's sexual curiosity seems innocuous to her and this encounter is perhaps another example of her innocent fun. Furthermore, this experience also highlights Eve's lack of comprehension and exposure to sexual violation and predatory behaviour. She does not reflect on the problematic nature of the encounter, and does not consider the potential of her losing control in a sexual situation with an adult man. Additionally, this encounter evokes a subversion of rape representation in South African literature, in that it positions a young girl as the violator and a mentally disabled man as the victim. As Graham claims in *State of Peril*, "black peril" and subversive "white peril" narratives have a long history in the country (4), with both frameworks pivoting on the sexual violation of white and Black girl bodies respectively. Graham also states that topics of gendered violence have become more visible in post-apartheid media and cultural texts (133), and critics have aligned high statistics of rape post-1994 as a "'new' war on women and children" (4). In that sense, the issue of rape has appeared to centre primarily on women as victims. With *Eve*, and specifically her encounter with Tommy, an alternative scripting of sexual violation is presented, where a male character's sexuality is exploited. This encounter also represents a loophole in the cultural fabric of Kensington's moral codes; the adults around Eve have mis-educated her about sex, which perhaps prompts her disposition to be an instigator in a system where men like Bookie, Mr Stern and the uncle who violated Pampoentjie, act as representatives of normalised sexual aggression.

Tommy's masculinity is characterised as defunct; Eve supposes he is in his late thirties but is treated like a child by his mother (Charles 99), which would imply that Tommy had not experienced the processes and everyday sexual relations which manhood is associated with (Nuttall 136). Of course, having the mental faculties of a child with a fully functioning adult male body would presumably not prohibit him from feeling sexual desire and arousal, but his underdeveloped social skills and understanding of moral norms makes him vulnerable to sexual violation, which Eve recognises and exploits. However, this sexual encounter in *Eve* contributes towards Charles' ongoing alternative scripting of coloured femininities, by highlighting the scope wherein sexual experiences could be attained within an *ordentlike* coloured moral economy. Through Eve's experiences, various configurations of forbidden sex are explored which problematizes the parameters in which rape and sexual violence have primarily been conceived.

### **Sex in *ordentlike* coloured communities: Rape**

Eve's exploitation of Tommy prefaces her relationship with her art teacher Mr Simon, who represents a narrative of rape that is familiar and frequently reproduced in literature. In "Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*", Lucy Graham points out the commonplace scenario of male teachers renouncing their ethical responsibility and positions of power in order to violate their students (434). Throughout *Rape*, Gqola reminds us of the countless cases of sexually violated school girls and the frequency in which women are more likely to be raped by men they know (96). In post-apartheid contexts, stories of male educators and the sexual threat they represent correlates with Graham's assertion in *State of Peril* that rape has moved to centre stage in South African imagination (133). *Eve* exhibits a high number of sexually controversial meetings and presents a strong case for hidden histories and repressed topics. These topics include, as explored, paedophilic inclinations towards young coloured girls, sexual play between prepubescent children, sexual violation against boy bodies, as well as taboo relationships with older men like Mr Simon. Eve is unsure about her feelings toward her teacher but her romantic interest in him is arguably genuine, despite the inherently taboo attachments of a twelve-year-old girl fawning over an adult man. Based on her emotional and physiological responses to him, Charles describes all the symptoms of a school girl crush and alludes to Mr Simon reciprocating Eve's feelings. Before their relationship develops, Charles makes it clear that Eve has begun to formulate opinions about sex and rape.

During a scene where one of her neighbourhood friends, Lena, is raped and cast out from the clique, we are given some insight into Eve's developing opinions of sex, power and consent. Her unsettled response to the way her friends and the broader Kensington community react to Lena's rape leaves

Eve questioning her emotional maturity and divergent moral codes (Charles 113). She finds herself losing interest in this group of friends, who uphold the community's moral ideals, and appears unsure about her stance on celibacy until marriage when probed by her male friends (115). Through Lena's story we learn of the community's consensus around rape; once feelings of sympathy have passed, it was widely understood that a rape survivor is tainted and somehow contagious (114). Mothers dissociate and gossip (Salo, *Respectable Mothers* 236), girls avoid associating with them for fear of garnering a poor reputation, while boys adopt a more aggressive approach by treating them as subjects available for derogatory slurs and as potential sexual conquests (Charles 114) – like a “disposable and meaningless object” that echoes with the “old story” of coloured girls' bodies being available for violation (Baderoon 89). Eve, along with many of the young girls in the community, is conditioned to associating pre-marital sex of any kind with punishment and shame, as preserving one's virginity is considered as a cornerstone of respectable womanhood.

In “Negotiating gender and personhood in the New South Africa: Adolescent women and gangsters in Manenberg township on the Cape Flats”, Salo identifies the importance of reputation in upholding local codes. For young women in Cape Flats' spaces, their reputations rest on feminine ideals associated with domesticity and modesty in terms of behaviour and dress (352). The contradictory notion here is the culpability attributed to Lena for her violation despite her adherence to local feminine ideals; she was raped by a gang member in her home, while caring for her younger siblings (which Salo identifies as a primarily female activity that that reflects *ordentlike* femininity). Lena did not collude with her rapist, and yet the damage to her reputation once news of her stolen virginity spread consequently positioned her as disreputable.

The community response to Lena foregrounds Eve's experience with Mr Simon and the fallout thereof. During her final year in primary school, Eve goes to great lengths to impress him by practicing her painting talents and securing a large monetary donation for a potter's wheel. She attains considerable sums of money from Bookie and Mr Stern, without Charles going into detail as to how she secured these sums from them (126), and also steals from her father's shoe business' funds (128). After several sexually charged glances shared during class time, at the closing of an art seminar when they are alone, Mr Simon admits to Eve that he is attracted to her and they almost have sex (144). From this first sexual interaction, Eve feels something is inherently wrong and dangerous about her adult art teacher kissing her and attempting to initiate intercourse (145).

Throughout their relationship, which took place after school and on weekends, Eve's reluctance to have sex with him is overshadowed by her community conditioning – to preserve her virginity for her future husband. The teachings of her parents and the reactions of her neighbourhood friends to

non-virgins presumably prompt her to keep their affair a secret. For the entirety of her final year in primary school, she conceals their relationship. Her naivety is obvious when high school begins and Mr Simon refuses to let their affair quietly fade away. He stalks her (170), sends messages via primary school students to her new school (172), and continues to call Nana's house phone in order to speak to Eve (173). As his obsession with Eve grows, so do the scope of her romantic interests elsewhere and the affection she once felt for Mr Simon soon develops into disinterest (171). She hopes simply avoiding him will be enough. Instead, he blackmails her with threats to share the nude photographs he captured of her (177), and he harasses her via telephone, demanding she see him. At this juncture in Eve's trajectory, she understands the danger she has exposed herself to in choosing to maintain a secret, sexually explicit relationship with an adult man. For years, she has successfully manipulated the male gaze without any harmful repercussions. Her 'innocent fun' is perverted under the control of Mr Simon, and her feelings of powerlessness culminate in the scene where he first rapes her. The language she uses in describing her rape assists in highlighting her childish naivety in believing that their relationship was fun and casual. The six-year-old little girl who once described Ivan's penis as a 'little dick' can now not bear to refer to Mr Simon's genitals in an expletive or evocative form, and instead refers to his penis as his "big ugly thing" (183). When she returns home, she is beaten by her father and the story catapults forward by two years.

It is revealed that Eve had essentially been a sex slave to Mr Simon from the ages of twelve to fourteen, and after she confesses this to her friend Cedric, a big confrontation between the Forbes' and Mr and Mrs Simon unfolds (195). The reactions by Mrs Simon and Eve's father are strange and worth exploring briefly within the framework of *ordentlikheid*. Mr Simon's beautiful wife (135) is surprisingly shocked and upset when her husband's sexual exploitation is revealed. It is not made clear whether she was the woman who called Nana's house phone on behalf of Mr Simon, but if Mrs Simon was responsible for this, it is easy to assume that she found nothing wrong with the situation, making her reaction seem out of place. Perhaps, her response can be explained as a reaction to her respectability being threatened because of her morally deviant husband. In *Gangs, Politics & Dignity*, Jensen explains the anxieties around negotiating one's *ordentlikheid* in relation to their husbands (or sons') violence (153). While Jensen refers specifically to gang violence and substance abuse activities, we can extend this category to include sexual violence. In this way, Mr Simon represents a man who has "failed to live up to the requirements of the moral community" (156). His transgression of *ordentlikheid* here is not necessarily based on his sexual relationship with a child but the fact that it was exposed. Masculine sexual violence appears as an undercurrent to the Kensington community that, as seen with Lena's rape, is rendered invisible by focusing attention on the victim whose compromised respectability affects their family's moral status. As

Jensen points out, the moral community being based on notions of *ordentlikheid* meant that it continuously needed to be “enacted to achieve material form” (157), which resulted in occasions for it to break down. In *Eve*, Mr Simon’s repeated rape of Eve illustrates a breakdown of morality because it was brought to light, and the confrontation represents a loss of dignity and a trigger for shame. During the conflict, Mrs Simon is concerned with whether or not Eve is pregnant (196), indicating her preoccupation with the shame that could result from a baby out of wedlock. She does not appear concerned with her husband’s infidelity or his capacity for sexual violence against children; she is primarily worried about the potential scandal that could result if Eve is pregnant.

Mr Forbes’ reaction appears to resonate with Mrs Simon in that he sympathises with her; he feels sorry for *her* respectability being threatened and her needing to manage the fallout of her husband’s actions. He does not offer any reaction to the news of his daughter being raped for two years by a man presumably his own age, and he does not express any outrage about this. Based on the Forbes’ parental outlook toward sex, they likely feel shame and embarrassment for Eve’s actions, a scandal by community standards that could threaten the respectability of their family’s image and reputation. This view is strengthened by her parents’ taking her to a gynaecologist outside of Kensington (198) as it would be easier to protect their family image from disrepute by minimising the potential for *skinner*<sup>4</sup> to spread. Eve accepts the shame her rape could bring to her parents (199), affirming their suspicions of her sexual curiosity and their failure to regulate her performance of ideal, coloured femininity.

While processing her shame, the community wisdom of a rape victim being tainted and seen as “fair game” (114) rings true for Eve. Her reputation is damaged and despite having grown up around her father’s friends and Nana’s boarders; after the news of her sexual assault becomes known her body is treated as sexually accessible and the uncles act on this. Uncle Sunny, one of Nana’s boarders, pulls Eve into his bed by surprise and lies on top of her (203). Boeta Basi, Eve’s granduncle, who always treated her like a grandchild, sexually violates her in his office by overpowering her physically and touching her genitals (205). These encounters with men she trusted and treated like family assists in reinforcing her internal shame and embarrassment at being the “little slut” (203) and “little bitch” (205) that she believes they predicted her to be. At the same time, she chooses to counteract these opinions and perceptions, by choosing to embrace instead of suppress her sexuality. In matters of *ordentlikheid*, it is also important to note that both sexual assault victims and women or girls who were considered as promiscuous, were considered as “fair game” regardless of the conditions surrounding their sexual activity. Charles’ highlighting of this double

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<sup>4</sup> “Skinner” is the informal shortening of the Afrikaans term “skinderstories” which translates to “slandorous gossip” (Jensen 164).

standard speaks to the challenge faced by coloured girls who grew up in communities where pre-marital sex was forbidden but sampled by both boys and girls, with or without consent. The repression of this facet of coloured history links back to colonial times, where Black female bodies were victims of explicit sexual aggression.

### **Sexuality: Subversions of respectable femininities**

Reading Yvette Christiansë's poem "Sunday School" (1999), Baderoon comments on the commonplace sexual violation of Black women in post-apartheid South Africa being directly linked to the "shockingly old story" of sexual violence in slave-holding times (87). Baderoon's reading explores the connections between stereotypes of coloured girls being sexually available as justification for their violation (89), an interpretation that has continually featured in *Eve* within the framework of *ordentlikheid*. For Wicomb, this perception is related to notions of shame, which Baderoon links to coloured girls' supposed culpability in their violation (88). This "old story" is arguably the worst kept secret in coloured communities. Sexual aggression and abuse is fortified through patterns of male violence against women, which contributes to the deep-seated shame that permeates Black girl bodies and punctuates the accepted behaviour and moral codes of femininity. Community agreements around honour and decency guide the policing of young coloured girls, but attempts to regulate access to sex can lead to situations where the perceived dangers are either avoided or embraced. In Eve's case, she found empowerment in sex and creatively explored her sexuality outside the boundaries of her household and community's moral belief systems. In analysing Eve's young life within the context of apartheid South Africa, the making of her identity is linked to her explorative sexuality, which is in turn dependent on the social and moral conditions of her time. Drawing on the register of Judith Butler with regard to gender, sex and sexuality in *Bodies That Matter*, Eve's body can be read as one that constantly struggles for recognition through the social norms expected of her "girl" body; in being "girl" the feminine assumption therein encircles her, sets a boundary (7-8), and functions as a construction that implies a specific kind of agency (4). Eve's story outlines a constant engagement to resist the cultural codes attached to coloured "girlness", and she is made to feel that her body does not matter in both cultural and racial parameters. Her body is treated as though it is available for sexual violation over and over; by Boeta Basie, by their family doctor, and by the white policemen. Butler articulates this notion at *Gender Trouble*'s 25th anniversary conference hosted at Teatro Maria Matos in Lisbon, stating that,

When one lives as a body that suffers misrecognitions, perhaps insult or harassment, cultural prejudice, economic discrimination, police violence, or psychiatric pathologization, that leads to a de-realized way of living in the world; a way of living in the shadows, not as a



human subject but as a phantasm, someone else's phantasm, but you're living it ("Why Bodies Matter" 24:12-24:39).

The Kensington community and the grown-ups who acted as the gate-keepers of the boundaries in which young coloured girls could operate, arguably assisted in shaping Eve's sexuality and femininity. Young coloured girls are reared to value domesticity, modesty and respectability (Salo 353), values which are deeply entangled with sexuality and the body. As Baderoon notes, coloured bodies "were the focus of both revulsion and attraction because they indexed the history of forbidden sex between whites and blacks" (92), and centuries of sexual violation coupled with registers of "miscegenation" and "degeneracy" (Wicomb 92) have had a profound impact on the making of coloured femininities. Where Baderoon and Wicomb draw on processes of slavery in their readings of coloured girl bodies, Salo has rightfully discerned the impact that coloured community members themselves have had in the shaping of femininities.

Within the cultural ambit of coloured communities, senior women – and specifically in Salo's study of Manenberg – controlled the economic and moral stability of their communities ("Negotiating gender" 350). Via social grants, mothers became influential brokers between the state and the community, upholding the existence of communities with economic support (349). Often, coloured men were rendered unemployable by the apartheid government, criminalized and labelled; this put the onus on coloured women to be the heads of their families. With the onset of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy, coloured women were favoured as workers within the Cape's thriving textile industry (350). In this way, coloured women wielded an economic power that expanded into social power. In *Eve*, Nana exploits the grant system by housing several foster children (Charles 43), and Tina works at a textile factory as one of the youngest managers ever (328). Both characters reflect the social conditions of the time that enabled a community's economic stability, and for senior women like Nana, their economic power was reconfigured as social currency within the community. Effectively, Salo comments, these women became the keepers of moral stability by policing moral codes and establishing the boundaries in which young women were required to operate (352). In the case of Nana, her strength as a social broker in the moral economy was questionable but her economic stability was not. As mentioned, respectability was a significant cornerstone of coloured morality and in family units' mothers was expected to lead by example. Idealistic views of femininity were valorised in communities like Kensington and are constantly explored throughout *Eve*. Eve's story provides an unflinching point of entry into painful, shameful and repressed topics like gendered-violence, rape, domestic abuse, promiscuity and paedophilia.

It is important to note the glaring disconnect between the moral ideals of the community and the

lived experience of adhering to those modes of respectability in conditions where sexual abuse and violence was pervasive. While motherhood is revered and encouraged, it is only considered respectable when married. With reference to a different area like Heideveld, Jensen explains that, “although premarital sex by definition ran counter to respectability, the ensuing pregnancy could be turned into a source of *ordentlikheid*, if the good son ‘went and told’ the mother of the girl, thereby paying tribute to and respecting her house” (155). In *Respectable Mothers*, Salo refers to this practice as *ga’t sê* (“go and tell”), noting how this “ritualised conversation” also functions as a way for a ‘good’ daughter’s reputation to be rescued as respectable when a son claims paternity (132).

As seen in *Eve* though, this sort of outcome was not always possible as unplanned pregnancies through processes of rape or relationships with non-coloured men outside of the coloured community and the associated moral economy did not ensure ‘good son’ behaviour. Additionally, there existed a discrepancy between marriage and respectability; women were more strictly policed to perform *ordentlikheid* in terms of displaying motherly behaviour, dressing modestly and being obedient, whereas husbands’ abusive, sexually deviant, lazy behaviours were commonplace. In many ways, a woman’s respectability obscured the disreputable behaviour of their men which existed as an open secret; *everybody*<sup>5</sup> knew whose husband beat their wife or was unemployed (Charles 84), but *everyone* performed decency around one another despite terrible home life situations. Salo’s study of Manenberg’s community posits the paradoxical nature of women who supported men “who seemed to compromise all claims of respectability” (Jensen 155). With marriage being characterised by domestic abuse, pregnancy itself is used to avoid being at the sexual whims of an abusive husband. While domesticity in women is viewed with great respect, it is often at the cost of living in poor conditions with a husband who is unable to financially support a growing family.

As is illustrated in *Eve*, it is up to the women to generate income, run households and secure Kensington’s economic stability. Eve’s mother is crafty in managing her husband’s meagre income, ensuring that her family could eat. Nana rented out rooms in her house, took in foster children for the welfare grants attached to them, operated lay-bye systems with the local shops and divvied up her husband’s pay check to ensure financial stability. Tina dutifully handed her wages over to her parents for their use, while learning to save up her pocket money and support herself. Eve single-handedly built up her father’s shoe business, which ensured the Forbes family’s ascent into a middle-class neighbourhood. In contrast to this, the male characters and specifically husbands are shown to be weak, lazy, undependable and abusive. Eve’s father and Nana’s boarders are often

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<sup>5</sup> Italics are used here to refer specifically to *Eve*’s community of Kensington, where residents were knowledgeable of one another’s private matters.



cited as being without work and sleeping until midday (67). Eve and her siblings were witnesses to their mother constantly being beaten by their father. They learn to normalise this behaviour, and male abuse against women is considered a normal part of community life. When Mr Thomas and his family move into the neighbourhood, the local mothers gather for gossip and one of them exclaims, “They remind me of a white family. I mean, did you ever hear of a white man who beats his wife?” (209). The group responds in chorus that that is unheard of, confirming how commonplace gendered violence is.

In these communities where femininity and sexuality are policed, it is also important to note the male role in enforcing the moral standards established by women, and specifically access to coloured female bodies. Violence is used to control, intimidate and coerce women into behaving in respectful ways – a cog in the machines that underpin the female fear factory. Eve encounters this often in multiple situations with different men. When she is twelve years old and escapes from her friend Jocelyn’s house to meet Mr Simon, Jocelyn’s brother monitors her desertion and reports her actions to her parents which results in punishment. Her father assaults her constantly and attempts to control her with fear and violence, similar to Mr Simon’s blackmail of her. When Eve is sixteen and falls pregnant with Will’s child, her relationship with him is extinguished by Boeta Basie and his friends (322). According to Eve, she believes they scared Will off in order to keep her close, since they depended on her and owed their elevated living conditions to her successful running of the shoe business. However, it is likely that their intervention was based on a need to conceal the illegal act of interracial union, as well as to secure Eve’s body as their concern, and her family invokes notions of “white peril” to ultimately separate Eve from Will. They insist that Will, as a white man, would either abandon or kill Eve (321) to conceal all evidence of his sexual relations with a coloured female and avoid being deported by the apartheid government. Additionally, their belief could perhaps stem from the idea that white men are dangerous and untrustworthy and Will, as a representative of this, colours their judgement of his true intentions with Eve. Based on these instances, it is evident that certain men in coloured communities uphold the moral boundaries of sexuality through violence.

### **Sexuality: Performance and concealment**

Interweaved throughout Eve’s story are nods to the moral economy characteristic of coloured communities during the mid-twentieth century. Charles does not explicitly state the year of Eve’s birth, but based on references such as six-year-old Eve noting Lynette dressing in fashions of the sixties (21), and fifteen-year-old Eve admiring the German tourists’ rented house styled in early seventies decor (289), we can deduce that Eve was born in the late-fifties. Her childhood years are

located during the first decade of the Group Areas Act, a time when ‘ghettos’ and ‘townships’ were defined by racial categories and imbued with social and economic meanings across gendered lines. The gendered roles performed in *Eve* reflect the lived realities and historical conditions that Salo’s studies illustrate. Female characters that appear to embody *ordentlike* traits surround Eve and contribute towards framing a tension between identities shaped according to community moral systems, and personhoods cultivated in opposition to that. In contrast to Eve’s characterisation, her older sisters, Tina and Sarah, represent the epitome of so-called respectable coloured femininity as church-going *ladies* who dress modestly and obey their parents. Eve’s behaviour and interests run counterintuitive to the community ideals of femininity and her secret life illustrates her inclination to subvert the gender roles expected of her. In the words of Butler, “if we cannot find our way within available norms of gender or sexuality ... we are exposed to what it means to live at the limits of recognisability” (“Why Bodies Matter” 46:30-46:42). Eve constantly practices the limits of her recognisability through her sexuality. She creates opportunities to practice her sexual charms under the guise of respectable actions, like offering to accompany Jocelyn or to mind Mr Thomas’s children in order to get close to him and attempt to seduce him. She soon learns to navigate the expectations held of her by her family, peers and the people of Kensington. By observing grown-ups, her sisters and her friends, Eve learns that in her own community she is ‘other’ and that it is necessary to conceal her actions and interests to maintain the appearance of respectability.

Eve’s decision to embrace her sexuality as a tool to empower herself while subverting the shame she is expected to feel, builds up to a highly explicit, dangerous and sexually promiscuous time period that eventually culminates in teenage pregnancy. As readers we understand that Eve is a victim of sexual abuse and has suffered great trauma, which generates empathy in readers. The path she chooses to walk following her escape from Mr Simon creates a sense of danger and appears at odds with the empathetic framing Charles creates and then seemingly unwinds, as Eve begins to seek out men to seduce, manipulate and sexually engage with. On the other hand, this choice in characterisation could also speak to Eve’s experiences with sexual trauma, with her behaviour being an outcome of that. Gqola notes the wide-ranging symptoms of Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS), and the ways it can be expressed through the body, as well as through behavioural and emotional changes (*Rape* 144). As Eve continues with her life following this trauma, she is represented as sexually suggestive and flirtatious, a callback to her behaviour and attitude prior to Mr Simon. With her friends Gee and Base, she uses her beauty and talent at lying to hoodwink petrol attendants and an Indian shopkeeper (221-226) out of paying for fuel and food. During this time, she has discovered her appeal to white men and enters a casual, sexual relationship with Mr Stern’s son, Ivan, who is eleven years older than her. Their relationship is transactional; she uses him for money

and he uses her for pleasure (237). Again, Eve's identity is shaped around her sex appeal and her willingness to engage with forbidden sex – be it sex as a minor or sex with white men, as both are taboo in coloured communities as well as unlawful in the context of apartheid legislation. Her progression from rape survivor to sexually explicit young woman, to a sixteen-year-old mother matures quickly and is premised entirely on her choice to embrace her sexuality and feel empowered through her transactional outlook towards sex and morality.

Despite Eve performing her duties as a respectful child with much success, her attraction to experimenting with sex often results in violent clashes with her parents. They attempt to police her behaviour and openly condemn her apparent promiscuity. Her femininity is rooted in her sexuality, and in some ways, she rejects the ideals valorised by her community. While she struggles to conform to subservience and modesty, she generates a form of respectability through her economic contributions to her household. Her business acumen as a shoe saleswoman assists in catapulting her family out of poverty and her liaisons with men similarly provide financial contribution. Despite her parents' condemnation of her activities, her financial support is needed and they choose to not question how she acquires these funds (297). This is significant, because it illustrates Eve's ability to subvert the local moral system in a way that still earns her respect, albeit begrudgingly. While she can no longer perform the role of a respectable daughter according to the politics of respectability given the news of her sexual slavery, she refuses to allow the shame and humiliation expected of her to shape her according to the community's idea of respectable womanhood (206).

### **Narrative silences and selections**

*Eve* presents a problematic insider view into the livelihood and experiences of Eve. We are provided an alternative scripting to coloured femininities reared within the rubric of *ordentlikheid*, and there are many insightful moments that illuminate hidden or repressed topics, but there are also slippages that destabilise Charles' narrative form and the characterisation of her protagonist. Eve's seemingly unfiltered point-of-view towards her experiences is possibly intended to contribute towards highlighting the underbelly of respectable coloured communities. At the same time, the narrative silences and selections within *Eve* possibly reproduce the very facets of *ordentlikheid* that it proposes to criticise. The familiarity of the setting provides a relatable quality and there are many scenes that ring with authenticity. In contrast to this, the scale of out-of-place scenes and the framing of themes almost undoes the moments of authenticity. The plot is more frequently flimsy than it is solid; the high number of expendable characters create gaps in Eve's coming-of-age, the storytelling can be sporadic and disjointed, and several chapters feel contrived and opportunistic for the insertion of light erotica. In this chapter, I have touched on the strange disconnect between

Eve's narrative voice and Charles' authorial voice, and the implausibility of a child possessing an explicit vocabulary. In several instances, Charles' authorial voice seems to overpower the voice of Eve and the effect is a disintegration of the fictional boundaries in place. In considering the possibility of Eve's story being based on true events, perhaps this disconnection in form and fictional characterisation can be attributed to Charles' attempt to smudge *her* truth. If that is the case, the out-of-place and far-fetched moments could be Charles' way of diverting attention in order to *appear* more fictional than autobiographical. However, rather than diverting attention, the far-fetched moments highlight the inconsistencies and generates questions around the relationship between truth and fiction, which I explore later in Chapters Four and Five.

It is particularly within bizarre scenes or painful story arcs where these narrative silences and selections are visible. In Eve's sexual violation of Tommy, her first encounter with an adult erect penis, the aftermath of her reaction is largely left unexplored. Tommy's sexual reaction to stimulation causes Eve to run home with a flushed face, without clarity as to the source of her blushing. Based on Eve's precocious personality, readers can assume she blushes in pleasure. At the same time, she is well aware of the shame that can be felt when transgressing moral codes, and she could conceivably have been blushing as a pre-emptive reaction to the possibility of being found out. Charles leaves it to the reader to decide, a responsibility which appears again with Eve's two years of sexual slavery. There is a massive narrative gap here; the story excludes all details of her life from twelve to fourteen years old. We are not given insight into how Eve managed to get away from home every week and conceal her situation; there is no expansion on her school activities, her dealings in the shoe business, interactions with family, or her relations with boys. It would seem that her life following her rapes by Mr Simon was put on pause. This could speak to the severity of the trauma she was experiencing, but also perpetuates a literary practice that depicts rape as unspeakable and therefore severed from articulation (Graham, "Reading the Unspeakable" 439). Eve's omission of her sexual slavery to Mr Simon contributes to this phenomenon, as Graham identifies, where victims are compelled to be silent; where the withholding of their stories indicates an apparent collusion with their rapists, reinforcing their culpability. The binary of silence and exposure with regard to Mr Simon presents a problem in *Eve's* narrative, raising questions about sexual entanglement – how power structures and politics of respectability impede on the decision to name a rapist and expose the violation. Eve is raped by her art teacher, her family doctor and by Jappie at the police station, by order of the white policemen. In each case, Eve's abuse by men in authoritative positions exposes power operating at gender levels and across institutional, healthcare and security structures of state. She does not expose her doctor as a rapist because he is well-respected and her family enjoys the social leverage that that connection entails. She does not expose

Jappie – in fact, she does not blame him – because the apartheid police ordered the rape and speaking out against this injustice was unfathomable.

With her rape by Mr Simon, the initial scene of violence is vividly related (Charles 183) whereas the subsequent two years of violence is completely elided. There is a sense that the sudden time jump (or absence, gap) of representing Eve's years of sexual slavery suggests rape existing as "both product and source of textual anxiety, contradiction, or censorship" (Higgins & Silver 3). However, this creates more questions in context of *Eve*, considering that she is raped again and again, with each scene unwaveringly relating the sexual violence enacted against her body. Charles' choices for exposing some rapes also raises a question of how explicit 'explicit' can be? Is there room within South African literature for clearly detailed relations of horrific sexual violence, and is there value in creating a language like this? Given the tradition of framing rape in South African literature as hidden and 'unspeakable', *Eve* provides an alternative insider view into sexual aggression and rape. Choosing to censor her sexual slavery felt like a tactic to progress the story and push on into Eve's highly sexualised phase of womanhood. Doing this not only exemplifies this notion of rape as unspeakable, but shuts down any opportunity to explore the complexities inherent in long-term sexual abuse and the effects it can have on the making of identities.

Where sexual violence can be categorised as a narrative selected for erasure, conversely there are themes or scenes included in Eve's story that appear out-of-place or disjointed within the storyline. One selection which would count as a significant cultural code in coloured communities is the maintenance and styling of hair. Erasmus has identified hair texture and styling as a key beautification practice in the making of womanhood (13), and Jensen, too, has explored hair practices as a feminine domain wherein performances of respectability and civilisation is evident (66). Charles touches on the importance of hair texture in terms of respectability, as Eve explains that among her childhood neighbourhood friends, those with straight hair were treated with respect while those with coarse hair were insulted. Eve recalls that, "[i]f you had straight hair, like I did, you passed in the group; and if you had straight and a fair complexion, they licked your ass. We didn't really know why we acted this way – it just seemed to be automatically there" (37). Eve's hair is instrumental in her self-perception of beauty, as she is often described as allowing her long hair to hang loose when she is enforcing her sensuality. There is a scene where Eve rejects the church, and by extension, her parents' ideals regarding coloured femininity (243), which is entangled with the cultural code of hair. Here, again, is a narrative selection included without much context or linearity in terms of the storyline. Up until this point, Eve's church attendance or relationship with religion is non-existent but is included here as a catalyst to frame themes related to the symbolism and identity performances linked to hair, sexuality, self-perceptions and suicide.

When Eve screams that she hates church, her father hears and attacks her. His violent reaction includes haphazardly cutting off all of her hair and leaving patches of bald spots that affect her appearance so much that she does not recognise herself in the mirror but rather sees a “strange animal” (245). This causes Eve to impulsively decide to commit suicide by swallowing various kinds of pills found in their medicine cabinet. It is important to note that she did not want to die, but to punish her parents with the guilt they would feel if she were to die. Their reaction to her attempted suicide is to conceal and feed her milk, rather than immediately rush her to a hospital, since there were church guests in their home at the time. Throughout the novel, we are informed that Eve has a complex relationship with her parents, as they try to humiliate and punish her for acting in ways counter to their idealistic views of respectable femininity. They would rather risk her death by avoiding immediate medical attention, for the sake of preserving a good reputation within the church and community. This scene illustrates the extremes approached in efforts to maintain the appearance of respectability.

Regardless, after the attack, Eve laments that for a “long time” she felt lonely and lost without her hair, as though a big part of her was missing (247), but this “long time” is never unpacked. There was an opportunity to explore the resulting effects of her self-perception and her understanding of identity, and how her relationship with sexuality developed as a result. Instead, Charles leaves the aftermath of her afro in limbo. If losing her hair was important enough for her to attempt suicide, it should arguably have had a ripple effect on her subsequent sexual behaviour. When she meets Will, there is no mention of hair and how she felt about engaging with a white man while looking like a “strange animal”. To explain further, when she is dancing on tabletops at the Starlight club (267), we are not alerted to her thoughts on how sporting an afro feels in predominantly white, male company. With these examples of Eve’s romantic and sexual interactions with white men, her hair texture is significant in terms of it being a signifier of her racial category. Non-straightened hair, in this case, show her non-conformance to coloured cultural codes, which ties into perceived standards of beauty with straight hair being considered as more attractive than kinky hair. There were moments here to explore themes around the “social and racial hierarchies internal to coloured people, in which hair practices formed part of a civilizing performance” (Jensen 67). Given that Eve is fifteen and sixteen years old during this time, as a young teenager the tumultuous emotions that accompany adolescence are not explored and Eve’s life resumes as though nothing majorly traumatic took place. The severity of her attempted suicide motivated out of spite, coupled with her apparent loss of identity following her hair loss, is completely overlooked.



## Conclusion

Eve represents a coloured child of 1960s South Africa; a tumultuous time where racial divisions were strictly enforced, with coloured communities encouraging their daughters and sons to lead respectable lives that never reflected shamefully on their families. Eve's life is filled with countless taboos, which she learns to explore in secret. She finds power in her body and weaponises her sexuality from as young as six-years-old. She learns how to manipulate men and reap rewards from doing so – for Eve, her femininity is inextricably linked to her sexuality. Despite her parents' attempts to control with fear and violence, she is willing to take risks in order to feel powerful. Eve enjoys power through sex and earns respect through money, as she would, in a sense, sell her body for payment that either directly or indirectly contributed to her household. With her cunning mind sharpened through observations of the grown-ups around her, Eve learns how to circumvent the moral system of her community and perform the role of respectable daughter for many years. This performance was in part aided by her sexual slavery to Mr Simon, given the narrative silence of her life during those two years. Presumably, while suffering in silence she managed to avoid bringing any shame to her family. After the news of sexual slavery emerges though, her status as a non-virgin warrants slander and sexual violation by men in her family circle, which prompts her to resist community ideals that shame her into a stereotype. In choosing to follow a divergent path to the traditionally modest ideal of femininity, *Eve* opens up considerations into forms of female identity that resist pressures from the local community, and she generates modes of recognisability through her sexuality, as a “girled” body that pushes the cultural boundaries of *ordentlikheid*. *Eve* also explores the unspeakable topics that undergird notions of respectability, like domestic violence against women and children, rape, paedophilia and promiscuity. These encounters reflect lived realities that appear to have been consigned to the silences and invisibilities of coloured culture. In contemporary South Africa, where coloured communities still tend to be regarded as comprised of violent men and hypersexual women, topics centred on forbidden sex and its ambivalent role in identity formation are explored in *Eve*. While the gendered stereotypes of coloured identities may reflect an exaggerated version of truth, it is a useful framework to evoke repressed topics linked to sexuality and its entanglement with productions of personhood. *Eve* addresses the contradictions of colouredness and provides a story of an alternative female identity at odds with the established moral economy. Her life experiences represent a history of coloured women who found empowerment in their sexuality and chose to circumvent the coloured cultural norms expected of them.



## Chapter Three – *What Will People Say?*

### Introduction: Using fiction to impart intimacy

*What Will People Say?* (2015), the debut novel by Rehana Rossouw, is an award-winning text that follows the Fouries, a family who live in Hanover Park<sup>1</sup>. The story is primarily based during the tail end of apartheid, in 1986, and is filled with characters that can be conceived of as vehicles for carrying various concepts figuratively associated with coloured identity, community moral codes and contrasting femininities. For readers with insight into colouredness, coloured communities and the range of cultural codes attached to that, this novel is arguably mnemonic in texture. There is a deep sense of familiarity throughout the text, and Rossouw's use of language and location lends greatly to this. For the purposes of my study, looking at the remembering that Rossouw unravels opens up interesting points of entry regarding my questions around coloured, female identity. Drawing on Pumla Dineo Gqola's use of memory studies and Toni Morrison's formulations around 'rememory', I am interested in excavating the entangled intimacies between history and fiction, and how memory configures in loosening that knot. Focusing on this framework of intimacy, I am attempting to explore what Sarah Nuttall calls the "human foldedness" of entanglement (1). I consider *What Will People Say?* as both a lens and a mirror that is useful in exploring the invisibilities, erasures and liminality of coloured, female identities. I investigate which everyday activities, behaviours and interactions point to the making and remaking of colouredness, and particularly how Rossouw's female characters illustrate competing forms of femininities in spaces characterised by the moral systems explored by Elaine Salo and Steffen Jensen. Related to this is the encoded sense of intimate comprehension that surfaces in the reading experience itself. Through the use of a specific Cape Afrikaans dialect<sup>2</sup>, the names of existing locations and the recognisable character archetypes present, there is an (un)comfortable closeness between the reader and the text, which can be unsettling for coloured readers with the sorts of intimate knowledge that Rossouw shares. This leads into my exploration of writing interiority and how Rossouw draws on the interconnected intimacies – the "human foldedness" – of writer, reader, truth, fiction, memory and experience, to explore themes of shame, dignity, stereotypes and belonging. While post-apartheid South Africa allows us to 'imagine ourselves anew' as noted by Gqola in *What is Slavery to Me?*, it also affords explorations of our old selves. It does so by recollecting constructions of identities

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<sup>1</sup> Hanover Park, located in the Cape Flats, was a designated area for coloured residents to be relocated to during the implementation of the Group Areas Act.

<sup>2</sup> I am hesitant to refer to this dialect as "Kaaps" as this term is considered as derogatory by some.

beyond essentialist rhetoric and filling Cape Flats subjects with rich interior lives that have been veiled by history and historians alike<sup>3</sup> (Adhikari 1).

Toni Morrison, in her essay “The Site of Memory”, explains that writing interiority involves,

A kind of literary archaeology: On the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image – on the remains – in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth (92).

Morrison’s quote is a reminder to rely on the images, or pictures, that are roused through memory and the feelings that accompany that. According to Morrison, finding and exposing a truth with the intention to write interior lives for people who did not (or could not) write their own narratives (93), is a critical exercise in the project to “fill in the blanks” of Black and marginalized people who were historically positioned to be silent or censored about the milieu of their lives (91). In this way, *What Will People Say?* can be considered as an engagement with the remains of a space located in coloured cultural history, which draws on ‘images’ and provides insight into unwritten marginalized lives. For coloured readers who recognise the ‘images’, the feelings and memories that are motivated by Rossouw’s story, arguably find these “remains” at the “archaeological site” as an entry point into their own interiority. Morrison describes this as the “route to a reconstruction of a world ... and to the revelation of a kind of truth” (95). The activity of reading *What Will People Say?*, then, becomes an intimate experience that recreates memories and feelings connected to private timelines and historiographies. As a result, this novel encircles an entanglement of time and history that configures into how Rossouw writes interiority, which contributes to the character archetypes coming to life in a visceral way.

In this chapter, I touch on several characters who are recognisable through stereotypical wisdoms, and how Rossouw fills in the outlines of history’s portraits of these types of identities. Throughout this chapter, I constantly touch on the importance of stereotypes, which I align with Steffen Jensen’s argument regarding the stereotype of the *skollie*, which he claims was internalized by coloureds and perpetuated by non-coloureds, linking danger and violence to the coloured, male body by virtue of their designated racial category (2-3). In Jensen’s study of the *skollie* figure, it is argued that the stereotype both undermines and stabilizes coloured identities (5), which I find to be

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<sup>3</sup> The last five years has seen an upswing in biographical texts written by (or about) coloured people and the stories of their lives. Most notably, Trevor Noah’s *Born a Crime* (2016), the film *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies* (2017), and most recently *Living Coloured* (2019) by Yusuf Daniels, which, at the time of this writing, was the number one selling novel at Exclusive Books stores in the Western Cape.

a useful framework through which to analyse Rossouw's varied characters who, in some ways, represent stereotypical figures. I define stereotypes according to Jensen's understanding, which draws on Stuart Hall's analysis that stereotypes "reduce people to a few simple essential characteristics" that draw on widely recognisable characteristics that are vivid, memorable and exaggerated (4). In turning towards the prevalence of stereotypes, themes related to insider discrimination emerge, where notions of shame and respectability pervade concepts linked to behaving according to expected coloured norms versus performative acts to defer expectations of colouredness. I will devote particular attention to the characters of Nicky and Suzette, the Fourie sisters, as I trace their experiences with remaking their identities in relation to the structural community codes that impact their livelihoods. This case study is motivated by Nicky's reactionary identity building in contrast to Suzette's dynamic agency in constructing her own identity. The sisters exhibit how different types of femininities emerge in the Cape Flats in response to generational tensions, the beginnings of a transition into the New South Africa, and the violence of the Hanover Park environment that ripples through individuals' strategies for respectable living.

Reading the Fourie sisters is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theorisations of habitus and cultural capital, as presented in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and "The Forms of Capital". I am specifically focusing on Nicky and Suzette's dispositions as informed by the structural framework of their habitus and how each sister draws on their symbolic capitals in different ways to contrasting effect. Bourdieu describes the habitus as "history turned into nature" (*Outline of a Theory of Practice* 78), as the *modus operandi* "which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent" (79). In other words, the habitus is the underlying structures of social life that become ingrained in how we physically move or talk in the world, and every individuals' subjective decisions rest on the objective potentialities conditioned by the structural framework of their habitus. How Nicky is drawn into a livelihood impacted by the repercussions of her brother and best friend, and how Suzette leverages her beauty and social connections to successfully navigate fields beyond the Hanover Park habitus, offer interesting lines of inquiry that reveal links to the entanglement of intimacy. In exploring this and its connections to the Cape Flats within Bourdieu's key concepts of habitus and capital, the social and cultural boundaries that underpin Hanover Park are explored in further detail.

The Fourie sisters' inner lives reveal their secrets and aspirations, and following their stories as nodes within the larger Fourie family happenings also highlights an overarching element prefaced by the novel's title. It is a sentiment that encapsulates a facet of the coloured experience. Readers who understand the way of thinking attached to this question are invited by Rossouw to ask this question of her characters, which prompts self-reflection into the personal experiences of living

coloured. A major preoccupation that permeates coloured culture and identity is the idea of maintaining a perception of high opinions—to be respectable and decent in a marginalised community. This is an area of study that has been highlighted in Salo's *Respectable Mothers, Tough Men and Good Daughters: Producing Persons in Mannenberg Township South Africa*. Her theorisations ground my study of Nicky and Suzette, family structures and the stereotypical wisdoms of archetypal coloured characters. In many coloured community structures, families valorise respectability and upholding a moral economy where subjectivities are expected to function within. The habitus of Hanover Park in *What Will People Say?* mirrors much of Salo's findings, who argues that Cape Flats communities operated according to moral ideals that included modesty, interdependence and self-sacrifice ("Negotiating gender" 353). Upholding this moral community involved collective action, and the title speaks to the constant vigilance coloured individuals enforce in their day-to-day lives, as well as the vigilance they are subjected to by others connected to them. Family, friends, neighbours and strangers all participate in this type of communal surveillance and judgement of one another, which is exacerbated by the physical and social density of the township space (350). Related to Salo's conjecture is Jensen's argument around dignity, which is explored in *Gangs, Politics & Dignity in Cape Town*. I find his work useful in supporting my exploration of shame and respectability and how these concepts interlink across family and community structures of power.

Where Salo and Jensen provide the ethnographic framework that sheds light on the habitus of coloured communities, Morrison's notion of focusing on the remains to 'yield up a kind of truth' speaks to Rossouw's narrative representation of the varied identities present in the Cape Flats. In Morrison's mandate to not lie (93), 'a kind of truth' is revealed in the space where memory and imagination intersect. This process of re-membering, and inventing is inherently an intimate affair, because it relies on the individuals' (the reader) reservoir of experience and capacity to tap into their own imaginations. Yet, in *What Will People Say?*, recognising the group identities and community ideologies as explored by Salo and Jensen also relies, to an extent, on what is subjectively remembered or experienced. Similarly, reading characters' identities also relies on recollection and invention. As Morrison states, "no matter how 'fictional' the account of these writers, or how much it was a product of invention, the act of imagination is bound up with memory" (98). Through private, intimate knowledge based on memory and experience, the fictional dimension of Rossouw's text is strengthened, and Morrison's take on writing truth elucidates the significance of writing interiority in the project of expanding discourses linked to Black identities. Rossouw takes truth and imaginatively explores a site of coloured cultural history where liminal coloured identities reside, speaking directly to the present with an intimacy identifiable to those who live(d) the

coloured experience, recognise the characters personally, and relate to their individual struggles. Based on the representations of intimacy that underpins this chapter, I am sensitive to how my own intimate knowledge of colouredness factors into my reading of Rossouw's novel.

### **Looking at the title**

'What will people say' functions as a multidimensional title because it is loaded with layers of meaning. Grammatically, it is a simple question. When taking into consideration the implications of such a question, its meaning expands to include offshoots of related queries – who is asking this question? Who is it directed at? Which people is this question referring to? In asking these follow-up questions, we then need to consider its meaning in context of the novel's setting. Knowing that the text focuses on a coloured family living in the Cape Flats, the title then takes on meaning that can be read in context to coloured cultural codes. In this case, 'what will people say?' is both a question and a condemnation, derived from a moral community where status is important and upheld through communal surveillance and judgement. Salo states that, "reputation is shaped through intimacy, gossip and visible performance" ("Negotiating gender" 351), which characterises the propensity for coloureds preoccupied with respectability to constantly be vigilant of others' opinions. In this way, the moral economy in Cape Flats' communities is a self-defeating system; interdependence is valued as a marker of respectability but this intimate, overlapping dependence on one another leaves everyone vulnerable to each others' gaze, thereby forcing livelihood strategies that juggle humiliation and respectability. All community members are in tacit agreement to monitor one another's activities and to ensure that measures of respectability are maintained. Conversely, in cases where non-respectable behaviour or activities are noticed, it generates gossip and the guilty parties are subjected to marginality and feelings of shame. We find multiple examples of this phrase appearing throughout the novel, which highlights its power across different types of relationships. When Sharnay, Magda Fourie's niece, falls pregnant and a quick wedding is arranged, it is considered a big scandal and Magda admonishes her children in a pre-emptive way, reminding them of the community's moral economy. As Suzette listens to her mother's tirade, she reflects that,

"Then she would ask the same thing she had asked a million times before. What would people say? She knew all the answers. They would say that Violet is a bad mother. That Sharnay was a loose girl. They would say shame; she comes from such a good Christian family" (180).

Suzette's contemplation here illustrates the attentiveness at play in the dynamic of watching and being watched, and it also provides answers to the question posed in the title. Magda, when she is in

the position of potentially being closely observed, constantly asks what people would say in response to scandal and disgrace. At the same time, as a participant in the system of surveillance she already knows the types of gossip that could ensue. Understanding the different sides of the same coin heightens senses of constant vigilance and the performances required to maintain appearances of upholding the moral codes of the community.

This loop of surveillance, vigilance and visible performance is done in efforts to appear respectable, to counteract stereotypes, and to manage a living situation supposedly steeped in shame, in order to emerge as moral individuals. Jensen describes this desire to project morality as ‘dignity’. For Jensen, dignity is “what powerless people have left when all else fails” (9), and within the boundaries of coloured communities, it can be considered as a sort of antidote to shame since it is a fixed quality seemingly inherent to every person. In other words, ontological readings of dignity imply immutable qualities that are located at the core of every person, but Jensen proposes that dignity can be aspired to or possessed in contexts where moral behaviour aligns with appearing respectable. To illustrate this point, I quote Jensen’s example here at length, in explaining a woman preserving her dignity by stoically exiting a welfare office after being humiliated by an employee (my italics);

When the woman left with only her dignity intact, that dignity was a result of the humiliation of the offence committed by officialdom; dignity was thus an effect of power. Dignity only became an issue in the moment of humiliation, and it did not exist independently of humiliation or of power. In other words, domination (in the form of the welfare official, the police officer, even the gangs and the neighbourhood watch, which we shall encounter in this book) hands down dignity to the poor and marginalized in the form of humiliation. However, it is possible to argue that the opposite is also true: domination exists only in so far as it is able to produce (induce) humiliation. In this way, *dignity and domination* (offence and humiliation) are *co-produced*; they are interdependent (10).

The concept of dignity being interdependent on domination has intriguing implications when read alongside shame and how these notions function together *inside* coloured communities. With Sharnay’s pregnancy, her offence of inviting shame to the family is counteracted by Magda’s instructions to conceal the perceived disgrace, which can be considered as her attempt to retain appearances of respectability and dignity. Francis Fukuyama, similar to Jensen, comments that the nature of dignity is considered as intrinsic and attributed to all people. In *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (2018), Fukuyama says that, “in other cases, dignity is due to one’s membership in a larger group of shared memory and experience” (Fukuyama np), which ties



to Magda's response and treatment to the perceived shame of Sharnay's pregnancy. Regarding the title then, 'what will people say' is also a warning – to act morally and protect dignity in the face of humiliation. Another implication here is the currency of offence and humiliation between community members. Individuals who experience disgrace through gossip are being shamed by their peers, who in turn are wielding a form of domination. This type of exchange also speaks to questions of cultural capital and class structures, which will be explored later in this chapter.

Shame, which has deep roots in the cultural history of coloureds, is weaponised in communities and Rossouw's novel's title speaks to this. As noted by Gqola in reference to Zoë Wicomb, "shame is a constitutive part of coloured identities. This shame infuses historic inscriptions of coloured people with miscegenation, degeneracy and non-belonging" (22). Indeed, these markers of shame existed as conventional wisdom up until the late 1970s (Adhikari, "Narratives of Miscegenation" 2), and it illustrates the deep internalisation of coloureds as a race apart, as an interstitial group, as an uneasy hybrid of binary race logic. As Wicomb describes in her essay "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa", coloured identity is "bound up with shame, a pervasive shame exploited in apartheid's strategy of the naming of a Coloured race," (92). Gqola in *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, expands Wicomb's assertion by identifying how shame functions as a tool of oppression that produces dehumanisation, stating that "all systems of violent oppressive power produces shame in those they brutalise" (38), which is true for all Black South Africans.

Returning to the example of Sharnay's pregnancy being scandalous and Magda's concern about being humiliated, we can identify how shame functions within the family unit and the larger community. Suzette recognises her mother's inclination to regard disgrace in close proximity as infectious:

"Whenever Mummy heard something bad about other peoples' children she convinced herself hers were going to be next. She always thought the worst of her children, even when they did nothing" (Rossouw 179).

Magda's disposition is not unique and Salo notes how senior women would coerce young women into following the expected modes of femininity ("Negotiating gender" 352). Soon after Suzette's realisation, Magda lectures her children about wanting to see rings on their fingers before bringing any grandchildren to her house (Rossouw 180). Her comment here speaks to highly valued cultural codes in coloured communities pertaining to abstinence, marriage, respectable romantic partners and domesticity. Sharnay's 'transgression' implies that she was being a bad daughter by not confining herself to the domestic arena, and falling pregnant while unmarried implies that she does not come from a respectable family. Even though we are not provided any insight into the details of



their relationship or the character of Sharnay's fiancé, a son who impregnates a perceived good daughter is implicitly considered as disreputable. Unless, Salo notes, when the ritual of *g'at sê* is performed by the good son to claim paternity and restore respectability (*Respectable Mothers* 132). Since *What Will People Say?* does not detail any acts of *g'at sê*, according to the moral codes, her pregnancy seemingly proves that she does not value abstinence and therefore Christian teachings, with her rushed wedding arranged to conceal the transgression. Underscoring these points is the 'pervasive shame' Wicomb refers to, and unpacking Sharnay's disgrace in context of the community and family moral codes highlights this.

This example also pulls into focus the idea of weaponising shame within the boundaries of coloured communities. Zimitri Erasmus, in her introduction to *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*, considers that coloured identities are constructed on the backdrop of a racialised hierarchy that associates privilege and power with whiteness and inferiority with blackness. Erasmus argues that coloureds are complicit in compounding apartheid's discourse of racial hierarchy and notions of inferiority can be mobilised by coloureds against coloureds (24). In this way, 'inferiority' can be considered as an alternative moniker for 'shame', and feelings of superiority can be induced by humiliating one another in acts of dominance. In the case of Sharnay's disgrace, Magda mobilises this shame as an instrument to coerce her own children to eschew duplicating their cousin's transgressions. Magda invokes superiority within the boundaries of her household by admonishing her niece and lecturing her children, but also understands the power this family scandal could have in the hands of the community, who would then have the ability to discredit their good family reputation and in turn stimulate feelings of inferiority and shame within them.

At this point, it is necessary to mention the distinction between shame that can be applied in large and little ways. Big transgressions, such as breaching the moral codes through non-respectable activities as embodied by Sharnay, can generate humiliation that has ripple effects across families and the community. While coloureds are tasked with leading respectable lives according to the moral codes, they are also held accountable at an individual level in terms of behaviour, where uncouth behaviour is considered as perpetuating stereotypical colouredness. Jensen categorises this relationship between race and unrefined behaviour as "a separation between the body and its surroundings" (66), which is referred to as "gam maniere"<sup>4</sup>. According to Jensen, "gam maniere" is the manifestation of the tension implicit in coloured people who strive towards living respectable,

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<sup>4</sup> Can be translated as 'uncouth manners'. Zoë Wicomb, in her essay "The Case of the Coloured in South Africa", notes that 'gam' is a self-naming strategy linked to slavery and rooted in shame. Wicomb argues that the total erasure of slavery's significance in coloured cultural history from folk memory is significant because 'gam' is derived not from memory but in "apartheid's legitimizing reference to the Old Testament narrative of Noah's son Ham, who looked upon his father's nakedness and so earned the curse of slavery" (100).

decent and dignified lives. Since race is lodged in the body, stereotypes are implicit but can be deferred by othering these constructions of colouredness as being located elsewhere. This is essentially an attempt at divorcing the self from the stereotype through visible performances of perceived civilization. As stated by Jensen (his italics),

*Gam maniere* were all those undesirable ways of behaving, dressing, shouting, carrying oneself, eating and talking that coloureds were presumed to do because they were coloureds. The stereotypical colouredness had to be exorcised through performance in order to maintain the separation between the civilised and the *gam* (66).

Jensen's assertion here is important to note as we can identify these 'civilised' performances in *What Will People Say?*, most notably in relation to Suzette. While visible performances counteracted *gamheid*, physical characteristics also configured into constructions of respectability. As noted by Erasmus, inferiority would be mobilised by coloureds against one another according to biological markings that indicated a lower class, such as dark skin or kinky hair (24). That being said, this imposed inferiority based on physiological traits is also escapable through grooming activities. Most notably in relation to hair, which holds a high cultural value in performances of civilisation, coloureds can produce respectability by treating their kinky hair. Jensen describes this type of grooming as illustrative of "the fact that the civilization was only skin-deep, impermanently lodged in the inescapable body" (67). With *ordentlikheid* being measured according to reputation within the community as well as individual proximity to *gamheid*, notions of shame as a constitutive part of coloured identities become apparent on multiple levels. Looping back to the significance of the novel's title, which can be considered as a question, condemnation and warning in contexts of humiliation and dignity, 'what will people say' arguably captures the complexities and contradictions that contribute to constructions of coloured identity.

### **Writing interiority**

It was mentioned earlier in this chapter that Rossouw writes a range of characters that fill out archetypes within coloured communities. These archetypes – or in another configuration, stereotypes – are reflective of the types of coloured identities that are constructed within the habitus of the Cape Flats. In reading *What Will People Say?* I was struck by the familiarity of the stories being weaved together, and am compelled by Morrison's concept of 'rememory' as I locate the people, places and scenarios within my own memory and lived experiences. For those entangled in the intimacy of colouredness, reading Rossouw's novel is an act of rememory because it engages with the 'remains at the archaeological site', which we access through private memories and experiences. The story encourages remembering memories through descriptions of locations,

through the distinct language used, and through the character profiles and the interactions between them. I cannot read about Suzette's excuses of sleeping over at Charlene's house without recalling my own schemes to go clubbing without my parents' knowledge (Rossouw 24). When Magda complains about Sharnay's pregnancy being a big scandal (180), I am reminded of the instances in my own family where 'good daughters' fell pregnant and the family worked together to conceal the apparent disgrace. I have friends who have family members that have grown to fame, like Suzette. And I have friends whose families are caught up in gangsterism, like Anthony. At almost every turn in *What Will People Say?*, I have first or second-hand experience of the narratives being highlighted. I can only relate and understand these stories because in some way I am a part of it. It is through my insider knowledge of the Cape Afrikaans dialect spoken by many coloureds, that I can read the linguistic code-switching with the proper inflections in pronunciation and the layered meanings embedded in terms like 'laaties' (10), 'naaier' (11), 'kinners' (43) and 'sabela' (113). This novel, while fictional, is entangled with realities that can be validated against memory or experience. This thread of truth creates an element of intimacy because it is grounded in what we know exists or has existed, and the cerebral activity of reading relies less on invention and more on memory and imagination. I do not need to follow the narration along in my invented settings because many of these settings exist. I do not need to invent what the inside of the Fourie household looks like because I have visited places like Magnolia Court. I have memories that fill out the narrative outlines of Ougat's shebeen, and I can recall occupying spaces like these at different moments in my life. I know exactly where Cosy Corner<sup>5</sup> is, and my memories of this Wynberg community characterises my interpretation of Nicky's meeting with Kevin. Given that I can recognise so many scenes from memory (and in some cases am prompted to re-member memories I have managed to unremember, which Gqola defines as "a calculated act of exclusion and erasure" (*Slavery* 8)), Rossouw's novel inherently resonates with me because it fits into my history. I can only make sense of concepts like disgrace, scandal and respectability in context of the novel's settings and plotlines, because I grew up in a coloured household and my family has in many ways upheld the cultural codes of morality, dignity and decency in relation to shame and marginality. This relatability makes for a mnemonic text that serves as both a portrait of cultural history and a rendering of coloured realities.

In other words, the thrust behind the mnemonics here can be attributed to Rossouw's engagement with rememory, by reconstructing a world that presumably relies on recollections of her own and others. To elucidate this point, Morrison's argument for trusting her own recollections and

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<sup>5</sup> This eatery is arguably an institution of the Wynberg area and is closely tied to coloured cultural history through its iconic menu item, the gatsby. For more detail on this subject, see Tazneem Wentzel's Master's thesis on the racialisation of food.

depending on others' (91-92), features into writing narratives that draw from memory. The realities explored in *What Will People Say?* are presented as fiction, but an entangled intimacy comes into play when considering the publically verifiable facts interconnected with biographical familiarities. For Morrison, it is crucial to distinguish between fact and truth, "because facts can exist without human knowledge but truth cannot" (93), and the project of writing interiority depends on a type of "filling in, recasting, relooking, reformulating (both of memory and history) outside of historiography" (Gqola, *Slavery* 8). While the verifiable elements in *What Will People Say?* anchor the text in both memory and history, through Rossouw's cast of characters we are provided with access to our own interior lives. We are also provided access to the inner lives of disremembered people that were not written about (Morrison 95), which then speaks to cultural themes to do with shame, dignity and issues of belonging.

### **Ghosts, mirrors and portraits**

There is something exciting about colouredness being thrust into the spotlight. When Wayde van Niekerk performed well at the 2016 Olympics Games, coloured people rejoiced at the representation of excellence. When Tamaryn Green won Miss South Africa 2018 and went on to earn the First Runner-up title at Miss Universe during that same year, coloureds were overjoyed. Whenever a coloured participant in *South African Idols* does well or wins the competition, there is always collective pride at the talent of one of our own. There are many notable coloureds I can mention here but my point is that, whenever a coloured person is recognised on a local or global stage for their glory, the excitement of their individual recognition is representative of us all. Or, to frame it according to Bourdieu's writing, when the individual cultural capital attained in their respective fields increases in volume through global or local fame, their symbolic capital is claimed as part of the shared capital that constitutes a collective identity. In short, we are quick to claim them as 'one of us'. Indeed, heated debates about coloured exceptionality in the context of a non-racial South African identity regularly surfaces in response to this<sup>6</sup>. Arguably, it is our way of counteracting longstanding tropes about coloureds being conceptualised in derogatory ways. It is so that we can say, "Look, he's a respectable coloured who comes from the Cape Flats!" which can be translated as: "See? We are not worthless, we are not degenerates, and we matter."

Reading *What Will People Say?* inspires similar feelings; it is exciting to see our cultural history represented in novel form, to read of stories that humanise Cape Flats spaces and draw attention to the people who live there. At the same time, it is unsettling because these representations brush up

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<sup>6</sup> See the comments section of "COLOURED DEBATE", a panel discussion uploaded by SABC Digital News regarding Wayde van Niekerk's winning performance at the 2016 Olympic Games.

uncomfortably against the embodied realities of living in the Cape Flats. Here we are seeing portraits of coloured people who are not famous or celebrated for their achievements in sport or entertainment; we are being represented by gangsters, rapists, alcoholics, and many more unflattering characters that feed stereotypical wisdoms. And while these representations may inspire discomfort in readers, there is also something warranted about it: No, we do not want to rush to claim gangsters as ‘one of us’ but drawing attention to these realities is needed. In this way, Rossouw’s novel underscores the social issues that shape coloured communities and the people who inhabit them. Her characters mirror people we know and the injustices they experience are haunting because it is possible to locate these fictional stories in our personal bodies of knowledge and experience.

It also provides portraits in that stereotypes and caricatures are recast with nuances that derogatory discourses do not include. Importantly, these portraits act as looking glasses as it provides an insider view of how seemingly unflattering character profiles navigate their daily lives and employ strategies for their livelihoods. Ougat is the head of the Junky Funky Kids and is widely reputed as a dangerous gangster. Where Rossouw details his home life in a scene where Anthony visits (78-81), we are given details of how Ougat’s mother, sisters and babies live in abject poverty and rely on him to provide for them. We are given insight into his responsibilities as a son and brother, suggesting that in some part he is motivated by his sense of duty to provide for his family. Despite his involvement in violence, drugs and gangsterism, he produces a form of respectability that is underpinned by his ability to provide economic stability for his family, thereby performing a ‘good son’ role. This portrait of contradictions points to the complexities of his inner life, and he is cast in ways counter-intuitive to ‘conventional wisdom’ or widely held perceptions of how gangsters behave and operate. The evocative nature of Rossouw’s storytelling captures the truth of the coloured experience and the alternative ways that different characters stake their claims to *ordentlikheid*. This is achieved through writing interiority and positioning these inner lives within the boundaries of the physical and moral space of Hanover Park, which then lends itself to explorations of issues like non-belonging and abandonment in juxtaposition to notions of shame and respectability.

Looking at Hanover Park itself, it is described as windy, dusty, sandy and smelly, indicating the neglect and abandonment literally embedded in the environment – a place many people were forcibly relocated to. Feelings of desertion reverberate through descriptions of an absent police presence (the closest police station is located in Philippi (67)) and the reactions of community members forming a neighbourhood watch to combat a violent environment controlled by competing gangs. The gang presence and their power over community happenings threaten the moral economy

where people's respectability is jeopardised. This is further related to feelings of moral and societal pressure in relation to raising respectable children and appearing decent despite the social conditions impeding this. Altogether, these broader issues of abandonment and non-belonging, managing threats to dignity as well as navigating the societal and moral pressure of appearing respectable are emphasised through character arcs and plotlines.

### **Habitus and cultural capital**

Continuing this reading of intimacy that *What Will People Say?* encourages, drawing on Bourdieu's formulation of regarding habitus and symbolic capital is useful for unpacking identity construction. Senses of intimacy are perceptible in this text partly due to the implications that a reading of Bourdieu's habitus encourages. As has been discussed throughout this chapter, the Cape Flats can be viewed as a space that is structured by a moral economy that pivots on shame and dignity. Combating humiliation and aspiring towards respectability are managed in different ways, and in the case of the Fouries, they draw on individual resources in the form of cultural capital to employ strategies to manage their family and individual reputations in the community. At the core of their strategies is the structural implications derived from their community's value system and beliefs, which is expressed in their attitudes and behaviours. It is that structural scaffolding of valuing reputation in a community plagued by historical conditions that has caused poverty, gangsterism and violence, which generates intimacy – the ability of the reader to recognise the different responses by different characters as they negotiate livelihoods in accordance with their individual cultural capitals. To explain this assertion in another way, it is possible to outline the impact that the habitus of the Cape Flats (and specifically Hanover Park) has in relation to Nicky and Suzette.

The Fourie sisters illustrate similarities and differences in the strategies they employ to manage their livelihoods. Their habitus is characterised around maintaining a respectable reputation, being good daughters, valorising moral codes like no pre-marital sex and the importance of community interdependence, to secure social and economic stability. These characteristics underpin how people in Hanover Park act, speak, dress, what music they listen to and who they date. With Suzette, we can see marked departures from the expected modes of behaviour and interests as she becomes more entrenched in spaces outside of Hanover Park. She is accused of being “sturvie”<sup>7</sup> by Nicky based on her change in accent, appearance and apparent values. Nicky admonishes her sister for

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<sup>7</sup> “Sturvie” is a term personally familiar to me. I have always spelled it as ‘sturvy’, as does Jensen, but for the sake of consistency, I use Rossouw’s spelling throughout this section. Jensen defines “sturvie” as someone who “wanted to be like the whites and had no respect for the township people” (80). In my experience, it is also infused with gendered meaning; young girls are considered as “sturvie” if they behave as though they are more important or superior to others. Men are more likely to call one another “franse” or “naaiers”, and in *What Will People Say?* both terms frequently appear in scenes including Anthony and the JFKs.



wanting to leave home – that is to say, to divorce herself from their habitus – claiming that she is selfish, a pretender and self-centred. This accusation is a reflection of the structural elements that make up the Hanover Park habitus, which Nicky understands and operates within. For her, Hanover Park is all she knows and Suzette points this out to her. In Bourdieu’s terms (his italics),

Each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning. Because his actions and works are the product of a *modus operandi* of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery ... It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know (79).

Nicky does not envision livelihoods beyond the fields closely connected to their habitus, whereas Suzette recognises the limitations that Hanover Park instigates and has learned how to behave, speak and dress in ways that belie the expectations attached to coloured ways of being. Despite their disagreement about their differing strategies for shaping their individual livelihoods, both sisters’ life goals are inspired by the desire to reach prestige and become highly respected representatives of their community. As summed up in their final confrontation the day after their brother’s funeral,

“I hate you! You false, Suzette, you make me naar! I heard you on the phone talking with your new friend. I heard your phoney voice; everything was so amazing and fantastic. You trying for white, I seen what you done to your hair. It’s almost blonde.”

“So what’s wrong with that? Grow up Nicky, it’s time you realise there’s a whole world out there. There’s places where people don’t live like this. You believe you can be Hanover Park’s first lawyer? Well, I believe I can be Hanover Park’s first supermodel. You just watch me!” (297).

This exchange underlines each sister’s disposition as shaped by the Hanover Park habitus and the cultural capital each has acquired through their personal experiences. The only difference between them is the strategies employed in the pursuit of the goals. Nicky stays home, becomes a community worker and focuses on her schooling and family, whereas Suzette chooses to drop-out of school to work at a factory that can further her modelling aspirations, leaving her family and community behind in the process. Interestingly, Nicky attempts to shame her sister for “trying for white” because her behaviour and attitude no longer reflects the habitus they both grew up in.

Earlier in this chapter, notions of *gamheid* were discussed, where civilising behaviour is performed through activities like hair styling. In this exchange, Nicky frames Suzette in opposition to what is considered coloured behaviour, by saying her adjusted accent and expanded vocabulary is



“phoney”, and implies that her blonde hair categorises her as racially ambiguous. Throughout the novel, Nicky refers to her sister as “sturvie”, which can, in some ways, be considered as the antithesis to *gam*. The term ‘gam’ never makes an appearance in the novel, and we are left to draw our own judgements of the Fourie’s and accompanying characters regarding their behavioural patterns. However, while *gam maniere* is understood as uncivilised and behavioural performances serve as a technique to distance oneself from the uncouth, being “sturvie” is regarded as attempts to completely divorce oneself from one’s racial group. To be “sturvie” is not necessarily synonymous with being civilised, as it is considered derogatory to “try for white”. Here we can identify another tension inherent in constructions of colouredness; to not display *gam maniere* while at the same time not veering off into a realm of “sturviness” in a show of complete shame for one’s race. In this confrontation between the sisters, Nicky attempts to shame her sister in multiple ways – for going against the expected social norms of interdependence and self-sacrifice, for her willing severance from their habitus, and for being “false” or “sturvie”. Essentially, she is framing Suzette as a *sleg* (bad) daughter similar to what Salo suggests. To garner a *sleg* reputation has social and economic consequences that can affect all parties connected to the *sleg* person (*Respectable Mothers* 130). For daughters, acquiring a *sleg* reputation via gossip circles reflected badly on *ordentlike* mothers (“Negotiating gender” 352) and could tarnish a family’s reputation as decent people. This ties in with the observations presented earlier in this chapter, where shame is weaponised to induce humiliation and thereby invoke domination. After this confrontation, the sisters grow estranged, which is revealed in the final chapter where Suzette and Magda catch-up after ten years apart (Rossouw 324). Both Nicky and Suzette have achieved respectability but their angles of entry into *ordentlikheid* reveal differences that are influenced by each character’s cultural capital, which in turn grounds the constructions of their identities.

### Looking at Nicky

Nicky is characterised as studious, sensitive and the model child who appears to be destined for a great career in law. She is well-behaved and pressured by her parents to achieve excellent grades in order to become the first lawyer from Hanover Park (34, 86). Nicky is transparent about her goals and involvement with the political struggle, and is mostly subservient to her parents’ instructions to monitor her siblings and confine herself to the domestic arena of their household. Ironically, this transparency results in her being wrongfully targeted by her parents for insubordination while her siblings lead secret lives (202). Nicky is open about her activities, driven by her own moral understanding of wanting to help friends, comrades and strangers. We see her character develop as a good daughter who diligently listens to her parent’s instructions and projected goals for her, to a young adult who is forced to take up the role of the family rock after her sister and her boyfriend,

Kevin, leave. She is then left to deal with the grief and trauma brought about by Anthony's murder, which drives her parents apart. Based on these points, the influence of family and the moral economy is identifiable as contributing in the shaping of her identity. Her parents' encouragement influences her career choice, the death of Anthony spurs on her decision to remain in the community to care for her parents, and her relation to Kevin with his cultural capital as a well-liked and heroic political activist plays in to her strategies for managing her life. While still a high school student, she gets a job at the advice office and does community work (307), which is also an avenue to staking claims in the politics of respectability (Jensen 164).

Nicky's life plans are disrupted after Shirley's arrival with a baby that she believes could be Anthony's, given that he participated in gang-raping her (196). Despite Nicky's careful attitude towards her life choices, she is ultimately forced into a position she did not ask or plan for. Through the actions of her brother and his gang activities, she needs to generate new strategies for managing her life, resources and reputation. Baby Anthony, named after her brother, arrives unexpectedly and inspires local gossip. In a twist that subverts the fear of what people would say, Nicky and Magda imbue meaning in the *skinner* by allowing it to transcend from scandalous hearsay to the accepted truth (326). Instead of actively trying to conceal the truth as in the case of Sharnay's disgrace, Magda's unmarried niece who fell pregnant, they allowed for the rumours to act as a cloak for their perceived shame, guilt and grief. Despite this disruption of unintended motherhood, Nicky returns to and completes her schooling, then goes on to work in a government position suited to her level of education. She becomes a mother, a homeowner, a full-time community worker. Essentially, she has done well for herself – she has a stable job, has moved her family out of Hanover Park into a more middle-class area and is raising a wonderful child. From the information Magda shares (324), we can deduce that Nicky has kept to herself and remained free of humiliation. It is important to note how Nicky's character reflects the kind of coloured femininities that are drawn into the ambit of masculine activities, which I unpack in Chapter Four focused on a case study of the film, *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies*.

### **Looking at Suzette**

Suzette's character arc is a strong example of a type of femininity that defies the moral economy while renovating local meanings of personhood. Throughout the story she is characterised as somewhat rebellious, a risk-taker and adept at playing the role of a good daughter. She understands the importance of respectability by performing her duties in the domestic arena (24), being highly involved in church youth activities (56), and avoids challenging her parents' career plans for her (47). For Suzette, the habitus of Hanover Park is burdensome and she is faced with the paradox of

performing respectability as expected while pursuing her goals, which require seemingly non-respectable behaviour and attitudes. Ultimately, her choice to drop out of school and pursue a modelling career results in Magda evicting Suzette from the family home (183), which Salo describes as the “most potent threat that a parent held over an adolescent who transgressed local norms” (“Negotiating gender” 359). For Suzette, her frustration with the local moral economy and the expectations attached to her is summed up in her brief reflection before being evicted. In reference to her parents, she notes that, “All they saw was someone in line with their plans, kak as they were” (Rossouw 176). During the confrontation with her mother, her view of these “kak plans” is reaffirmed by Magda who says that, “When you start working you work for all of us” (181), which ties in with the notions of interdependence and self-sacrifice in the scheme of *ordentlikheid*.

Her banishment, coupled with her resolve to become a successful supermodel, generates new conditions to create a sustainable livelihood. Without the support of her family unit and the broader coloured community, she is faced with autonomy. Beyond the boundaries of the Hanover Park habitus and the local codes of femininity, Suzette is free to challenge and subvert the expectations attached to respectable colouredness, and also free from the gaze of coloured community members in the system of surveillance. By choosing to not allow Magda’s idealistic views of femininity to destroy her dreams and aspirations of creating a better life for herself, she leverages her newly acquired social skills and beauty to eventually jump economic and social classes. According to Salo, there were intergenerational tensions that emerged in response to conflicting notions of femininity (“Negotiating gender” 359), and the confrontation between Magda and Suzette illustrates this. Suzette embodies the reconfiguring of local meanings attached to respectable, moral beings. Based on her “skill to manipulate space, linguistic codes, accents, dress style and attitude” (363), Suzette was able to successfully reroute notions of coloured femininity. If her parents had encouraged and supported her choices, she could conceivably have assisted in providing a better life for them all which falls in line with conditions of *ordentlikheid*, albeit accessed in ways counter-intuitive to local codes.

Furthermore, Magda perceives Suzette’s career choice as a direct reflection of her own capabilities and reputation as a mother, since a “daughter’s display of modest behaviour or dress reflected a woman’s ability to raise her children well and to run a respectable household” (352). Suzette was made to feel ashamed for wanting to pursue modelling, for saving up for a portfolio, and choosing to abandon her schooling in pursuit of her dreams. But Suzette illustrates how an emerging personhood structured according to Cape Flats moral codes can draw on their individual cultural capital to successfully renegotiate their identity. Through her friendship with Melanie, her co-worker at the factory, she manages to find a room to rent in Retreat (Rossouw 235). Through Neil, a

love interest she meets while modelling, she connects with Maureen who helps to secure her portfolio and first paying modelling assignment (226, 292). Suzette's cultural capital increases through proximity to characters like Neil and Maureen, who expose her to white spaces as she learns to navigate fields beyond Hanover Park. In the final chapter of the novel, we learn of Suzette's great success as a model, having earned fame and adoration over the course of her career while being completely estranged from her family and the coloured community. Her success also results in Magda's pride and approval, and she comes to realise a decade later that Suzette's choices and defiance against what was expected of her ultimately lead to her becoming an upstanding, respected coloured woman and role model. Additionally, in her subversion of ideological coloured femininity, Suzette grows into the type of coloured woman who is valorised by coloureds. People say that she is famous, successful, admirable, and 'one of us'. This turnabout in Suzette's public appearance factors in to Magda's revised opinion of her, coupled with her own deterioration in social standing as an *ordentlike* woman.

## Conclusion

In my thinking on intimacy, I have considered how frameworks of entanglement in relation to time, history and memory underpin engagements with *What Will People Say?* The novel evokes intimacy mnemonically in multiple ways; first, the title speaks to themes of shame and dignity and recognising these layers of meaning relies on shared cultural capital and memory. Being an insider to colouredness, or having structural experiences closely linked to the habitus of Cape Flats' communities, generates these senses of intimacy. This relationship between reader and text amplifies theorisations of interiority; the plotlines and characters resonate with truth because these stories and people can be verified through both reported realities and rememory. This effect created by Rossouw has, in a way, mirrored Morrison's own approach as a novelist. In the Q&A section following "A Site of Memory" in the 2nd edition of *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (1995), in response to a query regarding her point of view as a novelist, Morrison states that, "What I really want is that intimacy in which the reader is under the impression that he isn't really reading this; that he is participating in it as he goes along. It's unfolding, and he's always two beats ahead of the characters and right on target" (100-101). In addition to the intimacy of the reading experience, the tensions present in constructions of coloured identity are also amplified in *What Will People Say?* through notions of "gam maniere" and "sturvie" behaviour. These are particular categories that coloureds can embody and mobilise against one another when handing down humiliation or performing respectability and it also speaks to the overarching discussion around shame. Linked to this is the importance of stereotypes in terms of the strategies used to produce forms of respectability, and how approaches to appearing decent despite scandal, disgrace

and humiliation represent a cornerstone of the coloured moral economy. Furthermore, related to Bourdieu's theorisations around habitus and cultural capital, it is also possible to impart intimacy from the text based on how characters employ strategies for their livelihoods. Looking particularly at Nicky and Suzette, these Fourie sisters illustrate the impact that the habitus has on developing different avenues towards achieving respectability.

## Chapter 4 – *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies*

### Introduction: Using non/fiction narratives to read truth and memory

In 2007, the story of Ellen Pakkies made national headlines for its unique circumstances. News reports at the time recounted how Pakkies strangled her son to death, in his *hokkie*<sup>1</sup> attached to their home in Lavender Hill. What set this event apart from the countless violent happenings in the Cape Flats during this time were the conditions that led to murder and the long history of violence that emerged throughout the case's proceedings. Pakkies' son Adam, affectionately known as Abie, was a drug addict who terrorised Pakkies and her husband Odneal, stole their belongings to sell for *tik*<sup>2</sup>, damaged their property and frequently attacked them in drug-fuelled rages. Pakkies' crime was exceptional because it was one of only a handful of worldwide cases where a mother murdered their adult son. Further to this, she turned herself in to the police and pleaded guilty to her crime. The investigation and trial concluded after two years, where Pakkies was absolved of the maximum 25-year prison sentence suggested by the state, and was sentenced to a three-year prison suspension pending 280 hours of community service.

Pakkies' story has filtered in and out of public news over the last decade, and in 2018 her story was committed to film. *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies* is not the first artistic adaptation of her tale; in 2012, the play *My Name is Ellen Pakkies* was staged, and her life story has been the focus of doctoral dissertations<sup>3</sup>, a book<sup>4</sup> and an award-winning documentary<sup>5</sup>. Her story generates many questions about the effects of drug and domestic abuse, about living in impoverished communities fraught with violence and about what mental machinations can lead to a mother murdering her own son. These topics have been the focus area of the literary and non-fiction adaptations listed here.

In context of my research, I will not be focusing on these questions. I am concerned with the Ellen Pakkies story within a framework of exploring female subjectivities on the backdrop of masculine narratives. Reading *Ellen* as a text presents an entanglement of different truths. There is the witness and testimony of the event, the media reporting of the criminal case in public view, as well as creative retellings and academic published works. Implicit in engaging with *Ellen* are the many sides to this now legendary tale of a mother who was driven to murder while under extreme stress.

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<sup>1</sup> A small enclosure, like a shack or hut.

<sup>2</sup> The drug known as methamphetamine, or crystal meth. The name 'tik' is derived from the sound the crystals make when smoked through a glass pipe called a 'lolly'.

<sup>3</sup> See *An investigation into the motives of filicidal mothers* (2017) by Nicole Holm.

<sup>4</sup> See *Dealing in Death: Ellen Pakkies and a Community's Struggle with Tik* (2018) by Sylvia Walker.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Story of Ellen Pakkies* (2011) by Michael Duffet.

How do we detangle Pakkies from Ellen<sup>6</sup>, the household name whose life story has been scrutinised, dissected and sutured into retellings of various forms across multiple mediums? In a few words: I do not know. But more importantly, I do not plan to.

This chapter is structured in two parts. First, I have considered Pakkies as a female-subject in the film, by using Elaine Salo's framework of *ordentlike moeders* as presented in *Respectable Mothers, Tough Men and Good Daughters*. As described by Salo, *moeders*, or respectable mothers, were central figures in coloured communities since they embodied an ideal personhood (12) based on their abilities to provide for their dependents and were identifiable through their modest dress (5). Their centrality was tied to access to social welfare grants, which only mothers could collect, along with the feminization of the labour force in the Western Cape, as imposed by the Coloured Labour Preference Policy ("Negotiating gender" 349-350). As a result, coloured women in relatively impoverished 'townships' wielded an economic power that translated into social and cultural power (350). With the *ordentlike ma* figure as the nexus to a community's economic, social and cultural existence, their embodied personhood was central to the set of values associated with *ordentlikheid* (*Respectable Mothers* 14), as well as the kinds of identities which could be negotiated and defined within that ambit. In Salo's words, "women's identities as mothers and the ethic of social and biological reproduction effloresce outward from the household, producing an ideology of *ordentlikheid* or respectability, to which all other identities in the community are tied" (28). In *Ellen*, her role as mother is amplified within the scheme of Salo's study, but questions around Ellen as an *ordentlike ma* reveals corroborations and contradictions of this framework that ties into problems linked to storytelling.

There is over a decade's worth of news reports and interviews, which act as a media timeline for Pakkies' criminal case. In light of the information provided via media sources, there are identifiable ambiguities and omissions that diverge from the story that is presented in *Ellen*. The contrast between the 'media' story and the filmic narrative highlights questions, connected to personal and public narratives, and is indeed an underlying theme to *Ellen*. Starting from a point that hinges on exploring the state of truth telling in South African literary and media culture, I will trace the limits and ambiguities that accompany *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies* as a retelling that plays with truth and memory. Drawing on Hedley Twidle's *Experiments with Truth: Narratives of Non-fictions and the Coming of Democracy in South Africa* (2019), I will consider how *Ellen* can be read as a text that straddles a realm of non-fiction in a register that is possibly rehashed, while reinforcing notions of coloured femininity that fit within a specific rhetoric linked to the figure of the Cape Flats

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<sup>6</sup> I refer to the actual Mrs Pakkies as "Pakkies", and her filmic counterpart as "Ellen".



*moeder*. Twidle notes public discourse around South Africa's legacy of "unvarnished truth-telling" (199) is being reanimated with a turn towards memory work and personally inflected narratives (188). There is a more poignant focus on intimate and often painful histories being shared and used as entry points into addressing repressed topics that form part of serious national discourses. With this trend of exposing painful histories is the upswing in filmic texts focused on the Cape Flats, which have emerged in the last five years to high acclaim. Within this growing genre, masculine narratives dominate and, with the exception of *Shirley Adams* (2009), *Ellen* fits into this paradigm by proposing to present a coloured, female subject.

In light of this, reading *Ellen* as a text raises questions around where it can be positioned regarding memoir, non-fiction and biography. *Ellen* is difficult to categorise within a specific genre. Gabeba Baderoon, in her introduction to *Regarding Muslims*, identifies how "interstitial genres that hover between fiction and fact" can generate "the kind of knowledge that fills in the spaces" (23) of subjects that resist accepted or conventional discourse. As a filmic text, *Ellen* appears biographical given that it is based on true events, but it blurs the boundary between fiction and fact when considering the role of memory, news reproduction, imaginative takes and all sorts of contributing factors in the shaping of the story. For Twidle, defining 'non-fiction' as a genre is vague at best (1), but notes that the various types of non-fictive texts produced locally can be considered as,

a kind of ambitious and formally restless non-fiction (that) has become in a sense "the genre" of South African writing over the last decades, encompassing all those texts that make their meanings 'at the unstable fault line of the literary and the journalistic, the imaginative and the reportorial' (Brown and Krog 57) (2).

In a way, *Ellen* encapsulates a combination of all these text types, which makes it challenging to critically unpack based on the layers of meaning derived from journalistic, literary and imaginative avenues. According to Twidle, relevance and topicality underpin the success of non-fictive texts and that the demand for witness and testimony has shaped South African writing for generations (2). Based on this, Twidle proposes a pertinent query that directly relates to my own questions of *Ellen*, namely: How do the most compelling non-fictions grow to exceed and outlast their immediate topicality and relevance? "Why, in other words, does some news stay news?" (2). By focusing on the 'spaces' in between the topics represented in *Ellen*, we can trace how Pakkies' story has developed publically and how timing can be considered as an important factor in the lifespan and relevance of a unique event embedded in a vast repository of similar happenings.

The second half of this chapter is concerned with *Ellen*'s characterisation. Based on the collection of media reports and the insights gleaned from public utterances by Pakkies herself, there are facets

of her identity that are either omitted or appear to be glossed over in the film. This guides my close reading of select scenes that speak to specific themes to do with religion, rape, interiority, and how these elements can be read alongside notions of identity and within the framework of *ordentlikheid*. Working from Baderoon's method of inquiry that ferrets out knowledge that can be obtained when looking 'between the spaces', I launch into an investigation that highlights the interstitial areas between Pakkies' story as told by her, in contrast to the story being presented in film.

In addressing these themes of rape, religion and interiority, I draw on Pumla Gqola's *Rape: A South African Nightmare* and Steffen Jensen's *Gangs, Politics & Dignity*. Additionally, I also make use of archived source material that covered Pakkies' homicide case, specifically "Mom's Last Resort" (2010) written by Erin Clarke and published by *Vice*, as well as "Why I Killed my Addict Son" (2012) by John Harvey, published in *The Herald*. Alongside these news reports, I reference a promotional radio interview hosted by Radio 702's Azania Mosaka in an interview with director Daryne Joshua and Mrs Pakkies, that was radio broadcasted and uploaded to YouTube prior to *Ellen*'s theatrical release in September 2018. I have chosen these media sources for the topics it covers, specifically with regard to Pakkies' responses and how it can be read in reference to rape and religion. It also provides important direct quotes from Pakkies herself that serve to support my discussions around female subjectivity. The interview material published in these articles is also useful in terms of unpacking considerations of storytelling. Additionally, I touch on insights regarding empathy presented in the introduction to *Categories of Persons* (2013) by Megan Jones and Jacob Dlamini, and use extracts from Haji Mohamed Dawjee's *Sorry, Not Sorry: Experiences of a brown woman in a white South Africa* (2018), to flesh out notions of reclaiming female agency, control over personal narratives, and the power of sharing private pain and suffering.

## **Part One:**

### **'Between the Spaces' – *Moeders in media***

The trailer for *Ellen* opens with our lead character stating that 'people talk as if they know my story' ("Amptelike lokprent" 00:01). For South Africans who followed the case from 2007 onwards, Pakkies became a household name as her story had been reported on extensively. The narrative of her life is fairly well known and a quick Google search will serve a high number of results that include forum discussions, archived news reports, online articles and various social media posts discussing her life before and after she killed her son. This web of reported and opinion-based content paints a vivid picture that outlines her experiences with rape, prostitution and domestic violence in various volatile environments. With this wide variety of texts focused on the events that contributed towards a mother murdering her adult son, the line between non-fictional biography and

imaginative renderings becomes blurred and begs a question of whether *Ellen* can be considered as biographical in tone. With so much source material available, at what point do the reported facts veer into a script that becomes constantly reproduced, reaffirming a particular paradigm in which to conceive of Pakkies as a desperate mother and Abie as a *tikkop*<sup>7</sup> son?

Let me explain: the tale of Pakkies, as derived from media coverage that includes personal interviews with her, provides a portrait that, through a media reported lens, reveals duplicated content where online sources reproduce one another's content. She is portrayed as a heroine (and rightly so) and is usually framed as a distressed mother with an extraordinary history of suffering violence who was driven by desperation which culminated in a highly publicised homicide. This narrative has consistently grounded public engagement with Pakkies as a public figure and *Ellen*, in some ways, can be conceived of as following an 'accepted' script that has been rehashed through media reporting and public commentary. However, what makes Pakkies' story significant is that it captured national and global attention. It highlighted topics rooted in the racial and social history of the Cape Flats and became a touch point for the public to galvanize around and pull out of unspeakable territory. In an interview with *Vice*, when asked to expand on the severity of the *tik* epidemic on the Cape Flats, Pakkies' response is that, "almost every household has a problem" (Clark). Similarly, *The Herald* reported Pakkies stating that, "Drugs like *tik* tear [children's] lives and their families' lives apart. The only way we are going to beat this thing is to stand together and practice forgiveness" (Harvey). These pulled quotes from articles published in 2010 and 2012 respectively, echo the core messaging of Pakkies' community work – as reflected in *Ellen* where the judge explains Ellen's "duty to educate your community as well as other mothers like you" (1:53:52) – which is to protect the home, to be vigilant as mothers and to support one another in combating drug abuse.

In a way, the messaging plugged by Pakkies reflects the ideological structures Salo identifies regarding *moeders* and *ordentlikheid*. In the *Vice* article, Pakkies speaks on the effect that children's drug abuse can have on households, where "all order is lost in the home," (Clark), with the home being a key space for productions of *ordentlikheid* (Salo 28). It is important to note that Salo also identifies the decline in mothers' power as a nexus for *ordentlikheid* in the post-apartheid context, given that this ideology was generated in response to and partly by the apartheid racial economy. However, Pakkies' case can be considered as vestigial of the politics of respectability and specifically the role of mothers, based on the strength of her position in Lavender Hill and similar Cape Flats areas, as well as the authority linked to her voice in national discourses. Pakkies, as a

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<sup>7</sup> Defined as a *tik* addict.

representative of Cape Flats mothers, magnifies attention on the difficulties mother's face in combating *tik* abuse. She has stated how widespread the problem is and that she had encountered "many mothers in the same situation" as she had been in (Clarke). This sentiment is expanded upon in *The Herald*: "These drugs make kids violent beyond imagination and women become soft targets. People need to stand up and listen to them" (Harvey). In this way, the ideology of mothers as key advisors and leaders (Salo 13) in coloured communities continues to resonate and remains pertinent in considerations of Salo's concept of 'good sons'.

Salo has outlined how respectable mothers underpinned the identities of 'good sons' and could render sons' simultaneous masculine identities as *skollies*<sup>8</sup> or *ouens*<sup>9</sup> invisible to the community (28). This paradox, of women supporting men who appeared to compromise claims to respectability (Jensen 155), connects to the time period when Salo and Jensen carried out their work, since in the current post-apartheid moment where the *moeder*'s power has declined, there appears to be a resistance to concealing sons' deviant masculinities. Mothers (and some cases fathers) are no longer cloaking the violence and substance abuse of their sons<sup>10</sup>; the identity category of a 'good son' is now only measured against their attitudes and behaviours, and not through proximity to their mothers or respectable households. With attention to the rampant drug abuse of sons on the Cape Flats, Pakkies' narrative coupled with her position as a public figure, functions as a representative of respectable mothers in an updated code of *ordentlikheid* that in turn buttresses discourses around *tik*.

In the Radio 702 interview while discussing the subject of drug abuse, Joshua explains that "the reason why we made [*Ellen*] was to begin a conversation nationwide, because clearly things aren't changing" (33:51). This is an important comment to underline, as it is relevant to current affairs and speaks to the social climate where people feel empowered to boldly tell their stories. According to Joshua, *Ellen* was created as a vehicle to spark conversation about the lack of change in Cape Flats' communities and, truthfully, this is already an ongoing conversation that has developed strong legs in the past decade or so. *Ellen* may not necessarily have started this conversation, but it contributes to the growing discourse around topics related to living coloured. For example, with the development in social media and the access it provides to wide audiences, many initiatives have

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<sup>8</sup> According to Don Pinnock in *Gang Town*, 'skollie' "probably comes from the old Dutch *schoelje*, meaning 'scavenger' or 'scoundrel'" (19). Pinnock explains 'skollie' being used to generally refer to troublemakers. See p. 182-183 of Salo's *Respectable Mothers* for a detailed summary of the *skollie*'s identity in Manenberg.

<sup>9</sup> "Ouens" is described by Salo as a term describing those who "have earned the right to openly display their pride because they protect and police the geographic boundaries of the community" (182).

<sup>10</sup> See the story of Bridget van Ballo from Mitchell's Plain in the article, "I'm ready to kill my son" (2011), published by *News24*, and Sedick Abrahams who killed his son in 2018, reported in "Ellen shares 'killer' dad's pain" published by *Daily Voice*.

grown in Cape Flats areas that are specifically geared towards combating drugs, gangsterism, gender-based violence and protecting children<sup>11</sup>. Many of these initiatives rely on Facebook to generate exposure and conversation. Importantly, many of these organisations are created and led by mothers. Pakkies has played a role in this movement too, having served as a community worker and inspirational speaker at events arranged to spread awareness and discuss solutions. Additionally, as younger generations of coloureds, those born during the transitional time of the late 1980s and early 1990s (the ‘born-frees’) mature into adulthood, where the national social climate was outspoken and willing to challenge the status quo, the broader discussions around coloured marginalisation and the historical problems connected to it are boldly addressed in deeply personal ways, as I will unpack later in this chapter.

Recognising Pakkies as a leader in generating awareness and inspiring mothers with similar stories into actionable recourses like social justice groups and movements, it must be noted that Pakkies’ life story as a survivor in every sense of the word, is significant. In light of my study around colouredness and female identities, I am compelled to investigate how successful *Ellen* is in *actually* engaging with the story of Ellen Pakkies. Joshua stated that he felt it was important to humanise Abie (“Ellen Pakkies on 702” 15:44). In this regard, *Ellen* is successful, as the film traces Abie’s trajectory from the good son figure to a drug-addicted *skollie*, we are given insight into his struggles and mental deterioration. Conversely, we are given limited insight into Ellen’s inner life and the narrative is primarily structured to represent her in service to her son. Arguably, elements of her identity and the facets of her life story that fill out her characterisation as a survivor are only briefly shown. Her role as mother and caregiver is foregrounded, but she is more than a mother, and the film does not show this. Regarding this observation of what the film does and does not show, however, ties into questions of Pakkie’s own wishes in terms of representation. Given her hands-on involvement in *Ellen*’s production, it is pertinent to bear in mind what she may or may not have wanted spotlighted, what sorts of messaging she supported, and very importantly, how she wished to represent (and perhaps memorialise?) her son and their shared story.

### **‘Between the Spaces’ – Considering Cape Flats’ stories**

According to Twidle, we are experiencing a national cultural moment sparked by the activism of 2015, where “deep scepticism about the depth and durability of the country’s reconstruction went mainstream in South African literary, intellectual and media culture” (186). Along with uprising against university fee structures and calls for decolonisation emerged new ways of speaking out,

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<sup>11</sup> See Moms Move For Justice, a group headed by mothers who have experienced gang-related violence. As well as Mitchells Plain Network Opposing Abuse, an NPO focused on empowering survivors of gender-based violence.

where a register that is unabashed, bold and confessional appears to have become a norm in public discourse. *Ellen* seems to fit into this trend from a perspective where the visuals highlight a striking representation of the horrors experienced by Pakkies. In terms of testimony, media stories and Pakkies' work in public speaking supplements the visuals, and in combination this exemplifies the setting aside of all self-censorship 'to say the worst' (199). In context of the post-apartheid moment up for discussion here, it is also necessary to consider the coloured voices emerging to stake claims in the 'new code' of South African truth-telling. In reference to *Ellen* specifically, on the one hand we have a large repository of naked truth provided by Pakkies herself that paints an unapologetic image of her life experiences<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, we have a seemingly biographical text that has produced a familiar Cape Flats narrative in line with the already saturated genre of this kind. In other words, it appears that our emerging coloured voices who are active within the 'new code of truth-telling' (Twidle 186), are replicating similar stories that are continually covered as talking points in national spaces. This is not to say that there is no value in raising awareness to Cape Flats-related problems, my concern here relates to the potential of being greeted by a weary audience. When attention is constantly being drawn to familiar topics there is a tendency to grow jaded towards what becomes considered as commonplace or a normalcy. Regarding violence in the Cape Flats, statistics published by SaferSpaces show that Cape Town has the highest murder rate in the country that is presumably driven by gang violence ("2018/19 State of Urban Safety"). Based on the intimate understanding Capetonians have regarding safety and the dangers associated with the Cape Flats, that the media is known to perpetuate as a deviant space dominated by violence, as Salo points out (66), there is an acceptance of this environment as being a part of daily life and spotlighting every day events can lack effectiveness. Pumla Dineo Gqola has summed up this phenomenon. Although, in reference to the normalising of male sexual aggression, her assertion is relevant here:

To normalise depends on a combination of seemingly contradictory processes: frequent repetition of performance until the performance becomes invisible. In other words, when we see and hear something over and over again, we stop seeing and hearing it. It retreats to the background ... we come to expect it (*Rape* 78-79).

Returning to Joshua's point of 'starting a conversation' that is already well underway with many desensitised to it, the question then becomes how we can illuminate alternative modes of visibility to Cape Flats-related concerns.

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<sup>12</sup> In addition to my news media selections, see "Effects of tik" in *The Sunday Times* (2008).



Megan Jones and Jacob Dlamini, in their introduction to *Categories of Persons*, suggest placing “ourselves in the shoes of another” in order to engender a sense of empathy (10). They state that “commemorating experiences of suffering is the provenance of not only its victims but also its beneficiaries,” meaning that empathetic understandings of suffering can spur on new ways of engaging with a subject deemed as commonplace. In *Ellen*, empathy for Ellen is encouraged through her lived experience with Abie as a drug addict, but it is imperative we look beyond this representation of her story towards the spaces between. By doing this, we can shed light on the regenerative capacities of Pakkies’ story as a manifesto of feminisms for ‘speaking out of the house’<sup>13</sup>, speaking of the unspeakable, and unflinchingly addressing the different kinds of suffering experienced by coloured women. On top of that, we can also then create room to explore feminised concerns that affect not only mothers, but other Cape Flats related identities. While Pakkies, as a public figure, generally appears to be regarded empathetically, that empathy at times seems to be conditional to her testimony of murder, which appears to be *the* facet of her bigger picture that gets recreated continuously. The fact that her lifetime of abuse was integral to her criminal case being leniently ruled, and the subsequent lack of attention to her painful past in literary or creative reimaginings, speaks volumes about the types of coloured narratives being pushed for exposure.

However, this observation raises connected points to do with race, specifically regarding the role of Mr Yodaiken and the authority attached to his voice as a white man sympathetic to Ellen’s story. In narrative parameters, on the one hand Mr Yodaiken’s argument of support for Ellen is a necessary inclusion to flesh out the details of the High Court’s verdict. But, on the other hand, it can also be perceived as a moment where empathies for Ellen are truncated through the prism of a ‘white saviour’. Audiences are already aware of the outcome of Ellen’s case and the reasons for her lenient ruling, but are still shown a perhaps redundant encounter between the psychologist and Ellen; we are told why she is a survivor and not shown it through, for example, the rich detail that her interiority could convey. With this in mind, it is also important to consider the respect that white voices of authority are afforded in criminal court cases linked to gender-based violence, as well as how coloured communities attach veracity to white authority in line with the old racial codes of South Africa. Like Mr Yodaiken, Tamsin in *Shirley Adams*, and the child psychologist in *What Will People Say?*, white voices are notably positioned as authoritative figures on matters to do with mental and emotional health. However, the aftermath of Pakkies’ case has now positioned *her* as an authoritative voice on these matters, where her contributions are respected not because of her skin

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<sup>13</sup> This is a concept that fits in the scheme of *ordentlikheid* and religion, and is perhaps best articulated by Kelly-Eve Koopman, “‘a good woman is a woman who doesn’t talk out of the house.’ There is it. Not verbatim from the mouth of the Lord but it might as well be. I know this lesson well enough. Good women do *not* talk out of the house” (xiii).



colour, but by virtue of being an insider entangled in Cape Flats history, notions of motherhood, and as a survivor of the violence enacted by ‘bad sons’ and aggressive men.

In connection to these critical discussions around race and authority is a point relating to class and concerns a growing conception that Cape Flats’ stories ought to only be told by Cape Flats’ people. Public discourse around who is allowed to speak about Cape Flats topics<sup>14</sup>, and by extension colouredness, can most prominently be found in social media spaces. As a Lavender Hill resident, Pakkies represents a Cape Flats person and director Joshua does too, having grown up in Mitchell’s Plain and Bridgetown (Allies-Husselman “‘I never thought’”). Based on their statuses as ‘authentic’ and authoritative Cape Flats people, they can be considered as rightful in this reproduction of Pakkies’ story. My question, then, is whether *Ellen* can be considered as a valid reproduction of Pakkies’ story given that the general public had over a decade to process and cast Pakkies according to certain understandings, such as a ‘mother’, ‘heroine’, and ‘survivor’. Public opinions and views of Pakkies have had many years to mature and in some ways, *Ellen* strengthens these views and opinions, but it also raises questions regarding the intent of the film. Embroiled in these queries are intersections between truth and literary representation, which Twidle speaks to in reference to Daniel Lehman’s *Matters of Fact* (1997), stating that there is

a transaction between reader, writer and subject that can have material consequences for actual people, the non-fictional text is, Lehman goes on, *implicated* in a world beyond the written artefact. It is a term that carries the sense of being ‘deeply involved, complicit, even incriminated in both history and text’, and one that ‘complicated more traditional or tidy literary notions of “ideal” or “implied” authors and readers’ (9-10).

This is a complex subject that is beyond the scope of my study but requires mentioning<sup>15</sup>. My argument here is the exclusivity that is being applied to the notion of who may or may speak about coloured stories. If a coloured person is deemed authentic enough to share coloured stories or act as a mouthpiece for them, what were the parameters applied for that authenticity and how can we trust that those parameters have been filled adequately? Therein lay another problem of voice with regard to whose voice is truer than others – especially in relation to classism, where Cape Flats coloureds appear territorial about stories pertaining to the Cape Flats. Additionally, this problem undercuts the

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<sup>14</sup> Haji Mohamed Dawjee published an investigative piece with *Tortoise* regarding the South African Army being deployed to the Cape Flats in July 2019 as a means to curb gang violence, with focus on a mother’s experiences. In response to this, a content contributor to *The Daily Vox*, Jade September, published a response admonishing Mohamed Dawjee for “telling coloured peoples’ stories” when she supposedly has no right to.

<sup>15</sup> Hedley Twidle’s introduction to *Experiments with Truth*, and particularly p.8-10, go into further detail surrounding the complexities of truth and literary representation. *Portrait with Keys*, by Ivan Vladislavic, is also an example of a text that addresses the intersections between fiction and non-fiction.

strived-for exceptionalism of Cape Flats coloured storytellers and storytelling, proving that exclusivity is a contrived category of meaning that serves to alienate coloureds from one another and isolate coloureds from the diverse life narratives of all racially coded South Africans. *Ellen* is a good example of how this exceptionalism is problematic because the Pakkies case was surrendered to national discussions as soon as news outlets reports on Abie's murder, thus making it a narrative that lived and grew within "outsider" discourses. With that, and the multiple retellings and reproductions of it, the boundaries delineating whose story it is to tell become blurred and prompts questions regarding the life of a personal narrative versus the versions that live in public imaginations. When considering these questions alongside truth and literary representations thereof, *Ellen* can be read as focusing less on her portrait and more on her moment as a murderer. Undoubtedly, this aspect of Pakkies' life warrants representation in terms of the important social topics it speaks to, and as I have argued earlier in this chapter, *Ellen* provides visual content that supplements the large body of media and literary texts that fill out Pakkies' portrait, or biography.

What makes *Ellen* different from the trend of films that focus on coloured people, their livelihoods and the dangerous conditions faced in the Cape Flats space is that it does pivot on a woman. With films like *Dollars and White Pipes* (2005) *Four Corners* (2013), *Noem My Skollie* (2016) and *Nommer 37* (2018), Cape Flats stories are continuously being pulled into focus, and almost exclusively highlighting masculine narratives. In these films women are periphery, framed as love interests or distractions, filling common tropes of good and bad girls who either save the man from a life of danger or perpetuate it. *Shirley Adams*, as mentioned, is exempt from this list, as it centres on a mother and her disabled son. In *Ellen*, a common but invisible story is underscored; the plight of desperate Cape Flats mothers trying to find strategies to cope with the violence generated by the men around them. Women are pivotal to stories of masculinity – and masculine identities (Salo, *Respectable Mothers* 27) – and when looking at the Cape Flats, narratives reworked into texts such as films tend to focus on gangbanging activities that are dominated by masculine entities.

Surrounding this are the women caught within the power structures maintained by men and their roles are truncated into femme fatales or respectable saviours. As mentioned, *Ellen* is a narrative representation that underlines a female-subject, but seems to locate Ellen within the ambit of Abie's male narrative and in many ways the film highlights his story. If 'people speak as if they know her story,' then this film was meant, perhaps, to supplant the dominant narrative of who Pakkies is, what her life was like, and why she did what she did. Arguably, *Ellen* stages parallel stories of Ellen and Abie by charting their distinct and overlapping experiences to do with drug abuse, domestic violence and crime. Within these themes, considerations of race, gender and violence are highlighted and *Ellen* offers critical insights into these matters. Based on these points, I am

interested in exploring Ellen's characterisation and the moments that did (or failed to) focus on her identity and interiority, with attention to her subjectivity as a woman where her activities, emotions and lived experiences are detailed.

## **Part Two:**

### **Ellen vs. Pakkies - Religion, Rape and Interiority**

We have reached a point in non-fictional South African writing where women of colour are driving the marked turn towards the sorts of personal narrative that Twidle identifies, the sorts of texts that are grounded in truth-telling, relevance and topicality. Haji Mohamed Dawjee, in her book *Sorry, Not Sorry*, draws on the ideology of Steve Biko when she asserts the urgency behind black people needing to own their own stories, to break free from the “pre-determined narratives imposed on them” (2). This call to action is a notion I explored in the previous chapter regarding *What Will People Say?*, specifically in reference to Toni Morrison's assertions in “A Site of Memory”. Mohamed Dawjee is among the growing cast of women of colour who are telling their own stories, claiming control over the narratives where “we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic” (Morrison 91). Works by Ferial Haffajee<sup>16</sup>, Kelly-Eve Koopman<sup>17</sup> and the array of contributors to *Feminism Is* (2018) edited by Jen Thorpe exemplify this. These personal narratives that catalogue lived female and feminine experiences are relevant and topical, and come at a time where women within the public space defy expected paradigms. Baderoon, in reference to Meg Samuleson, explains her claim that women brought into or entering the public space since 1994 are either conceived of as “silent but enabling mother-symbols,” or as “dissident figures” that need to be reined in if they dare to speak in public (90). What we see from figures like Mohamed Dawjee is a resistance to the tropes and the patriarchal system that subjugates, illustrating that it is possible, and important, to go against pre-determined narratives. While Pakkies can be conceived of as a mother-symbol as has been unpacked through Salo's framework of the *moeder*, she was not enabling or silent, and her uninhibited retelling of her thoughts, feelings and opinions of her experience has continually been sought out. Pakkies' personal narrative as it exists in the public space may hinge on her world-famous crime, but her experiences before, during and after Abie's death are what continue to remain newsworthy.

Pakkies' personal narrative is certainly interesting but also important. There are no easy solutions for how discourses centred on coloured people and specifically Cape Flats' related identities can move forward and shift into a rhetoric that is less derivative and more constructive. A good place to

<sup>16</sup> *What If There Were No Whites in South Africa?* (2015).

<sup>17</sup> *Because I Couldn't Kill You* (2019).

start, to my mind, is by paying attention to and representing the details of lived experiences that shed light on the issues ‘between the spaces’ and expanding readings of identities to realms beyond ‘mother’, ‘breadwinner’ and ‘rape survivor’. As expressed by Pakkies in *The Herald*, “People need to stand up and listen to [women]” (Harvey), because they have valuable contributions to make in national discourses, they are instigating change through social justice groups and NGOs, and they refuse to be invisible or silent. In the occurrence of women of colour becoming increasingly active around national discourses linked to feminisms, this also means expanding understandings of Cape Flats people and communities. With this adjusted outlook it can be possible to engage in critical discussions without marginalising or categorising which kinds of Black people may or may not contribute to these discussions.

### **Regarding religion**

A recurring sentiment that can be found echoed across many, reported news stories on Pakkies, quotes her alignment with religion and belief in Christian teachings of faith and forgiveness. In *Vice*, in response to a question about the options mothers have in the fight against *tik*, Pakkies states that, “As a mother, you have to ask God for help. Ask him every morning to give you strength, because this is an impossible task for parents to go at alone” (Clarke). In *The Herald*, in an article published four years after Pakkies first became a household name, she pronounces that, “Some people, including my family, will never forgive me for what I did but there is nothing I can do about that. I know in my heart the Lord has forgiven me” (Harvey). In the Radio 702 interview with Mosaka, the above sentiment is echoed again; when asked if she feels guilt for her actions, she replies that, “The Lord took my guilt away. The only thing I feel now is the pain of losing my son and pain for mothers going through a similar thing. I don't feel guilt because I know what I did was wrong” (28:38). The selections I have included here can be found in varying iterations across news sources. These articles often include insights into Pakkies’ childhood, her experience with sexual violence, as well as her life during Abie’s terrorism. The assertion that “the Lord took my guilt away” has been published in varying degrees of sameness and has, in a way, developed into a scripted response. However, I am not concerned with the strength of this claim, but rather the consistency of its reappearances over the years. It is clear, from the trail of reported news up until this Radio 702 interview, that Pakkies is a devout Christian with strong faith and an allegiance to the Bible’s teachings. In the film, her relationship with her faith is skimmed over and given little focus as a significant part of her identity.

To illustrate this point, there are two scenes that touch on religion and its relevance in Ellen’s life. The film oscillates between two time lines that focus on the past and the present. The past timeline

traces Abie's life over a six-year period, and in the present timeline we are shown all the events following Abie's death. Importantly, the scenes outlined here are among the few explicit references to Ellen's faith throughout the film. The first, in the past timeline, shows Ellen seated in the local church with the pastor, confiding in him about Abie's struggles (00:22:08). This encounter takes place shortly after it is revealed that Abie is a product of rape and he is expelled from school. At the church, Ellen and the pastor pray for Abie, and this past scene is constantly interjected with scenes of the present timeline, where Ellen is pictured being escorted to the morgue to identify Abie's body (00:22:43).



**Figure 1.** Still from Joshua, *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies* (00:22:08).

Shortly after this, in the present timeline we are shown Ellen in court, where advocate Samuels requests to represent her and they meet in her holding cell while the court takes a short recess. Here, Ellen opens their meeting by asking Mr. Samuels if he is a believer, because that morning in court she had asked God to send her help (00:29:24). These references are among the few links to the theme of religion that directly contributes towards Ellen's characterisation as a religious woman.

Based on the fragments, reiterations and duplications that make up the story of Pakkies as presented through media and public discourse, we can piece together the significance of religion in the construction of Pakkies' identity. In *Ellen*, this factor is only shallowly explored. Religion can be considered as a prominent cornerstone of the coloured moral economy, and the studies of Salo, Jensen and Don Pinnock, verify this. Salo identifies religious bodies in 'townships' like Manenberg as a social element that could function as an alliance within the socio-economic differences that made up the residents of the space. Religious practices and beliefs, along with alliances like language, class and gender, "generated a unique, though permeable cultural system of meaning" (61). Religious institutions and practices provided residents with forms of femininity and

masculinity that allowed them to uphold the ideology of *ordentlikheid* (205). Jensen, in his work centred on Heideveld and working within Salo's framework, explains how forms of respectability can be produced through religion, and how mothers who aligned themselves with church entities could stake their claims within the moral economy (152). Within the church, these women and mothers are regarded with respect based on their characters and are not denied respectability through association with bad men (154). In *Ellen* this element of her identity, as well as its significance in the coloured community, is excluded. By circumventing religion and the politics of respectability attached to that, *Ellen* essentially eliminates a component of the coloured social experience to do with community assistance and input, performances of dignity and concealments of shame. While we are shown Abie's *skollie* activities, we are not shown Ellen's response to it. For example, Abie steals from the community and he would presumably have developed a reputation for this. In the interview published by *Vice*, Pakkies states that neighbours at the time were not aware of Abie's behaviour and his terrorism of Pakkies (Clarke), however, any reference to this is not expanded on in the film. If the community was oblivious to the happenings, it is not shown. In the film, when discussing Nikita's overdose, Abie chides his mother for speaking about her without knowing her, and she replies that '[she] has eyes in [her] head' and could see how *tik* was affecting Nikita (00:42:02). In the community system of surveillance, it strikes as odd that while her "home literally looked like a prison" (Clarke), her neighbours claim "that they never saw Abie acting strange" (Clarke) or, apparently, took note of her security upgrades – which the film shows in considerable detail (1:16:17).

Whether the community noticed her troubles and chose to not help, or if they truly were blind to her plight, the filmic choice to keep the community peripheral serves to create a sense of isolation and hopelessness. Perhaps, then, *Ellen* chose to frame a narrative attentive to the family portrait as a means to aid senses of intimacy regarding Pakkies' personal story. With this, the narrative is more focused on the private happenings of a Cape Flats family that can then be positioned in the broader reality of these struggles being commonplace and widespread – a sentiment that is illustrated in the closing scene of the film where the camera zooms out from the driveway of the Pakkies' house to reveal a sweeping expanse of flats and *hokke* (1:57:25). This filmic choice to keep the community peripheral is in alignment with Salo's notion of the home, or household, being the locus of productions of respectability, and concentrating on the happenings within the Pakkies household amplifies this.

In the adherence to *ordentlikheid*, factions band together to retain their respectability but in *Ellen* no community awareness, whether through intervention or disregard, is represented. There are no other church sisters or fellow mothers also struggling with drug-addicted sons, intervening or offering



help. In the scene of Abie's funeral (00:56:48), Ellen is rebuffed by some of the mourners in attendance – most notably by Waanie, the man responsible for introducing Abie to *tik* – and ostracised from the religious community, which serves to show her imposed severance from claims of respectability. Pakkies has stated that at Abie's funeral,

“There were a lot of people at the funeral, and they all had something to say. But I didn't pay attention. People gossip. I have endured abuse my entire life and I have lived through the worst. I was never one to fight back or speak ill of others” (Clarke).

This quote illustrates Pakkies' strong faith in kindness and forgiveness, as well as her piousness despite being ostracised. On top of that, her moral code as a Christian further strengthens her identity, as exemplified by her views of serving a prison sentence,

“When everyone was pointing at me I just said: “May God's will be done.” I knew I did wrong and even if I had to I was prepared to go to prison. Yet I thank God that he opened the doors of prison for me” (Clarke).

In this interview with *Vice*, it is suggested that Pakkies experienced community marginalisation but her reliance on her faith carried her through the criminal case, the community fallout, and her trauma, that *Ellen* does not show. An additional point to do with community socio-economic alliances is that coloured politics usually seek internal resolutions before involving state entities, and the film does not explore this. However, this could also have been a filmic choice by Pakkies and the production team in choosing to primarily represent a family portrait. Also, as Pakkies says, her neighbours claimed there saw nothing strange happening with Abie and it may be that the film purposely excluded any reference to the community because they simply were not present in aiding the Pakkies household. However, in *Ellen* there are no attempts by Ellen and Odneal to conceal the reality of Abie's *skollie* antics, suggesting that perhaps the community *did* know the extent of his drug abuse and terrorizing, but *chose* to ignore it. Specifically in the montage where Abie is shown as being chased by community members he presumably stole from (00:51:13), there is a clear sense that his reputation as a thief was widely known. Finally, shame and dignity are not used as elements within the storyline, and its exclusion arguably detracts from the intimacy of the narrative. The coloured experience, with religion, respectability and shame and dignity, are divorced from the narrative. This lack of representation ties into follow-up questions of interiority and female subjectivity.



## Regarding rape

In the same way that Pakkies' connection to religion is under-represented, so is the back-story of her experience with rape and sexual violence. In *Ellen*, the extent of her childhood trauma is edited to exclude the tragic details of Pakkies' formative years. In researching this chapter, I was struck by the reported details of Pakkies' life of abuse, and was surprised to note that these details had been buffed out in the film. In *The Herald*, Pakkies explains how she was kidnapped and raped at "about 12 or 13" years old, and how before her kidnapping she was forced to share a bed with one of her rapists, her mother's half-brother (Harvey). Pakkies also details how after being kidnapped, she ran away from home and entered into a life of prostitution, where she would frequently be raped (Harvey). In interview with Mosaka on Radio 702, she also expressed her fear of being raped by Abie, stating that, "it became so bad for me that I was thinking that he's going to rape me" (13:39). In *Ellen*, there is a moment where he straddles Ellen while choking her that invokes a sense of sexual aggression (1:03:44), but the fear as expressed by Pakkies is not explored beyond that. In "Mom's Last Resort" published by *Vice*, Pakkies states that, "Mothers are being destroyed because of drugs; they can't handle their own children. There are young men raping their mothers" (Clarke), which exemplifies Pakkies' fear and concern. While the film chooses to exclude most of the details listed here, they are easily accessible via reported news from publications like *The Herald*. Ultimately, Pakkies' history of violation is heavily edited but is arguably a big part of her identity, yet appears to be mostly used as a plot point in context of the film.

During Ellen's trial her psychiatrist, Mr Yodaiken, is questioned by the state (1:36:22). He argues that Ellen is a victim of a lifetime of abuse, that she had suffered for over 40 years and her six years<sup>18</sup> with Abie as an aggressor caused her to enter a dissociative state. He explains how her decades of abuse culminated in a moment activated by the need to survive, which resulted in an act of murder. Looping back to an earlier point regarding the authority linked to spokespersons like Mr Yodaiken, where institutional capital and white authority is trusted as valid, ties in with Gqola's assertion that testimonies by rape survivors generally tend to be received as biased or too emotionally invested to be reliable (*Rape* 29). This scope can be expanded to include survivors of any form of gender-based abuse. Prior to this court scene however, we are shown Ellen and Mr Yodaiken engaged in a therapy session (1:08:10), where he probes with questions regarding what Abie was like, how her family is coping after his death, and what her childhood was like. Ellen is shown as responding to most questions in a relatively pragmatic way, and even opens their session with a light-hearted joke, despite the cause of their meeting being a result of a violent crime. When asked about her childhood, Ellen appears uneasy and Mr Yodaiken responds by suggesting they

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<sup>18</sup> In *The Herald* article referenced here, Pakkies states that Abie's abuse spanned seven years.

discuss her childhood another time. Here, her reaction to talk of her past gives us some insight into her inner life and her matter-of-fact attitude reflects how Pakkies retells her story in interviews. When he mentions Ellen's mother having had multiple boyfriends and one of them having sexually assaulted her, Ellen explains that she was assaulted many times by, "Uncles, family, strangers, I didn't know" (1:10:50), expressing that she suffered sexual assault at the hands of many different men. Gqola identifies how most women who have survived rape or sexual abuse had been targeted by men that they know (*Rape* 96), which Ellen's off-hand statement here highlights. The severity of the rape problem nationally, and also within coloured communities, is left largely unexplored as an important theme to address. Again, it is also possible that Pakkies' involvement in the film's production prohibited too much attention on this subject. Alternatively, it could have been a creative choice by the production team. Nevertheless, we are provided with a flashback scene, where Ellen is a toddler (1:11:00). While her mother sleeps, one of her boyfriends takes little Ellen to the bedroom where he presumably rapes her. In the therapy session, Ellen reveals that she only learnt of the word 'rape' at 26 years old, and soberly relates the moment she learned a word to describe the years of sexual violence that she endured since four-years-old. Another important caveat here, speaks to the lack of education around rape in coloured communities. Given that *Ellen* is set in 2007, where discourses and awareness regarding rapes was perhaps not as loud as they are now, the point still stands that sharing knowledge on this matter is significant. Pakkies, as a public figure, is also important as a representative of rape survivors on the Cape Flats. When asked by Mr Yodaiken how often she was raped or sexually assaulted, Ellen thinks for a moment and then responds that she does not know. This scene gives the audience a window into her painful lifetime. However, her history with rape is used as a plot device on two accounts; first, it is what causes Abie to become a 'bad son', and secondly it is what saves Ellen from prosecution. Even here, the violating and intimate experience of rape is framed to suit an overarching masculine narrative, rather than as a vehicle to illustrate Ellen's subjectivity.

In *Ellen*, the representation of Pakkies primarily as a mother-symbol detracts from potential conversations around topics linked to male normative violence in the Cape Flats, rape and sexual aggression, and the livelihood challenges faced by women in places like Lavender Hill.

Understanding how Ellen's rape activated Abie's rebellious behaviour is important to mention. Part of the coloured experience involves concealing and sharing information. And, as I have explored in my chapters concerning *Eve* and *What Will People Say?* secrets and *skinner* can play major roles in the shaping of coloured female identities. *Skinderstories* can be regarded as a feminine activity, which Jensen characterises as "strategic reservoirs employed in times of crisis" that functioned as a readily available threat of de-legitimization that could be evoked whenever expedient (164). In

*Ellen*, it is the exposure of Ellen's family secret, fashioned as a *skinderstorie* that sparks Abie's deviant behaviour and eventual demise.

The extended family members are gathered at Ellen's eldest son Colin's home in Atlantis, where they are *braai'ing*, playing card games and socialising together (00:11:19). Uncle Stan accuses Odneal of cheating during their card game, who in turn brushes off his outburst by saying he is too drunk to see straight. Upset by this, Uncle Stan attempts to physically assault Odneal before Abie intervenes. In the confrontation, he reveals a secret and it is interesting to see a man dipping into a presumably feminine tactic in the scheme of *ordentlikheid* warfare. However, while *skinner* is stereotypically associated with women this scene illustrates that men engage in gossip too. Arguably, this female stereotype protects men from being viewed as gossips. He claims that Abie is not Odneal's son and that everyone knows of Ellen's 'dirty stories' (00:12:08). Everyone at the *braai* looks on at the confrontation, casting sideways glances to one another as the gravity of this accusation sets in.

I would like to pause here to briefly mention the significance of a *braai* being used as a social setting to convey the pivotal moment of Abie's turn away from his family and good son identity. The term 'braai', according to Lexico.com, is shorthand for '*braaivleis*' and is defined as a "barbeque where meat is grilled over an open fire". The activity of *braai'ing* has its roots in Afrikaner culture (Wicomb, "Culture beyond colour" 64), but it has arguably been absorbed into national culture as a distinctly South African activity. South Africa's National Heritage Day being renamed to National Braai Day in 2005 (Sihlangu) illustrates this point. In "Culture beyond Colour? A South African Dilemma", Wicomb mentions the impact that the cultural activity of *braaivleis* has had in the hands of non-Afrikaner cultures, where *braai'ing* is translated into activities that recast the activity within more sinister parameters. In this essay, Wicomb refers specifically to the black township punishment of necklacing (64), but it can also be read in reference to coloured culture. In the scheme of re-appropriating cultural affairs according to racial and cultural groups, within coloured communities the *braai* space can be considered as a problematic site underpinned by bickering that has the potential to develop into violence. As outlined in "Whiteness, Racism and Afrikaner Identity in Post-apartheid South Africa",

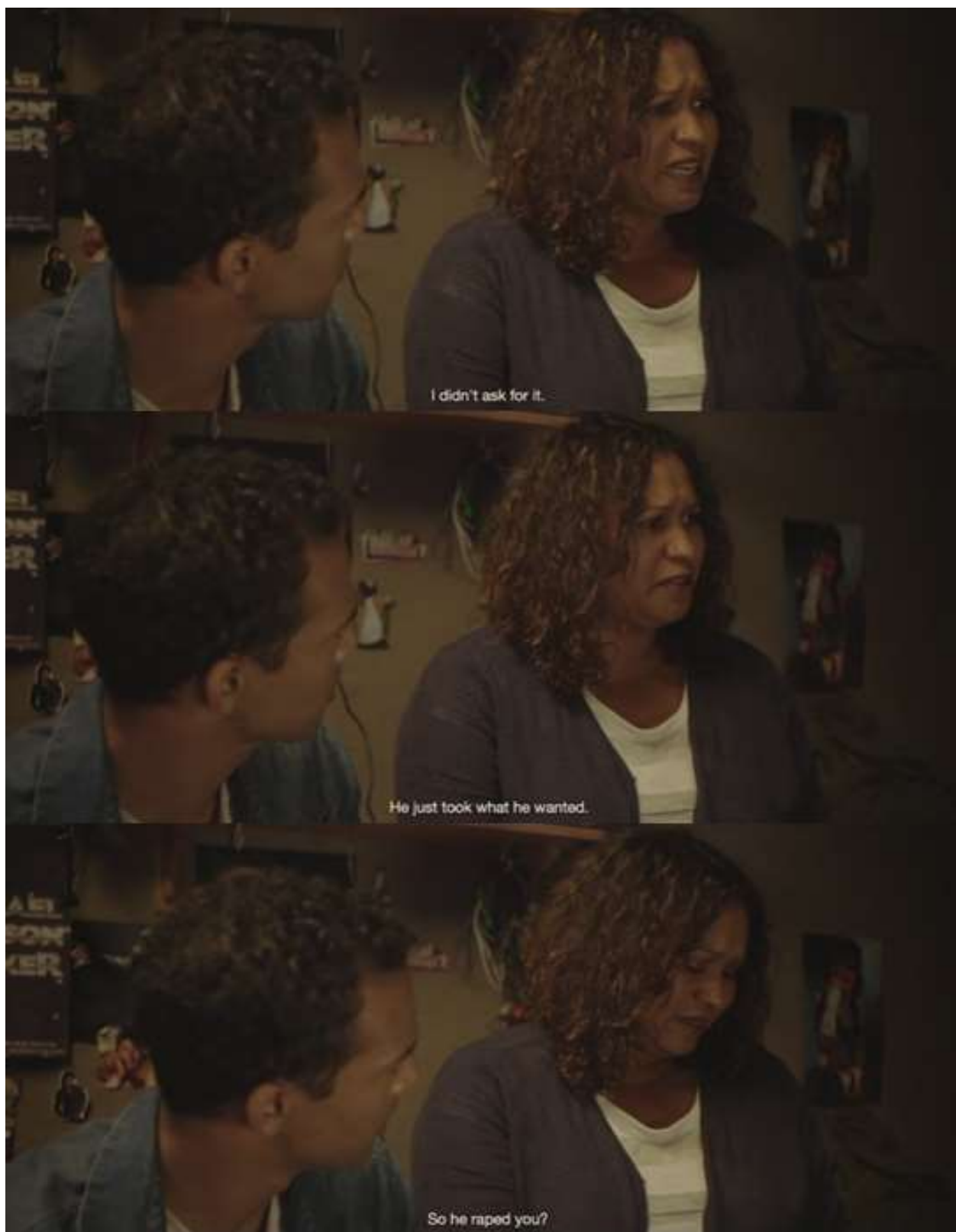
The social context of a private braai ... produced a racially and culturally homogeneous private space, and elicited the type of in-group talk that ... is rarely spoken in public or mixed settings. Of course, the braai is a distinctive social arena associated with alcohol, rugby, hunting, meat, and hypermasculinity (Verwey & Quayle 558).

Verway and Quayle's study reference Afrikaners specifically, but their summation of *braai* culture is neatly encapsulated and applies to coloured cultural groups in similar and diverging ways. In *Ellen*, Uncle Stan is drunk and emboldened by the supposedly safe environment of the private setting of the *braai*, and is prompted by his conflict with Odneal to reveal Ellen's secret. He does this as means to assert said hypermasculinity, which Gqola defines as "a heightened claim to patriarchal manhood, to aggression, strength and sexuality. It is effectively manhood on metaphoric steroids" (154). On the one hand, he aims to punish Odneal for challenging his claim of cheating at their card game. On the other hand, within this altercation his *skinner* also serves as a tactic to position himself as a 'real man' in contrast to Odneal by delegitimizing his role as father and insinuating that he is a weak and servile man in his choice to raise a child borne from rape.

Importantly, Uncle Stan chooses to frame this information as a fault of Ellen's, by implying that her 'dirty stories' indicate a promiscuous reputation that is widely known by the community. Uncle Stan is a character familiar to many coloured families: the uncle who gets drunk at family gatherings, is loud and aggressive, reveals secrets and tells lies, and sometimes even directs inappropriate comments to his young nieces. He was purposeful in his framing of the facts; he chose to humiliate the Pakkies family in front of everyone, to expose a truth and present it in a way that casts Abie as a product of shame, Ellen as a disgraceful mother, and Odneal as a weak man.

Following the events of the *braai*, Ellen sits with Abie on his bed and explains that she was raped (00:14:45). It is visibly difficult for her to share this information with him; she stumbles over her words and avoids directly answering Abie's questions about his biological father. While Ellen struggles to explain herself, Abie jumps to conclusions that she cheated on Odneal and Ellen's response is 'that it wasn't like that' and that the other man just 'took what he wanted' (00:14:55). Where she avoids using the word 'rape', Abie does not, and both are shaken by this interaction. In this exchange, Abie enacts power over his mother by using the word "rape", thereby asserting his identity in a moment where he feels his identity is breaking down. This foreshadows his future behaviour as a harmful man created by harmful men, with his father as a rapist and his Uncle Stan as an instigator that activated his identity crisis and also pre-empts his threat to her in later interactions between them. As expressed by Gqola in conversation with John Perlman from Kaya FM, "Talking about something that is traumatizing ... sometimes the mere mention, the mere thinking, the mere evocation of it can re-traumatise" (13:01). In *Rape*, Gqola explores this notion in detail in the chapter "Rape Myths", noting that victims and survivors of rape can be re-traumatized in a form of second-hand victimisation (143). The response from Ellen suggests this re-traumatizing effect that her son has evoked. This scene is also pivotal for Abie in his transition from good to 'bad son', in speaking the unspeakable into reality. As mentioned, rape appears to be used primarily as a

plot device and the extent of Pakkies' experiences are not fully unpacked; we are not shown how Ellen manages her own traumas, only the coping strategies employed for dealing with Abie.



**Figure 2.** Still from Joshua, *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies* (00:14:45).

## Regarding interiority

One scene in *Ellen* that visually relates her painful experiences with Abie and her thoughts on the situation is during the sequences that relate her questioning by the state (1:41:20). While in court for her crime, the film again swings between the two timelines to illustrate the details of Abie's death. As Ellen describes to the court the morning of the murder – details that are accessible through multiple news outlets via first-person interviews – we are given visual insight into how she strangled Abie, as well as narrated descriptions of what, how and why she did it. We see past-Ellen the morning of her crime, discarding rubbish while present-Ellen explains how dire her living situation was at the point. Abie was stealing everything from his parents, including her underwear, and she relates that she had nothing left. She then is shown preparing and delivering Abie a cup of tea, and her behaviour and actions appear deliberately detached. Ellen betrays no sadness, or rage, or any emotion beyond unresponsiveness, and explains to the court that she was tired, sick, and felt imprisoned in her own home. As she carefully and gently secures the rope around Abie's neck and the bedposts, she explains that she only wanted to talk to him and have him understand the suffering he is causing. Throughout this interaction, while Abie suffocates, Ellen appears composed (1:46:47). She embodies the mental disassociation that her psychologist had previously argued for. Present-Ellen explains how calm she was, that she felt no anger and only wanted quiet, how she wanted to feel peace for one day, to not live in fear or have to pray for safety every day. Ellen's time on the stand provides us with rich insight into her thoughts and feelings, as she details the terror and desperation she felt daily for six years.

Visually, this court scene conveys the frustration and anguish she had experienced as a result of Abie. Throughout the film, though, she is continually framed as reactive to Abie's activities, and we are hardly provided with insight into any private, intimate moments. Everything Ellen does frames her primarily as a caring mother, while her roles as wife, community member, breadwinner, church sister and rape survivor are under-represented or function as plot points. The effect then is that her thoughts, her interiority, is left to the imagination of the audience. Or rather, for the audience to draw on prior knowledge of Pakkies' life based on national news reports, documentaries, or a stage play. In this way, given the accepted and supported storyline that public discourse has built around Pakkies, we are essentially left to fill in the blanks of her inner life according to what we supposedly know; that she is a loving mother, who tried everything to help her *tikkop* son and having exhausted all options, murdered him.





**Figure 3.** Clark, Erin. *Crime scene photo courtesy of South African Police Services*. Vice.com. 2 Jan. 2010. Web. 18 October 2019.



Drawing on Baderoon's project to read absences and trace neglected elements of the past (22), there is something to be said about the representation of women's bodies in a post-apartheid South Africa during this moment of bold retellings of personal, painful narratives. As already discussed, Pakkies is candid and unapologetic about her history of sexual abuse. Her speaking out on this topic ties into a dynamic national movement that touches on the interplay between silence and reclamation. Women of colour sharing their stories is a powerful tool in the scheme of reclaiming agency and controlling their own narratives, as it sheds light on female experiences that have suffered from erasure or suppression. Figures like Oprah Winfrey and Maya Angelou, for example, have openly detailed their experiences with sexual abuse (Gwala, *Feminism Is* 203) and have contributed to the drive behind women telling their own stories in the project to supplement dominant, masculine discourses. In sharing this pain, whether via *Oprah Master Classes*, Maya Angelou's poetry or the recorded interviews of Pakkies, the significance of personal narrative and life-writing is re-mapped by positioning the "co-ordinates of private, individual experience onto a vast – not to mention public – cultural canvas" (Gill & Waters 7). In other words, women telling their own stories not only speak back to dominant, usually masculine discourses, it also instigates cultural change.

## Conclusion

In *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies*, we are provided with a filmic retelling of a South African legend that draws on the popular and constantly reproduced rhetoric regarding the drug scourge on the Cape Flats. Released during a national moment where personal narrative is hungrily consumed by South African audiences primed by a tradition of truth-telling, *Ellen* reanimates a 10-year-old story and re-broadcasts a tale from an angle that frames Ellen primarily as a desperate but respectable mother. From the beginning of the reports on this case, back in 2007, we can trace a consistent narrative provided by Pakkies that details her life experiences before and after Abie's death. Although fragmented and spaced over the course of a decade, there are nevertheless identifiable threads of female subjectivity. Her dealings with rape, prostitution, the isolation she felt during Abie's reign of terror, and her relationship with religion as a tenet to her identity, outlines a rich interior life that the film showcases in part. However, I argue that the exclusions in *Ellen* regarding her interiority can be read alongside the archive of news reports that reveal Pakkies' inner life, by providing a visual representation of the social issues connected to her lived experiences. The contemporary creative movement that showcases coloured lived experiences, whether through memoir, non-fiction or film, indicates a growing interest in the topicality around people of colour's subjectivities. For women of colour, there is a marked surge in material and authors like Mohamed Dawjee and Baderoon illustrate the significance of exploring personal narratives and painful histories, a trend wherein Mrs Pakkies and *Ellen* can be included.

## Chapter Five – *Melanie's Ghost*

### Introduction

“When it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more. Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange – when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her – isn’t it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood – doesn’t it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?” (Coetzee 158).

When Lucy Lurie is raped by three men at her small-holding in the Eastern Cape, she asks her father, David Lurie, if “sex with someone strange” feels like “getting away with murder”. Her query poignantly highlights parallels with Lurie’s own encounter with his coloured, female student, Melanie Isaacs, who reports their sexual encounter to the university and which results in disgrace for him. What makes Melanie’s experience remarkable is the fact that while she *did* tell of her sexual violation, her story is not told to us, the readers. Their relationship is entirely framed through Lurie’s perspective, and his biases expose a big blind spot that highlights rape culture in South Africa and the myths which continue to cast rape not as violence, but as a type of ‘bad sex’. Pumla Gqola, in interview with John Perlman from Kaya FM regarding *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, has articulated this disconnect in rape culture:

Rape works as though it is sex, whereas in fact it is violence ... and so I think the mystification and our queasiness generally to talk about sex ... spills over into this thing that actually isn’t sex at all because we, in large part, think about rape as a kind of bad sex rather than as a kind of violence (17:02-17:27) ... The sexual organs in a rape function in the same way that a knife might in a stabbing. And we don’t spend forever thinking that there’s an association between a stabbing and butchery (18:12-18:26).

Gqola’s work in debunking rape myths, alongside Coetzee’s representations in *Disgrace* (1999), prompts questions about the nature of rape within the South African literary context, how interracial rape configures into public imagination, where the boundaries of rape as a violent act extend to, and how sympathies (or empathies) are structured in rape narratives.

As noted by Linda A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver in their introduction to *Rape and Representation*, it is crucial to pay attention “not only to who speaks and in what circumstances, but who does not speak and why,” in order to unravel the gaps, contradictions and censorships that accompany these narratives (3). Similarly, Gqola reminds us of the value of this approach to “read

silences not as absences but as spaces rich with meaning” (*Rape* 171). With regard to Melanie and Lurie, elements linked to notions of “white peril”, histories of hidden and silenced Black bodies, as well as questions around politics of *ordentlikheid*, come to the forefront. For all intents and purposes, the ghost – or memory – of Melanie haunts Lurie as he navigates the fallout of his disgrace. Throughout the novel, he remains blind to his role as a rapist; he does not see their “love making” as moments when he trapped her, held her down and put all his weight on her. He believes things could have turned out differently between them, that perhaps there was a future relationship that could have been had (Coetzee 171). When she lies slack underneath him on the living room floor, her passivity contributes to his pleasurable climax and later (19), in recalling their encounter he likens her to a dead person (89), but still he does not fathom that their encounter could have been perceived as rape by her, because his reading categorises their encounter not as one of violence, but as a type of sex.

This chapter is an attempt to locate the ghost of Melanie inside and outside of narrative spaces. Using Melanie’s character within ghostly parameters is partly a creative exercise, and partly a framework through which the invisibilities and erasures of rape representations can be scrutinised. Recasting Melanie with qualities that speak to notions of hauntings and the kinds of eerie presences that accompany feelings of terror assists in debunking narratives of rape in South Africa. Additionally, by uncovering the intricacies of literary rape representation, it opens up considerations of Melanie’s rape in allegorical parameters; her rape speaks to themes that coincide with coloured cultural pain points. In this way, looking at rape in metaphorical terms underlines the intrusion and disruption enacted on a cultural group of people, and the silences, grief and pain that accompanies loss of dignity, heritage and memory. Rape in South Africa is an epidemic and can be traced to slave-holding times. Sex, whether consensual or not, has been used as a tool to control conceptions of race and police Black sexualities (Baderoon 85). For women of colour, sex and rape occupy an entangled history twisted together with invisibility, concealment, secrecy, shame and indelible identity-making properties. This entanglement, as Sarah Nuttall notes, “speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited” (1), and can be considered as a prominent feature of coloured femininity. The racial entanglement, of having mated with the coloniser (Wicomb 92), bearing products of “miscegenation” with skin tones that lodge race into the body, exemplifies the intimacy Nuttall refers to. *Melanie’s Ghost* is my effort to trace rape within literal and metaphorical parameters, and investigate the “resisted intimacies” interwoven in coloured cultural history. In the literary sense, using Melanie’s encounter as a prompt for discussions where her repeated sexual violations have been overlooked as “not quite rape” or as an “affair that turned sour”, contentious narrative territory is highlighted. Lucy Graham, in “Reading the Unspeakable:

Rape in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*", points out that a measure of responsibility is consigned to readers in their receptions of rape representations (434). This speaks to a broader problematic of rape's position in public imagination and in *Rape*, Gqola addresses this phenomenon. In context of rape narratives in coloured communities, Graham's point also foregrounds the hidden problems that undergird coloured cultural understandings and reactions to intraracial sexual violence.

By touching on *Unconfessed* (2007) by Yvette Christiansë, returning to *What Will People Say*, and looking at the poetry of Gabeba Baderoon, I am concerned with using Melanie's encounter as a means for reading literary rape representations in South Africa. I unpack topics linked "white peril" and the "unspeakable", the significance of female-authored texts representing rape, and the value of rewriting the physical violence into rape scenes. From discussions centred on slavery, colonisation and the effects generated by a sexually violent society, I move towards an examination of South African gender-based violence and trace its representation in the literary over time. Finally, by looking beyond the physical violations experienced by Melanie and other literary characters, I wish to read rape in allegorical terms, using poetry by Baderoon, namely "The Flats" and "The History of Intimacy", to stage the significance of intrusion and violation in coloured cultural history. It is also important to note that within this chapter I have remained aware of my subjectivity and proximity to rape as a coloured South African woman who has encountered instances of sexual violation in varying degrees of violence. In many ways, Melanie's ghost haunts spaces outside of the literary: her story is not unique and her spirit occupies every feminine body that has resisted, remained silent or broadcasted their experiences<sup>1</sup>.

### **A starting point: Rape through time**

The role of sex and sexuality in colonial Cape Town can be considered as deeply entangled with formations around coloured identities and Black bodies. Achille Mbembe in *Critique of Black Reason*, has pointed out how Blacks were conceived as ontologically inferior to whites (17), which was an ideology that emerged alongside slavocratic systems worldwide. Race, as Gqola explains, has everything to do with sex (and also rape when viewed as a type of sex, rather than an act of violence) (*Rape* 37), since conceptions of racial identities rested on the supposed racial hierarchy that white supremacist systems upheld. The paradox of racial boundaries however, laid in the policing of sex across racial groups while raping Black female bodies and thereby creating hybrid

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is a reaction to the memory of my own experience with a white male educator and his abuse of power. On one occasion, I was the only person of colour in my graduating class. I was the object of a particular educator's unsettling gaze, which was disarming, violating and not without racial implications. After re-reading *Disgrace* earlier this year (2019), Lurie's characterisation reminded me of my own "Lurie", and Melanie reminded me of myself. Fortunately, the Lurie in my story did not pursue, stalk and rape me. But it is only through my memories and experience that the idea for "Melanie's Ghost" came to life.

races. This inconsistency in ideology however, serves as an entry point to trace the formation of gendered identities, where public panic around “black peril” gained momentum (Baderoon 86-87). Where enslaved Black women were viewed as hypersexual, white women were seen as vulnerable and in need of protection from potential sexual violence by enslaved men. While the image of the sensual and abandoned slave legitimised white men’s sexual exploitation of the enslaved, at the same time colonisers felt a growing threat of sexual violence against white women by the large number of Black slaves present (86). The panic and anxiety generated by Black male sexuality supported the perceived threat of miscegenation, but obscured the systematic sexual violence enacted against Black women (87). In other words, white slaveholders and colonisers were allowed to abuse Black women because their supposed inherent licentiousness invited it, whereas enslaved men and their proximity to white women justified fears of rape and contributed in the general policing of sexuality and racial boundaries. Of course, the glaring contradiction of colonial thought is, in one way, illustrated by the constant reproduction of racially mixed babies who were conceived through rape, born as slaves, and owned by slaveholders who in turn expanded their own power as well as their wealth (Gqola, *Rape* 41). The ongoing loop of sexual violence against enslaved women being rendered invisible in the face of “black peril” pulls into focus the resulting consequences on Black, South African identities. For Baderoon, sexual violence lay at the core of the Cape’s slaveholding society, and the extent and scale of slavery’s legacy has critically impacted South African culture. Within cultural parameters, the sexual aggression inherited from slave and colonial times contributes to, “the present-day epidemic of sexual violence, and the combination of silence and denigration that greets sexual violence towards black women in South Africa,” which Baderoon identifies as direct legacies of slavery (87). In coloured communities, sexual violence has become commonplace and to an extent, a trope in the configuration of identities and stereotypes. Coloured girl bodies have to come to represent sites of extraordinary violence that symbolise both culpability and violation, living representations of forbidden sex.

In considering questions around the significance of historically sexualised and violated coloured bodies, I am concerned with how rape and culpability configure into stereotypes of coloured girls and representations thereof in literature. My study aligns with Nuttall’s notion in the chapter “Girl Bodies” in *Entanglement*, that increasingly high statistics of rape,

ha[ve] forced scholars to see the profound significance of sex and gender relations in South Africa’s history of race. This is so much so, (that) it is now clear that these relations are central to the fate of South Africa and are of non-negotiable significance to the country’s capacity to reconcile with itself (136).

While notions of national reconciliation are beyond the scope of my thesis, Nuttall's assertion here raises a pertinent point linked to the widespread and ongoing consequences of gender-based violence. This is a deep-rooted and longstanding problem that ties in with what Ferial Haffajee, in *What if There Were No Whites in South Africa?* (2015), calls the "unfinished business" of the past that is "catching up. Loudly. Scarily. Persistently" (43). At the time of writing, protests against the alarming rise in gender-based violence appears central to public discourse<sup>2</sup>, where calls to action for some type of resolution or justice for rampant female sexual violation is being demanded. As Lucy Graham states in *State of Peril*, despite there being no reliable statistical evidence that proves an increase in rape since 1994, given that all statistical data over the last two decades has remained high indicates the pervasiveness of rape as a major but hidden problem that pre-dates apartheid (4).

### **Repositioning the unspeakable: Rape in context**

Gender-based violence characterises South African culture and can be traced not only through historical record and statistical numbers, but also within literary texts. Graham's study reveals a South African obsession in literary representations of interracial rape, which is striking for a country where intraracial violations are ongoing and widespread (5). This "obsession" can perhaps be best understood in reference to *Disgrace*. The rape of Lucy by a group of black men is arguably one of the most discussed rape scenes of modern literature, whereas Melanie's rape has been viewed as an 'affair', a 'seduction' or a 'brief liaison' as Graham points out in "Reading the Unspeakable" (440). The contrast between Melanie's reception compared to Lucy, speaks back to what Baderoon discusses, where white male license to Black female bodies was acceptable (and even expected) during slave-holding or colonial times, in comparison to the fear of "black peril" and the urgency to protect white feminine purity. There is something to be said here about the academic response to these two representations of rape and the stance of sympathy that has historically been adopted in favour of Lurie, specifically with regard to how problematic it is to overlook – or not classify – Melanie's bodily violation as "Not rape, not quite that" (Coetzee 25). In *State of Peril*, Graham touches on this predicament of "white peril stories" (6) by concluding that all interracial rape narratives are complex. However according to Graham, one could argue that these representations "have historically been used for legislation against 'miscegenation'", citing Sarah Gertrude Millin's work as a specific example of literature that conceived of interracial sex in "violent and abased terms" (7). In "Reading the Unspeakable", Graham draws on this concept of "white peril" again, suggesting that Coetzee was self-conscious in his narrative representation of

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<sup>2</sup> During August and September 2019, there was a marked rise in gender-based violence, which sparked a national reaction calling on the state to deliver harsher punishments to rapists. The torture, rape and murder of Uyinyane Mrwetyana was the straw that broke the camel's back, which came to light following a series of brutal reports regarded as gender-based violence.



Melanie's rape. Graham argues that Lurie's blindness to his predatory sexual actions, and his refusal to acknowledge that his encounter with Melanie could have been non-consensual in any way (437), illustrates Coetzee's acknowledgement of the contradictions and ambiguities at play regarding conceptions of "black (and white) peril".

With "white peril" stories having a tendency to be marked by conceptions of miscegenation, with interracial sex conceived of as abject, lays a consideration for these stories to recover repressed topics. Christiansë shows how the narrative of Sila van den Kaap in *Unconfessed* illuminates the horror of constant rape and violation by white colonial men. In a post-apartheid context, this novel speaks back to the ideological structures in place that makes it easy to overlook Melanie's rape as an 'affair'. *Unconfessed* repositions notions of "white peril"; instead of framing interracial sex as a dangerous downward slope to miscegenation, it makes space for reading Black life during times where their experiences were shaped and documented by forces beyond their control – in this case, the slave owner and coloniser. While this text is considered a work of fiction, the story of Sila is based on the true records of a slave woman, which Christiansë researched for twenty years in order to bring to life (Baderoon 94). By focusing on providing insight into the (nearly) invisible life of Sila, we are provided with a re-imagining of slave life, and what Black enslaved women were likely to have experienced during this period of South African history. Sila's story foregrounds the violence, tragedy and injustices experienced by Black women during a historical moment that has constantly been minimised and portrayed as picturesque (84). By re-addressing and re-imagining non-white cultural identities through the literary, the silences and ambiguities of hidden histories are recovered. Specifically regarding the hidden but pervasive problem of rape, the "distortions of the archive" (22) as Baderoon calls it, speaks to the tensions between the speakable and unspeakable. Gqola insists that "meanings created in fiction seep out into worlds beyond the fictional worlds of the novel", and that "[w]e cannot allow the silences to stand for absence, to say this never happened" (*Rape* 172). For Gqola, fiction is helpful as a tool to flesh out fragments of the unspeakable that are "not fully told as stories". *Unconfessed* is one example of this.

South African literary representations of rape seem to no longer class sexual violation as "unspeakable", and perhaps *Disgrace* influenced contemporary approaches to rape stories within local literature. In a country where the "unspeakable" is intimately present through first or second-hand experiences and is a constant threat in women's daily lives with regular reminders served via shocking news reports, it would seem absurd – even disingenuous – for South African stories to *not* feature rape. Narratives of all genres can be considered as important tools for unpacking traumatic or painful histories marked as "unspeakable", and these works also act as texts through which entanglement and readings of intimacy can be scrutinised. In making space for the untold stories of



women like Sila, and Sandra Charles' Eve, the broader scholarly project of understanding colouredness is filled with texts that act as magnifying glasses of the minutiae of everyday lives. It is crucial to understand that these fictional-presenting characters form part of the historical legacy of coloured, female identities in contemporary South Africa. By providing a voice and an interior life for these characters, the "unspeakable" is highlighted in ways that subvert historical recordings, underlines the vacuums that various systems of power have created within racial and cultural ambits, and foregrounds the value of representing marginalised, invisible and disremembered perspectives.

### **Representations of rape**

In my concerns around coloured female identity and the various historical conditions that contribute to the shaping of identities, I have, with the exception of *What Will People Say?*, discussed rape at length. In this chapter, I am concerned with exploring whether racial identities configure into these scriptings of rape and bear any value, especially in context of *Disgrace*, where the scenes of violence were elided or framed as "not quite rape". Looking at Higgins and Silver's query of the significance of rape representation in male texts, they ask what role male authors play "in uncovering the structures that brutalize women's bodies and erase their subjectivity" (4-5). Their line of inquiry continues into questions of "masculine sexual anxiety or guilt" and whether male writers recognise their part in perpetuating violent, gendered systems. Conversely then, their line of inquiry engenders questions around women writers and their engagement with rape narratives, and how representations of masculinity, femininity and subjectivity differ (if at all). This avenue of inquiry ties into Higgins and Silver's suggestion that it is important to listen to who does and do not speak, under what circumstances, and why (3).

Similarly, then, is the connected point of who is reading, engaging or interpreting a text, and under what circumstances and why these texts illicit certain responses. I am drawn to Zoë Wicomb's "'Good Reliable Fictions': Nostalgia, Narration, and the Literary Narrative" as I navigate the role of remembrance and nostalgia in context of rape narratives and allegories. According to Wicomb, "it is through affective and cognitive processes that we encounter the narratives of others and make analogical links with the self, where the act of telling, the narration itself, engages us and produces empathy" (205). In other words, through the telling of stories, and particularly narratives that cover painful topics linked to South Africa's turbulent history, remembrance can be evoked to generate empathetic responses. Gqola, however, reminds us that "empathy is not an automatic response" and is often in contest with other responses (*Rape* 170). I am self-reflexive in my own readings of rape

representations and gendered violence, and whether I resist or embrace empathetic responses; I am aware of my intimate link to encounters of rape.

However, it is also worth noting how topics, like rape, could only be spoken about within a post-apartheid social climate. Like the story of Sila, broadcasting stories of rape experienced by Black women during times where white rule and the attached ideologies prevailed was simply not possible, renders these belatedly published stories as a necessary avenue of inquiry to explore. It is also important to remember that these stories are precisely that – literary representations that feed into the narratives of South Africa's pasts (172), given that many things continue to remain “unsayable” (170). Returning, again, to Wicomb who, in “Culture Beyond Colour? A South African Dilemma”, speaks of the New South Africa as being “umbilically linked to the matrix of apartheid so that parturition is a slow affair” (59), suggests the inherently painful process attached to post-apartheid literary narratives. In Wicomb's words, “weaning from the old is radically different for different racial groups”, and in texts centred on coloured cultural history the process has been especially belated. As explored in the previous chapter regarding *Ellen*, the recent upsurge in representations of coloured life has focused on the autobiographical and themes connected to the Cape Flats that, incidentally, features a lot of rape. The core texts I have focused on in this thesis have in each case, whether directly or indirectly, engaged with the legacy of apartheid and the socioeconomic fallout thereof. It is no coincidence that apartheid features heavily in coloured narratives, and its pervasive influence in our stories can be summed by Haffajee's claim that “Our country is stuck between people who want to move on – for whom the past is a hindrance; the people who feel we can't move on because the past is still their present” (67).

### **Representations of rape: Revisiting *What Will People Say?***

The single rape scene in *What Will People Say?* is brief but jarring, in that it represents the gang rape of Shirley, Nicky's best friend. Suzette comes close to rape but is saved by her friend Charlene, who she asks to keep an eye on her (Rossouw 29). Suzette's encounter highlights the tactics women employ to protect themselves and one another in a culture where women are expected to be vigilant of male bodies and their *potential* to be violent. Shirley's rape is represented from the perspective of Anthony Fourie; as readers, we are provided with insight into his thoughts, emotions and reaction to the violent encounter. In this way, the scene is positioned from a masculine viewpoint, and Shirley's interiority is inaccessible. Here the imaginative exercise of ‘putting ourselves in her shoes’ can easily be reached through first or second-hand experiences – coloured, feminine readers who have experienced rape or sexual violation can draw on memory to empathise with Shirley. Arguably, choosing to not script her interiority creates space for subjective reflections of rape, highlights the

contexts in which coloured girl bodies are violated in Cape Flats' spaces, and speaks to Wicomb's point about producing empathy in readers. By framing her sexual assault from Anthony's perspective, Rossouw reaches beyond a reading that illuminates the phenomenon of silence; she restores "rape to the literal, to the body; restoring, that is, the violence – the physical, sexual violation" (Higgins & Silver 4). Rossouw's use of language in the description of Shirley's rape assists in 'restoring rape to the literal'<sup>3</sup>. Anthony refers to Shirley's vagina as a "toet", how he kept his eyes fixed on her "hole" while his "piel was hot" (Rossouw 196). This encounter is characterised by how Anthony views Shirley as an available "toet", minimising the reality of the rape happening; he is more concerned about losing his virginity and the sexual learning curve – he is absorbed with his technique and notes how, "Shirley did nothing to help him; he had to do everything", while the Junk Funky Kids (JFKs) surround him and chant his name with encouragement for him to "'Naai haar Anthony, naai haar!'" After his climax, Anthony takes stock of the encounter, while his fellow JFKs proceeded to rape her; he sees "two rivers of tears" running down her face, her screams stifled by "the panties in her mouth", and the "dark brown blood" covering his "piel" (197). He vomits, questions what he has done and assigns partial blame to his sister Nicky for not paying attention to him when he tried to ask for help (198). Rossouw's description of Shirley's gang rape, as presented from the gaze of a male boy, is striking and uncomfortable to read. By not providing insight into Shirley's interiority, attention is brought to Anthony's thinking and his comprehension of rape as a violent, intimate and intrusive act. The language that Anthony uses reduces Shirley to a sexualised and debased female body, which potentially exemplifies the problem of how rape is understood and undertaken by males. This scene, when considered in conjunction with South Africa's colonial history and apartheid conditions that enable male sexual violence against women, provides insight into the question of why men and boys rape.

The aftermath of Shirley's rape is represented in fragments; we only see how she stumbles out of the shack (186), how she coldly receives Nicky days after the attack (207), and how she dumps her baby in Nicky's care several months later (316). The details of Shirley's life are omitted from the broader Fourie storyline but the circumstances which shape her story are comprised of familiar elements that are recognisable in coloured female narratives. Her rape, resulting unwanted pregnancy, and her complete disappearance from the community and the moral economy, are components of the "old story". There are strong intersections here between Baderoon's reading of Christiansē's poem "Sunday School" with Rossouw's scripting of Shirley's rape. "In the 'old story',

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of gendered language and common South African swear words that show traces of slavery, see Baderoon's *Regarding Muslims*, pp. 96-97.

the woman is ‘hunted’ by the men ... emptying her fate of meaning and her life of any other details”, and by representing Shirley’s rape with graphic imagery that re-inscribes the embodied reality of rape into the text, then assists in framing it as “a story not obscured by the tired familiarity of violation” (Baderoon 89).

In addition to this, Shirley’s rape evokes the even older story of employing sexual violence as a means to control, subjugate and punish. This ties in with patterns of male normative violence inherited from colonial times (89), as well as the connection between ‘rape’ and ‘war’ being an idiom pulled from what Gqola calls “the colonial archive” (*Rape* 48). The JFKs raped Shirley for two reasons: first, as a gang initiation tactic for Anthony to prove his loyalty to them, and secondly, to send a message to a rival gang. Sexual violence forms part of conquest; the JFKs had intended to abduct and rape Shirley’s sister, who was the girlfriend of the rival gang leader, but they secured the wrong target. Through her peripheral association with a gang, Shirley was caught in their warring activities, which also highlights the widespread vulnerability of women in coloured, gang-riddled environments. In *Gang Town*, Don Pinnock explores how rape is weaponised among warring gang factions, and quotes a girl gang member published in a text based on London gangs. She states that, “rape is used for everything ... If someone wants to get a rival in another gang, they might rape a sister or a girlfriend” (130).

Connected to the point of vulnerable girl bodies in Cape Flats spaces, is a related point about the sexual entanglement that undergirds coloured people and spaces. The idea that Black bodies were available for sexual violence is a concept that appears to have persisted in coloured spaces and grown alongside social conditions that have arguably exacerbated the problem. Rampant drug use and omnipresent gang fear and violence contribute to the problem of rape, and underpin a notion that nobody is safe, irrespective of gender, age or social standing. The possibility of being raped is open to all and can conceivably be carried out by any male: gang members, drug addicts, good sons, uncles and strangers. This point is presented in *What Will People Say?*, when Anthony is detained by the JFKs and set to be killed; he imagines that he will be gang raped like Shirley was, as a means to teach him a lesson for his desertion and initiate the new member who ultimately kills him (Rossouw 244). The overarching idea that no person is safe is a problem that Jensen explores, with relation to how the *skollie* stereotype is permanently lodged within the bodies of coloured men. It would be remiss to claim all coloured men have the potential to be rapists, but at the same time, it would be disrespectful to minimise the legitimate fear that vulnerable coloured women (and men) feel with regard to rape. As stated by Gqola, “All men, no matter what race, class or religion have patriarchal power and can choose to brutalise and get away with it” (151). It is a self-sustaining loop that functions as a ‘dark underbelly’ of the Cape Flats; the *skollie*/rapist stereotype persists through

high volumes of news reports on rape, which then feeds into fears of being raped, which in turn perpetuates the stereotype.

### **Rape beyond the physical**

Returning to “Sunday School”, Christiansē’s narrator laments on the rape of a coloured girl, wondering how “it must have been, giving/ birth to broken things” (lines 20-21). This statement, conveyed in the poetic language that Baderoon identifies as a “powerful means to register and name ubiquitous and normalised violence” (90), carries implications that can be read beyond the framework of sexual, bodily violation. In one way, Christiansē speaks to literal childbirth where products of rape are born from “broken things”. The child is a living reminder of the violation and intrusion experienced and can even be conceived of as intrusive itself. The “broken things”, on the other hand, can also speak to a number of intransient topics connected to coloured culture; those “things” that we struggle to speak of – the grief, loss, displacement, and tragedy that was born from being “raped” by extreme white supremacist ideology and policies. And attached to those “broken things” are the resulting fissures created in families, homes, livelihoods, identities and spirits. Continuing with this allegory of rape in a coloured cultural context, Melanie’s stifled story and hidden point of view captures a commonplace treatment of rape in South Africa’s culture of violence, but it also diagnoses the strained relationship between pain and articulation. I could draw on my own family experiences regarding secrecy and concealment to illustrate this point, but I feel Baderoon’s poetic register in *A History of Intimacy* would be more suited here.

In the poem, “The Flats”, Baderoon characterises the Cape Flats as having “sand streets” and “damp walls” (line 14), painting the image of a musty and unpleasant environment. Indeed, the expanse of the Cape Flats area is an unwelcoming space based not necessarily on the people who occupy it, but its geographic location and the inadequate structural facilities provided by the apartheid government. Baderoon explains how her parents were “removed/ to a place you cannot trace from here” (lines 11-12), conveying the liminality of the Cape Flats itself, as well as the people forced to inhabit it. The outcome of the Group Areas Act, which removed coloured residents out of the city centre to the Cape Flats from 1966 to 1981 (Wicomb, “Natural Narrative” 188), can be considered as a kind of parturition – a national ideology that re-birthed cultural groups en masse to a space beyond, outside of the area where whiteness and ‘civilisation’ were permitted to occupy and control. In the sandy and damp spaces of Cape Flats’ areas, communities were built anew, built upon the birthing of “broken things”:

Born in the new place, I was their ghost child,  
a grief growing

Older and older. ("The Flats", lines 20-22).

So too, is this "growing grief" a product of "broken things". Like the bodily violence experienced in rape encounters, where articulating the trauma is painful and subjective to who is speaking, under what circumstances and why, so too is speaking on that "grief". This notion of collective pain is somewhat addressed in the poem, "The History of Intimacy", where Baderoon self-reflexively breaks the fourth wall and directly addresses her mother by asking, "how do I write about you?" (Stanza V line1). In relating a second-hand version of her mother's first-hand experience of her time as a medical student, Baderoon states her mother's response as: "That is my story. That is not your story" (Stanza V line 19). This sentiment, that story ownership belongs to the person who experienced it, is echoed in *Disgrace* by Lucy. She urges Lurie to only relate his version of events, whereas she will tell what happened to her (Coetzee 99). As Graham points out, "the irony is that *she does not tell*, she remains resolutely silent about her experience" (432). Whether painful stories are told by the source, or through a re-telling from a second-hand perspective, unburdening these narratives of rape in both literal and metaphorical capacities contributes to the private, literary and national discourses that shape identities. In the words of Gqola:

Today, we have a Constitution that affirms women's dignity and rights to full humanity; at the same time, there are silences and gaps on the gendered dimension of our past. These silences are directly implicated in the siege under which we live, in the continued dominance of violence across difference areas of South African life ... We are not going to get very far, however, if we ignore our history, since how we deal with our history has everything to do with who we are and can be (61, 70).

## Conclusion

Narratives of rape are particularly pertinent to the coloured story; it can be read as a driving force behind the stereotypical sexualisation of Black girl bodies, the rampant sexual and domestic abuse that exists in the Cape Flats and stereotypes of coloured men, as well as an allegorical framework through which to explore the complexities attached to coloured cultural history. As Baderoon and Gqola show, rape as a colonial weapon of war has persisted since slave-holding times. This, linked with the racial rhetoric of the colonial systems that marked coloured people as shameful representations of miscegenation, has had profound impacts on the ways coloured identity is understood and the contentious, ambivalent attitude that continues to accompany colouredness today. As the local literary tradition of 'truth-telling' becomes emboldened by movements marked by a call (and demand) for intimate and private testimonies, the unspeakable and unusable pasts of the South African archive is being actively revised. In this chapter, I have explored the value of



fiction and poetry in unpacking what has been – and still is – considered as “unsayable”. Indeed, this entire thesis has been concerned with addressing uncomfortable pasts and destabilising notions of coloured identities that have been built within a cultural and moral framework that posits respectability, dignity and sexual modesty as key defining factors of femininity.

The primary texts I have focused on represent female characters or people that illustrate the complexities of living coloured at different junctures in coloured cultural history. *Eve*, *What Will People Say?* and *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies* trace a timeline from 1950s apartheid South Africa to present-day, with each offering insight into the historical and social processes that have contributed towards contemporary definitions of coloured femininity. In similar and diverging ways, these texts contribute towards the historical archive by representing the unspeakable. *Eve* makes room for illuminating hidden histories of Black women whose stories can be mapped on their bodies, during a period where moral codes of *ordentlikheid* and gendered violence paradoxically dominated coloured culture. *What Will People Say?* catalogues the tumultuous lived experiences of coloureds reared in the transitional time of 1980s South Africa, where notions of *ordentlikheid* broke down. Rossouw draws on the intimacy of shared cultural knowledge and experience to script a snapshot of coloured culture that can be recognised by coloured readers; blending fictitious textures with actual memories and experiences makes *What Will People Say?* a mnemonic text that fits in to the South African tradition of truth-telling. The film *Ellen* represents a complex intersection of themes to do with history, coloured culture, narratives of violence and emerging femininities. In unpacking *Ellen* within the scheme of truth-telling, related queries connected to story-telling emerged, specifically in context of how public and private narratives intersect, how exceptionalism flairs up in arguments of who is allowed to share these narratives, as well as the importance of sharing stories in national revisionist efforts of the archive.



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