

Journal of Southern African Studies

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Source: *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Special Issue: Writing in Transition in South Africa: Fiction, History, Biography (Dec., 2004), pp. 731-748

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4133880>

Accessed: 19-09-2016 05:03 UTC

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City Forms and Writing the 'Now' in South Africa*

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This article considers ways of theorising the now, or the contemporary, in South Africa. It seeks a method of reading that offers unexpected and defamiliarising routes through the cultural archive. The article discusses notions of race, class and space both in a general and historical sense and, in the second part, as they relate to new literatures of the city now emerging in South Africa. By focusing on urban 'philosophies' of the street it examines city life and city forms in fictional work on Johannesburg in particular. The article attempts to make an overall argument about how we might read the contemporary South African space.

Introduction

In this article I want to take up the question of how to read the *now*, the contemporary, in South African culture and history. I want to do so because I think that a surprising number of cultural analyses of this *now*, this contemporary, many of them neo-Marxist analyses, start from the assumption that not much has changed in South Africa since the end of apartheid. This is a different point from one that stresses, quite rightly, that many of the inequalities of the past remain in place, particularly for the poor in South Africa. This, in turn, does not exclude the fact that much has changed and that we need theories and ways of reading culture which take into account the extent of the transformations that have taken place. Shaun Jacobs, in his introduction to *Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, the most recent work in cultural studies in South Africa, makes very little headway in reiterating: 'Exclusionary notions of identity, based on race and ethnicity, are still operative among certain sectors of post-apartheid South African society'.¹ Of course. But how do we find a way of accounting for the transformations that are also taking place? Barbara Harlow and David Attwell, in their introduction to a special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* on South African fiction after apartheid, refer to South Africa as 'a society whose underlying social relations or even attitudes remain substantially unchanged'.² This may be partially true in the economic sphere, although even this is not entirely accurate since, for instance, very recent studies are showing that South Africa's black middle class is now, for the first time, larger than its white middle class, a statistic which hardly suggests a stasis in the social structure of South Africa. Certainly, neither recent South African fiction nor

* Thanks to Jon Hyslop, Achille Mbembe, Deborah Posel and Rita Barnard for their comments on this article.

1 S. Jacobs and H. Wasserman (eds), *Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, Social Identities Series (Cape Town, Kwela Books and SA History Online, 2003), p. 1.

2 B. Harlow and D. Attwell, 'Introduction', Special Issue: South African Fiction After Apartheid, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46, 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 1–12.

popular culture would suggest that this is the case. For cultural analyses such as these, many of the old categories that were used to account for the macro-issues of class, race, domination and resistance are consequently still seen to hold in much the same ways as they did before.³

In setting out to theorise the 'now' in South Africa one is undertaking the activity, as I see it, first, of working out what remains of the past, and how we relate to both the past and its remainders, or its traces in the present; and second, of working out our relationship to that which hasn't happened yet, the world of aspirations, the fictions with which people fill the future. I have argued elsewhere, with Cheryl-Ann Michael, that South African studies has, for a long time, been over-determined by the reality of apartheid⁴ – as if, in the historical trajectory of that country, apartheid was inevitable, in terms of both its origins and its consequences; as if everything led to it and that everything flows as a consequence of it.⁵ We worked from the idea that other historical possibilities were out there, and are evolving now, in the aftermath of that oppressive system. That there are continuities between the apartheid past and the present we fully acknowledged. Apartheid social engineering did and still does work to fix spaces that are difficult to break down in the present. There is no question about this. But, we contended, there are also enough configurations in various spheres of contemporary South African life to warrant new kinds of explorations, with new tools of analysis, new archives and new ethnographies. These include city, migrant as well as youth cultural formations. To confine these configurations to a lens of 'difference' embedded squarely in the apartheid past may miss the complexity and contemporaneity of their formations.

In this article, I want to take up and expand three fragments, possible registers or, as I will indicate, methods of reading, for theorising the 'now'. The first has to do with the *créolité* hypothesis we developed in *Senses of Culture*; the second comes at conceptions of race and class in the light of the first discussion, and the third, which forms the bulk of the article, has to do with the city itself and, in particular, new literatures of the city in South Africa. Each fragment or register relates to an overall argument about how we read space.

On Creolisation

One of my interests in reading the 'now' in South Africa has been to consider how aspects of a rich body of international work on *créolité* might raise important questions seldom asked of the South African cultural archive. This interest has developed specifically in relation to how to come to terms with a legacy of violence in a society based on inequality. The assumption, most often made by Marxist critics, has been that processes of creolisation

3 Several analyses have begun to emerge, in particular from 2004, by literary scholars who aim to theorize 'beyond apartheid', but surprisingly few of which actually engage with post-apartheid writing. These include L. de Kock, 'Introduction: South Africa in the Global Imaginary', in L. de Kock, L. Bethlehem and S. Laden (eds), *South Africa and the Global Imaginary*, (Pretoria, UNISA Press and Leiden, Brill, 2004); M. Titlestad, *Making the Changes – Jazz in South African Literature and Reportage* (Pretoria, UNISA Press and Leiden, Brill, 2004); I. Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan – A Transnational History of the Pilgrim's Progress* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press and Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004). See also M. Sanders, *Complicities – The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2002). I engage with each of these texts in my essay 'Desegregating Theory', forthcoming in 2005.

4 S. Nuttall and C.-A. Michael, 'Introduction: Imagining the Present', in *Senses of Culture* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1–23.

5 A similar point is made by Jon Hyslop: 'South African historians have tended to focus on explaining the tragic course of twentieth century South African history in terms of factors internal to the country, and to treat it as in some sense predestined ... there were possibilities and processes contained in the early city's [Johannesburg] existence which we miss out when we simply read apartheid back into it'. J. Hyslop, 'Global Imaginations Before "Globalization": The Worlds of International Labour Activists on the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914' (unpublished paper, 2002).

are devoid of conflict – in other words, that these processes are not grounded in materialities and therefore that the use of the term as a theoretical tool ends up sidelining the more crucial issues of class struggles, social hierarchies and inequalities. In the context of South Africa, theorists have tended to be uncomfortable with debates on creolisation. Two of the major reasons for this have been, first, the presupposition that 'creolisation' is tantamount to 'colouredness' as a biological and cultural construct; and second, the apartheid state's construction of colouredness as a political buffer between blacks and whites, and the interpellation of 'colouredness' as neither black nor white (according to an ideology of racial purity), a notion that was both racist and suspect. Zoë Wicomb, Zimitri Erasmus and Desirée Lewis have all written about 'colouredness' as having been constructed and experienced as a residual, supplementary identity, 'in-between' whiteness and blackness and interpellated in relation to registers of respectability and (sexualised) shame.⁶ Erasmus, in the introduction to her edited collection *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*, argues, however, that 'colouredness must be understood as a creolised cultural identity'. Coloured identities are distinguished not merely by the fact of borrowing *per se*, she argues, 'but by cultural borrowing and creation under very specific conditions of creolisation'.⁷ Creolisation refers, for Erasmus, to 'cultural creativity under conditions of marginality', and she draws on Édouard Glissant's notion of 'entanglement' to elucidate her use of the term. In particular she makes use of Glissant's notion that diversion – turning away from the pain and difficulty of creolised beginnings – needs to be complemented with reversion – a return to the point of entanglement, the point of difficulty.⁸

It seems to me that a 'créolité hypothesis' can be applied to aspects of the South African cultural archive, proposed as one set of questions amongst others in relation to the shaping of racial and cultural identity in South Africa, and offers a programme of possibility in relation to neglected questions and a point of interrogation directed towards a richly complex and extremely conflictual history in a future-oriented way. What many critics of the concept of 'creolisation' tend to overlook is precisely that the notion was born out of the historical experience of slavery and its aftermath. In his pioneering study *Singing the Master*, Roger Abrahams shows how the emergence of a typically African-American vernacular culture was the result of a dual legacy, a syncretic formation that was itself part of the events that brought together both slave and master in the plantations of the Americas.⁹ Focusing on slave dancing practices, Abrahams examines a context in which planters encouraged the display of what they recognised to be slaves' 'different set[s] of cultural practices', while slaves came to recognise in the obligatory play and performance 'an opportunity for cultural invention and social commentary'. Abrahams's overwhelming impression of life on the plantation, is 'that the representations of two cultures lived cheek to jowl for a matter of centuries, entertaining each other, subtly imitating each other in selective ways, but never fully comprehending the extent and meaning of these differences'.¹⁰ It goes without saying that this coming together happens in a context of deep loss: loss of a home, loss of rights and political status, and overall terror.¹¹ When considered

6 Z. Wicomb, 'Shame and Identity: the Case of the Coloured in South Africa', in D. Attridge and R. Jolly (eds), *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy 1970–1995* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998); D. Lewis, 'Writing Hybrid Selves: Richard Rive and Zoë Wicomb', in Z. Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: Perspectives on Coloured Identities in the Cape* (Cape Town, Kwela Books and SA History Online, 2001), p. 133.

7 Z. Erasmus, 'Introduction', in *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*, p. 16.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 24. She shows too, how Africanist discourse (a discourse of African essentialism) denies creolisation and hybridity as constitutive of African experiences, thus excluding Coloured identities.

9 R. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African-American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York, Pantheon, 1992).

10 *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

11 S. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997).

historically, then, creolisation relates to the worst that we are capable of, the maintenance of human beings in the shadow of life and death. Yet, even within this most violent of systems, as recent studies are showing, cultural traffic occurs – mutual mimics, border crossings, mutabilities. The notion itself, therefore, does not foreclose possibilities of ‘resistance’, nor does it deny the material fact of subjection. It signals a register of actions and performances that may be embodied in a multiplicity of repertoires. In this sense, creolisation is first and foremost a *practice*.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that ‘Creolisation is a miracle begging for analysis. Because it first occurred against all odds, between the jaws of brute and absolute power, no explanation seems to do justice to the very wonder that it happened at all’.¹² Although he treats historical situations that come from the Caribbean slave plantation, Trouillot writes that ‘this treatment may be useful to historically-oriented cultural anthropologists and linguists in general, inasmuch as it directly faces the issue of our management of the historical record’.¹³ For the majority of enslaved Africans and African Americans prior to the mid-nineteenth century, creolisation did not happen away from the plantation system, but within it, writes Trouillot. This creation was possible because slaves found a fertile ground in the interstices of the system, in the latitude provided by the inherent contradictions between the system and specific plantations. Trouillot writes about social time and social space seized within the system and turned against it, about the ability to stretch margins and circumvent borderlines which lay at the heart of African-American cultural practices in the New World.

If slavery and the creolisation it produced were crucial to early modernity, it was also crucial to the formation of diasporic communities. The articulation of race to space and motion is an integral part even of recent Marxist readings of early modern forms of racial identity-making. Some of these readings focus on the intercultural and transnational formations of the Atlantic world.¹⁴ This Atlantic world is peopled by workers: sailors, pirates, commoners, prostitutes, strikers, insurrectionists. Here, the sea is not a frontier one crosses. It is a shifting space in between fixed places which it connects. This is indeed a different geography of worldliness that could be opposed to the geographies of particularism and nationalism. It is worth noting here how relatively few theorists have explored these geographies, although the work of John Thompson, Veit Erlmann and Rob Nixon has been important in this regard. One critique of these readings is that South Africa, or the Cape at least, in fact looked to the Indian Ocean, as Robert Shell and Patrick Harries have suggested and as I am currently exploring in my own work with Françoise Vergès.¹⁵ Given its tri-centric location between the Indian and Atlantic worlds as well as the landmass of the African interior, further readings of this space from within a non-national geographic anthropology is likely to reinforce a *créolité* hypothesis.¹⁶

12 M.-R. Trouillot, ‘Culture on the Edges: Caribbean Creolisation in Historical Context’, in B. Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2002), p. 189.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 190.

14 See P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993); and P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2000).

15 See J. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992); V. Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1991); and R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York and London, Routledge, 1994).

16 See R. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope 1652–1838* (Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 1994); and P. Harries, ‘Cultural Diasporas and Colonial Classification: A History of the Mozambique Community at the Cape’, *Social Dynamics*, 26, 2 (Summer 2000). My work with Vergès and also Christiane Rakotolahy (in progress) looks at cultural corridors and diasporic economies in what we call the African South Indian Ocean (South Africa, Mauritius, Réunion, Madagascar and Zanzibar).

Trouillot and others provide a reading of creolisation firmly located within paradigms of violence and mobility, spatiality and circulation, and it is also on such terms, although with its own historical specificities, that any use of the notion in South Africa must be made. South Africa can be characterised as a country born out of processes of mobility, the boundaries of which have constantly been reinvented over time, through war, dislocation and dispossession (the Mfecane, European colonialism, the Great Trek, labour migrancy). A multiplicity of forms of subjugation have emerged as a result of this, not all of which are class-based. Here we might refer to the Mfecane as a series of violent encounters between people, leading to lines of exchange and fusion; or to the mutual borrowings in the realm of domesticity between 'servant' and 'master'; or to long-distance lines of connection in the mines between workers from South Africa and those who come from elsewhere on the continent and beyond, a trans-continental mixing which shaped worker identities and ideologies in South Africa in ways that have yet to be written about.¹⁷ Deborah Posel, in her work, has pointed to the vagaries of racial definition which the apartheid state relied on, a 'common sense' approach to who belonged to which race, based firmly within the materialities of everyday life. Rather than strict legal definitions, apartheid enforcers relied on such measures as the infamous pencil test, the idea that someone's race was to be decided according to 'what was generally accepted' [as white or black or Coloured] or 'the environment and dress of the person concerned'.¹⁸ These 'common sense' definitions were then fixed and bureaucratised by the state. They were also definitions which, once the apartheid straightjacket was broken, appear to have remained internalised. Yet how people actually thought about themselves, and the interstitial manoeuvres they were able to make with this 'common sense' bureaucracy of race, remains to be researched in a properly microscopic way. There is perhaps a further point to be made here, and that is in relation to the work of cultural theory itself. While social scientists seek a view of the social 'whole' and thus often repeat the apartheid metanarrative or prism of race in their interpretation of the social, cultural theory often finds itself freer to ask questions left unasked, to inhabit zones, even of the past, that refute the master trope and give life to interstitial narratives that speak to the whole in defamiliarising ways.

Any deployment of aspects of the work on *créolité* coming from scholars such as Trouillot, Gilroy and Linebaugh and Rediker must involve readings hardly yet undertaken of South Africa's relationship to other spaces, aiming to open South Africa's readings of itself to new boundaries. In other words, in order for the *créolité* hypothesis to be empirically verified, a shift in the reading of the South African space is not only necessary but is the very first gesture. As I have emphasised above, the resources of such a hypothesis in general can only be put to work if the term is given a particular inflection, that is, an attention to its violence. Indeed, why I prefer to revisit the resources of the term creolisation, rather than employ, say, notions of hybridity and syncretism which have dominated postcolonial theory in the last few decades, is that, given a properly historical reading, both in South Africa and elsewhere, creolisation carries with it a particularly vivid sense of the cruelty that processes of mixing have involved. While, to date, we have

17 Patrick Harries' history of Mozambican migrants in South Africa (*Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa c. 1860–1910* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1994)) and David Coplan's study of Basotho migrants (*In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1994)) begin to open the territory, to differing degrees, although still within circumscribed geographical limits. Abdoumalig Simone's work on migrant identities in Johannesburg has yet to make its full impact by tracking the historical dimensions of such mobilities ('Going South: African Immigrants in Johannesburg', in Nuttall and Michael (eds), *Senses of Culture*).

18 D. Posel, 'Race As Common Sense', *African Studies Review*, 44, 2 (September 2001), pp. 102–105.

undertaken few readings of the intimacies, across race and class, that have long characterised a deeply segregated society – that is, the often unexpected points of intersection and practical knowledge of the ‘other’ wrought from a common, though often mutually coercive and confrontational experience – we might equally remark, using the South African case as a particularly powerful moment in a wider global history of race, that intimacy does not necessarily exclude violation. Intimacy is not always a happy process. On the contrary, it may often be another name for tyranny.¹⁹ This all being said, my own intellectual preoccupation here is less with the term ‘creolisation’ as such, than with a way of thinking, a method of reading, the possibility of a different cartography.

Regional Variations

In view of the available historical and ethnographic material, it might be argued that a new method of reading South Africa relies on the history of the Cape. Although this might be the case, such an approach can be usefully applied to other regions of the country. Consider, for example, the density of the circulation of workers through urban sites of production in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Southern, Central and Eastern Africa over centuries. Consider, too, the transnational cultures of the mines of which we still know so little. Do we believe that there was no cross-cultural interaction, that South Africans took nothing from other African migrant workers in inventing an urban vernacular culture they now name their own? Or that the Indian presence in Natal had no influence on ways of being black, or white? As for the political culture of the Bantustans, it surely cannot be unearthed without mapping the imitations by local potentates of their white masters’ culture of power. Conversely, the practice of apartheid tyrants cannot be grasped without paying attention to the various ways in which they subtly and selectively mimicked their very victims, while at the same time denying their common humanity.

More substantial, though, is the evidence already gathered by historians, in particular, on the flexibility of racial boundaries on the Witwatersrand in the years directly preceding apartheid. Jon Hyslop, in his work on white working-class women and the invention of apartheid, shows how the new-found independence of the Afrikaner female working class on the Rand threatened patriarchal relations in white society, and how Nationalist government hysteria about ‘mixed marriages’ performed an important role in re-establishing gender hierarchies.²⁰ In urban slums, whites were frequently not demonstrating an instinctive aversion, socially or sexually, to racial mixing as government racial ideology proclaimed Afrikaans-speaking poor whites in urban areas would. Hyslop shows that these whites would by no means automatically identify themselves as ‘Afrikaners’ and, thus, the extent to which allegiance to Afrikaner nationalism had constantly to be created.²¹ One of the most distinctive features of Johannesburg’s built environment in the inter-war years was the existence of a large belt of slums that spread from the western suburbs across the city centre to the suburbs in the east. Eddie Koch’s work shows how resistance to the clearance of the slums opened a series of conflicts and tensions which delayed the implementation of segregation and allowed the culture of the slumyards to grow and thrive. The extent of the permeability of racial boundaries at this time again reveals the amount of work it therefore

19 See in particular here F. Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* and ‘Postcolonial Challenges’ (Durham, Duke University Press, 1999), in D. T. Goldberg and A. Quayson (eds), *Relocating Postcolonialism* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

20 J. Hyslop, ‘White Working-Class Women and the Invention of Apartheid: “Purified” Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation Against “Mixed” Marriages, 1934–9’, *Journal of African History*, 36 (1995), pp. 57–81.

21 See also C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Ninevah: Studies in the Economic and Social History of the Witwatersrand*, volumes 1 and 2 (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1982).

took to put and keep apartheid in place.²² The degree to which rural paternalism contained egalitarian elements has been debated in relation to van Onselen's *The Seed is Mine*.²³ Interesting, too, in this context is the existence of hybrid border communities: John Dunn's people, and Coenraad de Buys and his descendants, the Griquas, in particular, symbolise what Mostert calls 'a lost route of Afrikaner history'.²⁴ Of de Buys, Mostert writes: 'on the one hand he represented the interracial intimacy and familiarity, on the other the ruthless self-interest, preemptory will and desire and brutality, of relations between those forerunning Boers and the indigenous inhabitants'.²⁵

George Fredrickson, in his book *White Supremacy*, suggests that the Cape really was different.²⁶ He shows that the main external source of attitudes to race mixture in the early Cape colony were the precedents deriving from the Dutch experience in Indonesia, where the trend was towards encouragement of intermarriage in an effort to superimpose on the native social order a new caste of Dutch Christians. The Dutch, not particularly committed to racial purity, preferred to legalise Dutch-speaking Christianised 'mixed-race' people, although the British would later try to establish a clearer basis of stratification compared to what they saw as this racial chaos.²⁷

Recent work by Vivian Bickford-Smith *et al.* on Cape Town's history has tended to de-romanticise the Cape Town story but still contains a lot of material suggesting that Cape Town was much less racially bounded than elsewhere.²⁸ Yet the point I am pursuing here has less to do with the porousness or otherwise of racial boundaries *per se* than with the idea that the more racial boundaries are erected and legislated for, the more the observer has to look for the petty transgressions without which everyday life for both the 'master' and the 'slave' would be impossible. Racial segregation, that is, can only work if, somewhere else, the entanglements, denied precisely to safeguard the official fiction, are also taking place.

The larger question is, therefore, how to find a method of reading the social which is about mutual entanglements, some of them conscious but most of them unconscious, which occur between people who most of the time try to define themselves as different. The more they try to do the latter, the more the critic has to be suspicious of their talk of uniqueness and difference. Such claims, we might well suggest, at least at times repress precisely what draws together, what links, the oppressor and the oppressed, black, white and Coloured. In French, by contrast to English, there is a clear distinction between 'créole' and 'métis'. Creole is used most often to signal newcomers who imposed themselves as natives or ended up being recognised as quasi-natives (WASPS in the USA, French-speakers in Canada). Afrikaners and Indians would thus be the true creoles of South Africa, while colouredness

22 E. Koch, 'Doornfontein and its African Working Class, 1914–1935: A Study of Popular Culture in Johannesburg' (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983).

23 C. van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996).

24 See N. Mostert, *Frontiers* (London, Pimlico, 1993), p. 237.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 238. There was much about de Buys and his descendants' way of life, Mostert notes, that 'always stood as a strange and insistent contradiction of the new South African frontier offered by liberal historians, who for the past sixty years or so have been inclined to regard the eighteenth-century Cape frontier as the original mould from which the rigidities and narrowed racial perspectives of the later Transvaal Boer and Nationalist Afrikaner were cast whole. By them, the frontiersman was seen as implacably hostile to the blacks he confronted, and guided only by his belief in pigmentary superiority, separate destiny and mastership as God's elect in that land.'

26 G. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981).

27 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

28 V. Bickford-Smith, E. van Heyningen and N. Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1999). See also N. Penn, *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth Century Cape Characters* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1999).

may speak to registers of both *créolité* and *métissage*.²⁹ In these respects, it would not make sense to confine our understanding of *créolité* to the Cape past.

Race and Class

Once we take on board a way of reading which is based around mutual entanglements, we are obliged to think of race, class and power differently; in particular, we have to confront what it is that older paradigms are *not* able to show us.

Beginning with race, we might first of all note that the South African academy and beyond has produced many examples of carefully argued work on race and power in that country. Moreover, there is a self-awareness, from within these very traditions, of the limits of dominant approaches.³⁰ In asking how to locate the 'now', the contemporary in South Africa, we have to ask the question, When and how does race matter? Here we might reflect on the fact that race appears to be hardening in the public political realm precisely as legalised racism has been abolished. One example of this is the still recent public correspondence between the President, Thabo Mbeki, and the leader of the Opposition, Tony Leon. While Mbeki accused Leon of publishing 'hysterical estimates' of HIV/AIDS sufferers in South Africa and of 'making wild and insulting claims', along with the international community, about the African origins of HIV, Leon averred that it was 'a fundamental mistake and profoundly misguided to associate matters of race with the AIDS crisis' and that Mbeki was using 'tactics of moral blackmail or demonisation'.³¹ After 1994, moreover, what used to be called 'non-racialism' is seldom much heard in political discourse. This is closely related to the fact that since, under apartheid, racial discrimination was crucial to the twin issues of work and wealth, in the post-apartheid period the politics of black empowerment play an important role in shifting institutional power politics.

This hardening is taking place at the same time as more choices are becoming available in terms of racial identification, especially in the sphere of culture. The pragmatics of 'non-racialism' or 'cross-over culture' are now expressed through other vehicles, and in particular through powerful new media cultures and the market.³² There is, as yet, only the beginning of new work and theorisation of these cross-over or post-racial configurations which reinvigorate the political utopias of these terms, extraordinary ethnographies emerging by young scholars such as Nadine Dolby,³³ Tanya Farber³⁴ and Mpolokeng Bogatsu.³⁵

29 At the same time, we might also consider that British settlers became to some degree creolised in colonial settings. See for example, J. Hyslop, 'Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish: Military "Scottishness" and Social Power in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 47 (November 2002).

30 See C. Hamilton, 'Historiography and the Politics of Identity in South Africa' (unpublished paper, conference on 'Problematising History and Agency: From Nationalism to Subalternity', University of Cape Town, 22–24 October 1997) and Hyslop, 'Global Imaginations before "Globalization" '.

31 Correspondence between Tony Leon and President Thabo Mbeki, between 7 July and 5 August 2000. In this correspondence Mbeki twice charges that he and Leon, and by implication those that they represent, 'originate from different planets with radically different value systems' (17 July, 2000).

32 See S. Nuttall, 'Stylizing the Self: The Y Generation in Rosebank', *Public Culture*, 16, 3 (2004), pp. 430–452.

33 N. Dolby, *Constructing Race: Youth, Identity and Popular Culture in South Africa* (New York, State University of New York Press, 2001). Dolby argues, on the basis of detailed ethnography carried out at a KwaZulu lower-middle class school, that 'taste' increasingly replaces orthodox versions of race and culture in such a way that race becomes both highly charged and increasingly unstable in its meanings.

34 T. Farber, 'Loaded with Labels: The Meanings of Clothing Amongst Urban Black Youth in Rosebank, Johannesburg' (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2002). Farber examines intra-racial and intra-class identities in youth culture in Rosebank, Johannesburg.

35 M. Bogatsu, "'Loxion Kulcha": Cultural Hybridism and Appropriation in Contemporary Black Youth Popular Culture (South Africa)' (Honours research paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 2003). Bogatsu's study of 'loxion kulcha' in Rosebank unearths an economically hybrid, globally inflected cultural space in which township culture comes to occupy what she calls 'the subjective centre of the city'.

In relation to studies of class in South Africa, emphasis has been oriented towards the working class, while fewer studies have focused on peasant or rural culture, and one might add, on middle-class migrant and city cultures in South Africa.³⁶ How can we re-imagine its usages? Where is class located? If popular culture replaces church, neighbourhood and family as dominant sites for the making of identity, how class-bound is it? As I show in my work on 'Y' or 'loixon' culture, remarkably similar processes of identity-making, especially in the realm of popular culture, emerge between 'working' and 'lower-middle class' school kids in Durban and 'middle class' teenagers in Johannesburg.³⁷ What kinds of imperfect meshings occur between myriad individual lives of 'making do' and larger kinds of political categories? How do sharp technological change, new forms of power, demographic upheavals, urban growth, challenges to stable identities, bureaucratic expansion and deepening market relations affect the making of social lives and the construction and deployment of class identities?

Tim Burke's work suggests that class – perhaps not class formations exactly, but relations of economic and social power – needs to be thought of in a much less mechanical way than it has been to date.³⁸ Burke, in his study of commodity culture in Zimbabwe, shows the complexity of 'proletarianisation' in a colonial context, and even of the day-to-day living out of poverty and privilege. Questions of class will need to be posed in a context in which not only South Africa has changed, but so too, has capitalism. Jean and John Comaroff's work on 'millennial capitalism' suggests that the new South African nation-state is not only new in itself, but operates in a new world: it must achieve modernity in a postmodern world of 'casino capitalism'.³⁹ This is a historically new situation, both internally and internationally. Production, as it was known before, is increasingly being replaced by the provision of services – the capacity to control space, time and the flow of money through speculation. Speculation is practised not only by the middle classes, for poor people also frequently participate in high-risk investments such as the lottery. In higher echelons, dealing in stocks and bonds whose rise and fall is governed by chance, results in new cultures of circulation. All this points to new temporalities or velocities of the social. James Campbell has written how, given South Africa's elaborate tradition of labour repression, scholars have focused their attention on production, leaving consumption as something of a 'historical orphan'.⁴⁰ South African theorists have yet to give an adequate account of these new configurations of the political economy and of culture, and for this reason it is more important than ever to pay attention to those archives still at times undervalued and, in any case, under-written by historians and anthropologists in South Africa. One of these archives is that of the city – and the literary – itself.⁴¹

36 For a useful analysis of the changing foci of class analysis, see B. Bozzoli and P. Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', introduction to 'History From South Africa', special issue of *Radical History Review*, (1990), pp. 46–47.

37 Nuttall, 'Stylizing the Self', p. 8.

38 T. Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1996).

39 J. and J. Comaroff (eds), *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2001).

40 J. Campbell, 'The Americanization of South Africa', in A. Offenburger, S. Rosenberg and C. Saunders (eds), *SAFUNDI – A South African and American Comparative Reader* (Safundi Publishers, 2002) Accessed online at www.safundi.com.

41 I am not suggesting that studies of the cultural dimensions of city-living are by any means non-existent. See for example E. Hellmann, *Rooyard: A Sociological Survey of an Urban Native Slumyard* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1948), as well as extensive work on Sophiatown and other parts of Johannesburg in both history and fiction. My point is that more attention needs to be paid by social scientists in particular to literary archives of the city, to fiction as ethnography and to the theorising of the city *as city* – or *citiness per se* (see below).

The City

In terms of the overall argument that I have been making so far in relation to race, class and space and the contexts of both violence and transformation-as-entanglement to which they speak, the city becomes a key archive from which to read these configurations. Until recently, the city in South Africa has been read largely within the framework of the political economy of urbanisation, segregation and underdevelopment. Far less attention has been paid to its cultural dimensions as *city life and form*. This is true despite important work by scholars such as Lewis Nkosi,⁴² Paul Gready⁴³ and Rob Nixon⁴⁴ on Sophiatown and the cultural world of the 1950s. These writers did each consider the famed Johannesburg suburb, later forcibly removed from the city, as the locus of a dazzling new cosmopolitan world providing the engine for new black writing; the site of a tension-filled inter-racial frontier, and a place in which claims to the city were fortified through the Harlem renaissance. Nevertheless, it is true to say that most work on the South African city, including that by literary scholars, has focused on themes of African urbanisation, the squalor of African working-class life, the dangers of the city for Africans and so on – themes which presumed to supersede, while also continuing nevertheless to draw on, the tropes of the earlier ‘Jim comes to Jo’burg’ thematic.

Post-apartheid fiction offers a fruitful site for understanding city-culture in a more extended idiom – the intricacy of the city as a spatial formation, its density as a concentration of people, things, institutions and architectural forms; the heterogeneity of lives juxtaposed in close proximity, the citiness of cities, the ways in which they gather, mix, remix, separate, conceal and display and the ways in which urban life becomes the irreducible product of mixture, each urban moment sparking performative improvisations which are unforeseen and unforeseeable.⁴⁵ The city of Johannesburg has emerged as the primary site for the creation of the social imaginary in much of the newest writing. The city in fiction, that is, has become a vivid and explicit template for an entire array of social fears and possibilities.⁴⁶ Yet, to date, it is urbanist Jennifer Robinson who has offered the most overt methodological challenge:

The transition from apartheid urban space to – something else – draws our attention from the fixing moments of these historically divided cities to experiences of mobility, interaction and the dynamism of spaces. The enthusiasm for change, which is symbolised by the end of apartheid, not only sets out a new way of relating to space now; it also suggests that we look again at experiences of apartheid spaces. Were those spaces so fixed, so divisive, so certain in their form? Our imaginations have lived for so long with the lines of apartheid city space, with the blank spaces in between, the deadening images of power drawn on the ground. We have uncovered many reasons for the emergence of these dividing lines: sanitation, health, planning, government, administration, policing, racism, disgust, employment, class, development strategies, industrialisation, political order ... Can we begin to shift our experiences and our visions to capture and understand the world of always-moving spaces? What do the spaces of change and dynamism look like? In what sense was even the apartheid city – a city of division – a place of movement, of change, of crossings?⁴⁷

42 L. Nkosi, *Home and Exile* (London, Longman, 1965).

43 P. Gready, ‘The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties: The Unreal Reality of Their World’, in S. Newell (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Fiction* (Oxford, James Currey and Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001).

44 R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood* (New York and London, Routledge, 1993).

45 I am indebted here, as I am throughout the next section, to the important work of Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, in their book *Cities – Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002).

46 See L. Gunner, ‘Writing the City: Four Post-Apartheid Texts’ (paper presented at Advanced Research Seminar, WISER, University of the Witwatersrand, 24 February, 2003).

47 J. Robinson, ‘(Im)mobilizing Space – Dreaming of Change’, in H. Judin and I. Vladislavić (eds), *Blank – Architecture, Apartheid and After* (Rotterdam, NAI publishers, 1998). D7, ‘Imagining’ (p. D7).

When Robinson asks whether apartheid city spaces were 'so fixed, so divisive, so certain in their form', she does so *not* to underestimate their oppressiveness but to understand city-worlds as always-moving spaces. She begins her narrative of 'changing space' with the figure of Toloki in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*:

In the afternoon Toloki walks to the taxi rank, which is on the other side of the downtown area, or what is called the central business district. The streets are empty, as all the stores are closed. He struts like a king, for today the whole city belongs to him. He owns the wide tarmac roads, the skyscrapers, the traffic lights, and the flowers on the sidewalks. That is what he loves most about this city. It is a garden city, with flowers and well-tended shrubs and bushes growing at every conceivable place. In all seasons, blossoms fill the site.⁴⁸

Toloki passes across the lines of the apartheid city, across its cruel divides; he generates crossings, not so much, as Robinson notes, undoing the spaces of poverty as refusing to treat those spaces as one-dimensional.⁴⁹ We are in the realm of Lefebvre's 'representational space', and each time we move, we potentially use space differently. Robinson views the apartheid city from the fresh, experimental vantage that is opened up by the transition. The new South African city is still a space where nightmarish divisions may be witnessed and where the fear of crime delimits dreams of truly public space.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, she suggests that we think not only in terms of fixed structures, but also in terms of movement, journeys through the city.⁵¹ In re-reading the city as an 'always-moving space', Robinson also attempts to find a way of conceptualising the 'now' which is the focus of this article. This conceptualisation of the now is also, as I have attempted to show above, a re-reading of the historical archive, in this case of the city itself.

It is in the last decade or so that an international body of work on the city has emerged which has turned for inspiration to, but also begun to critique, the writing of Michel de Certeau⁵² and Walter Benjamin.⁵³ It has returned to these writers, as Amin and Thrift note, as part of a struggle to name neglected urban spatialities and to invent new ones, and to use hybrid, in-between figures to connect that which has been held apart, thereby revealing the diverse urban worlds that have been edited out of contention.⁵⁴ De Certeau's key insight was that people use cities by constructing who they are, producing a narrative of identity. They write the city without being able to read it – they don't know how their individual paths affect the city as a whole. They make a sentence or a story of particular places in the city, while the city is not available as an overview – the city is the way that it is walked. Much of an earlier terminology of location and mobility – vocabularies of the nomad, the decentred, the marginalised, the deterritorialised, border, migrant and exile – by contrast was seldom attached to specific places and people, representing instead ideas of rootlessness and flux that seem as much the result of ungrounded theory as its putative subject.⁵⁵ More recent studies, building on Benjamin, want to see walking in the city as a conscious cultural act, less analytical than improvisational. Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur* (the aesthetic bohemian, drifting through the city like a film director) invites us to read the city from its street-level intimations, to encounter the city as lived complexity, to seek alternative

48 Z. Mda, *Ways of Dying* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 46.

49 Robinson, '(Im)mobilizing Space', D7, 'Imagining'.

50 See L. Kruger, 'The Restless Supermarket: Narrative, Capital and Urban Form in Inner-city Johannesburg' (unpublished paper).

51 I am grateful to Rita Barnard for our discussions on this point.

52 M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984).

53 W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge Mass. and London, The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002 [1982]).

54 Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, p. 4.

55 R. Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York, Viking, 2000).

narratives and maps based on wandering.⁵⁶ He used the term transitivity to grasp the city as a place of intermingling and improvisation, resulting from its porosity to the past as well as varied spatial influences. Benjamin was also overwhelmed by the city's theatricality, its passion for improvisation, its ironies.⁵⁷

As critics have drawn increasingly on the work of de Certeau and Benjamin, there has been a new focus on the citiness of cities, especially the spatial and temporal openness of the city; the city as a place of manifold rhythms, forged through daily encounters and multiple experiences of time and space; and the city as a series of imprints from the past, of the daily tracks of movements across and links beyond the city.⁵⁸ The spatial and temporal porosity of the city and the idea of urban imprints or footprints, contests the idea of the city as an ordered and segregated pattern of mobility, and reveals myriad other trails of mobility in the city (commuters, shoppers, tourists, children, the homeless).⁵⁹ Zygmunt Baumann, while considering figures who walk the city, writes about the pilgrim, a figure as old as Christianity, a walker who is focused only on his/her destination, who is dissatisfied with the present, the now. Baumann describes the pilgrim's successors in the Western metropolis: in addition to the *flâneur*, there is the tourist (for whom the city is a spectacle; the player (who knows the rules of various urban games); the vagabond or vagrant (who moves at the borders of the establishment through the practices of transgression); and the commuter (who treats the city as a place you enter, park in, work and leave – an autopolis)⁶⁰. We could add the figure of the *sâpeur* – the figure of spatial transition, operating in the interstices of large cultures, participating in a cult of appearance, involving expensive French clothing; a mobile individual who, following Janet MacGaffey and Remi Bazenguissa-Ganga⁶¹, creates ramifying networks extending through time, space and multiple cultures as he circulates between countries, pulling off *coups* in otherwise invisible spaces in and between cities.

All of the above constitutes a body of literature that tends to overstate the city as a space of open flow, human interaction and proximate reflexivity. Although the figure of the *flâneur* links space, language and subjectivity, critics such as Amin and Thrift are now showing how it (a) virtually silences what the experience of the *flâneuse* might look like – a gender-related city consciousness; (b) fails to consider whether the transitivity of the contemporary city, based on an endless spread and multiple connections, is best grasped through the trope of wandering/wondering – or requires other imaginary means;⁶² (c) underestimates the extent to which striating openness and flow are a whole series of rules, conventions and institutions of regulation and control (much of what goes on in cities is centred around the practice of biopolitics, of engineering the body and its senses – and life more generally – so as to produce governable subjects);⁶³ (d) neglects or underplays the evocations of strangers from afar, often with a sense of place that draws rather more from a diaspora imaginary than from locality itself; as it does (e) night rhythms and their ordering technologies.

To grasp the rhythms of the city, Lefebvre, Amin and Thrift invoke 'rhythm-analysis', practised at a 'spectral' distance. If the reflexive wanderer reads the city from *within* and *with* a certain poetic sensibility, 'spectral analysis' contemplates

56 Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, p. 11.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

60 Z. Baumann, 'From Pilgrim to Tourist or a Short History of Identity', in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London, Sage, 1996).

61 J. MacGaffey and R. Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo-Paris – Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law* (Oxford, James Currey and Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000).

62 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

the rhythms of the city from a more detached vantage point.⁶⁴ As part of this analytic project, we need to try to establish what philosophies of urban space and city form are emerging in the fiction of a metropolis like Johannesburg. Titlestad has observed that such a city has been characterised less by practices of *flânerie* and drifting than by a set of divisions contrived by law, surveillance and threat, hostile to errant and nomadic meaning, to improvised selves and versions of social hope.⁶⁵ Yet, as Amin and Thrift warn, we need to be careful about (how we analyse) space:

The city allows for juxtapositions at all kinds of levels – the meeting in the street, the rich and poor areas cheek by jowl, the lack of control of public spaces and so on. All kinds of forces may conspire to nullify these juxtapositions ... But the fact remains that the city, through these juxtapositions, is also a great generator of novelty.⁶⁶

City Texts

Phaswane Mpe's novel *Welcome To Our Hillbrow* explores, via a modality of pedestrian enunciation, the inner-city quarter of Hillbrow, in Johannesburg.⁶⁷ At a number of points in the novel, Mpe's character describes how to cross this part of the city, for instance:

Your own and cousin's soles hit the pavements of the Hillbrow streets. You cross Twist, walk past the Bible Centred Church. Caroline makes a curve just after the Church and becomes the lane of Edith Cavell Street, which takes you downtown; or, more precisely, to Wolmarans at the edge of the city. Edith Cavell runs parallel to Twist. Enclosed within the lane that runs from Wolmarans to Clarendon Place (which becomes Louis Botha a few streets on) is a small, almost negligible triangle of a park. On the other side of the park, just across Clarendon Place, is Hillbrow Police Station, in which you take only minimal interest. Crossing the park, you walk alongside the police station, still in Clarendon Place. A very short distance later, you join Kotze Street. In Kotze you turn right to face the west.⁶⁸

Mpe offers a revised inventory of the city, comprising a path along its streets, both tracking and breaching historical constructions of city space. Built sites along the streets symbolise specific practices, demarcate racial identities in particular ways and in turn determine *how* one walks.⁶⁹ Thus one might feel oneself to be at the 'edge of the city', 'enclosed within the lane', 'walking alongside', or 'facing west', depending on where one is – a complex combination of built structure and felt identity. Significantly, Refentše takes 'only minimal interest' in the Hillbrow Police Station, one of the most notorious sites of apartheid police repression in the city. Street names, too, mark the trace of the colonial and apartheid epistemologies and practices but these proper names, as de Certeau notes, also make themselves available to the diverse meanings given to them by passers-by in the now, detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting points on divergent itineraries.⁷⁰ These words operate in the nature of an emptying out and wearing away of their primary role, as de Certeau sees them, and insinuate other routes into the functionalist order of movement.⁷¹

64 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

67 At least 90 per cent of Hillbrow's population live in blocks of flats. The remainder live in hotels, on the streets, in domestic quarters on the roofs of blocks of flats or in the negligible number of residential homes still standing. As Alan Morris notes, Hillbrow is one of the very few neighbourhoods in South Africa that, despite the Group Areas Act, moved from being an all-white neighbourhood (in terms of flat dwellers) to being predominantly black.

68 P. Mpe, *Welcome To Our Hillbrow* (Scottsville, University of Natal Press, 2000), p. 10.

69 I am grateful to Tom Odiambho for our discussion on this point.

70 De Certeau, 'Walking in the City', p. 104.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 105. As de Certeau further puts it, a migrational, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.

Throughout Mpe's novel, the streets are marked by 'incidents': certain things happen with greater intensity or regularity in certain streets, and where the danger spots are is a matter of great contention. The coming of what Mpe calls 'black internationals' into Hillbrow invoke the streets and their names as 'receptacles for other routes'. If Mpe doesn't know who Edith Cavell or Wolmarans are, he knows or chooses to remember that the Hillbrow Tower is really called the JG Strijdom Tower and recalls the civilised labour policy of the 1930s, as well as the historical irony that Hillbrow is now a largely black neighbourhood.⁷² Hillbrow, for Mpe, is figured as the partial and now patchy inventory of the old apartheid city and as the revised inventory of a largely black, highly tensile, intra-African multiculturalism. At the beginning of his book, Mpe makes it clear that the novel's preoccupation with writing the map and navigating the streets, has much to do with the figure of the migrant itself: 'Your first entry into Hillbrow was the culmination of many converging routes. You do not remember where the first route began. But you know all too well that the stories of migrants had a lot to do with its formation.'⁷³ It is the figure of the migrant that comes to overlay the earlier trope of race, and even dominates the always-moving dynamism of urban spaces that the novel explores.⁷⁴ Mpe's focus on the figure of the migrant echoes Alan Morris's 1999 study of Hillbrow in which he finds that, while race and racism in Hillbrow are still beset with contradictions and anomalies, most respondents (84 per cent) felt that racial barriers had broken down and that acts of overt racism were not common. On the other hand, the more than 23,000 Congolese and 3,000 Nigerians living in Hillbrow faced xenophobia and 'political racism' in a context in which the anti-apartheid struggle did not breed a pan-Africanist consciousness, or an instant ethos of international solidarity or respect for diversity,⁷⁵ but which is nevertheless leading to the unofficial forging of the highly tensile beginnings of an 'Afropolitanism'.⁷⁶

Mpe's enunciation of the street echoes (although with different historical and contemporary inflections) Zimbabwean novelist Yvonne Vera in her novel *The Stone Virgins*:⁷⁷

Selbourne Avenue in Bulawayo cuts from Fort Street (at Charter House), across Jameson Road (of the Jameson Raid), through to Main Street, to Grey Street, to Abercorn Street, to Fife Street, to Rhodes Street, to Borrow Street, out into the lush Centenary Gardens ... Selbourne carries you straight out of the city limits and heads all the way to Johannesburg like an umbilical cord, therefore, part of the city is here, its joy and notorious radiance is measured in the sleek gestures of city labourers, black, who voyage back and forth between Bulawayo and Johannesburg and hold that city up like a beacon. They have learned something more of surprise, of the unexpected: of chance.⁷⁸

Here too, street names offer an inventory of the city, a colonial inventory, and, as in Mpe's novel, they also map alternative itineraries, black and intra-African itineraries, journeys back and forth, measured in the 'sleek gestures of city labourers' who have been to

72 E-mail correspondence with the author, 12 April 2003.

73 Mpe, *Welcome*, p. 2.

74 Of course migrants are not necessarily 'always-moving' figures, but may instead be forced to follow well-beaten tracks. In the case of Johannesburg, it may rather be the new black middle classes who are really 'on the move' in the city. Nevertheless, in fictional representations, migrants are shown, thus far, to be quintessentially 'moving' figures.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 316. See also A. Simone, 'Going South – African Immigrants in Johannesburg', in Nuttall and Michael (eds), *Senses of Culture*.

76 See N. Hoad, 'Welcome to Our Hillbrow: An Elegy for African Cosmopolitanism' (forthcoming).

77 By turning to the work of Vera here I am not implying that there is a lack of South African material to pursue. There are many obvious examples to take up, including, most obviously, Jonathan Morgan's *Finding Mr Mandini* (Cape Town, Ink, 1999). What I intend to signal here is the existence of a transnational imaginary of the city, one which has hardly yet been pursued by literary critics and social scientists.

78 Y. Vera, *The Stone Virgins* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2002), pp. 3–5.

Johannesburg and back. Walking on the streets and avenues of Bulawayo has a very particular history for black Zimbabweans. A bylaw drafted in 1898 prohibited 'Kaffirs, Basuto, Hottentots, Bushmen and the like' – later lumped under the single designation 'Native' – from using the pavements in Bulawayo. The measure was implemented in 1894. After that date, as Vera writes in her earlier novel *Butterfly Burning*:

The black people learn how to move through the city with speed, and due attention, to bow their heads and slide past walls, to walk without making the shadow more pronounced than the body or the body clearer than the shadow ... The people walk in the city without encroaching on the pavements from which they are banned.⁷⁹

Terence Ranger, writing of this extraordinarily neurotic colonial attempt to control space,⁸⁰ notes:

Thus white Bulawayo proclaimed its triumph. Nevertheless the new town was in reality very much a shared creation of whites and blacks. White masters depended on and lived cheek by jowl with black servants. Black labour built the streets and buildings of the town (Vera writes of her novel's hero, Fumbatha, all his life he 'has done nothing but build and through this contact, Bulawayo is a city he understands closely, which he has held, brick by brick, on his palm ... he has built. When he is dead, his hands will remain everywhere'). Side by side with the white city, there grew up an African town.⁸¹

Vera overwrites this history of oppression and entanglement with another, transnational, migrant city-history, casting it in terms of black agency and subjectivity. Bulawayo and Johannesburg are intimately connected and the migrant is the figure who has learned of 'surprise', the 'unexpected' and of 'chance' which come with the transgressions of national space and of identity, often under conditions of need, linked to survival itself. Both cities are made from links to communities and constituencies other than the city as such; both are about themselves and about somewhere else, producing contingencies that make each city become fluid to itself.⁸²

Ivan Vladislavić, in his novel *The Restless Supermarket*, also depicts a city that has become fluid to itself.⁸³ The novel is once again set in Hillbrow and Aubrey Tearle, its main protagonist, is an old hand at the Café Europa, their most venerable patron, an incorrigible 'European', as he describes himself, playing on the name of the café, though he has never been to Europe. Tearle is a disgruntled, ageing white man, a proofreader by profession, who devotes his life to the task of eradicating error. Tearle is obsessed with language, a device the author uses to place language itself at the very heart of his narrative of the post-apartheid city. Tearle is preoccupied by the maintenance of 'standards',⁸⁴ of order, and prides himself on his 'sense of discrimination',⁸⁵ his 'civic duty',⁸⁶ his decency, his 'respect for rules and regulations',⁸⁷ and so on. His epistemological fetish soon segues into a political predisposition towards the maintenance of apartheid social engineering and censorship. The novel is set at the time of the political transition and Tearle is not taking it well. On the wall of the Café Europa is a painting of the imaginary European city of Alibia, and when

79 Y. Vera, *Butterfly Burning* (Harare, Baobab, 1998), p. 6.

80 T. Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning* (forthcoming) notes that 'What one may call pavementia perfectly expressed the surreal absurdity of proclaiming segregation while simultaneously demanding constant service and even bodily care from Africans' (ms, p. 59).

81 *Ibid.*, ms, p. 7.

82 M. Titlestad, Creative Writing MA Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 25 April 2003.

83 I. Vladislavić, *The Restless Supermarket* (Cape Town, David Philip, 2001).

84 *Ibid.*, p. 259.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Tearle hears that the Café is to close, he is most saddened by the loss of Alibia, which is really the loss of old Johannesburg:

The impending loss that grieved me most was Alibia, the painted city that covered an entire wall of the Café. I imagined workmen in overalls slapping polyvinyl acetate over our capital without a second thought. It should be moved to a new location, I decided: sawn up into blocks, numbered and packed, transported to safety, and re-assembled. The Yanks were all for that sort of thing, carving up the world and recycling it as atmosphere. I don't know why I was thinking this way. After all, it's no Florentine fresco, it was of no historical significance, nothing important had ever happened in this room. There was no point in preserving any of it. It was merely – that phrase so beloved of Lost and Found columns came to my head – 'of great sentimental value'.⁸⁸

The loss of the fantasy of Europeanness is also the disappearance of Hillbrow, and even Johannesburg, as it used to be – a largely white, orderly suburb inhabited by large numbers of Eastern European immigrants who benefited from apartheid privileges. The Café is about to be closed, in favour of a 'warehouse or a disco or a chicken outlet',⁸⁹ and Tearle fears that with it will go his fantasy of 'elsewhere'.

Instead of being 'knocked down and carted away', however, Alibia is still there, 'lights twinkling gaily in the dark' and 'the big wheels turning'. But the Goodbye Bash for the 'Café Europa', or the old city, and its 'citizens of elsewhere' – the demise of Alibia – is the coming into being of the new Hillbrow:

...The Café Europa had been trashed. That was the word for it. We picked our way through the debris of paper cups, monkey vines of coloured streamers and tinsel and toilet paper, tattered dollars, carrot tops, bottles of every shape and size, the jeweled shards of the stained glass. And Cheese Snacks everywhere, crunched into powder, like shed gilt. The newspapers lay scattered on the carpet, with their pages curling from the wooden spines, like moths that had flown too close to the chandeliers. I was tempted to take one of the staves as a keepsake – but that would reduce me to the level of vandals. I would take nothing more than was mine.⁹⁰

The trashed city, the debris of paper cups, the tattered dollars and Cheese Snacks, the vagrant in the making that Tearle is about to become: this *is* Hillbrow. The Café Europa is a figuring of the street of the new city. Tearle describes the brilliance and banality of the metropolitan city street, strewn with old newspapers, its beauty and violence ('moths [that fly] too close to chandeliers'). In the final scenes of the novel, he finds himself out in the streets of Hillbrow, his skin increasingly 'gray' in colour, with a young Coloured woman called Shirlaine, eating chicken at a chicken outlet. Tearle, perpetually out of touch with his city throughout the novel, even though he calls himself a 'true Johannesburger',⁹¹ finally comes actually to inhabit its streets, to fall kicking and screaming into the future.

In Johannesburg's northern suburbs, there have often been sharp differences between those who walk – some children, many black adults – and those who do not. As these suburbs deracialise, it is still the case that many in the middle classes seldom walk, at least not in suburban streets.⁹² In Muff Andersson's novel, *Bite of the Banshee*, urban space is negotiated through talk, walking the city is talking the city, as the new middle class hang

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹² See N. Gordimer, *The House Gun* (London, Bloomsbury, 1999).

out in Rosebank, Killarney and Melville.⁹³ The book is described as 'créole' in form by its author, and written out of a local mix of the romance and melodrama of West African fiction, Mbembe's relations of abuse in the postcolony, Bakhtin's dialogic voicing, and post-traumatic stress after being beaten up in her flat.⁹⁴ Its *créolité*, as the white author writes in the voice of a black woman, is to be found, amongst other places, in the way stories are told, the way the city is written. In these stories, the horrible and the ugly surface in light, sharp banter, in a way that is so much part of contemporary South African culture. The novel name-drops, as does the new celebrity culture of the suburbs, and is written in the spirit of the new journalism, in the style of Hunter Thompson, in which 'resemblance to real life figures is "entirely intentional"'. In this novel, Hillbrow is where Pindi and Cornelius go to escape their right-wing fathers (only hers is rich while his is poor and dispossessed, she is black, he is white) to make love.

Conclusion

The task of this article has been to suggest ways of theorising the 'now'. Implicit in that task has been, first, an attempt to understand how and on what terms the past inhabits the present in South Africa, the forms that its remainders and traces take in shaping the 'now'. Second, has been an attempt to come to terms with a theory of race in particular, but also class, that takes cognisance of the shifting parameters of the present, but also enables an interrogation of the archive of the past in ways that might be defamiliarising. It has sought a theory of race and space which is: (a) grounded in the materialities of conflict, violence, social hierarchy and inequality; (b) which understands the making of race identity in terms of cultural traffic – mutabilities within a system of violence, border crossings that do not deny the material fact of subjection, and registers of action and performance which may be embodied in a multiplicity of repertoires; and (c) which is embedded in processes of mobility, lines of exchange and fusion, of mutual borrowings within a multiplicity of forms of subjugation.

The article has been interested in the entanglements that occur precisely within contexts of racial segregation and its aftermath, transgressions which may take various syncretic forms, at times including a certain racial porosity. Finally, I have sought to offer a method of reading the social, which is about mutual entanglements that occur between people who most of the time might define themselves as different, and which receive little attention from those who study them.

The final section of the article dealt explicitly with the question of city-form as a narrative of the present, as it appears in the fiction of the 'now'. I tried to show, drawing on this fiction, how, where and on what terms city space – in this case via the trope of walking – is fixed, divisive and certain; and how, where and on what terms it comes to be about movement, change and crossings. By drawing on Lefebvre, via Robinson's view that 'each time we move (in the city) we potentially use space differently', I tried to resist reading space and identity, including racial identity, as one-dimensional. This 'always-moving space' (a quintessential fact of city-life), a constant revising of the inventory of the city, its map of streets, is a tracking and a breaching of its historical construction; it is also a way of conceptualising the now.

What emerges from walking the city, in these texts, is in part a migrant itinerary and a method of reading itself characterised by the known as well as, to use Vera's

93 M. Andersson, *Bite of the Banshee* (Yeoville, STE publishers, 2002).

94 Interview with the author, 2 April 2003.

words, surprise, the unexpected and the contingencies of chance. The migrant becomes the embodiment of these processes not simply due to globalisation: the figure of the migrant is central to South African history, a deeply embedded topos, which now takes on new configurations because the country is more open, with fewer forbidden places: space has expanded. In the figure of Tearle, an older version of whiteness unwillingly and resistantly writes (itself into) the newly creolising city. For a younger generation, represented in Andersson's fiction, a dialogic and creolising impetus makes its imprint on the ways in which stories (of the city) are told.

Summoning the city – in this case the African city of Johannesburg – into our scholarly analysis, is also summoning the question of the now, or the present. Why is this? Partly because the city form – and the city lives to which it gives rise – is the most conducive space to the remaking of culture and identity, because it is the place of most difference – where difference, that is, the juxtaposition of culture, works to revise and reread the orthodox, any stable notion of who is who.⁹⁵ But is it? Aren't cities also the places of the most effective surveillance in which people – as in apartheid's spatial geography – are confined, segregated, monitored and rendered violently invisible to others not in their 'group'? The point this article has sought to work with is rather this: that it is precisely within a culture of surveillance, or difference, and its legacy, that highly-charged border crossings are likely to occur, that people will find ways of walking, unsurveyed. The city, even where it is a space of segmentation or regimentation, is also a space of creolisation.

De Certeau responded to Foucault's panopticon by arguing that people do have agency, can walk forward, unsurveyed. I have tried to investigate, in this article, a method of reading which looks for connections as well as differences, intra- and cross-racial exchanges despite and even because of structures of deep racism and violence that are a part of all the histories I have discussed above. An investigation of such complex and contradictory formations may be the only way to write South Africa out of a past and into a future, while always remaining mindful of what is actually happening. The work of critical theory is, after all, not just a ritual repetition of the past but also a way of speaking to a future.

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⁹⁵ De Certeau writes of 'one's body ... clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law ... possessed by the rumble of so many differences'. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 92.