Littoral Uncertainties:
water, women and climate precarity
in South African literature

by

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Abstract

This dissertation plots the trans-temporal applications of the littoral in South African literature. According to Meg Samuelson, the littoral maps the point of contact between land and water which confounds the easy boundaries between land and sea. The littoral, as a speculative device and as an ecotone, is subject to haphazard ocean tides and ambiguous conditions. It facilitates porosity and allows for open ended global flows, while also containing hidden depths and tenuous undercurrents.

By extension, I argue that the littoral provides a framework with which to read our current socio-political context in a post-transitional South Africa. The authors examined in this dissertation reflect on the convergences between time and the littoral. In Chapter 1, I analyse the temporal bleed from the 1850s to 1994 and into the present, as depicted in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Jacklyn Cock's *Writing the Ancestral River*. Mda and Cock's narratives are framed through the histories of the rivers of the Eastern Cape, the ocean that borders it and the people who occupy the shores. In Chapter 2 Henrietta Rose-Innes's novel *Nineveh* and N.R. Brodie's *Three Bodies* trace the present manifestations of the littoral in the contemporary cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town. Finally, in Chapter 3, Masande Ntshanga's expansive work *Triangulum* pivots towards possible imagined littoral futures, following an unnamed protagonist who receives signals from a mysterious machine about the end of the world.

When read successively, this dissertation illustrates the fluctuation of the past, present and future as they fold in on one another. I argue that littoral temporalities are a significant stylistic and conceptual turn from the pre-existing binary logic of South African social and political architecture, as it gives way to more complex and ambiguous threads of connection. I show how the littoral also permits a grounded realism when engaging with these future imaginings. It simultaneously holds space for threatening and dangerous futures, along with ones that are hopeful and hospitable.

Key Words

Henrietta Rose-Innes

Jacklyn Cock

Littoral

Masande Ntshanga

Nineveh

NR Brodie

South African Literature

The Heart of Redness

Three Bodies

Triangulum

Writing the Ancestral River

Zakes Mda

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Introduction

Time is particularly elusive in its definition; its slipperiness and perpetual fluidity has lent itself to metaphors of water since the Greco Roman era. A case in point is the common saying "you cannot step into the same river twice", which has its roots in the musings of Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher (540-480BCE). Heraclitus originally stated that "upon those who step into the same rivers, different and ever different waters flow down" (Brittanica 2019:3). Similarly, in his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius, writing between 160 and 180, refers to time as "a river made up of the events which happen, and a violent stream; for as soon as a thing has been seen, it is carried away, and another comes in its place, and this will be carried away too" (2013:43). By using these metaphors, we also attempt to forge some definability to an inherently unrecognizable and moving state. These inscriptive metaphors indicate the mutual flux and slipperiness of water and thus, time.

In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson elucidate that metaphoricity is a condition of our humanness. They write that "human purposes typically require us to impose artificial boundaries that make physical phenomena discrete just as we are: entities bounded by a surface" (1980:25). Even in this description, Lakoff and Johnson evoke a metaphoric duality between surface and depth, of humans containing meaning, like the hidden darkness of a lake within the bounded parameters of its surface. The metaphors we use to navigate the world around us serve the same purpose. We use metaphors as a way to naturalise, contain and normalise intangible things that govern us, like time. Lakoff and Johnson write how metaphors are not only characteristic of language, but that they also encompass our very thoughts and actions (1980:3). The two explain that the conceptual structures we create that "govern our thought" are not merely "matters of intellect" (1980:3). Rather, they also "govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our

concept's structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people" (1980:3). More so, they argue that this conceptual system is predominantly metaphorical and, thus, "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3). In other words, our entire reality is based on thinking of something by way of likening it to another, we are wholly reliant on the metaphors that we live by. When we examine this phenomenon, the boundaries of our internal and external worlds shed their protective layers of boundedness.

The metaphors we live by, and the connections they create are often unconscious. In this dissertation, however, the authors that I examine surface these often-hidden convergences of time and the littoral as a way of commenting on a post-transitional South Africa. In the various works I examine, water is used - both through physical representations and in language - to metaphorically talk about the national temporality and temperament. As a result, this dissertation maps the trans-temporal application of the littoral in selected South African literary works and shows how the fluid and chaotic nature of time in these works renders a complex and ambiguous reading of the post-transitional moment in South Africa. Each chapter is a meditation on different temporal manifestations of the littoral, which can be read through physical and metaphorical renderings by the selected authors, and so this dissertation takes a sequential journey through concerns about the past into imagined futures. As I argue, littoral temporalities reveal how we are still linked to the past and the ways in which it constantly drags us back and obscures our visions of the future and affect the way we read the sociopolitical structures of South African society. The littoral allows us to read our national imaginary as one in perpetual flux, and as subject to wavering conditions that stem from resonant hauntings of the past and multiple possibilities of the future.

In a material sense, the littoral is a term specific to oceanic studies that depicts the point of contact between the land and water; it is a place of perpetual flux and movement, home to both life and ever shifting tides. Meg Samuelson describes it as "an ecotone in which the elements of earth and water ceaselessly overlap and draw apart" (2017:2). In a conceptual sense, the littoral provides a framework with which to expand on readings of inherent flux and vacillating conditions in the postcolony because, in contrast to oceanic thought, Samuelson argues that the littoral "confounds the moralistic Manichean structure that provided the ideological guise for an extractive colonial structure" (2017:4). In colonial practices such as legislature and literary renderings, Manichaeism was often employed in order to justify inherent violent practices, all in the name of 'civilization' or, rather, the codification to a particular Western ideology.[1] This inscription of binaries also lends itself to the oppression of gendered bodies and the nonhuman world. Thus, what the littoral presents as an alternative – much like tidal occurrences – is a continuum in which there is constant flux that destabilises these rigid inscriptions. Samuelson dubs this "amphibian", and states that "it is characterised by the perspectival ambivalence and optical bifocality that arises from littoral proprioceptively in which sensory reception is orientated simultaneously towards land and sea, interior and exterior, here and there" (2017:4-5). In comparison, some of the key elements of the littoral is its permeability, porosity, fluctuance and density.

By extension Samuelson also proposes that the littoral can be used as "a heuristic device" and as a "unit of analysis" (2017:1) in literary studies that allows us to read it as a metaphor in which ambiguity can be fostered. In particular, this opens up investigation into the fractural and murky ways in which power operates across temporality. After all, the littoral is a mode of

[1] One of the most prominent examples of this is seen in racist practises where whiteness is associated with virtue and enlightenment while blackness is associated with deviance and savagery. One cannot exist without the other and, as Fanon indicates, "not only must the black man be black; but he must be black in relation to the white man" (1952:110).

analysis that sensitises us to surfaces and depths; to suppressed histories, memories and archives. When viewing the proliferation of this violence in the post-colonial, neoliberal global order the effect of this continuum informs how we might conceptualise South African literature. The resulting flux delivers a reflection of a suppressed archive on the present day and future subject in the postcolonial nation state. The littoral also facilitates "think[ing] through the literary form" and "ways in which genre shapes and contains meaning" (Samuelson 2018a:4). One particular manifestation of this according to Samuelson, which I also explore in Chapter 2, is in the noir genre that plays into notations around the cosmopolitan space. These texts typically travel through the dark, decrepit waters of apartheid era train tunnels; a hidden world beneath the city of Johannesburg that facilitate a flow of crime and corruption. Yet expanding upon Samuelson's observations on genre, I also illustrate how historical fiction and Afrofuturism also lend themselves particularly well to littoral interpretations and "the particular ethical and aesthetic challenges they surface" (Samuelson 2012d:499) in a post-transitional context and beyond in Chapters 1 and 3, respectively.

Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie present the term 'post-transitional' as a way of conceptualizing writing generated by contemporary South Africans that is "often unfettered to the past in the way that much apartheid writing was but may still reconsider it in new ways" (2010:2). The use of post-transition eludes strict temporal anchors and points to "a widening of the scope of what characterises current cultural formations. It signals a broadening of concerns and styles that reach both backwards and forwards" (Frenkel & MacKenzie 2010:7). In other words, they argue that contemporary South African literature side steps "apartheid-era racial categories" (2010:2). These categories were the framework with which South Africa was viewed as a heavily policed and racially segregated state before the official end of apartheid. This is something that is being brought into question by writers today who are starting to unpack the ambiguity and fluidity of what it meant to occupy South Africa before and now,

after the 1994 democratic elections. In a similar vein, Frenkel and MacKenzie state that "history is often interrogated in the literature of the transitional years in the form of buried histories being excavated from a variety of perspectives to add to the growing body of new South African stories. This trend has continued to the present but is also accompanied by much literature that disavows the past altogether" (2010:2). In other words, many South African writers have realised that time is a muddy amalgamation in which you cannot entirely separate one thing from another, it is messy and resists categorization. As a result, the option presented to us is to sit with the past in the present – in a country burdened by "both a history of violence and repression, and [positioned] as an arbitrator of justice in the global imaginary" (Frenkel & MacKenzie 2010:5). Thus, we must recognise how reductive constructs obscure the interconnectedness and ambiguity that is far more characteristic of the current sociopolitical climate of present-day South Africa. My sense is that a more accurate reading of the diverse cultural formations of this country can be demonstrated through a littoral lens, particularly as it is presented in contemporary literary works. This opens up readings of the present moment – along with the past and even the future – to more hospitable and nuanced interpretations.

Sarah Nuttall's work can be read as a similar reckoning of present day South African temporal moment as littoral. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's (2001) argument about *the time of entanglement*, Nuttall writes that time is an interlocking coexistence of the past, present and future in which there is an inherent ebb and flow (2009:4). Her understanding of entangled time bleeds into our human and nonsocial relationships – or what I would extend towards the nonhuman world – by arguing that they stretch across temporalities in multifaceted and varied ways. This method of reading time and temporalities marks our current moment as ambiguous and mutable. For example, Nuttall surmises that entanglement

> enables a complex temporality of past, present and future; one which points away from a time of resistance towards a more ambivalent moment in which

> the time of potential, both latent and actively surfacing in South Africa, exists in a complex tandem with new kind of closure and opposition. (2009:11)

For the purposes of this dissertation, I intend to expand on theories of entanglement and ambiguity as presented in South Africa's current imaginary through the littoral. While entanglement focuses on the connectivity and threads shared between people, through the littoral we can extend this interpretation into the nonhuman world. The littoral's material properties refer to water and the shoreline, which lend to its application in reading environmental degradation and the complex interactions people have with the nonhuman. With regard to its metaphorical properties, the littoral represents a complete unbiased framework, much like the vacillating currents of the ocean tides. The littoral lastly is opaque in nature; hence, it reveals some things and hides others. In doing so, the littoral leaves space for unanswered questions without detracting from the revelations that it gleans.

Furthermore, the littoral sea is uncontrollable and violent, it teaches us to live with, not against ambiguity and unknowability. Therefore, perhaps it can inform our existence with the other or how we deal with difference. To not count on certain outcomes, to live alongside and not fight against the currents is "an immanent and mimetic method" that reflects "the systematic haphazardness of coastal thought" (Samuelson 2018b:1). In South Africa, we need the littoral to account for the presence of the past and future in our collective present. We are perpetually haunted by an unresolved past and an unseeable future. This is an uncomfortable state; however, it also allows for a fuller representation of ourselves and the world around us. It provides an acceptance of difference and difficulty, without obscuring the light as well. Each present moment is obscured by trauma and ambiguity, but there is also the opportunity for connection in these spaces. In her work *The Black Shoals*, Tiffany Lethabo King writes how

> slavery and genocide linger in places we do not expect and cannot yet see or define. Their touch can arrive in an illness, a 'not feeling right', or not wanting to rest your

> feet on the ground. Their presence can feel like not being able to fully expand your lungs. In a more profound sense, it and they are a haunt. (2019:x)

She also makes reference to Eve Tuck and Christine Ree's statement that

> haunting does not hope to change people's perceptions, nor does it hope for reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop. Alien (to settlers) and generative for (ghosts), this refusal to stop is its own form of resolving. For ghosts, the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved. (King 2019:x)

This idea of haunting as a perpetual state of the past in the present lends to how we might conceptualise of our current temporal moment in South Africa, but also about how we might move into the future. It is far more indicative – as argued by King – of resistance and hope than of succumbing to the pressure of the world around one. Embracing a littoral reality allows to accommodate a fuller experience of our own being, it involves, as Avery Gordon puts it, to "move analytically between that sad and sunken couch that sags in just that place where an unrememberable past and unimaginable future force us to sit day after day" and those abstractions that name the structure of "monumental social architecture[s]" (2008:4). Gordon concludes that to be haunted, "is to be tied to historical and social effects" (2008:190).

An awareness of a littoral being in current moment is not just an individual endeavour, it also raises alertness about nationalism. The littoral provides a reading of nationalism that positions it as porous and interfused (Samuelson 2017:3). This connectivity and entanglement posited in the littoral destabilises ideas of western superiority and even South African exceptionality in the postcolonial era, through questioning the politics of autochthony. Essentially, as argued by Frenkel and MacKenzie post-transitional South Africa is "a nation in and after transition" (Samuelson 2013a:9) where there is the presence of "the neoliberal global order […] while various tides continue to transport and haunt the post-apartheid imagination" (Samuelson 2013a:9). Samuelson states that water flows and saturates borders, muddying their dividing lines and therefore acting as "connective tissue" (2013a:16). The result of this, she continues,

is that water "transports national subjects to and from various imagined homelands and points of departure and disembarkation" which may inflect "the neoliberal global order whose emergence coincided with or was the condition for that of the post-apartheid state" with "the post isolation worldliness that it conceptually opens up" (2013a: 16). Similarly, Samuelson writes about producing new geopolitical and cultural imaginings through the littoral. She states that through the littoral,

> [s]uch complex forms of worldliness imagined through the collective tissue of the oceans are opened up once more post-apartheid. No longer conceptualised as a state of exception and a land apart nor simply as an extension of the Atlantic economy, South Africa after apartheid comes to inhabit a connectedness inflected by its emergence into the neoliberal global economy following the end of the cold war. The sea looms large in the narrative of negotiations in this new state, whether in dystopian futures, contemporary crime thrillers or novels trawling the historical past. (Samuelson, 2013a:12)

Thus, in this dissertation, there is a recognition of the porosity of borders and the movement of people, which reveals autochthony as "more protean in its substance" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001:648). The Comaroffs indicate how this it could allow for a simultaneous detachment from and connection to the "seemingly open-ended global flows" (2001:648). In other words, it inscribes a littoral sensibility into the nation, which also impacts how we conceive of the citizenry or definable population of a state. The connective hook of the nation, as the Comaroffs argue, is the concept of "'native' rootedness, and special rights, in *a place of birth*" (2001:635, Comaroff & Comaroff's emphasis). This idea of endemic right to a nation extends beyond government and "resonates with deeply felt populist fears – and with the proclivity of citizens of all stripes to deflect shared anxieties onto outsiders" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001:635). The Comaroffs argue that the general anxiety experienced by the nation state regarding its present and future condition in a global economy is far more "complex, more diverse, than [the nation-state] allows" (2001:634). What the littoral enables is a contestation to the regulation and borders through "the porosity" of characters, who initiate "practices of hospitality and

exchange" as part of their "coastal condition" (Samuelson 2017:7). The value in this statement lies in raising questions about how we might conceive of ourselves as a part of and apart from the world around us in the postcolony. This provides opportunities to reconfigure our sense of connectedness to the wider African continent and the world at large. The key point to draw from here is how water sources can be seen as unifying forces, not simply because every living thing requires it to sustain life, including the natural environment. It marks the necessity for the postcolony to move from a position of terrestrial thinking, about the nation and the nonhuman world, to thinking in littoral terms.

In his work *Naturalizing Africa* (2018) Cajetan Iheka argues that "the quest for decolonization and national liberation trumped other considerations including questions of patriarchy and women's rights. The environment did not merit inclusion at all" (2018:9). Iheka's argument posits that, despite this exclusion of the nonhuman and women, African societies actually have an inherent connection to the nonhuman world, and this often surfaces in literature. This connectivity proposes a "distributed agency" that takes inspiration from "indigenous cosmologies and materialist-oriented scholarship" and puts forward the idea that "humans possess and share agency with the landscape and animals, among others" (Iheka 2018:4). Essentially, Iheka's concept of "distributed or diffuse agency" allows us to create a broader picture of the interactions between the human and nonhuman world as dependent on a network of ambiguous action (2018:4). This integration is far more accommodating of our place on this planet as part of a larger system that is infinitely complex and varied. As a result, his theory is "a recognition of nonhumans as companions in a precarious world" (2018:5). Such thinking may act as a counter for binary inscriptions of neoliberalism and late capitalism – to which we largely owe the current climate crisis – by reaching beyond our human 'meaning' and into the far more littoral awareness that "it is not a crisis for the inorganic planet in any meaningful sense" (Chakrabarty 2009:217).

Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that ambiguous views towards climate change saturate the now (2009:197). He writes how "the discipline of history exists on the assumption that our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human existence. We normally envisage the future with the help of the same faculty that allows us to picture the past" (2009:197). In other words, he posits a "historicist paradox" (2009:197) and states that we cannot use an outdated mode of rendering the future by relying on the past anymore. Yet, based on his argument, climate change plunges us into a littoral space. We are no longer guaranteed a place on this planet and this ambiguous view of the future informs our present (2009:198). Chakrabarty emphasises the importance of ecocriticism in a globalised era that collapses a separation between the history of human affairs from natural history (Chakrabarty 2009:201). Thus, a more prudent way to read our present moment would be through the convergence of the human and nonhuman. Despite the accompanying anxiety of this predicament, Chakrabarty theorises that this new path may be one that leads to freedom. He argues that freedom is inherently different between groups and individuals, he defines it as a "blanket category for diverse imaginations of human autonomy and sovereignty" (2009:208). Thus, freedom can be arguably littoral and its difference or "semantic capaciousness of the world only speaks to its rhetorical power" (Chakrabarty 2009:208). This might help us better read freedom and thus hope in a broader spectrum of the Anthropocene.

Given the focus on littoral water bodies in this dissertation, the specific literary works that I have chosen explore how human behaviour shores up against the environment, and Karen Thornber's understanding of ecoambiguity usefully describes this tenuous interaction. Thornber posits that the way in which we interact with the nonhuman world is marked by ambiguity and contradiction. She defines the term as, "the complex, contradictory interactions between people and environments with a significant nonhuman presence" (2012:1). Thornber's theory allows us to understand that meetings between the human and non-human often consist

of contradictory interactions. She suggests that "environmental ambiguity manifests itself in multiple, intertwined ways" (Thornber 2012:6). Her theory allows space for human and nonhuman relationships to be marked by ambivalence, as well as levels of disconnect to the nonhuman world, or as she puts it "confusion about the actual condition of the nonhuman", which she argues is "often a consequence of ambiguous information" (Thornber 2012:6). This is a particularly pertinent observation towards people's limited interaction with the nonhuman in urban areas. Furthermore, her framework also allows us to account for "contradictory human behaviours towards ecosystems" as well as our sometimes flawed and misguided attempts to protect nature, some of which can actually destroy it further (2012:6). This understanding allows for a more accommodating view of our relationship with the nonhuman world, one grounded in the littoral that does not romanticise a relationship with the nonhuman. It also helps to accommodate indigenous knowledge into the fold and account for issues surrounding poverty and the African continent that are often sidelined. Thornber writes how "imbricated forms of ambiguity" are "fundamental attributes of literary works that discuss relationships between people and the nonhuman world" (2012:6). Through ecoambiguity, we might be able to draw "thematic webs" that point connection across boundaries and "diachronically through time as well as their synchronic presence across space" (2012:16). In line with this sentiment, the literary works I examine in this dissertation all draw upon these thematic slipways through the language of the littoral, thereby positioning the littoral as literary.

Beginning with the past, Chapter 1 explores the past as a littoral phenomenon in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) and Jacklyn Cock's *Writing the Ancestral River* (2018). In *The Heart of Redness* (*THOR*), Mda traces the bloodline of Xikixa, with a narrative that spans generations and focuses on two temporal moments. The first is from the 1850s cattle killings, during a time of prophecy and the ancestors. The second tracks the present-day descendants who form the cults of the Believers and Unbelievers. In the novel, the two cults battle over

fixations of the past and possibilities of progress at the village of Qolorha-on-Sea in the Eastern Cape. These present-day disputes are all shot through with the prismatic parallel storyline that depicts Nongqawuse's cattle killing prophecy in the 1850s, and in this way the novel makes clear how the past has a heavy impact on the present.

In *Writing the Ancestral River* (*WTAR*), Jacklyn Cock details the continual assaults on the Kowie river, from the harbour architected by her great-great grandfather, William Cock, to the modern-day Port Alfred Marina, which was constructed on a destroyed wetland. The work traces her own reckoning with the past, as well as her family's role in the destruction of an area that she so loves. In each literary work, power, carried through prophecy or industry, plays out on the littoral; whether the banks of the Gxarha river, the muddy Kowie or on the shores of the Indian Ocean. In *THOR*, the Gxarha river becomes the location for the prophecies of Nongqawuse and then the Great Disappointments. The Indian Ocean is a place of sanctuary for the modern-day descendant Qukezwa, while also providing the poaching possibility of development, and thus the exclusion of the inhabitants of Qolorha-On-Sea. In *WTAR* the Kowie provides a place of sanctuary for Cock, however, it is also a perpetual reminder of nature lost, and of her own history of destruction and oppression.

The aim of Chapter 1 is to complicate our readings of the present moment in showing how it is muddied by the past. The novels constantly pull between past and present, through their dual narrative structures as well as in the way the characters are perpetually aware of the past pulling their past behind them like a ghost. What can be drawn from this chapter, is that there is a disillusionment that comes with a separation from the past in the post-apartheid present; *WTAR* and *THOR* indicate the stickiness that it still has for us in the current moment.

Chapter 2 examines where we are now, and explores South African present-day circumstances as abundantly littoral in itself. N.R. Brodie's *Three Bodies* (2020) and Henrietta Rose Innes's

Niveveh (2011) both depict attempts at and failures of maintaining order in South Africa's neoliberal cities, Johannesburg and Cape Town respectively. I illustrate how these spaces are actually represented as littoral; as monstrous and magical swamps filled with insects, dead bodies, mermaids, pollution and hope. In the novels, attempts at controlling these neoliberal spaces comes at the cost of women and the nonhuman world. In *Nineveh*, the protagonist Katya is forced to reckon with her own fractured sense of belonging as she travels to the upmarket estate of Nineveh to remove a mysterious swarm of insects, called goggas. As the novel progresses, she discovers a mirrored cavern beneath the luxury estate that reflects back up an entropic and hidden natural world, of which she finds remnants in herself.

In *Three Bodies*, Captain Reshma Patel and Ian Jack launch an investigation of murdered women who are discovered on the banks of polluted rivers in and around Johannesburg. Their search leads them to the upmarket estate of La Gondola, which lies on the banks of Hartbeespoort Dam, which is heavily polluted and infested with invasive plants such as water hyacinth. At the centre of the murders is Jan Snyman, a director of La Gondola and ex-apartheid mercenary. He, along with Mr. Brand, who owns Nineveh, exemplifies an embodiment of the autochthon in South Africa's neoliberal imaginary. However, with the climax of the novel, both men are overthrown, and their estates compromised through the rise of the littoral. These novels thus successfully cultivate their littoral bodies in order to negotiate pressing issues such as violence against women and environmental degradation.

Finally, Chapter 3 turns its gaze towards a littoral representation of the future. Through an analysis of *Triangulum* by Masande Ntshanga, I explore how the neoliberal trajectory of the future is interrupted through the presentation of an alternative counter-narrative of the future, which reads as a littoralised manifestation of this temporality. Ntshanga's novel is very complex, and in order to give it the appropriate amount of space for analysis, it stands alone in

this chapter. The future that the unnamed protagonist inhabits sees the rise of data mining and citizenry control and monitoring through technology as well as in the rise of the Zones that are reminiscent of apartheid era homelands. However, in the novel, the unnamed protagonist also receives signals from a mysterious, otherworldly machine. Through its signals, the protagonist is able to prepossess the future (Garuba 2013:271) and open up to the possibility of other worlds and alternate, more hopeful futures. Yet, in true littoral form both of these futures co-exist in the novel, which predicates an awkward balance between hope and reality, particularly pertaining to oppressed black life. It allows for realistic imaginings of inhospitable future realms; however, it also holds space for the opposite. Perhaps it falls somewhere in the middle, for the environment, as well as for us as writers and South Africans.

Through mapping the littoral temporalities in contemporary fiction, this dissertation marks the post-transitional nation as fundamentally informed by it. This turn from dualistic and controlled conceptual structures gives way to a more complex and nuanced streams for connection. Hence, though the future may be frightening – this is not something to be denied – the littoral affords small pockets of hope and hospitality that sit alongside pain and suffering. As citizens, we too can benefit from perceptions of ourselves as littoral bodies that stop thinking of ourselves as separate from or exceptional to other countries, people or species. Rather, we are folded in with and tied to everything across time and space.

Chapter 1

The stickiness of our present modality in the post-apartheid moment is undeniable. In South Africa we find ourselves wading through murky waters, unsure of what our feet might touch next, whether it is persistent racism, gender-based violence or poverty. We feel the past, but it is not always apparent why. In *The Heart of Redness* (*THOR*) and *Writing the Ancestral River* (*WTAR*), Zanemvula (Zakes) Mda and Jacklyn Cock face this ambiguity head on, revealing the instillment of the past in the present as littoral. Through intertwining past and present narratives the authors show how these unseen things, these sources of tension within and around us, are very much entangled in our lives. In a biography of a small muddy river in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, Jacklyn Cock tracks the ways in which past instances of environmental degradation and oppression continue to replicate through time. For example, in *WTAR*, the original development of the Port Alfred harbour directly leads to the construction of the modern Port Alfred Marina, both of which have devastating effects on the amaXhosa and the integrity of the Kowie River. In *THOR*, Mda traces the historical trajectory of a blood line descended from the headless ancestor, Xikixa. There are two temporal moments in the novel that take place in Qolorha-by-Sea in the Eastern Cape and run parallel to each other. The first temporal moment is situated in the time of the prophets, namely Nongqawuse, and the cattle killing movement of the 1850s. It follows two brothers, Twin and Twin-Twin, who come into conflict during the turbulent period over the movement. The second temporal moment takes place in 1994, in which Twin's descendant Zim and Twin-Twin's descendant Bhonco respectively head the cults of the Believers and Unbelievers. As their titles may suggest, the cults continue to fight over the events of the past and a belief in the prophetic validity of the cattle killing movement. It culminates in the present as a conflict regarding an upcoming development in

Qolorha-by-Sea. In each of these works, history persists into the present through forms of haunting, causing tension and terror as spectres.

Haunting, as Avery Gordon posits it, provides a language with which we can unpack the ways that "abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with […] or when their oppressive nature is denied" (2008:xvi). The sources of power in *THOR* and *WTAR* take the form of European colonial incursions. In both texts, the actions of the past create a legacy of dispossession and unresolved trauma, which manifest as apparitions or binds to the past that refuse to loosen. Furthermore, Gordon writes that

> haunting raises spectres, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These spectres or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomise is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. (2008:xvi)

The trouble represented in both texts is that of a post-apartheid discomfort, one that each author grapples with. For example, Richard Samin writes how Mda pursues a "twofold agenda" in which he "delves into a dramatic turning point in the history of South Africa from the vantage point of a country which has now formally got rid of colonial oppression, and at the same time he examines how the resurgence of past quarrels affects the present" (2008:48). In *WTAR* Cock details the historical dispossession of the amaXhosa people, resulting directly from what she dubs "settler capitalism" (2018:71). In *THOR* and *WTAR* the shore, or what Samuelson calls the littoral, becomes a contact point in which historical debt is highlighted through the enmeshment of the present and the haunted past. In *THOR* and *WTAR* we see the shifting structures of power play out on the banks of the Kowie and the Gxarha River as well as the Indian Ocean. On these shores, the characters in these texts come into contact with the past. Hence, the littoral space becomes an indicator for time in the novel *THOR* and *WTAR*, as a permeable barrier in which different timelines come in to contact. The narratives refract history,

with the shore acting an imaginary locale that is both playful and indicative of South Africa's violent making and unfolding (Samuelson 2015:17). The littoral in the text reads as temporal dissonance in indicating historical tension and 'stuckness'. Therefore, the littoral also prevents the romanticization of the past by indicating the tension it causes in the present.

In *THOR*, colonialism is shown to have a lasting and devastating impact on the amaXhosa. One character who provides a good framework for indicating the backstory of European colonization is Sir George Grey, who is referred to in the novel as "The Man Who Named Ten Rivers" (Mda 2000 95). This name is the result of his conquests in Australia and New Zealand, where he wrote "extensively about the native people of those countries, and about their plants. He had even given names to ten of their rivers, and to their mountain ranges. It did not matter that the forebears of those natives had named those rivers and mountains from time immemorial" (Mda 2000:95). With reference to this statement, Sir Grey's name holds significance because it refers to the power of naming as a way of overriding or erasing existing culture and pushing a particular colonial authority, as is the legacy of European colonialism. This plays out in the novel as contact with rivers, such as the Gxarha, become central to how characters encounter the past as it bleeds into the present. This instance also provides an example of the role of epistemology and of how, as is the case in South African towns such as Port Alfred, Makhanda and Kenton, these actions leave traces which still hold power in the present. Sir Grey, for example, is pictured in the novel by Mda as a man acting on behalf of the colonial government in order to pacify the amaXhosa and civilize them according to European cultural standards. By the end of the novel, just this is done, after the cattle killing movement Sir Grey will only assist the now starving amaXhosa who agree to work for the colonists as near slave labour (Mda 2000:296). This creates a legacy of dispossession by the colonial government and its perpetrators which leads right into the present. In other words, Mda's novel

uses particular characters and instances, such as Sir Grey, to indicate how the past surfaces in the present South African context as haunting.

Another example of the past haunting the present is shown by the statement by Sir Grey regarding the cattle killing movement and how it links the two temporal moments of the novel together. In the novel he says: "I am afraid that is exactly what those cattle-killers of the frontier plan to do… kill settlers and rape white women…and I will deal with them in the same manner that I dealt with Te Rauparaha" (Mda 2000:157). In the next paragraph, there is a temporal jump to an anecdote about the impact of the cattle killing movement on the middle generations. Mda writes:

> The sufferings of the Middle Generations are only whispered. It is because of the insistence: *Forget the past. Don't only forgive it. Forget it as well. The past did not happen. You only dreamt it. It is a figment of your rich collective imagination. It did not happen. Banish your memory. It is a sin to have a memory. There is virtue in amnesia. The past. It did not happen. It did not happen*. (2000:157 Mda's emphasis)

Then there is yet another jump to the present timeline. It starts with the comment that "John Dalton's friends think that memory is being used to torment them for the sins of their fathers. Sins committed in good faith" (Mda 2000:157). John Dalton, who is the descendant of a colonial governor by the same name, is having a braai with some friends at a cottage by the ocean. The reason for the meeting is that two of the men are emigrating in the next week, "one for Australia and the other for New Zealand" and one of the emigrants is the cottage owner (Mda 2000:157). One emigrant says to the other that "this is one of the things we'll miss…I don't think where we're going we'll get such beautiful land for a bottle of brandy" (Mda 2000:160). The comment by Sir Grey mirrors the rhetoric used by settlers and then later their descendants, for indigenous people – such as the amaXhosa and the New Zealand chief Te Rauparaha – who are seen as savages who need to be civilized and saved. This is a romantic notion – if you are on the side of the coloniser or benefactor that is – as it justifies acts of

violence and oppression for the sake of exploration, knowledge and civilization. For example, in the timeline of the past Mda refers to the ideology of Sir Grey by writing, "civilization is not cheap" and "of course [Grey] had to take their land in return for civilization" (Mda 2000:95). The very fact that the cottage owner states that the land could have been bribed off an amaXhosa chief (Mda 2000:76) with only a bottle of brandy indicates the extreme power imbalance between races in South Africa. The joking way the emigrant says this also indicates cognitive dissonance. This cognitive dissonance is mirrored by John Dalton's statement about 'committing sins in good faith', like a civilizing mission. It is an attempt to negate the sins of history and push aside the discomfort of historical debt, instead focusing on the romanticization of the past in which settlers are revered as heroes. The temporal jump to the Middle Generations, and then the present timeline indicates the way in which historical oppression persists into the present. The inherited wealth of John Dalton and the other white people who own land in Qolorha indicate the ways in which colonization implemented lasting legislation, which in turn became social doctrine. The temporal jump points to the impact of Sir Grey and other colonial architects' actions, which resulted in historical debt in post-apartheid South Africa.

Cognitive dissonance, as it is present in *THOR*, can be read as the littoral space of white memory that is caught in a state of tension between past romanticization and reality. This reworks the view of the past as one riddled with violence, thereby 'forcing' white residents to flee to places such as New Zealand and Australia. For example, the emigrants believe that South Africa is being "sucked into a whirlpool of crime, violence, affirmative action and corruption" (Mda 2000:161). Such a mass exodus, in other words, is the result of a weakening of white structuralist power. Places such as New Zealand and Australia are deemed safer because settlers like Sir Grey effectively annihilated the population, making them of no threat or concern. For example, one emigrant titters, "at least in Australia they killed almost all their

natives" (Mda 2000:161). The use of the image of a whirlpool creates the perception of a cyclical and repetitive process, which in the minds of the emigrants all started with the historical unrest from the times of the settlers. However, this is a rhetoric constructed from their own versions of history that does not account for amaXhosa and black experience. Arguably, the comfort that the emigrants are chasing will not be found in some far-off continent, where almost all of the indigenous people have been eliminated or thoroughly oppressed. These emigrants are carrying this sense of dis-ease in their own histories of violence; they have mislabelled haunting and embraced the disillusionment of salvation in another place. In the novel, Dalton challenges the emigrants' reasons for leaving and they respond defensively; "how dare [Dalton] call them racists when they are well-known liberals who fought against apartheid" (Mda 2000:161). To this, Dalton states that "yes, you prided yourselves as liberals…but now you can't face the reality of a black-dominated government. It is clear that while you were shouting against the injustices of the system, secretly you thanked God for the National Party which introduced and preserved that very system for forty-six years" (Mda 2000:161). This statement indicates that the nationalist pride and comfort of the emigrants, the romantic ideal, is a fallacy. The discomfort of the past surfaces in the present timeline at a cottage owned by white people who directly benefited from the historical disendowment of the amaXhosa. The location of this exchange is also significant. The cottage is located on the shore, overlooking the Indian Ocean. This lends to Samuelson's iteration of the littoral in literature and indicates that how time operates in the novel is also littoral. The shore, or the littoral "function[s] through fluctuance, rather than by constructing coherent arguments upon solid foundations" (Samuelson 2003:1). This chapter provides one particular analysis of the littoral, as something which is paradoxical and unsettling. It has much to do with how we view the haunted past.

For the amaXhosa, the reality of their own experience of the whirlpool of littoral temporality started in the time of the ancestors and has continued to resurface in the present. The resulting epistemological traces result in discomfort and are often unpredictable. Samuelson calls this "the systematic haphazardness of coastal thought" (Samuelson 2003:1). Along with the colonial inquest, implemented by agents such as Sir Grey, the arrival of lungsickness provides a catalyst for the proceeding events in the novel. In the past timeline the rampage of the new disease, which decimates the amaXhosa's livestock, is seen through the eyes of Twin and Twin-Twin, the sons of the headless ancestor Xikixa. Mda writes how "[i]t was brought to the land of the amaXhosa nation by Friesland bulls that came in a Dutch ship two years earlier, in 1853. Therefore, even the best of the isiXhosa doctors did not know how to cure lungsickness" (Mda 2000:55). The disease, as well as the ongoing oppression, are foreign invaders for which the amaXhosa do not have the tools to deal with. Therefore, when salvation comes in the form of the prophetess Nongqawuse, many amaXhosa are inspired to belief. The impact of which seeps well into the present, effecting the remaining amaXhosa cults of the Believers and Unbelievers.

Another key piece in the understanding how a littoral temporality operates in the novel is Nongqawuse, a young prophetess who lived 150 years before the present-day setting. She and her relative Nombanda are beckoned by two strangers hiding behind an usundu bush (Mda 2000:59). The Strangers, as they are called, deliver a prophecy to the women for the amaXhosa nation. In the novel, Nongqawuse says that

> the Strangers said I must tell the [amaXhosa] nation that all the cattle now living must be slaughtered… The Strangers say that the whole community of the dead will arise. When the time is ripe they will arise from the dead, and new cattle will fill the kraals. (Mda 2000:60)

This prophecy outlays a key sentiment that continues to run throughout the novel, in both the past and present timelines, of the dead coming back and invading the land of the living. Samin writes how

> from these different elements – the frontier wars, the spread of Christianity and the influence of amaXhosa prophets – Mda constructs an eschatological discourse which runs through his novel, ensuring the structural and thematic continuity between the two narrative levels. The myth of the Christian millennium and the return of a messiah were reinterpreted in terms of amaXhosa beliefs and practices. (2008:51)

Moreover, the point of contact between the living and the dead – or rather – the past and the present are on the banks of bodies of water, such as the Gxarha River. Nongqawuse is cast as a central figure who draws those who believe to the banks of the Gxarha River in order to revel in the promise of the past reborn – a time in which the amaXhosa prospered before the advent of colonialism: "[E]very day [Nongqawuse] led the multitudes to the Gxarha river to show them the wonders of the Otherworld" (Mda 2000:90). In the novel, the banks of the Gxarha river provide a site for both fantasy and for delusion. This is the operation of the littoral, as a space in which both possibilities can sit together. For example, the banks of the littoral act as "a setting that resists closure and muddies categories, that convenes encounter and stages scenes of recognition and that figures both prohibition and transgression" (Samuelson 2015:18). Therefore, the fact that Nongqawuse delivers her prophecies on the littoral speaks to the way in which the events of the novel play out in the novel, with the Great Disappointments and the eventual salvation of Qolorha-by-Sea in the present timeline, as non-linear and seemingly haphazard ways of eventually opening up to a more hospitable existence.

As previously mentioned, the littoral does not abide to clear or set rules and the past does not resurface as salvation. Samuelson adds, that although shaped by its affordances, coastal thought is "by nature, be non-linear" (2003:1). Instead, convening with the littoral in the novel raises

spectres which haunt characters and remind them of the persistent pain of history. For example, in the very next paragraph after which Nongqawuse relays her encounter with the Strangers there is a temporal jump from the past timeline to the present. It describes the protagonist Camangu's thoughts as he enters Qolorha-by-Sea for the first time. Camangu describes seeing a lush landscape, one where green and blue are dominant colours (Mda 2000:61). Rivers wind through the landscape, all leading to the sea. As Camangu comes to settle in this place he will find out the pivotal roles that these water sources have in the "complex of problems" (Samuelson 2015:17) faced by its inhabitants. These separate temporal scenes indicate the start of dramatic events to follow and are encapsulated by littoral time.

This complex network of problems is captured in the past timeline by the Great Disappointments. These are dates of resurrection which were set by the prophets, only to continuously fail. The First Disappointment was supposed to be during "the full moon of June 1856. The Believers waited with anticipation. But the day came and went like any other day. No miracles and wonders were seen at the Gxarha" (Mda 2000:148). The resurrection was then scheduled to occur during the next full moon half way through August:

> Twin and Qukezwa did not sleep that night. They joined the revelers at the banks of the Gxarha River, and filled the valleys of Qolorha with song and laughter. The hills echoed the joyous sounds, and sent shivers down the spines of the colonists. (Mda 2000:149)

However, "the ancestors did not venture out of the mouths of the rivers. This was the Second Disappointment" (Mda 2000:150). Finally, there is The Great Disappointment, which occurs on 16 February 1857. This final disappointment cements the rift between those who believe the prophecies and those who do not. The failure of the prophecy's fulfilment is blamed on the Unbelievers by the Believers for not slaughtering their cattle (Mda 2000:242-3). The final disappointment was a death blow for the amaXhosa, leaving many of them near starvation and causing King Sarhili to surrender to the colonists for fear of total annihilation (Mda 2000:243).

The Disappointments indicate how the amaXhosa attempt to find salvation but are left without any answers. They take place on the shores of the Gxarha River, which is a littoral space and has littoral consequences – the manifestation of searching for comfort in inherently uncomfortable circumstances.

The occurrence of lungsickness and the subsequent prophecies indicate a littoral sense of time as the amaXhosa attempt to grapple with the loss of an existence by contacting the past, while confronted with an unknown future, all in the face of an oppression that operates sinisterly. Their attempts to do so almost always take place on the littoral such as the communions with the spirits with Nongqawuse and later the Great Disappointments. Such is the case in *THOR* as the events of the past create a knock-on effect, of which the reverberations are felt by the Believers and the Unbelievers in the present timeline as a haunting. For example, Twin's descendant Bhonco and Twin-Twin's descendant Zim coming into conflict through their respective cults' different standpoints. Bhonco heads the Unbelievers who stand for progress while Zim heads the Believers, who hold fast to traditional beliefs of the past. The result is that two descendants of the headless ancestor are thrust into conflict due to opposing beliefs around the appropriate way to preserve the amaXhosa. Mda writes about each cult in the following paragraph:

> The amaXhosa people called the Believers amaThamba – those whose hearts were soft and compassionate. The clever ones, whose heads caught fast. The generous ones. The Unbelievers were called amaGogotya – the hard ones. The unbending ones. The selfish and greedy men who wanted to hoard their cattle and thereby rob the entire amaXhosa nation of the sweet fruits of the resurrection. (2000:98)

One particular instance in *THOR* exemplifies the mindset of the Believers. In the time of the ancestors Twin-Twin and Qukezwa distinguish themselves as Believers by shaving their eyebrows after they meet the new prophetess Nonkosi of the Mpongo River (Mda 2000:148). Twin-Twin describes how, from the riverbanks, "they saw the horns of cattle emerging from

the water, then sinking again, and heard the lowing of cows and the bellowing of bulls" (Mda 2000:148). Zim revives this in the present timeline by shaving his eyebrows, he proclaims that "it is the new look of the Believers, in accordance with the teachings of Nonkosi, the prophetess of the Mpongo Valley" (Mda 2000:190). This scene indicates how Zim attempts to convene with the past or tradition in the present. In conversation with John Dalton, Camangu says that "the Believers are sincere in their belief" (Mda 2000:282). The Believers hold on to the sincerity of belief and attempt to conserve traditional or ancestral ways of life as much as possible, this includes protecting Qolorha-by-Sea from any possible development and preserving its natural environment. However, living in the past does not assist in dealing with present strife because of the way in which the past translates into the present as littoral.

The other side of the coin of the Believers are represented as the Unbelievers. Although they vehemently support development and modernity, they too are haunted by the past. For example, members such as Bhonco often exclaim that any general injustice or hindrance to progress "is all the fault of Nongqawuse" (Mda 2000:80). Bhonco is the descendant of Twin and is responsible for resurrecting the cult in the present. The Unbeliever states how

> he does not care that only his close relatives and himself subscribe to it. Nor does it matter to him that people have long forgotten the conflicts of generations ago. He holds to them dearly, for they have shaped his present, and the present of the nation. His role in life is to teach people not to believe. (Mda 2000:2)

Bhonco also states that

> the Unbelievers are reputed to be such sombre people that they do not believe even in those things that can bring happiness to their lives. They spend most of their time moaning about past injustices and bleeding for the world that would have been had the folly of belief not seized the nation a century and a half ago and spun it around until it was in a woozy stupor that is felt to this day. (Mda 2000:1)

In *THOR*, the Unbelievers enter trances, which "take[ ] them back to the past. To the world of the ancestors. Not the Otherworld where the ancestors live today. Not the world that lives parallel to our world. But to this world when it still belonged to them" (Mda 2000:81). The Unbelievers describe it as "a memory ritual" (Mda 2000:83). One such memory is as follows, "under the umsintsi tree the elders present a wonderful spectacle of suffering … In their trance they fleet back through the Middle Generations, and linger in the years when their forebears were hungry" (Mda 2000:83). In the next paragraph Mda employs a temporal jump to the time of the ancestors. He writes how

> hunger had seeped through the soil of the land of the amaXhosa. It also fouled the ill-gotten lands of the neighboring amaMfengu. Yet that part of kwaXhosa that had been conquered and settled by the children of Queen Victoria – they whose ears reflected the light of the sun – continued to eat. (Mda 2000:83)

This instance is indicative of the haunted past and littoral time as it effects the Unbelievers. Like the Believers, they are unable to escape the suffering of their people as it vacillates as moments of personal strife in the present.

The project that most exemplifies the littoral as an indicator of the tension and discomfort experienced by the Believers and the Unbelievers is the upcoming development in Qolorha-by-Sea:

> …a big company that owns hotels throughout southern Africa wants to build a casino on the Gxarha River mouth. They want to introduce water sports in the great lagoon. Tourists will come from all over the world to gamble and to play with their boats and surfboards. At last Qolorha-by-Sea will see progress. But it seems some people in the village are against these developments. (Mda 2000:73)

The development will subsequently disrupt the flow of water from the river into the ocean. Water sports and boats will also likely churn up the riverbed, resulting in a constantly disrupted and murky space. Therefore, this development can be seen as a manifestation of a littoral

occurrence, one in which the outcome may not be as anticipated by either the Believers or the Unbelievers. For example, Xoliswa Ximiya, the daughter of Bhonco, is one particular character who often expresses disdain for the Believers. She calls Qolorha-by-Sea backwards, and says: "[W]e cannot stop civilization just because some sentimental old fools want to preserve birds and trees and an outmoded way of life" (Mda 2000:75). This statement is not entirely misplaced and the way the believers live is outmoded, which Xoliswa Ximiya calls the shame of the amaXhosa (Mda 2000:75). In contrast, the Unbelievers stand for progress and development, seeing it as the best way to uplift their people in the present. Essentially, Qolorha-by-Sea is governed by independent littoral fantasies of what *should* happen to it. Both the Believers and Unbelievers have reasons for their beliefs and either side cannot be neatly condoned or sanctioned in what they view as the way forward.

The real question that both sides raise is how to conceptualise this trade-off between modernity and traditionalism. Unfortunately, the middle point is that of perpetual discomfort and the littoral; neither the Believers or Unbelievers can be seen to act out of pure malice or spite, they are using inappropriate tools to reckon with an unresolved past that continues to haunt them in the present. As Thornber iterates, we must make strides in re-examining what we mean by positive and negative, forward and backwards, it is not something that can be "neatly classified" and we must always ask ourselves whose or what's perspective leads to this classification (2012:11).

The last sections of *THOR* beg the question of what is to be done in the present. In the novel, Twin says that "it is left to future generations to avenge the headless ancestor. If they think it is worth it" (Mda 2000:313). This statement is a direct reference to the ways in which Twin recognises that the past will continue to haunt the present. A little further on in the novel, and in the present timeline, Bhonco attempts to reconcile historical debt and "avenge his ancestors"

by hitting John Dalton, the descendant of a colonial governor who beheaded his ancestor Xikixa, with his knobkierie (Mda 2000:316). However, the damage is already done but this resurfacing of the past indicates the unresolvable problems in our post-apartheid present. For example, Gordon writes how "specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomise is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (2008:xvi). This tension comes to a head at the end of the novel as the two timelines seamlessly intermesh. In the timeline of the past, after the Believers disband, the ancestral Qukezwa walks the shore and "paddles at the shallow end of the lagoon" (Mda 2000:312). While she is in this littoral space, Qukezwa,

> [s]ings in split-tones […] she sings in glaring colours. In violent colours. Colours of gore. Colours of today and of yesterday. Dreamy colours. Colours that paint nightmares on barren landscapes. She haunts yesterday's reefs and ridges with redness. And from these a man who is great at naming emerges. He once named ten rivers. Now he rides wildly throughout kwaXhosa, shouting at the top of his voice, declaring to everyone who cares to listen, 'finally I have pacified Xhosaland! (Mda 2000:312)

Mda adds:

> pacified homesteads are in ruins. Pacified men register themselves as pacified labourers in the emerging towns. Pacified men in their emaciated thousands. Pacified women remain to tend the soil and build pacified families. When pacified men return, their homesteads have been moved elsewhere, and crammed into tiny pacified villages. Their pacified fields have become rich settler farmlands. (2000:312)

The littoral in this scene comes to symbolise the entanglement of time itself and the tension that this creates. In addition to this, after the Believers have won, ceasing the development and creating a sustainable tourist economy, Camangu cynically thinks to himself:

> [A]t least for now. But for how long? The whole country is ruled by greed. Everyone wants to have his or her snout in the trough. Sooner or later the powers that be may decide, in the name of the people, that it is good for the people to have a gambling complex at Qolorha-by-Sea. And the gambling

> complex shall come into being. And of course the powers that be or their proxies – in the form of wives, sons, daughters and cousins – shall be given equity. And so the people shall be empowered. (Mda 2000:319).

Thus, the cycle will repeat itself in a variant form, as is the case of the littoral.

Jacklyn Cock's work *WTAR* provides a similar but real-world example of the effect of how the past can manifest in the present for the amaXhosa. *WTAR* tracks the history of the Kowie and how this history acts as a spectre in the present. The work centres around three distinct temporal moments in which the Kowie plays a pivotal role in telling the story of environmental degradation and racial oppression. The first is the battle of Grahamstown which took place in 1819, the second is the development of the harbour in Port Alfred by William Cock from 1821-1870s and the last is the construction of the Port Alfred Marina in 1989. The development of the marina indicates just how the epistemological traces of the past, like those depicted in *THOR*, play out in the present with dire consequences. For example, Cock writes that *WTAR* "is a story that incorporates both social and environmental justice: the silting and pollution of a river and the violent conquest of the indigenous Xhosa whose descendants continue to live in poverty and material deprivation" (2018:13).

The Kowie, which is at the centre of the text, is "a wild, tidal river, dynamic, forever changing and diverse" (Cock 2018:15). Development on the Kowie River has been happening since the 1830s and has involved,

> Extensive canalisation of the lower reaches of the river: the main channel was straightened and confined within stone walls, and the mouth moved westwards. Today the mouth is an estuary, a narrow, 21km long stretch of tidal river. The river itself is significantly larger, some 70km in length. The lower part of the Kowie estuary now consists of an artificial channel, approximately 80m wide, with loose stone-packed berms. (Cock 2018:23)

The Kowie was restricted even further when William Cock constructed two piers at the river mouth (Cock 2018:24). As a result, the Kowie estuaries – as is the case with many estuaries in

South Africa – has "been subject to increasing pressure, especially as the result of reduction in river water inflow and increasing development along the river banks" (Cock 2018:23). Estuaries play essential roles in draining sediments and pollutants into salt marshes where they can be filtered (Cock 2018:22). Compromising this estuary will likely impact the effectiveness of this system and cause the particles to remain in the river. The artificial walling has certainly caused a line of foam in the middle of the river mouth. Nadine Strydom, a marine biologist, states that "the white line is caused by a convergence zone created by the meeting of water of different densities in a confined channel. The confined channel is the result of the artificial walling by William Cock when the two piers were constructed" (quoted in Cock 2018:24). This walling and churning of the Kowie is the direct result of settler capitalism which resulted from "the settlement of thousands of British settlers, who secured the frontier area for the British colony and initiated a new mode of accumulation" (Cock 2018:55).

One pioneer of settler capitalism is William Cock, the authors great-great grandfather. William Cock spearheaded the development of the Kowie River mouth and in particular, the harbour. Cock quotes an environmentalist who argues that the development of the harbour was the result of "a few men's blind pursuit of personal fortune" and thus, "triggered the steady decline of the Kowie estuary" (2018:71). The harbour soon became a busy throughway for ships and boats as well as a result of continued development, such as the extension of the west pier, sedation became a huge issue. This created the need for the continued dredging of the water. If we are to read this in terms of the littoral, the disruption of the Kowie river as well as the continuous encroachment of the sandbanks can be seen as metaphorical representations of the effect of colonial progress as something that is not entirely successful and always running the risk of collapsing. The continual efforts to dredge and control the river are indicative of the poor infrastructure of colonialism. Like with the Kowie river, settler capitalism also uprooted and narrowed the livelihoods of the amaXhosa. So, as is typical of the littoral, the Kowie river and

the space it occupies are haunted through the continued oppression of the amaXhosa in the area, as well as how impoverished they are. They continue to exist, but in a survivalist and liminal way.

The encroachment on the river by settlers such as William Cock leads into the present with the development of the marina. For example, Cock writes how "my story of the Kowie River acknowledges how the ravages of the past continue to flow through the present" (Cock 2018:13). In particular, Cock states that "the developer of the Port Alfred marina told me 'William Cock is the father of the marina'" (2018:11). The marina, which was commissioned by Justin de Wet Steyn in 1985, lies near the Kowie River mouth, adjacent to the river itself. It consists of "355 plots on five constructed islands placed in a complicated set of canals within a 45-hectare private estate" (Cock 2018:99). The impact of the marina is extensive. The salt marsh near the river mouth is referred to as a 'dead swamp' by locals, it was destroyed during the construction of the marina (Cock 2018:35). In addition to this, the jetties built off of the properties "protrude into the estuary channel and marina canals and obstruct the tidal flow" (Cock 2018:105). Justifications for tearing apart this ecosystem include stating that the area was already disturbed (Cock 2018:102).

With regard to the human impact of the marina, the worst affected were indigenous people in the area, most of whom are amaXhosa. The marina was expected to create many jobs and increase income. However, "this has not happened" (Cock 2018:104). In stark contrast to the upmarket marina is the township Nemato, which is short for Nelson Mandela Township. It is a home to thousands of people, "mostly living in poverty" (Cock 2018:109). The strife of the amaXhosa is historically informed and extends to their relationship with the entire Kowie river. Many amaXhosa people still commune with the ancestors on the banks of the river and its pools are considered sacred (Cock 2018:15). Cock writes that "in Xhosa cosmology the Kowie, along

with all rivers, is regarded as spiritually significant" (2018:16). Many amaXhosa still leave *intlwayalelo* or offerings at the banks of the river (Cock 2018:16). Offerings are left at "several sacred pool sites, the deep pools favoured by water divinities or river spirits. These are the 'People of the River' (*Abantu Bomlambo* in isiXhosa)" (Cock 2018:16-7). Cock adds: "They are sometimes described as mermaids (half fish, half human beings) and are associated with pools situated deep in forests", such as the pools along the Kowie which she has explored (2018:17). It makes sense that hybrid or supernatural creatures are believed to reside in these spaces which barrier the lands of the living and the dead, the unknown and the known. The amaXhosa who commune with the *Abantu Bomlambo* on the banks are faced with the very real historical debt and racial dispossession due to the developments of the harbour, the marina as well as the general privatisation of land for farming. Cock points out that "the privatization of land has led to many of the sacred pools being inaccessible to healers" (2018:19). In addition to this, there is also now an influx of invasive plants on the pools, such as the aquatic weed, Azolla (Cock 2018:22). This all points to the disintegration of a nostalgic past in the present, as well as a depiction of the natural environment that defies romantic representations.

Similarly, in *THOR*, Qukezwa's relationship to water illustrates a more littoral way of grappling with a de-romanticised representation of the past in the post-apartheid present. Qukezwa is the daughter of the lead Believer, Zim. Her namesake is the same as her ancestor, the Khoi wife of Twin-Twin. Camangu describes seeing Qukezwa for the first time; "she is short and plump. She wears a skimpy blue and yellow floral dress. Although she is not particularly beautiful, she is quite attractive" (Mda 2000:62). He later meets her by chance at Nongqawuse's valley, "riding bareback and reinless on Gxagxa [her father's horse]" (Mda 2000:100). She proceeds to chop a bush with a panga, and when questioned by Camangu she retorts, "nice plants, eh? Nice for you, maybe. But not nice for indigenous plants. This is inkberry. It comes from across the Kei River. It kills other plants. These flowers that you like

so much will eventually become berries. Each berry is a prospective plant that will kill the plants of my forefathers" (Mda 2000:102). This instance establishes her as a character who adheres to the systems of the Believers, that of protecting the traditions of the past in all of its forms, even its ecological manifestations. For example, Camangu says to Xoliswa Ximiya, "where you see darkness, witchcraft, heathens and barbarians, she sees song and dance and laughter and beauty" (Mda 2000:219). This quote illustrates the ways in which Qukezwa embodies the complexities of the past and holds a kinship to the nonhuman. Dirk Klopper writes that for her, "nature has soul" and that her relationship with the natural world is "based on mutual recognition and reciprocity" (2008:100). Camangu's interactions with her also place her unabashed womanliness at the forefront of her being. For example, she invades Camangu's dreams, he calls them "orgastic dreams" (Mda 2000:195). Orgastic could be a possible combination of the words orgasmic and orgiastic, which describes her as a woman who is unafraid of her body and "disruptive with her sexuality" (Klopper 2008:101) who has a simultaneously arousing and mystical influence that Qukezwa has over Camangu.

A key part of her complex personhood, particularly in the face of progress and indirectly, that of gender stereotypes, is Qukezwa's relationship to water. She says, "I love the sea. The sea loves me" (Mda 2000:139) and "this is my lagoon. I live here" (Mda 2000:113). In one scene, Camangu encounters her swimming in the lagoon: "[S]he walks out of the water. She struts around in panties and a bra, as if she were a fat model in a top-of-the-range bikini" (Mda 2000:113). However, Qukezwa's interactions with the sea are more complex and paradoxical than these scenes depict. Qukezwa is actually initially frightened by the sea, until her mother dies (Mda 2000:139). Her mother teaches her to fear the sea and she only teaches herself to swim after her death. In the novel, she describes how she almost drowns in the sea when she is in secondary school. Qukezwa

> went to the sea with a friend without her mother's permission. She took off her school uniform and tried to swim in her panties. She became stuck between two rocks, and couldn't move an inch. Waves came, buried her, receded, only to come back again. She thought she was going to die. Her friend ran to the village to call for help. (Mda 2000:139)

This scene can be read as a manifestation of the littoral, as Qukezwa and the ocean come into contact with each other in the shallows. Instead of the ocean welcoming her in a manner that is significant to her spiritual ideals of connection and shared vulnerability, it pins her in between two rocks as water swirls around and over her. This points to the "peculiar logic" that the ocean is

> simultaneously random and systematic, variable and repetitive. While generated by inexorable rhythmic forces, it would also be directed by serendipity; structured by tides, currents and winds that are alternatively periodic and spasmodic, it would muse also on the fragments of flotsam they deliver to shore. (Samuelson 2003:1)

Qukezwa's interaction with the ocean points to the ways in which the littoral is not a homely space, it provides moments of connection, but ultimately is not governed by readable patterns. Much can be said for the way that the spiritual operates in *THOR* and all that it offers in the possibility of hope. However, it is not certain by any means, rather it is littoral.

The littoral is also reflected in the contrariness of Qukezwa's nostalgic view of the reverent past. It is a view similar to that of the Believers, which is inherently romantic and reciprocal with nature. For example, Mda describes that while standing in Nongqawuse's valley, "Qukezwa has a distant look in her eyes" (Mda 2000:120). She says to Camangu, in a voice "full of nostalgia" that "we stood here with the multitudes… visions appeared in the water. Nongqawuse herself stood there… we stood here and saw the wonders" (Mda 2000:120). Other readings of Qukezwa, such as Klopper's (2008), tend to frame her in an idealised manner, as a figure who is akin to the natural world. However, as is shown in her relation to the ocean and

the use of the world nostalgia, this idealisation is highlighted as merely wishful thinking that is ultimately unsustainable in the post-apartheid present.

Reliving the past will not provide an antidote for the littoral present. It does not allow space for the inevitable discomfort that defines our post-apartheid moment. The impossibility of ignoring this tension is exemplified by the end of the novel in Qukezwa's interaction with her son, Heitsi:

> she sings in soft pastel colours, this Qukezwa. She sings in many voices, as Heitsi plays on the sand. He is six years old, yet he has shown no interest in the sea. From the day he was born to ululations and heckling, his mother dreamt of the day she would take him to the sea and teach him to swim. His upbringing would be different from hers. Her mother had never allowed her near the sea. Heitsi would swim better than any fish. (Mda 2000:312)

However, "to her disappointment, Heitsi has no interest in the sea. He has come because his mother dragged him along. He plays on the sandbank as Qukezwa paddles at the shallow end of the lagoon and sings in split-tones" (Mda 2000:312). Qukezwa's split-tone singing can be seen as an attempt to tap into a nostalgic past. Mda writes how she sings in "colours of today and of yesterday" (2000:312). However, her singing does not have any effect on her son, who is uninterested. Qukezwa is unsettled by this aversion and she thinks: "Oh, this Heitsi! He is afraid of the sea. How will he survive without the sea? How will he carry out the business of saving his people?" (Mda 2000:319). In an attempt to rectify this discomfort, "Qukezwa grabs him by his hand and drags him into the water. He is screaming and kicking wildly. Wild waves come and cover them for a while, then rush back again" (Mda 2000:319). Qukezwa is initially pleased and "laughs excitedly" (Mda 2000:320). However, it is short lived as Heitsi simply "screams even louder, pulling away from her grip" (Mda 2000:320). He exclaims, "No, mama! No! This boy does not belong in the sea! This boy belongs in the man village!" (Mda 2000:320). This is the last scene of the novel and constitutes a few key insights into a very real post-

apartheid experience, particularly pertaining to the fractures that constitute it - between human and nonhuman, man and women, tradition and modernity.

It also takes place in the littoral, "the space in which the land and sea interfuse…[where] complexity manifests" (Samuelson 2017:18). At first glance, this may seem like a reductive attempt by Mda to position Qukezwa as a dated Mother Earth figure, who strongly aligns herself with the natural world, and her son Heitsi as a rational and enlightened man. However, this instance is far from dualistic. Although it certainly points to Samuelson's iteration that this ending of the novel "gender[s] heritage as female and the national future as male[2] and having established a strong association between women and sea, ultimately reinstates the binary of historical land versus unhistorical sea" (2013a:14). It is arguably far more fraught. The interaction between Qukezwa and Heisti is more indicative of the interaction between two littoral temporalities. The meeting of these different viewpoints of the natural world cause discomfort, for both mother and son. The surprise and confusion that Qukezwa experiences at her son's dislike for the ocean creates a lack of connection with the boy, and as a result reveals her own disillusionment. Despite accommodating new understandings for old traditions, Qukezwa is stripped of any idyllic inscription at the end of the novel. Even she is not able to fully rectify the vacillating conditions that mark our present moment in South Africa. This reflects the disillusionment we have in the present day for the 'rainbow nation'. Its failings have shown in how the past has lingered on, and as Rita Barnard puts it, "economic inequalities, […] have remained, as has racism and sexism" (Barnard 2012:652). She goes on to quote Cyril Ramaphosa, who describes the dream of liberation not as "a dream deferred" but a "dream derailed" (2012:652). What the time since the official end of apartheid has taught us is that South Africa is not an exception, it is not a promised land apart. For example, according to

[2] Cf. Samuelson (2007:71)

Barnard, "South Africa has not proven immune to the troubles of other African post-colonies: a grasping national bourgeoisie, dangerous forms of ethic assertation, dire poverty and mismanaged disease" (2012:653).

Therefore, the ending of the novel indicates a littoral field of old and new power which is composed of a new series of interactions and negotiations. For example, Samuelson suggests that the beach is a "contact zone […] shaped by 'radically asymmetrical relations of power' yet hosting the mutual constitution of the subjects that meet there" (Samuelson 2015:2). Thus, what is actually necessary for us is to remind ourselves of the past and how it manifests in the present. As Barnard states, "the political events of the 1990s not only invited new dreams for South Africa's future, but a radical reimagination of its past" (2012:656).

In writing her book, *WTAR*, Jacklyn Cock unearths how the actions of her ancestors have led to dire consequences for both the human and the nonhuman world. She states that writing the book has involved "three kinds of journeys: firstly, intellectual in the research process […] secondly, it has involved many physical journeys down the river […] this book has also involved an emotional journey, which has raised some unsettling questions about my own ancestry" (Cock 2018:11). At the centre of this reckoning and Cock's attempts at disentanglement from her own existential experience is the figure of her great-great grandfather, William Cock. William Cock's name was spoken in "deferential tones" by her family who described him as "an entrepreneur" and his involvement in establishing the harbour was always "framed as a heroic confrontation with the forces of nature" (Cock 2018:11). William Cock has been called "the lord of the Kowie River" and is "hailed as the man who put Port Alfred on the map" (Cock 2018:80). While researching this part of history Jacklyn Cock was faced with a disturbing revelation about the actual impact of her ancestor. She states how it was "deeply shocking for me to read of him in recent historians' accounts as a member of a

settler elite who promoted the violent dispossession of the land and livelihoods of the indigenous population" (Cock 2018:11). She adds: "[O]bviously I found it painful to consider my revered great-great-grandfather as part of an imperialist settler elite driven by narrow commercial interests at best, a warmonger and profiteer at worst" (Cock 2018:12). The details of William Cock's profiteering are as follows: "Cock participated in and benefited from the imperial commitment to the militarization of the frontier. For the settler elite, it meant expanded markets, war profits and more land through the dispossession of the indigenous [ama]Xhosa people" (Cock 2018:96). More so, Cock describes how her grandfather "had no compassion for the amaXhosa" and was "motivated largely by self-interest" (2018:94). She goes on to describe that his lack of compassion remained unaltered, "even when the Cattle Killings of 1856-57 brought the [ama]Xhosa to the point of starvation" (2018:94). During this time many of the "[ama]Xhosa people of the Zuurveld were being driven from their homes and subjected to the […] violent process of dispossession" (Cock 2018:8). Grappling with the reality of her ancestor's actions puts Jacklyn Cock in a particularly precarious position, one that undeniably ties her own privilege, comfort and wealth to the direct oppression and dispossession of an entire generation of people. This level of dispossession is also ongoing. This is shown in *THOR* through the historical implications of the cattle killings which are also mentioned in *WTAR*. As a result, the historical debt that Jacklyn Cock is forced to deal with in *WTAR* is in direct correlation with how her whiteness is positioned in the post-apartheid present. For example, Cock states that writing *WTAR*

> has involved a personal journey during which I have learnt a great deal. This learning also involves a new understanding of myself and the meaning of an identity shaped by generations of enduring, racialised privilege. Owning privilege is clearly a necessary part of challenging the persistence of apartheid inequalities in the present. (2018:144)

This positioning is something that causes its own discomfort and psychological angst for Cock, with much of the discomfort manifesting in relation to littoral spaces, such as on the banks of the Kowie River.

Jacklyn Cock's existential angst and psychological discomfort largely results from the disparity between her reverence for the Kowie River and the ways in which her ancestors have directly threatened it. She writes how "the Kowie River has given me a great deal" (Cock 2018:5) and that "since infancy there has never been a year when I have not swum in the green-brown waters of the Kowie River, walked its wooded banks or spent hours watching the surge of the tide and the crashing waves as it empties into the sea […] the Kowie River has been a constant thread, a source of renewal of energy and purpose for over seventy years of a tangled life. Going to 'the Kowie' became a kind of pilgrimage, a place to journey to receive the river's spirit and be nourished" (Cock 2018:6). She adds: "I think nostalgia for the Kowie River has meant for me an aching kind of longing, a restlessness to return" (Cock 2018:144). Returning to this river has a twofold effect on Cock: it provides a source of nourishment, but also of nostalgia and angst. She states that "in relation to the lagoon adjoining the east bank of the river, this pearly haze of happy memories is infused with a sense of loss" (Cock 2018:6). Quoting Robert Macfarlane, she describes her experience as a 'double-bind', in which she questions one's ability to love a place as well as to recognise the ways in which it is laden with history (2018:7). Her description of the very banks of this tidal river can be read as a representation of the littoral. Looking out at the Kowie River from its shoreline generates a feeling of nostalgia, of something lost. However, in the process of grappling with her past, instead of being fulfilled Cock is left in limbo as she comes in to contact with the tainted past and damaged present at the same time.

The littoral may also allow one to refract history through a narrative in order to provide etymological insight (Samuelson 2013b:1). Jacklyn Cock's experiences in writing *WTAR* do just this and, in the process, highlight a more general insight. It is an insight that is indicative of a particular place in time and is the result of different social markers such as race and class. In other words, Cock's longing for the past is not the same as that of the Believers or Qukezwa in *THOR*. What she longs for is a time of innocence, when she was able to commune with the river that she so loves without a constant awareness of being haunted in the present by "the ghosts of the past" (Cock 2018:8). Cocks states: "[T]he Kowie River and the little town on its banks remain for me a site of density and depth, a connection to ancestral shades and a web of social bonds" (2018:6). Gordon provides a possible lens with which to view this statement. As she puts it, haunting is a mediation, "a process that links an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and a biography" (2008:19). In other words, Jacklyn Cock's personal position provides an insight into the levels of social justice and existing breaches of it in South Africa as a whole. The historical divide in South Africa is based outwardly on racism, but it is far more subtle and multifaceted in reality. The societal impact of the past is evident in the sentiments of many of the white descendants in the present. This illustrates the ways in which the actions of the past colonisers compound in to overriding beliefs in the present. For example, Cock writes: "[O]nly one of the descendants I interviewed during the course of research for this book expressed any regret or shame about the historical role of their ancestors" (2018:129). The descendants' answer is not conclusive, either. One says:

> I don't feel guilty about taking land away from the Xhosas because we developed the land. The first blacks only came into this area in 1776[…] the 1812 clearance was not such a bad event, but after that all the frontier wars pushed them back and that's where we went wrong. They arrived before us and there was no doubt about possession then. (Cock 2018:129)

Cock writes that this comment indicates a "disavowal of founding violence and of indigenous people" which stems from "defensive mechanisms" and is used to "explain the resilience of

settler colonialism" (2018:129). She also quotes the South African political analyst, Aubrey Matshiqi, who writes that "the lack of acknowledgement of what was done to black people during the colonial and apartheid eras is a recipe for social, political and economic calamity" (qtd. Cock 2018:4). The assault of the Kowie River and resounding dispossession of the amaXhosa indicate the ways in which – over and over again – a select few 'elite' benefit in South Africa today (Cock 2018:143). This raises further questions around social justice and the ways in which it is suppressed. For example, Cock argues that "the structural violence of settler colonialism" appears to have been replaced with "the structural violence of apartheid and neoliberalism" (2018:143). She adds: "[F]ollowing the course of the Kowie through what used to be the Zuurveld and trying to access the 'deep history' of the area is also troubling because of my knowledge of what has occurred there, of earlier calamities" (2018:7). Essentially, through telling the story of the Kowie River and in reflecting on it on its banks, Cock frames the story of a small tidal river in the Eastern Cape as a representation of a general malaise in the South African post-apartheid present which is usually unseen. Her work is indicative of how Janice Radway describes Gordon's work in the forward to her book, *Ghostly Matters.* Radway states that the book mediates on concepts of knowing as "disciplined in the contemporary age with a deeply affecting inquiry into the character of an economic and political system that depends essentially on practices of social disappearance and enslavement" (2008:ix).

Over the course of *WTAR* Cock mediates on what might be actionable in the given situation. For her, it entails pondering on questions of justice for her beloved Kowie and for the people who live in poverty near it. She writes that "acknowledging that past and the inter-generational, racialised privileges it established and perpetuated is one reason why this book is also a personal account of what the river represents to me" (Cock 2018:4). All of these mediations that Cock goes through are connected to the river. For example, she writes how

> [r]ivers can connect us not only to nature, from which many urban people are alienated, but also to questions of justice. Understanding that we are all part of nature in the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe means recognizing both our ecological and social interdependence and our shared vulnerability. (Cock 2018:12)

She also states that "rivers can connect us to our past and show us how it is inscribed in the present" (Cock 2018:12). This is certainly the case for Cock and her family legacy since "researching the Kowie River has involved revisiting my own ancestors and confronting the inter-generational privilege which forms part of their legacy. This has meant confronting many prejudices, myths and distortions" (Cock 2018:12). This can be seen as her way of grappling with angst and attempting to reconcile the past. It mirrors what Gordon states about haunting and what it can represent, for both the individual and a society. Gordon states that 'the ghost' is "not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (2008:8).

In South Africa, this social figure is defined by scarcity and, in particular, water scarcity. Water can very often be the barrier between a good life and a painful one for people. For example, Cock writes how both developments that have damaged the river – the harbour and the marina – raise questions of environmental justice:

> Rivers epitomise the connection between social and environmental justice. Recording the story of the Kowie River involves acknowledging the legacy and continuation of deep injustice: the violent conquest of the indigenous population whose descendants continue to live in poverty and deprivation, on the one hand, and the silting and pollution of the river and the destruction of a wetland, on the other. (Cock 2018:127)

Thus, Cock's iteration of the river goes beyond mere aesthetic and functional inscriptions, it raises issues about one of the most valuable resources on our planet and argues for protecting it and preserving it at all costs and in whatever state we find it in.

In *WTAR* and *THOR*, Cock and Mda map out how the past bleeds into the present through representations of the littoral. In the next chapter, this littoral temporality is further unpacked with regard to what culminates into our experiences of the contentious present moment itself in South Africa.

Chapter 2

Although we want to believe in the possibility of a definable and neatly categorised nation state, it is far more mutable and porous in substance, and finds more accurate representation through the littoral. In their respective novels *Three Bodies* and *Nineveh* N.R. Brodie and Henrietta Rose-Innes, indicate how South African cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town respectively, grapple with uncertainty and ambiguity when facing the very real issues of free market capitalism, gender-based violence and environmental degradation. In elucidating the space of the littoral, these novels explore how alternative systems of justice and individual accountability can lead towards a more mature nation state that embraces rather than denies its littorality.

Nineveh is a novel by Henrietta Rose-Innes that is set in a modern Cape Town and follows the attempts by Katya Grubbs to rid the upmarket estate, Nineveh, of a mysterious swarm of insects called goggas. Katya is the owner of Painless Pest Relocations and is assisted by her nephew Toby. While removing an invasion of caterpillars from an estate in the well-to-do suburbs of Constantia, the estate's owner and the proprietor of Nineveh, Mr. Brand, asks Katya if she will travel to Nineveh and finish off her father's job of removing the goggas. Len Grubbs has been an intermittent and abusive figure in Katya's life and his eventual reappearance breaks open the carefully controlled barrier that Katya has maintained between herself and the world. As Katya travels to Nineveh, which lies on the outskirts of Cape Town, and attempts to locate and remove the goggas, she is faced with the resurfacing of a past that she has tried to shield herself from. What becomes apparent is that beneath Cape Town and this seemingly perfect estate lies a mirrored littoral ecotone that reflects back up at Katya. This causes a bodily response from her as a point of recognition between two ecologies that are affected by the same roiling and ambiguous depths. As the novel reaches its rising action, Nineveh collapses in on itself amidst

a swarm of the illusive goggas, the cavern swallowing Mr. Brand in the process. Katya rescues him and exits the ruins, transformed and aware of the ambiguity that defines her existence. Essentially, she is forced to reconcile with her ever-shifting sense of self and her precarious belonging as a white woman in post-apartheid South Africa.

Three Bodies by NR Brodie takes place in present-day Johannesburg. It is a sequel to Brodie's initial novel, *Knucklebone* (2018). *Knucklebone* follows an investigation by Captain Reshma Patel and Ian Jack which leads them to Northcliff Ridge, "where witches and a sangoma had battled the poachers who had killed [Reshma's partner] Tiny" (Brodie 2020:130). *Three Bodies* also taps into the noir genre as it opens with the discovery of an unidentified woman's body on the banks of an exclusive gated estate called La Gondola at Hartbeespoort Dam. Ian is called in by Myburgh, an old friend of his father's and head of security at the estate, to investigate the dead woman in conjunction with the disappearance of one of the security officers, named Zebulon. At the beginning of the novel, Reshma has been working in the kidnapping unit in the Johannesburg Central Police Station and follows up on rumours of a woman who was dragged into the tunnels beneath Park Station. The novel tracks Reshma and Ian's investigation of three dead women, who are discovered in water bodies in and around Johannesburg. With the assistance of a sangoma by the name of MaRejoice, as well as an agency that supports sex workers called the Mermaid Bureau, Reshma and Ian uncover hidden truths about Johannesburg's underbelly and the wealthy estates that sit tucked away on its outskirts. Similar to *Nineveh*, *Three Bodies* reaches a crescendo with the destruction of a seemingly immaculate estate, La Gondola, at the hands of revenge seeking mermaids. Like the goggas that rise up from the littoral cavern beneath Nineveh, the mermaids emerge from the polluted depths of Hartbeespoort Dam. These creatures enact revenge on the sinister men in the novel, namely the Sangoma, Odi and proprietor of La Gondola, Jan Snyman. In addition, much as Katya does,

Reshma is also forced to reckon with her own expression of self, making way for a more nuanced and ambiguous understanding of the world around her.

The strong parallels between *Three Bodies* and *Nineveh* makes apparent that the power structures of the two main South African cities hinge on predications of what the nation state is 'supposed' to resemble. The novels offer acute descriptions of the ordered areas in Johannesburg and Cape Town. However, these spaces soon give way to an underbelly as the protagonists are struck by the truer and littoral nature of these spaces.

We meet the protagonist of *Nineveh*, Katya, at an estate in Constantia with Toby. The two are in the process of removing caterpillars from an "abomination" of a tree that is "sleeved with a rind of invertebrate matter, with plump, spiked bodies the colour of burnt sugar" (Rose-Innes 2011:9). The tree sits in an otherwise pristine garden and Katya notes that "while they are working, the uniform separates her and Toby from the pastel colours of the lawn and flowers" (Rose-Innes 2011:10). While Katya and Toby remove the living layer from the tree, there is a garden party starting, where "a few guests stand organically by the pool, drinks in hand" (Rose-Innes 2011:13). These descriptions imply that this space is generally serene and ordered, which is mirrored by the perceived ease of its guests. However, the calm atmosphere of the garden stands in sharp contrast to the chaotic messiness of the engulfed tree and by the people working on it. Katya describes the suits that she and Toby are wearing as "poison-toad green, boomslang green" (Rose-Innes 2011:10). Both of the animals that Katya likens her suit to are poisonous and dangerous, unsavoury invaders of gardens and homes. In the suburban garden of Constantia, nature is deployed as an alibi to illustrate how they do not belong in the suburbs of Constantia, these 'safe' and 'homely' spaces. The Comaroffs explain that this concept is used in order to justify constructions of being in and out of place. They posit that "the deployment of nature as alibi, as a fertile allegory for making people and objects strange" helps "to forge

critical new social and political distinctions" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001:628). In the novel, the grounds are ordered and contained to reflect the desired directive of its inhabitants. The arrival of the caterpillars and the pest relocators is held in opposition to this curation, thereby making these invaders strange. In actuality, these vermin – people and caterpillars – are endemic to Cape Town as well; it is the garden that is changed to create the face of a new 'normal'. The garden may be read as a microcosm of Cape town as a purposely structured space, where a cultural pruning or gardening has to take place in order to eradicate 'unsavoury' elements, be that caterpillars or, in the wider context, poor people or foreigners. In other words, the garden represents the controlled surface of the nation state, which attempts to hide any signs of dirtiness, decay or disorder.

The presence of the caterpillars and blue-collar workers disrupt the ordered calm of the garden, causing a spike of anxious energy that taps into primal responses. For example, as Katya and Toby carry the caterpillars through the crowd of the garden party, guests "scatter instinctively" (Rose-Innes 2011:13), and "if Katya could rattle like a snake, she would" (Rose-Innes 2011:13). Katya's reaction, to align herself with the insalubriousness of her perceived 'boomslang green' work suit indicates a defence mechanism that she turns to for protection and autochthony. However, ironically the inscription of the suit is far more ambiguous and paradoxical then it may initially seem. The suit serves a few purposes; it makes Katya feel protected and concealed within it, giving her the appearance and authority of an ungendered professional. She thinks of her overalls as "her defensive greens" (Rose-Innes 2011:112) and she likes the feel of latex, as it "deadens" (Rose-Innes 2011:10). Her uniform acts as a sealant, but also as a signifier of her difference, both with regard to class and gender stereotypes. For example, in the novel Katya holds her ground when hissed at by her employer, Mrs. Brand. She states how "this job. It brings it out in her" (Rose-Innes 2011:14):

> [S]pecifically, it's the uniform […] when [she] puts on her greens, something changes in her. She becomes cockier, more aggressive – if in the passive way of the servant. Also more stylised in her movements and her words: acting out the role of a working man. It's heady. But peel off her boiler suit and she's soft again, a lamb, a girl. (Rose-Innes 2011:14)

This passage also points to her social standing, that of the servant or worker. With this in mind, we see how the uniform also aligns her with the invaders or vermin who she relocates. As previously mentioned, it is a swampy, 'poison-toad' colour and she calls this "her signature colour" (Rose-Innes 2011:10). Katya uses her suit as a protective layer as she navigates the world in very particular ways depending on her surroundings and the way her past has shaped her present. Examples of which include her sense of self as a woman, her upbringing, her relationship with her father; along with the city of Cape Town and its surroundings.

As *Nineveh* progresses, Rose-Innes disrupts these inscriptions of cultural gardening even further as she introduces us to various stagnant bodies of water, such as pits and swamps. These holes open up in the ground and in doing so predict the inevitable breakdown of order and definability clutched at by the nation state and Katya. The first that we encounter is in a demolished play-park opposite Katya's house, in the building site there is a trench filled with "cloudy water" (Rose-Innes 2011:26). The trench is depicted as a kind of wound in which "old foundations lie exposed, [showing a] strata of concrete and twisted metal pipes" (Rose-Innes 2011:26). The water in the pit is "opaque" and Katya can see "the wavering outlines of buildings and streetlamps, a sunken city that might still be raised, intact" as well as "herself a blurred reflection in dirty milk" (Rose-Innes 2011:26). The description of the water's surface as opaque implies that it shows and replicates some things but not others. The water reflects warped images of the city above Katya, mixing in with elemental and violent metal shards jutting from the earth. The pit represents a place with hidden depths that encompasses both the lofty structures above – that of Cape Town and its inhabitants – and the grungy, sinister ones

below, the unseen world and haunting spectres. What is revealed is the true makeup of the city, as something that is constantly regenerating and driven by unseen forces, such as global capital and multivalent experiences. For example, Katya thinks how "something new will be rising up here soon. This is what happens when you don't pay attention" (Rose-Innes 2011:27). In other words, this pit, and how it is represented, points out littoral elements of the neoliberal makeup of Cape Town, as a divided city and one that is constantly collapsing in on itself. Katya reads the "sweating flesh" of the pit walls (Rose-Innes 2011:29), and experiences sensations in her own body that draws a connection between these two organisms – that of the city and an individual human body – of which each are complex ecosystems in their own right. For example, she describes how "the filthy hole across the road has opened up inside her. Depth, which the city conceals with its surface bustle. You forget what's underneath. A sudden vision of the deeps beneath the city, alive with a million worms, with buried things" (Rose-Innes 2011:29). For Katya the pit symbolises "all the wear and tear, the rot and disintegration, the distressing entropy of built things" (Rose-Innes 2011:30) and it throws her "out of synch" (Rose-Innes 2011:30). The unease that Katya feels points to how things are moving, rather than staying still and settling.

In comparison to *Nineveh*'s Cape Town, *Three Bodies* sets its sights on Johannesburg, revealing a similar ever-shifting underbelly and an entropic built environment. We meet Reshma as she descends into the tunnels beneath Park Station, following sightings of a woman who was dragged down there by two men. The underground channels in the tunnels are filled with "unpleasant looking brown water […] the sides of the drain (or whatever it was) were caked in yellow grime, making the entire scene look like something out of a science-fiction movie" (Brodie 2020:14). As Reshma moves underground she loses her sense of time and finds "a wall full of peeling adverts, marketing a long-forgotten brand of whiskey, a type of cigarette she had never heard of, and a post for the Rand Show from 1954. It was like being in a museum"

(Brodie 2020:30). According to her guide, Mr. Kruger, these tunnels run under most of Johannesburg, providing a hidden nervous system beneath the city surface. Reshma realises that it would be "impossible to explore the tunnels fully – it sounded like they extended in a small web all through the immediate vicinity, and possibly into the city centre" (Brodie 2020:31). More so, Mr. Kruger tells her that the yellow grime on the walls and polluted water is consistent across the tunnels. He says that "it happens in the CBD. Old infrastructure. Our tunnels are the lowest point, so the water and everything else drains there" (Brodie 2020:66). These tunnels are much like the sunken pit in *Nineveh*; they are otherworldly, filled with strange milky or garish waters and take on a corporeality of their own. They contain remnants of the past, such as the old adverts or old foundations that still exist in the present, and are mixed in with the decay seeping down from the modern city surface.

In *Three Bodies*, the extent of urban decay becomes evident when Reshma comes across a piece of human hair or part of a wig and a severed human finger drops out of it. Reshma thinks how "it looked like the nail still had the remnants of nail polish on it. Also red. Or that could have been blood" (Brodie 2020:17). Reshma has a physical reaction to seeing the finger – "despite her best efforts, Reshma gagged" (Brodie 2020:17). After leaving the tunnels, Reshma is haunted by the hidden workings of the underbelly of Johannesburg, a city in which her job as a police officer is to maintain order. For example, the following morning she awakens with a start, "literally catching her dream-self as she fell down the spirals of the staircase that led below Park Station" (Brodie 2020:57). In this section of the novel, a parallel can be drawn between Reshma's reaction in the tunnels and Katya's experience of the pit. Going into the tunnels and finding the finger punctures Reshma's own suit of armour. While Katya's protective layer is her latex suit, Reshma's position as a cop acts as hers since it enables her to deny her vulnerability. When challenged in her new position under Super Sobukwe, Reshma thinks how she "didn't like being put on the spot. It made her feel defensive, which she couldn't

admit out loud" (Brodie 2020:81). This armouring of self has, in all likelihood, stemmed from working in a male-dominated environment. After a colleague makes a comment about women being bad drivers, Reshma thinks that "there were lots of people, lots of men she had worked with, who were the same. Barbed comments about women in general, and women as cops" (Brodie 2020:107). As a result of her experiences in the kidnapping unit and her profession generally, Reshma seeks to suppress her femininity and thereby her vulnerability. This also leads to her shying away from elements of the unknown, disordered and magical that are contained in definitions of femininity. For example, Brodie writes that "Reshma wasn't big on psychic powers, or magic, in spite of what she had seen on the Northcliff Ridge […] but she did believe in her gut feel" (Brodie 2020:130). However, when Reshma is faced with the investigation of the dead women it brings up uncomfortable feelings of vulnerability. For example, she watches video footage of a kidnapping that may be the woman who was seen dragged below park station and into the tunnels. Seeing it gave her "a bad feeling that ran up her spine and out along her collarbones" (Brodie 2020:165). Reshma describes how

> …staring at the screens, looking at the woman trying in vain to get away, she wondered if she had let herself get distracted by the big prize of working on the cash heists, and if in doing so, she had left this woman – whoever she was – to some unspeakable fate. She felt cold, and a little sick. (Brodie 2020:165-6)

This instance shows a break in Reshma's conception of justice. She reckons with the concept that there is important work to be done in finding the missing women, something worth investing in, rather than simply excelling in her career.

Something similar happens to Katya, who enters the same field as her father, in pest control. Samuelson argues that Katya is also "taking up and adapting the masculine voice" (Samuelson 2012a:758). However, Katya transforms the role by relocating vermin rather than eradicating them. For example, Rose-Innes writes that "Katya does not destroy. This is her skill, her niche" (Rose-Innes 2011:19). As both women look into the respective holes that have opened up in

their cities they are confronted with a turmulous underbelly that confounds their sense of stability and order. Reshma is plagued by her descent into the tunnels and the discovery of the finger, and after encountering the pit, Katya is also plagued by its lingering presence. She finds it "disheartening" that "respectful inattention is not enough. That to keep things exactly as they are requires arduous maintenance, like a lawn needs cutting or a body needs feeding. Such ceaseless labour to shore up the world" (Rose-Innes 2011:31). In other words, the pit incident mirrors Katya's feelings of dis-ease at the seemingly perpetual movement of things around her and inside of her, in the form of haunting spectres of her father and an ambiguous sense of being.

More broadly, this threat applies to the social body of the postcolony as a clearly definable entity. The problem that is highlighted is that the old nation state relies on borders and systems of control. This is shown through the existence of the underbelly in comparison to the surface where there is an inevitable and constant breach of boundaries. Policing is the language of control used, whether social or structural. For example, in *Three Bodies* there is a description of the persistent removal of homeless people at Westdene Dam by the metro police, as well as their continual return (Brodie 2020:26). We uphold these structures because we want to believe in 'cultural gardening', as Katya puts it, she longs for "a little bit of – not luxury, exactly, but ease, permanence" (Rose-Innes 2011:31). However, as the Comaroffs argue, we need to account for disorder and free flow – particularly when it comes to borders. The Comaroffs point to a comparable connection that is drawn in the novels through the awareness of the underbelly – which is the idea that we cannot rely on systems of policing and control.

Their article 'Naturing the Nation' speaks to a similar fracturing of the known into messiness and ask us to read nature in a metaphorical way to understand the conception of the nation state. They argue that as the nation becomes more diverse in its "political sociology" it becomes

increasingly difficult to clearly define or categorise it within strict parameters (2001:635). Thereby, the existence of the nation state is increasingly abstract, which means that "the threat of its rupture" is ever more compelling (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001:635). The threat of rupture creates a response from those who consider themselves autochthons. Their belief is that, with this abstraction of the nation, there is an increasingly authoritative need to "divide and to negate whatever is perceived to endanger it" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001:635). In other words, as the postcolony develops and carries on with its outdated modes of operations, its instability becomes more overt. Therefore, the need to find an outlet for this anxiety becomes more necessary. When this happens, as the Comaroffs imply, the blame falls on bodies and objects of difference – the "treatment of alien-as-spectre" (2001:650). What accompanies this inscription is the positioning of the alien as displaced in a "technicist discourse about demography and economic sociology, about health and disease, about social pathology and criminality" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001:650). These latter descriptors are all things that the goggas or the mermaids come to embody as threats to the structure and sanctity of a controllable nation state.

This intent to control and neutralise perceived threats is epitomised by some select male characters in the novels, who are iterative of this system. The white men who close these metaphorical holes to the underbelly embody a kind of masculine and racist hubris. They use a language of policing and control in order to maintain their world view. Jan Snyman and Mr. Brand speak to the capitalist endeavours of apartheid infrastructure as respective proprietors of La Gondola and Nineveh. Nineveh is owned by the quintessential caricature of the South African 'authority' archetype, Mr. Brand, who also has persistent delusions of grandeur. After arriving in Nineveh, Katya listens to him drawl on:

> He wants to expand. There are plots across the road that belong to him, too, that will become more luxury estates, perhaps a shopping centre. There will be nature trails through the wetlands, beach access. And not forgetting the poor: he talks of the

> people in the informal settlements, how they can be put to work, and how in turn they can be provided with better homes, roads, electricity. He speaks without enormous animation, but rather in a tone of calm surety. (Rose-Innes 2011:84-5)

There is a strong sense that his visions allude to a specific white, male fantasy as an erasure of discomfort. This discussion has much to do with perceptions of race and class, something that has become increasingly complex since the official end of apartheid in South Africa. Archer and Orr argue that "while people continue to shy away from identifying with a class, they readily draw distinctions between 'people like us' and 'people not like us'" (Reay in Archer & Orr 2011:105). Therefore, "social and cultural practices are produced by, and serve to reproduce, class inequalities", and while people will readily distinguish between classes – like the guests scattering at the sight of Katya and Toby in their uniforms – it is rare for "class identities [to] emerge as collective and organizing agents in people's lives" (Archer & Orr 2011:105). As readers and academics, we often have to remind ourselves of our own position in a particular class that readily shields us from the existence of poverty, which is the reality of most South Africans. This previous part of the novel indicates the unreachable distance that we as readers have between us and truly understanding what it means to live without our basic needs being met. To see it written out holds up the absurdity of the musings by people like Mr. Brand and even Katya. For example, as Katya vaguely listens to Mr. Brand, her thoughts are more occupied with a desire to stay in this fairy-tale land. Rose-Innes writes how Katya, "wants more of that grand entitled feeling she had up on the terrace, with Mr. Brand's one arm around her shoulders and the other raised in invitation, urging her into the glorious prospect" (2011:90). At first, Katya is seduced by Mr. Brand's ideations; her position as a white, middle-class woman means that she is not forced to comprehend the racial and classist undertones of Mr. Brand's statement. Yet the reality is that these flimsy daydreams are happening in the same space of immeasurable poverty and suffering. This makes the disintegration of pristine spaces, such as the estates depicted in the novel, inevitable. As the novel progresses, we begin to see

that the statements of Mr. Brand and the grandiosity of Nineveh are overdrawn concepts. This is not to say that they do not still hold power, however, the issues are far more complex and often paradoxical then they may appear.

A figure from *Three Bodies* who is similar to Mr. Brand is Jan Hendrik Snyman. Ian finds his name under the list of directors for La Gondola. Ian knows of this man, he was involved in the murder of Union activist Tallboy Moeti and his wife in 1991. Snyman had been granted amnesty after testifying at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings that had taken place between 1996 and 1997. After the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and 'Post amnesty', Snyman had "re-invented himself as an entrepreneur, and still operated in the same area" (Brodie 2020:213). For Snyman,

> Amnesty had proved profitable. Snyman alone held interests in five property companies – two of which were at Hartbeespoort, the others in North West and Limpopo – plus a handful of other directorships of companies that were registered but not public, and so Ian couldn't determine the real nature of their business. There were other names too. Sakkie van Rensburg. Barend van der Westhuizen. William Craig. All of them commandos. Colonels, spies. Beneficiaries of both apartheid and democracy. (Brodie 2020:240)

Like Mr. Brand, Snyman provides an example of an autochthon who has continued to profit from a system that still operates in the same way, despite the end of apartheid. Jan Snyman embodies violence and abuse, Ian describes the likes of him as "a bunch of apartheid assassins and death squad members" (Brodie 2020:240). Furthermore, Reshma finds him deeply unsettling. She describes how "he might have been considered handsome, except for an almost imperceptible weakness in the line from his nose and mouth to his chin. Reshma couldn't put her finger on it, and yet it made the otherwise ordinary man appear as if something was very, slightly wrong" (Brodie 2020:279). Snyman appears to reflect the horrors that he has committed in his appearance. Like his facial features, his sense of reality is also slightly warped. He is convinced in his belief that "what I did was necessary for the stability and for the safety

of the state. If you look, properly, at history, you will see that it is true" (Brodie 2020:280). Reshma realises that what makes Snyman so frightening "was that he obviously believed his own version of the past" (Brodie 2020:280). Much like Mr. Brand's visions of Nineveh and the future, Snyman's viewpoint is positioned on historically oppressive racial and class lines, erasing those that fall outside of them.

The estates that these men own provide us with a compressed view of the world that created them. Nineveh and La Gondola are built on principles of surveillance and borders, as a neoliberal investment in the post-apartheid nation state. Initially it seems as if Nineveh, which lies on the outskirts of Cape Town, may offer an antidote to the disintegrating city. As Katya drives up to the estate, she thinks: "[T]he mountain is still there behind them, and somewhere up ahead is the ocean, where it should be, but everything else is turned around. This is somewhere else now. This is new" (Rose-Innes 2011:52). The place she enters presents, at least on the surface, as a magical parallel universe. Somewhere fantastical and beautiful, and most importantly, free of the trappings of Cape Town and its cavernous, agitated underbody.

Nineveh is inscribed with strict measures of control that maintain its pristine interior – much like the suburbs of Constantia – merging the idea of beauty *as* order. For example, upon arrival Katya describes the gateposts of Nineveh as "ornate, elaborately shaped and tiled […] a grinning lion paces either side, done in hard-wearing ceramic. Some kind of Mesopotamian fantasy, it seems" (Rose-Innes 2011:52). Katya notes that "although the lions are hokum, the padlock on this gate is real enough" (Rose-Innes 2011:52). In other words, despite its seeming calm and beauty, this space is heavily reinforced – with thumb pads and high fences on the

inside of the complex – and Katya remarks that "it seems that whoever designed the system was just as worried about people getting out as getting in" (Rose-Innes 2011:71).[3]

Nevertheless, the estate initially offers an exciting change for Katya; "Nineveh is a brand-new world, made from scratch" (2011:62). She describes her accommodation, Unit Two, in the following way:

> Here it is: cleanness, simple lines, plush finishes. This is the comfort and ease that she was thirsting for, back in her crumbling, cracking old house. It's as if she has imagined Nineveh, dreamed up out of her own cluttered mind these volumes of coolly defined space…in short, [she] has never seen a less parasite-infested place in her life. (Rose-Innes 2011:64)

This sterility speaks to how Nineveh is a fantasy, not just for Katya, but of a modern nation state that regulates access.

In *Three Bodies*, Brodie provides descriptions of a similarly pristine estate called La Gondola, which is a gated estate positioned on the edge of Hartbeespoort Dam. The houses on the estate are uniform and modeled on Italian architecture, "rendered in off-white or off-pink" (Brodie 2020:6). Like Nineveh's relation to Cape Town, La Gondola offers the illusion of a world apart from the dirty and chaotic surrounding city of Johannesburg. For example, Ian notes how "while the rest of the province was slowly turning brown at the edges, the greens at La Gondola were a uniform shade of emerald" (Brodie 2020:5).

[3] Similarly, in *Three Bodies*, Brodie also parodies the appearance of these fake lions. When Ian drives into Johannesburg and passes Lanseria airport, he arrives at the corner "where the old Lion Park used to be, and where only a cartoonish statue of a lion now remained" (Brodie 2020:26). Brodie writes: "Ian half-paid attention as the peri-urban edges quickly folded in on themselves, the veld turning into rows and rows of suburbs as he hit Cosmo City" (2020:26). Ian drives past a dilapidated caricature of a lion statue – a symbolic gesture to the crumbling pretences of the past and an unrealistic dream – and enters into the swarm of individual realities that make up the contemporary patchwork city of Johannesburg. In *Nineveh*, there is the grand estate gates with carved lions that is bordered by a settlement, this is refracted in *Three Bodies* by the low-income suburbs of Cosmo City and the remnants of the lion sculpture.

In the novels, through the downfall of seemingly idyllic estates, the authors turn these neoliberal inscriptions of order on their head and offer a transformative interpretation of a more mature nation state. Despite initial appearances, La Gondola and Nineveh contain underbellies of their own. In *Nineveh,* the estate is bordered by a littoral water source. The swamp that surrounds it acts as a contrast to its seemingly controlled interior. As Katya exits the gates of Nineveh, she notes that there is "a physical change in the atmosphere" (Rose-Innes 2011:72) and is struck by a sudden openness, much like when she encountered the pit. This causes her to pause, as she attempts to "read the landscape" (Rose-Innes 2011:72). She concedes that "the beach is a public place, relatively safe, as is the walled in compound behind her, but she's not sure about the stretch of ground that lies between. Instinctively, she scans for dodgy signals: no litter or other signs of human habitation, no stands of alien wattle. The place seems pristine" (Rose-Innes 2011:72). She zips up her suit, her barrier to the unknown outside, before moving forward. Ahead of her, "the vegetation masses […]. The yellow road of the boardwalk turns sinuously to enter a maze of reed – and stops abruptly" (Rose-Innes 2011:73). Katya attempts to jump to the bank facing the edge of the boardwalk and lands in the water, before pulling herself on to the shore. As she looks around, she describes the swamp as "a watery patchwork place, shifting and uncertain. There are no markers here, no distinctive great trees or boulders – or any stones at all. She's lost sight of Nineveh now, but she can't yet hear the sea" (Rose-Innes 2011:74). She adds that in "some places the water runs clear, elsewhere it stands still over a precipitate of slime" (Rose-Innes 2011:73). The swamp appears to be both fluctuous and deceptively still. It is brimming with life, but also ever changing. It exists in an undefinable space, where hooks in certainty – like the societal markers that Katya searches for – are not visible. It is also a connective littoral tissue between the ocean and land – it merges the public beach and the private estate. As a result, it embodies both, and represents the "fluctuant and fractural" nature of coastal or littoral thought (Samuelson 2003:7). Lastly, the dreamlike

descriptions of the swamp, as well as its hidden depths indicate how the littoral "gathers dispersed scraps into speculative assemblages, muddying generic boundaries, overflowing geopolitical borders and churning up temporalities" (Samuelson 2003:2).

This section of the novel is indicative of a comparison between the littoral exterior that is apart from Nineveh and its ordered interior. In other words, what the wetland embodies provides a metaphorical representation of the littoral parts of the nation state and borders that are excluded and destroyed through policing, in an attempt to create sanitary and ordered spaces like Nineveh and La Gondola. In *Nineveh* and *Three Bodies*, the estates are constructed on reclaimed wetlands, an example of an attempt to police the chaotic natural world. For example, in *Nineveh* Katya wonders "how much of the wetlands they had to drain, how many thousands of vertebrate and invertebrate souls were displaced or destroyed to make this place" (Rose-Innes 2011:61-2). The destruction of the wetland therefore concedes to the boundedness and control of Nineveh, indicating that certain levels of violence come with creating these systems. Much of this has to do with policing borders in South Africa, which is very clearly iterated in the descriptions of alien nature and the view of foreigners in South Africa. Hence, as soon as Katya exits Nineveh, she scans the landscape for perceived threats. Namely, she searches for signs of litter and "alien wattle" trees (Rose-Innes 2011:72). The litter points to human life, specifically life associated with poverty. This kind of life that is in opposition to the neat, orderly gardens and inhabitants of Constantia and Nineveh.

However, what quickly becomes apparent is that this swamp has permeated the walls of Nineveh. Despite appearances that Mr. Brand has tamed the littoral waters that lurk outside of the estates walls, there is a cavern that exists as a mirrored image beneath its surface. The extent of this permeation is embodied in Unit One, the apartment directly below Katya's spotless Unit Two. Unit One is flooded, but Katya recognises that "the dimensions are familiar: the floor

plan is the same as Unit Twos. But it is transformed. What she sees is a strange duplicate of Unit Two, one existing in some degraded alternative world. Or that same shiny apartment in twenty years, fifty – a place that has lain ruin for decades" (Rose-Innes 2011:163).[4] When Katya enters Unit One, she states that "they're in a gloomy, splashing place. The first thing she notices is the smell. It is not a foul odour, but the smell of living things, their wastes and exudations. Spittle and musk, mold and decay. Intimately linked to the smell is a sense of indefinable disorder. Chaos hangs in the air like a shout" (Rose-Innes 2011:163). In Unit One there is a large hole, it has been used by Len to get in and out through the cavern underneath. As she looks at the hole, an insect climbs out through the gap. She recognises it as "*Promeces palustris*" or a gogga. Katya realises that "this is their portal" (Rose-Innes 2011:164). The discovery of Unit One as a portal shifts the entire depiction of Nineveh. It is no longer an ordered space, one disassociated from the spectre of the destroyed wetland that it was built on. Nineveh's walls are revealed as porous, with hidden depths seeping in freely. The goggas are one such example of this porosity as they point to the ambiguity of the alien and homeliness. The Latin word *palustris* refers to a marsh, as used in Linnaean taxonomy (Williams 2018:427). Therefore, "although a headache for Nineveh, these creatures are thus autochthonous, not technically invasive" (Williams 2018:427). The goggas thus act as a metaphor for belonging and "the salience of autochthony as a naturalising allegory of collective being-in-the-world… [and] about its salience as a motor of collective action" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001:648). Once more, the duality of Unit One and Two points to the complex and ambiguous rendering of a littoral space. Nineveh is in fact an example of an ecoambiguous space that reveals the failings of "a cultural tendency to selectively appreciate and resist the natural world, seeking to control [an] experience and the natural environment as a way of maximizing a desired mode

[4] In this instance a parallel can be drawn between the shadow image – of a space thrown into decay in Unit Two – with the decrepit museum in the tunnels beneath Park Station that Reshma comes across.

of experience" (Slovic, Rangarajan & Sarveswaran 2014:vii). Karen Thornber argues that ecoambiguity, which under grids how people can simultaneously appreciate and destroy the nonhuman world (2012:6), and

> [h]opes to work toward breaking down barriers of isolation, insularity, and exceptionalism, reminding us that although human societies, the environments in which they live, and the dilemmas facing different peoples and ecosystems are distinctive, they are not unique. (2012:4)

This approach is useful when reading representations of belonging and the littoral in these novels, particularly in terms of how we view the nation state. In Nineveh, it culminates with the arrival of the goggas.

Following the discovery of the cavern and Unit Two is the climactic, operatic invasion of the goggas. It begins ominously after a heavy rain. In the still morning, Katya looks down at the result. Rose-Innes writes how "the moon is still above the rim of the sea, letting alight the patches of water down in the wetlands. From here she can see that the vlei has grown, the smaller pools linking up to form a twisting lake flowing around the black islets of ground" (Rose-Innes 2011:172). This vlei growing after rains coincides with the disintegration of the borders of Nineveh. The littoral sources appear to swell, seeping even further into the estate. For example, inside the walls of Unit One "the mud is shining; it could be groundwater, raised up by the rains and lit by the moon" (Rose-Innes 2011:173). Around her a vibration starts, at first it seems as if Nineveh is coming alive. However, she realises that it is because of pressure building beneath its surface. Katya describes how "Nineveh is breathing, flexing in a complex new rhythm that is alien to her: it is not the rhythm of a heartbeat, it is nothing warmblooded" (Rose-Innes 2011:173). She then sees the swarm of goggas. Interestingly, her first reaction is awe – Katya had not "expected the beauty" (Rose-Innes 2011:173). The swarm itself can be read as a littoral occurrence which Rose-Innes describes as that of "insectoid exuberance, the joy of the swarm. Or desperate warning. Or mad lasciviousness. Or something" (2011:173).

The effect of the swarm on Katya is paradoxically comforting, chaotic, joyful and dangerous. This mirrors her experience in the swamp and reflects an ecoambiguous tendency to simultaneously fear and appreciate the nonhuman world.

After the dramatic chaos that ensues with the swamp, Mr. Brand falls through the floorboards of Unit One into "a hole in the world" (Rose-Innes 2011:189). Katya is the only person who stays and attempts to help him, and in doing so she is forced to enter into the cavern beneath Nineveh. She describes how "it is a strange journey through a low-ceiling underworld… afloat in it are beams of wood and swatches of carpet, and cold slithering things that wrap around their legs. Flotsam and jetsam" (Rose-Innes 2011:192). Under Nineveh, "strewn all around is a collection of random objects: towel rails and wooden beading and chair legs and sections of melamine countertops, haphazardly washed out onto the mud. And more fundamental objects: bricks, chunks of concrete" (Rose-Innes 2011:193). What Katya realises is that "the place that once seemed so stable is not at all. It is rushing, swirling, all its bricks and tiles and phony lions flushing out. Nothing can be contained. And as the substance of Nineveh unravels, the swamp winds it up like yarn into a ball. Knitting new patterns, weaving Nineveh into the shacks and the city beyond" (Rose-Innes 2011:193). This part of the novel reflects how Nineveh, despite its stable façade is, in fact, littoral. Pieces of the estate are pulled loose and float around haphazardly in its hidden underbelly. The cavern reflects Samuelson's iteration of how coastal thought gathers "dispersed scraps into speculative assemblages, muddying generic boundaries, overflowing geopolitical borders and churning up temporalities" (2003:2). In this way we can come to read this part of the novel as a clearer representation of the nation state in South Africa. It is something in which the cruel depths are not immediately visible, they are held at bay by systems of control and power, but these are temporary solutions that require perpetual attention. In South Africa, as the protests of July 2021 have shown, infrastructure is subject to an aporetic state in which poorly conceived floorboards will inevitably give out. In other words, the

systems of autochthony that were inherited from apartheid are still too static and unable to account for collective being-in-the world.

In *Three Bodies*, La Gondola also has similarly ecoambiguous inscriptions. Through the representations of sex workers and water hyacinth, Brodie actively disrupts the seemingly clean estate, providing glimpses of a underbelly. For example, the missing security guard Zebulon, who Ian locates in Ga-Rankuwa, says La Gondola is "all beautiful on the outside, but inside, it's rotten" (Brodie 2020:205). As further evidence, the woman who is later found dead is seen on security footage entering the estate with other women in a car. Zebulon says to Ian that these women "come for… parties" (Brodie 2020:207). Ian is confused, "Parties. Are they waitresses?" he asks (Brodie 2020:207). However, Ian realises that this is certainly not what is implied. Brodie writes how Ian is both, "surprised and also not surprised that a pristine and pseudo-European place like La Gondola would have what appeared to be fairly pedestrian sex workers visiting the estate" (Brodie 2020:207).

Three Bodies also includes descriptions of alien invasion and environmental degradation of the Hartbeespoort Dam bordering La Gondola. Brodie writes that at the estate, "the land flowed almost seamlessly into the water" (2020:1). This creates "an illusion" which is "facilitated by an algal bloom that had been killing off the fish for weeks. The surface of the dam near the lock was covered with floating scum one shade off the rich green of the lawns" (Brodie 2020:1). Porosity between the destructive algae and the shores of the estate can be read as a metaphor. It can be seen as representative of how beneath the surface of this seemingly pristine estate and green-coated dam there is an inherent rottenness. In the novel it is stated that "nobody was sure what had caused the algae to go crazy" (2020:2). However, "there was a report in a local newspaper, the *Kormorant*, which stated it was because of the sewage coming in from the Jukskei and entering the Crocodile River" (Brodie 2020:2). The algae that Brodie refers to is

likely cyanobacteria, which "accumulates on the dam surface and rots in the sunlight" (Dower 2003:13). [5] Sophia Dower explains how this process occurs:

> The source of the huge outcry is tiny – a minute cyanobacteria called Microcystis, which, through a process known as eutrophication, develops to massive concentrations. Eutrophication is a natural process through which normal nutrient levels in the water are raised, but it is enhanced by human activity in the dam's catchment area. Coupled with other environmental factors such as low rainfall and warm, windless weather, this influx of nutrients leads to rapid and excessive growth of cyanobacteria and aquatic weeds. (2003:13)

In other words, along with mismanagement of water supplies (Coetzee 2021:5), environmental degradation in Hartbeespoort is the result of persistent disturbance to an area along with climate change. Ironically, the smell and bloom of cyanobacteria is actually a natural response to clean the area. The process is a way of "absorbing and removing excess nutrients from the water. However, in attempting to rectify the unnatural balance of nitrogen and phosphorus, nature is creating a new problem – one that, in this case, is proving extremely difficult to resolve" (Dower 2003:15). The algae bloom is rather indicative of ecoambiguity in the water. Its bloom is "informed in part by ambivalent attitudes arising from social standards and institutions that are themselves contested" (Thornber 2012:10). In other words, the bloom mirrors the lack of inclusive systems that may be implemented to truly tackle the root cause of environmental degradation, such as issues with infrastructure. Rather, characters such as Jan Snyman and Mr. Brand construct exclusive estates, indicating how "human behaviours toward the nonhuman tend to be contradictory. Behaviours fluctuate and cancel out one another" (Thornber 2012:10). More so, one cannot deny the algae bloom which is similar to the blooming of rubbish and the dead bodies in the water, that appear to be hybrids. It is telling that these bodies emerge in these littoral sites as it represents a surfacing of previously hidden depths. Thus, the green algae can be read as a metaphorical representation of the backfired attempts by estates like La Gondola

[5] Citing: Carin van Ginkel, specialist scientist at the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) in Pretoria.

and Nineveh to police borders and shore up boundaries or remove 'impurities'. Ecoambiguity thus also presents itself as a problem without a total solution. One way of dealing with the algae would be to drain and dredge the dam, although this would not tackle the main issue – namely "nutrient-rich water inflows" – and it is also not viable as South Africa is too arid (Dower 2003:15-6). Another solution would be "the creation of a wetland or pre-impoundment dam could filter nutrients out of the water before it reaches the dam" (Dower 2003:16). These solutions echo the methods used to control and restrain the Kowie River and build the Port Alfred Marina, as addressed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

Another, equally fraught issue in the dam that Brodie addresses are the water hyacinth plants, which are described as "transient invaders" (Brodie 2020:1). This mythos surrounding the cause of the algae bloom and hyacinth is a representation of the Comaroffs argument about the rhetoric that informs aliens and invasion in order to maintain other levels of autochthony. Instead, as the depictions of the dam present, the situation is far more littoral and ambiguous that it may seem. In addition – and with no small amount of irony – the hyacinth actually acts as a very effective filtration device for pollutants and algae.

In a scientific study titled *Use of Water Hyacinths in Wastewater Treatment*, Gian C. Gupta states:

> Water hyacinths, because of their prolific growth rate, pose special problems in water management by clogging irrigation channels and interfering with transportation. Water hyacinth is classified as an aquatic pest. Integrated biological and chemical methods for controlling the plant growth are costly. The plant's voracious appetite for nutrients and explosive growth rate is now being put to use in cleaning up municipal and agricultural wastewaters. Water hyacinths have been effective in removing algae, fecal coliform bacteria, suspended particles, trace toxic metals, organics and many other dissolved impurities from wastewaters. (1980:80).

Therefore, Gupta concludes that the "use of water hyacinths for wastewater treatment has been demonstrated to be highly efficient and inexpensive" (1980:80). Furthermore, some of the

proposed ways to get rid of the hyacinth is through using foreign insects, weevils, as a form of biocontrol. This form of biocontrol by the Centre for Biocontrol (CBC) has proven to be the most effective. These weevils are called "*Megamelus scutellaris planthopper*" (*Kormorant* 2020:4) and are native to South America, as is water hyacinth *(Kormorant* 2020:9). However, Professor Julie Coetzee from Rhodes University told the *Kormorant* that, although hyacinth is under control, a new invasive plant called *Salvinia minima* has started to take over in its place. Professor Coetzee says:

> This highlights the magnitude of water pollution in the dam, where one invasive species has been replaced by another because the cause of the invasion has not been addressed. Floating aquatic weeds thrive on high nutrient levels, and Hartbeespoort Dam is South Africa's, and if not Africa's, most polluted systems as a result of effluent from industry, urbanisation, and failing water treatment works. (2021:5)

Professor Coetzee's statement echoes the ways in which invasive species operate on the dam as littoral. Since the root issue causing the invasion is not addressed, there will always be instances of hidden depths coming to the surface. These findings provide a paradoxical solution to issues of environmental degradation in Hartbeespoort Dam. The role of water hyacinth provides an ecoambiguous process in which "exploitation coexists with cure" (Moonsamy 2019:85). The water hyacinth provides an example of how solutions to problems are not necessarily all encompassing. Rather, their existence provides an example of the truer littoral politics of the nation state, in which suffering is a perpetual occurrence. The best option to counter it is to restore balance rather than totally erase the negative elements. Instead, it is more reasonable to make spaces liveable and realistic, not exclusionary and utopian.

In *Three Bodies*, balance is restored by the mermaids who destroy La Gondola. In the end, the estate is ruined by the very thing it is trying to suppress. In other words, frightening spectres are raised from the littoral depths and, as they do, they totally dismantle the structures of power that have oppressed them. This part of the novel provides the dizzying crescendo to the last

remnants of structural autochthony that this estate holds. For example, Snyman's house is blown up and "in the flickering light of the blaze, Reshma thought she saw the figure of a woman run towards the slick waters of the dam, and dive in" (Brodie 2020:282). While on the water, Ian and one of the women from the mermaid agency, Linda, see Odi and some other men trying to kill the other missing woman, Ernestina. However, they are then attacked by a monstrous mermaid. Ian describes how "the black water grew arms, and a mouth full of teeth, and dragged the man down beneath the surface so fast he barely had time to scream" (Brodie 2020:287). Ian is then pulled under the water and "he could hardly see anything, but he could feel. Arms, legs, hands. Something human. Something not human. Part of his brain insisted that it was a panicked Linda, dragging him down beneath the water, driven mad by her own fear of drowning" (Brodie 2020:289). However, he soon realises that what he is looking at is a warped version of Linda "with a crown of bone and skin like a lizard [as well as] a mouth with rows of teeth, and black dead eyes" (Brodie 2020:289). Two more monsters with "dark eyes and sharp teeth and strange faces" (Brodie 2020:289) appear and pull the other men below the surface (Brodie 2020:290).

In the destruction of the estates, the novels provides us with an opportunity to think about the littoral and ecoambiguous politics that might comprise a 'new' world. These novels open us up to an imaginative understanding of how attempts at policing borders, by Mr. Brand and Jan Snyman, are futile. Instead, a better way to account for the way we move through the world is *through* the littoral and ecoambiguity. The goggas and the mermaids indicate the appreciable way of using nature as an alibi, which involves viewing it as littoral in order to make space for imagination and ethics. This aligns with the Comaroffs' iteration that "the passage across frontiers, among plants as among people, illuminates all the contradictions of openness and closure, of regulation and deregulation, of otherness and indigenisation" (2001:650).

The upheaval of order and the revelation of a more ambiguous and littoral world has a profound effect on both Reshma and Katya in the novels. As Katya and Mr. Brand exit the cavern through a cave and end up in the wetland. Mr. Brand strides forward, away from Nineveh, eventually arriving on a beach. Katya's protective layer – her suit – has been breached after the fall of Nineveh:

> …her uniform is completely saturated with mud, her face pasted with weedlike strands of hair. She can smell herself, too: that ditch water odour that she first sniffed, days ago, in the pit of the excavation opposite her home. She's transformed, like something that's lain under the earth through a long damp season, waiting to emerge. (Rose-Innes 2011:195)

With reference to the smell of ditch water from the pit, in this section of the novel we see the littoral spaces of Nineveh and the park merge. Thereby, each of the littoral spaces – the dug up park, the wetland and Nineveh's underbelly – have entangled into one complex, turbulent representation of the same feelings across different infrastructures. This instance is transformative, and forces her to confront ideas of permanence, belonging and stability. For example, she realises that

> [p]eople like them – like her and Len – they're not homey. They don't have homes, they don't really fit in them. The whole idea she had of Nineveh, of living there in comfort and ease behind walls that would never crumble, safe within the armed guard's circling lights: a dream, as grandiose and doomed as Mr. Brand's visions. (Rose-Innes 2011:206)

Now, instead of trying to rid herself of her father, Katya accepts that she will always carry a part of him in her. She describes herself as "a ball of string unravelling, always connected, but lighter the further she goes [away from her father]" (Rose-Innes 2011:205). Therefore, we can view Katya as an "endosymbiotic subject" (Moonsamy 2019:89) who has absorbed elements of another, of Len, and she continues to carry him with her as she moves through the world. While attempting to shed her father, she paradoxically feels connected to him and what he stands for, in terms of her sense of home and identity and her existence speaks to both

"biological and nationalistic" displacement in a body (Moonsamy 2019:89). However, this no longer antagonises her, she just accepts the instability and fluctuance of belonging. Belonging, as Katya comes to realise, is not a state of permanence. It cannot be achieved by rooting oneself in a house, or attempting to ignore parts of yourself or the world, rather it is a singular experience. For example, after the fall of Nineveh, Katya uses the term "Ninevehs" (2011:207) in describing an individual experience of a collective space defined by inequality. This argument indicates that we cannot prescribe a universal theory of belonging and autochthony, as every person's experience is different. The only way to hold these experiences in their complexity is by recognising difference and paradox, as is indicated by ecoambiguity. In short, aporia is unavoidable. However, despite this, the only way to access pockets of connection is by embracing the discomfort of uncertainty. For example, when Katya talks about Ninevehs she says:

> Out there, [she] sees many such places: domains of uncertain ownership. Unfinished boulevards, the smoky glitter of settlement still to be named, nebulae of black between the lights. Everything's in motion, changed and changing. There is no way to keep the shape of things. One house falls, another rises. Throw a brick away and someone downstream will pick it up and lay it next to the others in a new course in a new wall – which sooner or later will fall into ruin, giving spiders a place to anchor their own silken architecture. Every human skin, Katya has read, is porous and infested, every second letting microscopic creatures in and out. Our own bodies are menageries. Short of total sterility, there is no controlling it. (Rose-Innes 2011:207)

This quote concisely knits together the human and nonhuman, as well as the nation and the individual. Each of us contain elements of the world around us, we have absorbed them in so many different ways. Therefore, current iterations of belonging and autochthony simply fall short. For example, Katya writes that "she's lost faith in [her] job. The fruitless work of trying to keep things in their proper places" (Rose-Innes 2011:207). At the end of the novel, Katya sleeps in the back of her van and has "no permanent address" (Rose-Innes 2011:205). This mirrors how it would feel to adopt this uncertainty in the political sphere. So, Katya lives on

with a connection to her father and a recognition of abuse. In other words, her own individual ecosystem becomes ecoambiguous. This is the right way to use nature as an alibi, by embracing the littoral to navigate the world around you. You cannot cover holes all the time, you need to engage. Therefore, the novel outlays the predicament we find ourselves facing in the postcolony. For example, Daniel Williams writes:

> *Nineveh* catalogues Katya's activities as she discovers how human and insect actors undermine the spatial expectations of post-apartheid South Africa, siphoning off the estate's materials into broader economic and ecological circuits. Nineveh offers an allegory of sorts for a nation-state trying to address novel challenges in spaces and structures haunted by deep-seated inequalities. (2018:420)

Thus, how we conceive of the state needs to be re-ordered, in doing so we need to re-examine what we perceive as threats and why.

In *Three Bodies*, Reshma also undergoes an internal metamorphosis of her own, as she opens up to ambiguity and is forced to re-order her preconceptions of the world around her. This is a metaphysical undertaking, it does not reflect in the physical world like it does for Katya with her suit. The cases Reshma is a part of open her up to unexplainable events. For example, when she is caught in a shootout during an intercepted cash-in-transit heist, she experiences magic, first hand. Reshma describes how, while she is aiming at a man and about to pull the trigger, "something made her pause. It was as if there was something wrong with the tall man. Because she could almost see through him" (Brodie 2020:144). After the incident, she realises that she had the statue of Ganesh, given to her by her mother, in her pocket (Brodie 2020:146). She also finds out that "one of the men they had arrested had been found with body parts in his pockets" (Brodie 2020:146). After this experience she suggests that they get MaRejoice, a sangoma, to help with the case, and she puts her statue of Ganesh on the bed next to her. The experience also causes her to open up to being more vulnerable and accepting of the unknown world around her. For example, after the incident she expresses love for Ian, admits that she was

injured in the shootout and asks him to stay with her. Furthermore, at the end of the novel, this acceptance is cemented as she comes to terms with not being able to explain the events at La Gondola. For example, in the last chapter, Brodie writes how "in the end, there were details that were confusing, but which didn't seem to matter" (2020:291).

In both *Three Bodies* and *Nineveh*, there is a speculative or magical element present. The "witching zone" (Rose-Innes 2011:194) around Nineveh and the mermaids who rise out of Hartbeespoort Dam point to an explainable element of the world, that rises from the littoral. In addition, characters like MaRejoice understand that the river is a metaphysical entity and how it is inherently ecoambiguous; water is thus a medium in which we can see the importance of balance outlaid by indigenous practices. The mermaids are an example of this, particularly as one referral of them is through the Shona word, Njuzu, which has both positive and negative connotations. Grant Lilford writes that the Njuzu are usually represented in Shona oral literature as "an ambivalent figure, with a capacity for extremes of good and evil. It does good deeds by training people to be 'N'ganga' (traditional healers), but it can also steal people from their families and, in some cases, destroy them" (1999:199). Like MaRejoice's iteration of the river as neither good nor bad, indigenous beliefs highlight this too in their world views. For example, when referring to the other Sangoma, Odi, MaRejoice says that "we don't practice on the same sides of the river" (Brodie 2020:222). Reshma wonders "if MaRejoice meant a literal river, before recalling an earlier discussion about spiritual territories, and metaphysical rivers" (Brodie 2020:222-3). Therefore, in *Three Bodies* the littoral provides a platform to highlight indigenous beliefs that colonial infrastructure has suppressed. Like in nature, all of these beliefs are surfacing through water. Reshma's experience speaks to is an unearthing of indigenous understandings/appreciations of water bodies as inherently spiritual. This means opening up to more ambiguous beliefs, something that Katya also has to do. In *Three Bodies*, women are shown to be adaptive, much like the littoral water they are connected to. For

example, the water is negatively charged by Odi and the mermaids rectify the balance of power. This points to a need to monitor individual efforts and a constant return or maintenance that is needed to keep a balance of power. This is what can be defined as the littoral politics of the novel, which can be adapted to our reading of the nation state. It provides an offering for what maintaining a more realistic nation state would look like, not through suppression and order, but rather through constant rebalancing, and an acceptance of ambiguity.

When *Nineveh* and *Three Bodies* are viewed alongside one another, the two cities that they focus on appear to share similar littoral underbellies and systems of policing used to suppress them. Essentially, Brodie's Johannesburg and Rose-Innes's Cape Town share the same agenda when conceiving of the neoliberal nation state. The novels make strides in disrupting this and pointing to more fluctuous undertones of these spaces, revealing them as littoral and ambiguous. What these novels actively emphasise is the tenuousness of these cities. This plays out largely through the infection and destruction of the two estates in the novels, La Gondola and Nineveh. The authors of both novels explore speculative imaginings, through swarms of mysterious insects and monstrous mermaids, in order to make a point about the indigenous beliefs that underpin many unacknowledged cultural practices in South Africa. As shown, these cultural practices are much more open to ambiguity and maintaining balance between the constant presence of both positive and negative elements. Essentially, these practices can be seen as embodying a littoral politics that is far more reflective of the current nation state than inscriptions carried over from colonialism.

Chapter 3

In the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have explored the ways in which various novels project a littoral depiction of the South African nation state of the past and present. The obvious conclusion to this would be to ask – where do we go from here? An author like Masande Ntshanga provides us with a reading of possible imagined future through depictions of the littoral and how it might provide us with hopeful signals of worlds to come. In this chapter, I aim to highlight the spatial-temporal and metaphysical applications of the littoral, rather than focusing on its concrete representations.

In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson, argue that a metaphor is "pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (1980:3). In other words, the meaning we create through our thoughts – our conceptual structure – dictates the way that we move through the world, our reality as well as perception of time and space. Through metaphors we make the unrecognisable, recognisable. As Lakoff and Johnson state, "*the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*" (1980:5). In *Triangulum*, the littoral is positioned as a naturalised metaphor; it shows up throughout the novel through the flux and ambiguity around constructions of time and the future. The littoral is presented in metaphorical representations of technology, the nation state, the machine and even in the specific vocabulary that Ntshanga uses in his writing. For example, the protagonist speaks about feeling "the sensation of being dropped into the ocean" (Ntshanga 2019:209), of silence deepening (Ntshanga 2019:179) and of "movements as slow as the ocean current" (Ntshanga 2019:164). Throughout the novel, there is a sense of sinking deeper, of being swallowed by something. This 'something' can be interpreted as the cultural and social

restrictions of race and class that has an inherent 'stuckness' or 'stickiness' through which it is defined.

Triangulum is a science fiction novel by Ntshanga that details the experiences of an unnamed female protagonist. The novel consists of a collection of transcribed recordings and journal logs, along with a distinct section of "autofiction" (Ntshanga 2019:17) by the protagonist, titled 'Five Weeks in the Plague'. In the novel, these pieces of information are compiled by Dr. Naomi Buthelezi and Dr. Joseph Hessler, who received the materials at the South African National Space Agency (SANSA). The materials foretell the end of the world in 2050 and predict events that occur after they are received at SANSA, so as to consolidate their validity. The materials document the unnamed protagonist's experiences, ranging from growing up in the Ciskei in the Eastern Cape of South Africa at the turn of the millennium, to her adult life between Johannesburg and Cape Town. The protagonist spends her childhood and teenage years predominantly in King Williams Town, living with her father, Tata, and then after he dies with her aunt, Doris. The protagonist's mother disappears in 1994 under mysterious circumstances. In October 1999, she starts to receive visions of what she calls the machine (Ntshanga 2019:26). She only describes the machine in relation to a triangle that sometimes changes direction and at one point splits in two (Ntshanga 2019:144). Growing up, the protagonist also has two close friends named Litha and Part. The three become interested in UFO's following the protagonist's confessions about the machine. Something else that happens is that, while she is in school, the protagonist sees an advertisement that reads: "*Unusual paid position for top-performing local student. Must be imaginative*" (Ntshanga 2019:100, Ntshanga's emphasis). She applies and while there, meets a woman named Marianne and her colleagues whose research is based on "Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development" (Ntshanga 2019:123).

Like her disjointed descriptions of the machine, the narrative structure of the novel is also fractured and disorientating. The novel jumps between timelines as the journal logs and transcribed recordings are presented alongside each other. More so, some of the information in the novel becomes relevant to the overall story arc, while other pieces are left open-ended or unanswered. The visions of the machine, as well as the protagonists perceived "reduced affect display" (Ntshanga 2019:26) are diagnosed as different disorders by psychiatrists and doctors, such as dysthymia and schizoaffective disorder. However, for a large part of her growing up, the protagonist believes that the machine's appearance can be interpreted as signals sent by her mother. As an adult the protagonist gets a job at "Population Control, which was the name [she and her colleagues] gave the Grant Regulation Office [G.R.O] in east Johannesburg – an unofficial wing of the Department of Social Development" (Ntshanga 2019:214). The true purpose of the G.R.O is to collect data on South African citizens and sell it to private entities. In the novel, Ntshanga depicts how the past is reanimated in the present and future through modes of oppression against South African citizens similar to those used during apartheid.

The next chapter in the novel is titled 'Part B: 2035'. In this new, later timeline, the protagonist now has a daughter and is contacted by Marianne, who reveals that her mother was around the whole time – even during the experiments. She learns that Nobomi, her mother, saw the machine too. The protagonist goes with Marianne to a facility and is able to plot the points laid out by the machine which direct her to a triangulation between three points. Namely, these points are the Vredefort Crater, the Cradle of Humankind, and the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park. Once there, the protagonist receives the message about the imbalance inflicted on the universe by humanity. Thus, other celestial beings are going to destroy earth if humankind does not rectify their ways.

For black people in South Africa, cultural memory is riddled with oppression and dispossession. From the time of colonialism when settlers first landed to continual racism in the present, the history of blackness has been saturated by violence on the continent. There is, unfortunately, the possibility that this continues into the future, which forms the basis of afropessimist thought.[6] However, Triangulum represents the future as littoral and allows for a contradictory counterpart – an opening up of sorts – of a more hopeful alternative also.

In this regard, Afrofuturism becomes useful lens to interpret the novel. Afrofuturism, coined by Mark Dery in 1993, can be defined as "a fluid ideology" created by various writers and creatives in order to "reconstruct 'Blackness' in the culture" (Crumpton 2020:1). Afrofuturism can be read along the lines of what John Jennings refers to black technosis (2020:25,53), as the fusion of how we think of technology and spirituality which can be read as a parable to black culture today (2020:26,36). It provides a platform for future imaginings in which literature and the arts provide interpretations of what it means to break free from specific boundaries inscribed by a neoliberal and racist society. More importantly, as defined by Kodwo Eshun it "is concerned with the possibilities for intervention within the dimension of the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory and the future conditional" (2003:293). Eshun argues that

> Africa is always the zone of the absolute dystopia. There is always a reliable trade in market projections for Africa's socioeconomic crises. Market dystopias aim to warn against predatory futures, but always do so in a discourse that aspires to unchallengeable certainty. (2003:292)

[6] Weier notes that "the terms 'Afro-Pessimism' and 'Afro-Pessimist' (uppercase and hyphenated) here refer to a stream of thought coming from African American or Black Studies. Although it must not be confused with the 'afropessimist' (lowercase and not hyphenated) approach concerning the postcolonial state and potential of the African continent that was popularised in the 1980s and 1990s, there are points of contact and works, such as those by Achille Mbembe, that are of relevance for both Afro-Pessimism and afropessimism" (2014:419).

The use of an Afrofuturist approach is predicated on recognition of internal and external knowledge in order to prevent and protect Africa from predatory futures. Similarly, the littoral recognises a more hopeful counter-future, that sits alongside afropessimist temporalities, and allows for a necessary mitigation against the trajectory of time that will steep us in further into black death and despair. For example, Rasheedah Phillips states:

> Afrofuturism lends itself well to exploring pathways to liberation, unearthing our true histories, mapping our futures, and understanding our present conditions in the flow of time. Because it provides a perpetual bridge between the past, present, and future, Afrofuturism and the black speculative imagination can be used as liberation technologies to build future worlds. (2019:437-8)

Afrofuturism predicates balance and opening up to the unknown, by doing so those who have been trapped in the tar of time might be able to prepossess other futures. Eshun writes how Afrofuturism may be seen as an attempt at "recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afro-diasporic projection and as a space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political dispensation may be undertaken" (2003:301). The intervention to predatory futures that Afrofuturism provides is a hopeful counter-narrative for blackness that predicates the necessity of littoral futures. It provides a platform for future imaginings in which literature and the arts provide interpretations of what it means to break free from specific boundaries inscribed by a neoliberal and racist society.

Although Afrofuturism contains roots in America, and some of its central characteristics centre around the middle crossing and the nostalgia of returning to a non-existent Africa, some question its applicability in an African context. Yet Henriette Gunkel and Kara Lynch argue that specific "geographies are not fixed, and no one vantage-point is privileged over another" (2019:24). However, it is important "to address the diaspora's dominance in claiming this

moniker" (Gunkel & Lynch 2019:24).[7] According to Jemima Pierre, "race is often not treated as global in scope and content" (Pierre 2013: xi). She writes that despite the fact that "Africa—as trope and geopolitical space—is clearly understood as the site of racial otherness, it is this very assumption (and all that it entails) that obstructs sustained analyses of race and its continuous and active processes on the continent. Africa stands in for race but yet, paradoxically, race does not exist in Africa (Pierre 2013: xii-xiii). This largely stems from the diaspora's reading of themselves in relation to Africa through the lens of modernity, which leaves "no theoretical space […] for understanding continental African racialised experiences of slavery, colonialism, and continued racialization in the postcolony" (Pierre 2013: xiii). According to Pierre, Africa and Africans remain functional cogs in the collective machinery of global capital. What I argue in this dissertation is that Afrofuturism must be predicated on a much stickier inscription of race, it has roots in the diaspora, but this does not make it any less useful as a framework.[8]

[7] There are many elements of Afrofuturist thought that are pointed to in the novel. For example, when the protagonist is at university, she meets an American exchange student named Tiana (Ntshanga 2019:281). Through Tiana, the protagonist gets involved with a religious sect that was created by Tiana's father, The Professor, "a former biologist who'd lost his wife to a car crash" (Ntshanga 2019:291). The church is called "XR03" and combined "the tenets of modern biology with those of The Nation of Gods and Earths" (Ntshanga 2019:291). The church was named after "Clarence 13X, who founded the Five-Percent Nation in 1964, and the process of cellular respiration ("R"), which had been The Professor's field of research; the principles which he had reconfigured into a theology" (Ntshanga 2019:291). The church is an amalgamation of different things, technological and religious and human.

[8] One of the most powerful allegories for this stickiness can be found in Toni Morrison's 1981 novel, *Tar Baby*. Morrison depicts the cultural trauma and erasure involved in the experience of blackness through her characters and representations of the tar pit. The tar pit traps Jadine, coating her in sticky, viscous liquid. I would like to argue that the tar pit can be read as a littoral representation of the aesthetics of blackness. Krumholz states:

> In *Tar Baby*, the black aesthetic reveals blackness and its meanings; it makes visible the often invisible and inescapable ideologies of race; it shows the ways in which struggles over racial meanings have real consequences in the world; and it shows readers their activity and complicity in the production and consumption of blackness. In this way, the novel *Tar Baby* becomes the reader's tar baby; we are immersed in the tar, in the meanings of blackness, and we must work through the ways of thinking that make blackness horrifying, threatening, or liberating (2008:266).

She adds: "Morrison connects certain aesthetic choices in *Tar Baby* to blackness: she converts long-standing representations of blackness as absence and excess into rhetorical strategies; she uses the word 'tar' to dismantle the embedded racism in language" (Krumholz 2008:267). In other words, the complexity of Jadine and Sons'

Similarly, *Triangulum* indicates how we are all globally complicit in systems of control and oppression. Ntshanga draws on a shared black experience, framing blackness as a precarious position, often leading to contrary behaviours that still allow for the operation of power. For example, he writes how since "throughout our history, […] oppressors have always relied on our willingness to barter each other. From the Middle Passage to data" (Ntshanga 2019:276). We are warned about how this joint history of oppression will extend into predatory futures through the Zones and the protagonist's involvement in data mining and what it constitutes on a global and local level. These scenes highlight the ways in which black life is universally trapped in racialised capitalism and Afropessimism as data mining highlights the connectivity between South Africans and the neoliberal global order. For example, Ntshanga writes about the transition of the state to a 'multifaceted corporation' as data is mined by the protagonist and other employees at the G.R.O. At this organisation, citizens are fitted with implants for "data extraction, collection, collation, [and] algorithm building" (Ntshanga 2019:248) and their information and rights are traded to the highest bidder for a profit. One such subject is a construction worker from Alexandra township, who the protagonist describes as "one of a multitude" (Ntshanga 2019:272). In the novel these 'masses' are plagued by poverty and oppression, that then results in substance abuse, violence and mental illness. This is directly illustrated through the construction worker who is described by the G.R.O. as "the addict" and took methamphetamines while also being subjected to electroshock therapy (Ntshanga 2019:271). The protagonist, and the rest of the chosen team, are shown a 30-minute montage that includes depictions of the subjects substance abuse, increased sexual activity and violence

relationship and the relevance of the tar pit can be shown as metaphorical representations of the ambiguity of blackness. It is littoral, not dualistic. As Krumholz states, 'tar' "constructs an excess of meaning, the slippage of meaning that allows blackness to escape the oppositional logic of 'black' and 'white' and to undermine the structure of meaning on which racial ideology depends" (2008:273). Thus, Morrison posits race as littoral, as a swamp that contains tar pits but also excess, and thus allows for an opening up. Race is a swamp, this is a metaphor that we live by.

(Ntshanga 2019:271-2). This construction worker's life and predicament is not unusual and through this example, Ntshanga constructs a hidden underbelly of data collection that views data as "as the oil of the 21st century" (Paschalidi 2015:5) – a resource to be mined. Similarly, Hwang and Levy write that "data are costly to acquire and produced primarily for commercial or industrial ends, but bear the possibility of big payoffs for those with the means to extract it" (2015:9). Neoliberal capitalism is the driving force for this collection of information that happens through the assistance of the state. Moreover, it points to the ongoing 'machinification' of the black body that has historically been controlled and calibrated for labour and profit; a pure reflection on the collective history of slavery and of South Africa's mines. The latter is pointed to in *Triangulum* when the protagonist looks upon the bronze sculpture of a miner, depicting George Harrison; "the miner was captured in a moment of triumph, holding up the first nugget from the world's largest gold field" (Ntshanga 2019:256). Yet the protagonist looks upon the statue and locates the miner as "a part of the plague. It's patient zero" (Ntshanga 2019:256). This moment speaks to the immense wealth reaped by colonial powers in South Africa, while countless and nameless black people toiled in abhorrent conditions. It thus becomes clear that this history follows South Africans all the way into the present and future where the G.R.O examines and pathologises these black bodies for the sake of profit.

Similarly, the Delta Urban Renewal Project and the subsequent Zones that are created also seek to monitor and control the population of South Africa. The protagonist states:

> …the townships were meant to serve as micro-cities, we were told: self-contained, privately owned Zones with standardised populations of 200 000 and streamlined economic functions, including energy production, recycling, manufacturing and urban farming [which is] not too different from us at Population [...] It marked a trend: the nation was transitioning from underdeveloped state to multifaceted corporation. (Ntshanga 2019:215-6).

In the novel, Ntshanga writes that since its launch in 2019, these "Delta Labour Camps" (Ntshanga 2019:19) were increasingly cordoned off, starting with townships such as Alexandra (2019:215). In other words, as is argued by a sociologist in the novel, this "Urban Renewal Project" resulting in Zones can be described "as a new form of apartheid" (Ntshanga 2019:216). The development of the Zones speaks to a few previously mentioned ideas about the operation of the nation state as an ambiguous entity that is continually haunted by the past in the present and, as we see in *Triangulum*, possibly into the future. Therefore, the South Africa that Ntshanga depicts reflects the dark side of the ideations of the 'new' nation, depicting it as irrevocably joined to past inscriptions. For example, Samuelson writes that we need to reimagine the post-apartheid state through the littoral so that we can recognise how "the nation takes on new conceptual forms, or reanimates earlier ones abandoned under the urgencies of apartheid, while past structures of oppression and displacement, or memories thereof, seep across the temporal rupture posited in the 'post' into disavowing the present" (Samuelson 2013a:10). If we read *Triangulum* in such a way, the novel creates a possible future in which the past is reanimated in the future, wreaking havoc on vulnerable inhabitants.

Generally speaking, Afropessimism speaks to a perpetual reckoning of black social life against racism and oppression, as well as the continual exploitation and suppression of the African continent. Writing on Afro-pessimism in America, Jared Sexton argues that

> [n]othing in afro-pessimism suggests that there is no black (social) life, only that black life is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonised, of all that capital has in common with labor—the modern world system. Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space. This is agreed. That is to say, what Moten[9] asserts against afropessimism is a point already affirmed by afro-pessimism, is, in fact, one of the most polemical dimensions of afro-pessimism as a project: namely, that black life is not social, or rather that black life is lived in social death. Double emphasis, on lived and on death.

[9] Moten, Fred (quoted in Sexton 2011:28).

> That's the whole point of the enterprise at some level. It is all about the implications of this agreed- upon point where arguments (should) begin, but they cannot (yet) proceed. (2011:28-9)

Afro-pessimism and afropessimism thus concedes to a static expression of black oppression, an immovable brittleness or a storm torn sea that is not crossable. In the part of the novel that takes place in the Ciskei, the protagonist details the multiple boundaries faced by black people in South Africa and uses the metaphor of the 'Zone of Avoidance' in a letter to her missing mother,

> Dear Nobomi,
> I've learnt something new about humankind, but it's not from the machine, or from what you called the dial, it's from a book. I've learnt that from our vantage point on Earth, we can't make out our own galaxy, the Milky Way, in its entirety. Instead, interstellar dust – like human thoughts and emotions – occludes the view, limiting our appraisal of the whole to 20%. This is how it was between us, and how it was between you and Dad, and how it is between everyone else, too. It's called the Zone of Avoidance, and it starts down here, where we all are, and then it reaches up to the heights of the supernovas. (Ntshanga 2019:195)

The Zone of Avoidance can be read as an iteration of the veil or Double-consciousness as posited by W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois's philosophical framework refers to "a source of inward 'twoness' putatively experienced by African-Americans because of their racialised oppression and disvaluation in a white-dominated society" (Pittman 2016:1). For example, Du Bois remembers: "[T]hen it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (1897:2). This is similar to the experience of the protagonist who looks up at a vantage point from earth at the stars – which are obscured by the past and her missing mother, the present and her dying father – to see what lies beyond, her own future. This indicates a murky layer left by the past and present that all roil together and obscures the highest potential view of the future. The Zone of Avoidance speaks to a particular reading of blackness, through the

lens of time and space. It references a particular oppressive stickiness that is seen to constrain blackness.

However, through the messages she receives from the machine, Nsthanga depicts that the way in which this Zone of Avoidance may be breached is by alternative futures that provide an antidote to afropessimism. In the novel, the machine leads the protagonist to the triangulation of three points: the Vredefort Crater, the Cradle of Humankind, and the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park (Ntshanga 2019:337). The Vredefort Crater is the aftermath of an asteroid that hit earth about two billion years ago. It is "the world's oldest and largest known impact structure shows some of the most extreme deformation conditions known on Earth" (Hansen 2018:n.p.). The Cradle of Humankind is where some of the oldest hominoid fossils have been found (Maropeng and Sterkfontein Caves 2021:2). The relevance of the inclusion of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park can be read as a direct evocation of the littoral, as it speaks to the turbulent and fluxtuous nature of the nation state that Ntshanga depicts. Yet, somewhat tellingly, Nsthanga elevates the wetland from the physical to the metaphysical by leaning on the language of the cosmos. An example of this is seen when the protagonist attends an art exhibition opening in Johannesburg:

> The sun was beginning to descend below the smog line. We were given digital headgear to give us access to an augmented-reality application – which made it appear as if the building was falling apart, the seams leaking a viscous red substance that looked like lava. The source of the fluid was a centrepiece that resembled both the Earth and an asteroid caught at the moment of implosion. Above it, computer monitors hung suspended from the ceiling on shredded fibre-optic cables; below them, in a circle around the spherical sculpture, were hominoids in various states of evolution, each reaching for the paintings and photographs that were on the walls. These leaked black fluid and depicted, in turn, complex star systems, binary code, and satellite images of disintegrating ecosystems. (Ntshanga 2019:293)

This exhibition points to a transcendence from earthly oppression; from the Zone of Avoidance, into the ether. The way in which this movement is depicted is through liquid, a littoral

representation of moving into the future while maintaining porosity with the past and present. This correlates with Michelle M. Wright's concept of epiphenomenal time, which she describes as "the 'now': through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted" (2015:4). Wright describes that although Epiphenomenal time "denotes the current moment, a moment that is not directly borne out of another (i.e., causally created)." It only precludes "a direct, or linear, causality" (2015:4). Thus, Wright continues,

> [t]he current moment, or 'now' can certainly correlate with other moments, but one cannot argue that it is always already the effect of a specific, previous moment. Read together, they underscore the depth and breadth with which these notions of spacetime pervade Western expressions of collective identity, most especially Blackness. Even further, they underscore that while the linear progress narrative is an invaluable tool for locating Blackness, when used alone its very spatiotemporal properties preclude a wholly inclusive definition of Blackness, yielding one that is necessarily inaccurate. By contrast, Epiphenomenal time enables a wholly inclusive definition (appropriate to any moment at which one is defining Blackness). (2015:4)

This precludes a distance from the current trappings of blackness, opening it up to more hope and free flow. Therefore, if we are able to adapt to this, we will essentially be embracing the littoral and the hope that it provides. This radical opening up to hope is something that blackness currently does not have access to.

In *Triangulum*, the machine acts as a conduit for this opening up. When the protagonist first sees the machine, she thinks of the word "canard" (Ntshanga 2019:29). Canard can have two meanings, the first aligns with "myth", "rumour" and "falsehood" (Ntshanga 2019:29-30). However, canard also refers to a small projection attached to the wing of an aircraft, its use being to provide stability and sometimes enhance performance. Thus, as per the nature of myth in African cultures – one example being that of Nongqawuse – the machine carries signals like the *Abantu Bomlambo* (the people of the river). More so, if we read the machine in the novel as a combination of the qualities of canard, it presents as a vessel that carries myth and signals, but also provides a possible stable future, if it has any of the 'mechanical' qualities of a canard.

Therefore, it is presented as a littoral entity. When the machine communicates with the protagonist, she writes how "the world is black and infinite. Footsteps thud on the floor, like a fist pounding the hull of a ship underwater" (Ntshanga 2019:51). Later on in the novel she states:

> When I get home at 21:35, I see the machine again. Its hum sounds louder than I remember. I watch it expand to cover the ceiling, its silver parts blinking, rolling inside the darkness. From the mattress, I turn the recorder on. As I drift off, I make out the triangle again, before it sinks back into the murk. (Ntshanga 2019:70)

In both of these examples, I would like to draw attention to the use of the metaphors of sinking, of being underwater, of murky depths with infinite and hidden darkness. The machine provides a littoral sensibility of black space and time and thus, by extension, its futures. Rather tellingly, 'the machine' never presents itself as a material object but is imbued with metaphysical forms of knowing that blend its animist and materialist nature, and encourages a littoral interpretation of its function.

The machine in the novel can be read as a rendering of an animist materialism, a term coined by Harry Garuba. As per Garuba, Africa reads technology through the lens of animism. This is exemplified in his explanation of Sango, the "patron god of electricians and the deity who presides over Nigeria's power corporation" (2003:263). In other words, the Sango represents an adaption of myth to protect the modern man. Furthermore, Garuba argues that this is a particular way of reading technology in Africa, through the lens of animism. For example, he writes how the Sango is a "symbolic deployment by a modern elite [which] underscores a form of sociopolitical practice that has become quite pervasive in contemporary Nigeria, if not all of Africa" (2003:263). Garuba argues that in African cultures, technology is absorbed into local cultures, it does not exist separately from them. Thus, something like the Sango is a meeting point between tradition and modernity. How we read modernity in Africa is free from Western binary tethering, it is also not just a 're-traditionalisation' of Africa, but a generative animist

unconscious that continuously enfolds modernity in Africa. According to Harry Garuba, animism is not tied to any specific religion, instead "it is the umbrella designation for a mode of religious consciousness that is often as elastic as the user is willing to stretch it" (Garuba 2003:267), and sees the divine as *located* and *embodied* in objects (2003:267). Animism can be read as "the 'locking' of spirit within matter or the merger of the material and the metaphorical, and this process of re-enchanting the world is what the machine performs. Thus, the machine exemplifies the merger of spirit and machine in animist material thought that is particular and unique to African interpretations. Furthermore, in disrupting our idea of the machine, Ntshanga is able to raise broader concerns about how we view and internalise machines in an ontological way. Ontological metaphors, such as the mind is a machine, are necessary for even attempting to deal rationally with our experiences" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:26). In other words, it is a way of making the unknown known. As Lakoff and Jonson argue, "the MACHINE metaphor gives us a conception of the mind as having an on-off state, a level of efficiency, a productive capacity, an internal mechanism, a source of energy, and an operating condition" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:28). This metaphor that we live by enables us to connect with and interpolate the world around us. For example, when the G.R.O. department head, Pius, is found dead in his bathtub, the protagonist states: "I thought about Pius on the drive home, imagining him like the rest of us, a configuration of chemicals and flesh burdened by consciousness – which I thought of as a vague collection of ideas, both cumulative and transient, running the motor of a warm and wet machine" (Ntshanga 2019:221). In this example, we see the fusion of machine and spirit, in the comparison between machine and human, or rather machine and being. This is then reflected in the protagonist's views of the ways in which human and machine merge after Pius's death. Similarly, this shows up in the language Ntshanga uses to describe Johannesburg in *Triangulum;* he describes how "the streets below the former statesman were often choked with traffic, the call of women selling mielies

a welcome intermission in the chorus of machines" (Ntshanga 2019:213); he writes that "the metropolis never stopped turning under our feet. Even though the sun had sunk, its cogs still churned out a familiar song for us, coughing men and women alike into underpaid labour" (Ntshanga 2019:240). In a neoliberal society, *the machine* is a metaphor that we live by – but the machine in the novel parodies the ideals of efficiency and productivity above all else.

Yet, in contrast, the machine in the novel presents its final overarching message to the protagonist telepathically and says that "the communication is a warning […] of the destruction of humankind" (Ntshanga 2019:340). It continues to tell her that there is a celestial body on its way to Earth and that "the impact will obliterate Earth" (Ntshanga 2019:340). According to the machine, "the goal of our signal is to communicate that saving this planet is conditional. The celestial body with be intercepted if humankind changes its trajectory" (Ntshanga 2019:340), and the reason for this destruction is that "the existence of the universe is predicated on balance, but humankind has not heeded this. This planet's conscious life has grown to deter the universe's transference of the energy required for it to regenerate and sustain itself: a chain that passes through all sentient life on this plane" (Ntshanga 2019:341). Finally, the concluding statement from the machine is that

> if the corporatisation of Earth does not end, then humankind will advance, but it will destroy this planet. It will seek other worlds and its imbalance will infect and spread, disturbing the universe and its calibration. The wars it will ignite, and the sickness it will spread, will result in the destruction of numerous worlds before the universe rectifies itself and regains its balance. This warning has been the goal of our signal. (Ntshanga 2019:341)

To response to this message, the protagonist entitles the middle section of her notes, 'Five Weeks in the Plague', and sets the intention "to clear the plague" (Ntshanga 2019:342). This, in addition to her references to the prophetess Nongqawuse (Ntshanga 2019:343), not only provide an echo of *The Heart of Redness* as discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, but also point to the kinds of internal and external sickness and oppression faced by black people

throughout history; just as the lungsickness and the prophecies of the dead returning, the protagonist has watched a plague of substance abuse and poverty affect people of colour – herself included – coming to a concentration in the city of Johannesburg. Ironically, unlike our general understanding of a machine, this machine points at the over-industrialised nature of neoliberal society that has ultimately led to our collective detriment. And it is the machine that offers the protagonist a glimpse of an alternative outcome to being in the world, one that she has not been privy to before. Garuba writes how animist culture "opens up a whole new world of poaching possibilities, *prepossessing the future*, as it were, by laying claim to what in the present is yet to be invented. It is on account of this ability to prepossess the future that continual enchantment becomes possible" (2003:271). In the novel, the machine does prepossess the future through sending signals of warning to the protagonist, as well as giving humanity a chance to re-route off the path of its destruction.

At the centre of this radical opening up to hope in *Triangulum* is the protagonist. She becomes an unlikely saviour due to her position as a cyborg. The protagonist can be classified as a cyborg for a few reasons, the central one being her ability to receive messages from the machine. The only way that these signs can be read is by beings that are divergent – something both human and something else. Haraway outlines a definition of the cyborg in the following way:

> A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. (1985:291)

I prefer to focus on the hybridity and obscurity that Haraway uses to classify a cyborg, rather than strictly adhering to a popular definition of a human containing machine parts. It is the nature of a cyborg to resist this essentialism, anyway. The protagonist's connection to and communication with the machine is what separates her from a 'normal' existence. Later in the novel, the protagonist reunites with a researcher, Marianne, who interviewed her while she was

a teenager in the Ciskei. As it turns out, Marianne had been working with The Returners and the protagonist's mother, Nobomi, who was the first to hear the signals of the machine. Marianne tells the protagonist: "Nobomi believed that her visions were an alien communication […] Nobomi believed that she'd been the first to receive the signal, but that it was compromised in her; that she hadn't been strong enough to hold it" (Ntshanga 2019:333).[10] When the protagonist queries about who gets the signal, Marianne says "none of us know for sure. It might be evolutionary – that was Nobomi's deduction. Or a rare mutation" (Ntshanga 2019:333). In addition, at the beginning of the novel, Dr. Buthelezi receives a note from the protagonist. Part of it states, "I am still human, or I was human, and to understand me one must understand the life I've lived" (Ntshanga 2019:12). She has human parts, however, she has other parts that are nonhuman, which could be alien or a 'natural' mutation. However, they give her access to forms of knowledge that the rest of humanity cannot see and this knowledge lets her transcend beyond the known into possible imagined futures. For example, Haraway writes how "my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (Haraway 1985:295). The value of the cyborg is instrumental for social change and advancement because they are not bound to the limiting cognitive structures that other people around them are. Cyborgs do not fit into our definitions of human *or* machine, thus they are able to receive information differently – as is the case with the protagonist in *Triangulum* – and so, the way they interpret our socio-political structure is not bound to the realms of mere human oppression or machine compliance. More so, the cyborg provides a meeting point between "imagination and material reality" (Haraway 1985:292). It enables us to venture forward in

[10] As an observation, the protagonist is finally provided with an answer to a key question regarding the machine and a connection to her mother on page 333 of the novel. Perhaps an interesting inclusion by the author, as the machine is comprised of three points that are mapped out as the protagonist, her father and her mother on the final page of the novel.

time, to the imagined future as well as draw back on the past realities, in this way it helps us forge the path forward. In other words, "the cyborg is our ontology, it gives us our politics" (Haraway 1985:292). In the novel, the protagonist shows this littoral way of being, departing from a point of knowing while also connecting to our communal sense of governance by the social and literal machines in our lives. The protagonist embodies these mergings; she balances the past, present and future throughout the novel. She is nameless and thus, indicative of both the individual and the collective; a cyborg is both apart from and within our own experiences. In this way, she exemplifies a littoral embodiment. Her relevance lies in the ways in which she is able to connect with the part of a littoral future that allows for hope, the signals of the machine, while also embodying a failing future, through her use of medication and work at the G.R.O.

In reference to Amos Tutuola's novels, Francis B. Nyamnjoh writes that the worlds that the author depicts are ones of "infinite possibilities where nothing is ever complete, and where to seek or claim completeness is to ignore, to one's peril, the reality of incompleteness as the normal order of things" (Nyamnjoh 2015:2). This is the littoral way of moving through the world that the protagonist adopts. Her cyborg nature allows her to receive and interpret messages from the machine. The signals she receives give her visions of possible alternative futures for humanity but the narrative itself is structured in a way that reinforces just how different these visions are for us as the readers. The complexity and fractured nature of it represents its anti-narrative nature, something that coincides with the importance of the protagonist. This is deployed in the narrative structure of *Triangulum*.

Ntshanga offers us a view of time, in which the past, present and future are intermingled. Throughout the novel, it provides fragments of information that are not ordered. However, it is not meant to be. In the novel, the collection of found material blends together into a form of

littoral literature, with swirling depths and hidden meanings that are not always immediately apparent. The middle part of the novel, a work of autofiction that warps certain details, as well as the anonymity of the protagonist, point to a hidden nature and an inability or unwillingness to make everything known and certain. Thus, the novel refuses to sit still, it is constantly moving between definition – refusing to select a neat vision of either utopia or dystopia. Instead, the novel embraces the littoral, which evidently saves us from escapism and also despair. As Haraway argues, "writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs" as it speaks to ambiguity (1985:312). The protagonist, as an embodiment of the littoral, shows us a collection of opaque inscriptions that might propel us into the future. Her optimism is projected in her journal logs as the narrative progresses and she finally meets the machine.

The novel ends with her expressing hope for humanity through making her experiences public. These sympathies lend to an Afrofuturist sentiment that calls for the necessity of possibility and continuity, even if it is not utopian, it allows for some form of agency. Similarly, in the face of climate crisis, gender-based violence and racial oppression, Ntshanga's *Triangulum* emits some light on a future that is otherwise very pessimistic. In this way, the rhetoric of the littoral is freeing; it allows for the possibility of progress without it having to feature in a particular utopian or binary way.

Conclusion

In South Africa, we are tethered to littoral temporalities. The past, a space defined by difference and oppression of both people and the nonhuman world, continues to bleed into the present moment. The same goes for the future, whose direction is inherently uncertain and varied when taking stock of past and present. Yet as I have argued, reading time as littoral in South Africa is useful in helping us conceptualise and navigate our present socio-political moment, while also allowing us to consider the past and an unforeseeable future.

In this dissertation, I have navigated through three different temporal times as littoral, beginning with Chapter 1, where I focused on the past as a littoral temporal moment through the works of Zakes Mda and Jacklyn Cock, both of which are based in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. This area of South Africa brings a particularly relevant focus on the past because it marks one of the earliest points of contact for the indigenous population with European colonial settlers. In the Chapter 2, I cast my gaze at present day representations of the cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town. As I have illustrated, Rose-Innes and Brodie detail present ruptures of littoral water sources, which come to be symbolic of where we find ourselves, as South Africans and Africans, in the present day. Lastly, in his work *Triangulum* – an interwoven and sometimes fractal narrative that consists of transcribed recordings, journal entries and autofiction – Masande Ntshanga offers us a radical and littoral opening up to the future. His protagonist, an unnamed, cyborgian saviour, embodies the contrariness and hope that the littoral offers us in the future. Though she seems like a distant and troubled figure, she also "returns us to a concept of the human where we do not necessarily expect to find it" (Nuttall 2009:12), as her cyborgian body makes her particularly adept at littoral embodiment and interpretation, and so opens us up to further possibilities in the future.

What each of the writers I examine in this dissertation illuminate is a point of rupture; a moment where protagonists come into contact with the revelation of the littoral, through either physical or metaphorical water sources that point at the inherent ambiguity of our post-transitional state. Through these works I am able to show the various cadences of the littoral that moves seamlessly between pessimist outlooks and prospects of hope. As I have argued in Chapter 3, hope is necessary, and simply cannot be abandoned. Hence, the littoral sustains it, as part of its messy ecology, because there is a "need for a utopian horizon, while always being profoundly mindful of what is actually is actually going on. Such a horizon carries particular weight in societies which confront the precariousness of life, crime, poverty, AIDS and violence on a daily basis" (2009:11).

Although Chapter 3 of my dissertation ends fairly openly, and we do not learn what exactly happens to the protagonist, she delivers the machine's message and the book ends without us learning how it is received, or if catastrophe is averted, it evokes an awareness of Wendell Bell's[11] iteration of future studies. Bell separates different levels of future that can be interpreted as "three types: (im)possible, (im)probable, and (un)preferable" (Bell, quoted in Assa 2017:66). The second iteration, the improbable future, like the littoral, is a more grounded perspective than the unpreferable (solely dystopian) or impossible (solely utopian) future. Hence, the value of littoral temporalities is that it holds these counter-narratives alongside one another.[12] Within flux is possibility; a littoral interpretation of the future is what we need, and it is also, always, more likely than we think.

[11] Bell, Wendell. "An Overview of Futures Studies." The Knowledge Base of Future Studies. Ed. Richard A. Slaughter. Hawthorn: DDM Media Group, 1996. 28–56.

[12] See also the "use of "futureS" and "FutureS" set before by Susan Arndt, so as to respectively accentuate the multiplicity and the analytical purchase of the term. In "Dream hoping Memory into futureS", Arndt aptly begins her argument by advocating for both "futureS" and "FutureS" instead of "future" for two reasons; (1) futureS represents the polyphony of future (in the wide realm of those that happened and those that did not); whereas (2)

The application of a littoral temporal framework could prove useful for further studies of literary and artistic renderings in South Africa and for its neighbouring countries. A particular area of interest that I have is in a littoral application of literary and visual artworks in my home country of Botswana. Specifically, concerning the Okavango Delta and the threat it faces from fracking and climate change. Botswana is often mislabelled as a monoculture and seen as exceptional by Western media. In his last address as president of the United States of America at the United Nations in 2016, Barack Obama even commended Botswana for its transformation and improvement as a developing country.[13] The World Bank concluded that after being an extremely impoverished nation before 1966, Botswana "rapidly became one of the world's development successes. Significant mineral (diamond) wealth, good governance, prudent economic management and a relatively small population of slightly more than two million, have made it an upper middle-income country with a transformation agenda of becoming a high-income country by 2036" (2021:1). However, Botswana faced complex issues of racism, sexism, xenophobia and environmental degradation. Botswana has also had a crisis of identity since its independence in 1966. Through a littoral reading, I believe that there is a possible throughway to examine the troubles facing Motswana society without disregarding its genuine 'success story' as country. Furthermore, the Okavango delta is an apt example of the littoral. Filling from water that seeps down from Angola and drawing thousands of tourists yearly, it is seen as an exclusive location, often considered a favourite destination by the British royal family,[14] and diplomatic envoys. However, the city on its borders, Maun, is a mismatch

FutureS marks the "category of analysis", designed to analyse the performances of competing and complementary futureS" (Assa 2017:67).

[13] "So, yes, my views are shaped by the specific experiences of America, but I do not think this story is unique to America. Look at the transformation that's taken place in countries as different as Japan and Chile, Indonesia, Botswana. The countries that have succeeded are ones in which people feel they have a stake" (Obama 2016). Transcript of Barack Obamas UN Speech, Time online, By Katie Reilly (2016) http://time.com/4501910/president-obama-united-nations-speech-transcript/

[14] https://www.townandcountrymag.com/society/tradition/g29153334/prince-harry-botswana-royal-tour-2019-photos/

of huts, unpaved roads but also extreme wealth. In helping to bring together these contradictory vectors, the littoral might provide ways for Southern Africans to better comprehend our present sociopolitical state and tenuous borders that we share so that they might open up to a new, more hospitable futures.

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