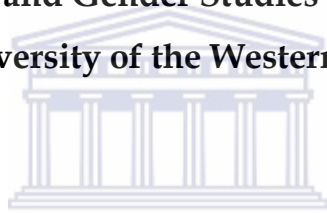


**“Passing Women”: Gender and hybridity in the fiction
of three female South African authors.**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Magister Artium in the Faculty of Arts,
Women’s and Gender Studies Department,
University of the Western Cape.**



**UNIVERSITY of the
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In dedication to the memory of Patsy and Eric Marais,
who first planted the seed of enquiry.

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Abstract

“Passing Women”: Gender and hybridity in the fiction of three female South African authors. (Registered title.)

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29 August 2012

A key aim of this study is to shed light on the representation of coloured women with reference to racial passing, using fictive characters depicted in Sarah Gertrude Millin’s (1924) *God’s Stepchildren*, Zoë Wicomb’s (2006) *Playing in the Light*, and Pat Stamatélos’s (2005) *Kroes*, as presented by these three racially distinct female South African authors.

Since I propose that literature provides a link between a subjective history and the under-represented narratives from the margins, I use literature to reimagine these. I analyse the ways in which the authors present ‘hybrid’ identities within their characters in different ways, and provide an explanation and contextual basis for the exploration of the theme of ‘passing for and as white’ within South Africa’s complex history. I provide a sociological explanation of the act of racial passing in South Africa with reference to the United States by incorporating Nella Larsen’s (1929) *Passing*. Since the analyses will concentrate on coloured females within the texts, gendered identity and female sexuality and stereotypes will be the focus. I look at the act and agent of passing, the role of raced and gendered performance in giving meaning to social identities, and the way in which the female body is constructed in racial terms in order to confer identity. Tracing the historical origins of coloured identity and coloured female identity, I interrogate this

colonial, post-colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid history by employing a feminist lens. A combination of postcolonial feminist discourse analysis, sociological inquiry and feminist narrative analysis are therefore the methods I use to achieve my research aims.

Chapter 1: The concepts of 'coloured', 'coloured identity', and 'passing' are introduced. I provide a historical overview of the origins of 'colouredness' in the South African context to examine the historical, ideological and social implications of the subject matter under discussion.

Chapter 2: Set over a period between the years 1821 to 1921 *God's Stepchildren* deals with a family spanning four generations, bound by 'tainted' blood. I focus on the character Elmira who represents the third generation of the initial 'miscegenation'. I look at the effect the racist social milieu has on the author's representation of coloured women and how this translates into apparently insurmountable beliefs that stereotypes equal nature.

Chapter 3: *Playing in the Light* confronts racial passing through an unwitting passer and her intentionally passing parents. I analyse how Wicomb presents the protagonist's struggle to relocate her identity in contemporary South African society. I compare the attitudes toward race presented by the characters, especially across the two generations of passing women in the novel in order to demonstrate a progression in attitudes toward passing.

Chapter 4: *Kroes*, published in 2005, is partially biographical. The novel is set in urban Cape Town and Johannesburg of the late 1950s to 1970.

The protagonist, and central passing figure, narrates the story in the first person using Cape vernacular Afrikaans. I look at the way in which women are influenced by internalised inferiority, and how arbitrary skin pigmentation is deemed to decide their fate.

Chapter 5: I draw together the common themes found in the three works of fiction, and draw inferences from my findings about the representation of coloured women.



Declaration

I declare that *Representations of coloured females 'passing' in the fiction of three female South African authors* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree of examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Marcia Helena Marais

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29 August 2012



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Representations of coloured females 'passing' in the fiction of three female South African authors

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Racial identification and the subject of 'passing' in South Africa

This dissertation is concerned with fictional representations of 'racially hybrid'¹ female characters. I focus primarily on the fictional narratives of three female South African authors, including Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*² (2006), Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Stepchildren*³ (1924), and Pat Stamatélos's *Kroes* (2005)⁴ which have as a common theme female characters of 'mixed-race' or coloured⁵ origin passing for white. The novels were written in two distinctly different eras, pre-apartheid, and post-apartheid. But the fictions represent these characters in the colonial, post-colonial⁶, and pre- and post-apartheid eras. The historical path mapped out by the three novels can therefore be thought of as a

¹ When I speak of 'hybrid' or 'hybridity', I refer not to the "fact" of biological mixture, but to the cultural constructedness of the hybrid identity as the 'Other'.

² For ease of reading, *Playing in the Light* has been abbreviated to *Playing* in this study.

³ For ease of reading, *God's Stepchildren* has been abbreviated to *GSC* in this study.

⁴ For the sake of brevity, please note that all quotations taken from the primary novels under review will be acknowledged by placing referenced page number/s in brackets after the quotation.

⁵ 'Coloured' is a uniquely South African term used to describe persons of mixed-race origin, who may or may not identify with the stereotypical and largely negative social characteristics or identities that have historically been associated with this marginalised group.

⁶ The term 'post-colonial' in the South African context is highly problematic, as the country gained independence only in 1994 with the appointment of a democratically elected government. Prior to this, white colonisers still governed following the country's original occupation by white settlers in 1652. The result is that the country never underwent a period of true post-coloniality. Instead, colonial occupation was converted directly into settler rule, which morphed into a protracted era of black subjugation under apartheid. The country is only now experiencing the effects of post-apartheid majority government. Regardless, the term post-colonial remains useful when thinking of a general post-emancipation era.

fictional interpretation of the ways in which coloured female subjectivities have been represented and understood at different historical and political moments in literature by female South African authors. By choosing works from a cross-section of South African authors, the varied representations of racially hybrid female characters, specifically in terms of gender, 'race' and sexuality, class, age, religion, ethnicity, etc. - and the intersections of these - are explored.

The fictional representations in the novels under study provide a complimentary archive, in the sense that these experiences provide insights into the lived realities of real-life passers, from divergent emotional, social, political, and historical vantage points. Central to my attempts to provide a complimentary archive, is an interdisciplinary and comparative exploration of both the subjects of *passing* and *the passer* in South African and North American literature. Due to the extensive research that has gone into the passing trope in the United States, I frequently apply or adapt the existing theorisation of these passing narratives to explorations of passing, race and performativity in the South African context, where there has been abundant fictional exploration, but very little academic or theoretical work. Detailed historical exegesis is also central to my methodological approach to create an alternative archive. Because the fiction on which I focus covers a vast historical period, a detailed understanding of the historical moments that the texts occupy and the historical conditions in which they were conceived are essential. The aim here is to explore, as comprehensively as possible, the discursive contexts in which writers explore race, multiple subjectivities, and the connected subject of passing; as well as to examine the evolving political and divergent social contexts in which each writes and to which each writer responded.

At the outset, it could be argued that a study such as this one is retrogressive in the wake of South Africa's emergence as a democracy in 1994. Theoretically speaking, the change in South Africa's political dispensation to one that promotes non-racialism should effectively have ended both individuals' obsession with aspiring to 'whiteness', as well as the academic interest in this obsession, and the environment and psycho-social circumstances that shaped it. However, considering the lack of attention that the subject has received in the past, even despite its historical prominence as recently as the mid-twentieth century, I would suggest that this study is not only necessary, but, in fact, overdue. While South African writers of fiction have long explored the subject of black peoples' passing for white, the lack of research into this practice, and how writers have reflected and responded to embedded ideas about racial identification, remains significant. I emphasise the ongoing significance of the subject and its fictional representation, since both 'passing' and the way that writers have explored it contribute importantly to understanding the meanings and impact of 'race' both for the present, and to understand the past. By focusing on the novels by Millin, Stamatélos and Wicomb, I consider how the intricacies of racial identification explored by theorists like Erasmus (2001) are illustrated in relation to the practice of 'passing'. While each novel responds to a different historical period, all three authors stress the extent to which passing sheds light on social subjects' racial identification and the inevitable contradictions contained within coloured identity, their responses to this identification and the social and cultural landscape in which these individual experiences occur.

The 'passing narrative' is a fictional representation of the passing character within literature, which usually employs issues common to

the hybrid. Through her very existence, the passing character interrogates the nexus of 'race' and gender within uneven and seemingly unrelated hierarchies that prioritise whiteness and maleness proportionately to its marginalisation of colouredness and femaleness. I am concerned primarily with how these authors' representations of intersecting identities focus on racially 'hybrid' characters who pass for white⁷, and deal especially with what could be defined as a distinct genre within fictional representations of race: the passing narrative. The differences in the passing narrative become clear when we look at the diverse ways in which these three authors have addressed the theme and represented the characters who pass. It thus becomes similarly necessary to address each work in a different manner. For this reason, in my analysis, I do not approach the 'passers' represented in the texts as though representing a single homogenous category. Instead, I explore the nuances of each author's reference to passers as being unique to that author's writing, and the personal, political and biographical locations of the authors themselves; the historical context in which the author writes; the period in which the passing act is set; and the myriad variables that influence the way passers are depicted in works of fiction.

The term *racial 'passing'* refers to an act of temporary or permanent 'race-change'. The transition is most commonly made by persons occupying marginalised subject positions to a socially more favourable location that offers greater social mobility (i.e. subordinate to dominant 'race-change'); while 'passers' specifically refer to those persons

⁷ It must be noted that the condition of 'passing' is not always racially motivated, as 'transgressions' of gender, religious denomination, class, and nationality exist just as easily alongside, and intertwined with racial passing. I do not deny the inequities that motivate people to pass along these lines, but these are not the focus of the plots in the novels under review. I concede that the study of these forms of passing is therefore beyond the scope of this paper.

implicated in the act of passing. Werner Sollors (1997) lists three kinds of passer/passing, namely 'voluntary', 'inadvertent', and 'involuntary'. The agency afforded passers in to choose their race enables inadvertent (Marion) and involuntary (Elmira; Barry) passers to become voluntary passers (Pattie; Lorrain; Helen; John) and for voluntary passers to revert to the original racial designation. Nonetheless, all the female characters must deal with the reality of their race-change as women in a predominantly male dominated society in which women's agency is most often suppressed or relegated to those spaces deemed suitable for women to occupy.

The kind of 'race-change' represented in the South African novels under discussion is primarily coloured-to-white. In the South African context, the term 'passing' is tainted by hegemonic racial ideology, as it is invariably assumed to imply 'passing for white'⁸. Hegemonic racist discourse repudiates, outright, voluntary white-to-coloured passing. Although dominant-to-subordinate-race passing undoubtedly occurred, trading the 'superior' status that 'whiteness' veritably guaranteed for 'inferior' colouredness – far from being considered noteworthy – is simply determined implausible within dominant discourse. Exceptions to this norm have of course always occurred. But these 'cases' have usually been presented as being the unfortunate consequence of pathology or even outright mental infirmity – with the white transgressor often labelled in derogatory means as having 'gone native'. (Hendricks, 2001: 39) The pathologising of passing from a state of racial superiority to one of marginality is largely due to the effectiveness in South Africa of both colonial rule and racist colonial discourse. The direct consequence of these is a racially stratified society

⁸ In this paper, I will, for ease of use, refer to the term as 'passing', but ask that the reader recognise that I refer to 'passing for white'.

produced in this hierarchical landscape; and the subsequent regime characterised by an apartheid state that defined 'whiteness' as *the* 'naturally' 'superior race' and privileged state of being.

This study is underscored by the belief that race is a construct⁹, which implies that it does not of course exist as a biological or ontological fact. However, the social reality of 'race' cannot be denied when its colonially rooted and apartheid-inspired ideological legacy remains so pervasive in present-day life. In South Africa, even within a context of a post-apartheid democratic dispensation, identity formation still hinges greatly on race, and racial stereotypes still provide the basis for much socially inscribed identification, and self-identification. Michele Ruiters (2009) contends that post-apartheid, "all identities are in the process of being reconstructed particularly in opposition to their apartheid-era incarnations..." (Ruiters, 2009: 104-105) However, for a great majority of coloureds, living conditions post-democracy remain similar to apartheid era living, with the effects of centuries of oppression being slow to dissipate under the new dispensation. Under these conditions, it is difficult to re-imagine coloured identities that are free of the stigma of marginalised second-class citizenry that apartheid discourse evoked.

Discussing the features of passing, Sollors (1997) says that, "only a situation of sharp inequality between groups would create the need for the emergence of a socially significant number of cases of "passing"". (Sollors, 1997: 248) In the South African context, coloureds undoubtedly received preferential treatment by the state. Although not to the extent that whites did, and most often inferior versions, they were afforded concessions like the Coloured Labour Preference Policy, which affected

⁹ Since 'race' is here acknowledged as being a social construct, the need for inverted commas to denote its constructedness is henceforth regarded as superfluous.

employment opportunities and thus social mobility, education, and the provision of housing and social services. In relation to the substandard, if not absent, versions of these services black people received, and the severe oppression blacks endured under apartheid, there is a justified perception that in the hierarchy of oppression, most coloureds were relatively privileged and did not experience dispossession to the extent that black South Africans did. However, this view is one that typically assumes that coloured oppression originated with the formal racial classification of coloured people as such by the National Party¹⁰ government's Population Registration Act of 1950, and the subsequent, rigidly enforced means of apartheid engineering. What is not readily acknowledged is the tortuous history of 'proto-coloured' subjugation (some may describe it as annihilation or even genocide¹¹) the predecessors of the racial grouping referred to 'officially' as 'coloureds' experienced under colonialism and slavery, and that continues to taint coloured advancement and self-perception through enduring and deeply entrenched racist discourses and stereotypes in South Africa. The existence of the "sharp inequality" Sollors proposes is arguably less pronounced in apartheid's stratified society, but the inequality was undeniable, and in the presence of 'choice' through the availability of light skin, inequality could be exchanged for privilege. In South Africa, passing was and is not a subject readily acknowledged or explored in the public discourse. However, it remains an undeniable part of our history, culturally entrenched in the uniquely South African terms ascribed to those passing for white, including 'play-white' and 'try-for-white'. Within this study, I hope to demonstrate 'racial passing' as a

¹⁰ The National Party came into power in 1948, under DF Malan.

¹¹ For a discussion of the applicability of the term 'genocide' to the decimation of the indigenous San by colonial influences, see Adhikari, M. (2010) *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The extermination of the Cape San peoples*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

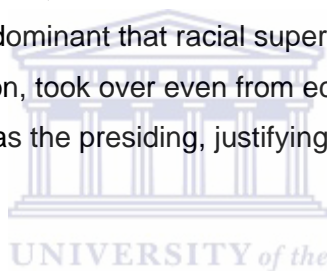
means by which the culturally constructed 'hybrid' seems either compelled to or chooses to negotiate subject positions within South Africa's repressive, segregated climate. As indicated earlier, in these three novels, this climate spans distinct historical and political eras. While each novel responds to different historical periods, all three authors demonstrate the extent to which passing sheds light on subjects' racial identification, their responses to this identification and the social and cultural landscape in which these individual experiences occur. I will explore the hierarchical social contexts in which authors conceive of their female characters' 'passing for white', and in so doing, examine the distinctive ways in which coloured female identity (expressed as 'colouredness') has been conceived in South Africa's race-obsessed social imagination.

In order for the condition of passing to be understood, it is essential that an understanding of what 'being coloured' entails, and how 'colouredness' as a discourse is constructed. Although the constructionist approach is the one more generally accepted post-democratically, essentialist theories of coloured origin remain entrenched in many of the stereotypes and residual apartheid discourse that endure in South African culture, including within literature. Accounts of the origin of 'a coloured race', most commonly depicted in essentialist, biological terms as having transpired through the process of 'miscegenation'¹² are not uncommon, even in the present day. It is, however, in the country's colonial past that the dominant myths about mixture, 'miscegenation' and the biological diluting of racial purity took root. Whether 'miscegenation' is imagined to be as a result of a lack of sexual access to white women, or a lack of social control among

¹² 'Miscegenation' is a biological term transcribed through scientific racist discourse to refer to the crossing of 'degraded' blood between individuals from different 'races' through sexual intercourse.

metropolitan subjects in the colonies, inter-racial sex between white colonists and indigene and slave women admitted a great many mixed-race children into colonial society.¹³ With the myth of Western/white superiority in danger of being exposed through this form of colonial 'impropriety', colonial laws pertaining to 'miscegenation' were called into question. Venter (1974) remarks that by the middle of the eighteenth century, a shift in public opinion on the 'virtues' of 'miscegenation' had occurred against continued sexual contact with those who were not 'racially pure'. (Venter, 1974: 22) Robert Young (1995) supports the notion of a shift in the significance afforded 'race' in the colonial context:

In the imperial phase, from the 1880s onwards, the cultural ideology of race became so dominant that racial superiority, and its attendant virtue of civilization, took over even from economic gain or Christian missionary work as the presiding, justifying idea of the empire. (Young, 1995: 92)



The prevalent attitudes founded in colonial society, in which conditions of slavery and abject subjugation of the 'under-classes' dominated the social landscape, leaned towards a view that racially hybrid individuals constituted a socially degraded race. This, paired with sexual stereotyping mainly of women within these classes, informed the view that sex between the 'races' was immoral. The discourse that developed around 'miscegenation' thus constructed a 'race' of physically, morally and intellectually inferior individuals.¹⁴ It also conferred morally corrupt values on those involved in the act, but more so the *actor* from the 'inferior' race. The genesis of coloured identity premised on this

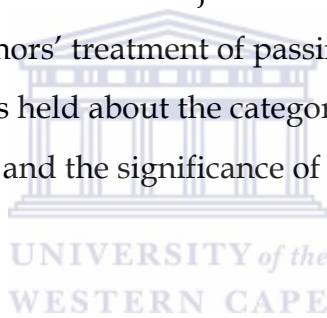
¹³ Marais (1968) claims that within the first twenty years of Dutch settlement in the Cape, "no less than 75 per cent of the children born at the Cape of slave mothers were half-breeds." He also notes that in cases of marriage between colonists and slaves, "children of such marriages were classed as Europeans." (Marais, 1968: 9)

¹⁴ See Adhikari (2005: 24–27) for commonly held stereotypical claims of the origin of coloured people through 'miscegenation'.

essentialist school of thought dictates a one-sided ascription of an inferior identity *by* the 'superior race' *on* the resultant hybrid 'race'. This is ironic when considering that hegemonic racist discourse placed the agency for the formation of the homogenous entity of 'the coloured race' squarely at the door of that other homogenous character, 'black woman' – the *actor*. Unequal power relations in colonial society meant that white male colonisers or slave owners were in a position of control over these women's bodies. As they were regarded as chattel, these bodies represented accessible means to both sex and the economically viable progeny deriving from these relations.¹⁵ The paradox of the (what can only be described as) sexual abuse perpetrated within these unequal power relationships, is that slave women were depicted as the perpetrators, and that these violations occurred, as a "result of the promiscuity of slave women, not as the result of domination by slaveholders." (Scully, 1997: 28) The prevailing discourse exonerates white men, positioning them as the victims of black female hypersexuality and deceit; and white women, who were often implicitly, if not intentionally, implicated in the abuse, depicted as the binary (to black women) model of moral virtue. The role of 'miscegenation' and discourses of black female sexuality, especially as they occur in literature, will be explored in greater detail in relation to the subsequent racial assignment, as 'coloured', foisted on the hybrid product of colonial 'miscegenation', and the practise of racial passing that ensued from this 'inferior' designation.

¹⁵ Marais (1968: 10), in a footnote, comments on an assertion obtained from an 1828 booklet, claiming that, "since slaves of mixed European blood were more valuable than the rest, masters encouraged the intercourse of slave women with Europeans." From *Remarks on the Demoralising influence of Slavery* by a Resident of the Cape of Good Hope. London. pp 6–8.

Having noted the interconnected constructions of race, gender and class, I aim to explore these in relation to fictions and constructed myths of racial 'impurity' and 'purity'. Racial and other "identities", as Stuart Hall (1996) indicates, are never stable and pure. Nor, as postcolonial feminists such as Chandra Mohanty (1988: 73), Judith Butler (1999: 6), and Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) argue, are the categories of race or gender experienced in isolation from each other. This is what is referred to by Yuval-Davis (2006) as 'intersectionality', a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. As race, class and gender do not operate in isolation, it is not possible to presume to focus on one social aspect to the exclusion of another. As the novels I deal with reveal, 'passing' exemplifies ways in which social subjects manipulate the instability of racial boundaries. Authors' treatment of passing also reflects their own and wider social beliefs held about the categories of race, the meaning of racial identification, and the significance of identifying as coloured specifically.



Subjectivities of the author: The treatment of passing in South Africa and the United States

Theorising within the United States context, Gayle Wald (2000) contends that authors' rendering of the passing plot place them in an ambiguous position as critical of dominant ideologies, and at the same time, complicit in the naturalising of predetermined scripts for social behaviour within normative constructions of race, gender and class. In other words, the passing trope, as it pertains to the female passer, while seeking to transcend predetermined social roles, simultaneously reifies 'race' and promotes heteronormative femininity and dominant class aspirations. While authors seemingly control representation, their work is subject to interpretation by readers' subjective understanding of the author's ideologies and intent. The role of publishers in manipulating

representation by endorsing these normative plots can also not be discounted. My focus on passing therefore deals with an exploration of how coloured identification has been socially constructed, entrenched and experienced at a range of levels, including authors' points of view, the contexts in which writers' novels are published and conceived, and the historical periods in which they are set.

Focusing on female passing characters extends my exploration of how various social identities are complicatedly constructed in relation to one another. It foregrounds the role of gender, sex and sexuality in the construction of identity. Writers' representations of coloured female characters who pass allow me to examine the social meanings and experiences associated with hybrid forms of identification, as well as the psychological implications of these meanings and experiences. Within the novels under discussion, the passing imperative is highly racialised and the interrelatedness of motivations to pass is not always foregrounded. In the South African context, passing almost always returns to 'race' due to the positioning of the passing figure within a repressed environment under apartheid.¹⁶ Within milieus where race and identity are almost interchangeable, the affiliation with dominant race provides stability to the subject. Race is thus prioritised, often at the expense of other social determinants in order to provide stability to the necessarily unstable identities of passers. The presence of the 'hybrid' within 'pure' society disrupts the status quo of a 'natural order', of dominance due to genetic superiority, and brings into question racial authority over 'inferior races'. Although not often

¹⁶ This is similar to the American context under enforced segregation, when the 'one drop rule' determined black identity. Juda Bennett describes this phenomenon as follows: "This rule, which gathered state-by-state acceptance in the nineteenth century and became "uniformly accepted" by the 1920s argues that one-drop [sic] of "Negro" blood makes a person a "Negro"." (Bennett, 1996: 5)

acknowledged, when it is, the term 'passing' immediately conjures thoughts of black or coloured people trying to escape the 'inferior race' to which they have been assigned by duping the social agents responsible for policing the boundaries of race, and thereby falsely laying claim to the 'superior race' and all that that represents, in the most 'devious' means possible. Passing is popularly imagined in negative terms to be an evasion of genetically pre-ordained race, presented as a shameful denial of 'inferior' ancestry and heritage. It is very rarely presented as a means of temporarily or permanently evading the extreme oppression associated with those 'inferior races'. Neither is it conceived as a reasonable desire towards achieving, from the point of view of the subject, the full human self-actualisation and economic potential that is simply not possible when occupying an inferior race position within a racially oppressive society. Unterhalter (1975) acknowledges both views, when she describes passing first as a, "pusillanimous act" that "represents a denial of racial pride, a willingness to accept the identity of the master race". She counters this criticism, saying that, "it is easy to understand how it became one of the few avenues for escape from minority status". (Unterhalter, 1975: 53) However, the idea of 'master race' superiority is not interrogated, and the passer is thus still reductively portrayed merely as an opportunist who aspires to whiteness for the sake of whiteness, in other words, the coloured passer aspires to 'racial superiority' at the expense of those not able or willing to pass.

Passing is not uniquely South African, and much literature exists on passing in the United States of America. Here, passing first evolved as a viable means for light-skinned black slaves to escape the condition of slavery. Historically speaking, the United States and South Africa have differing social classifications of race. The latter has created a separate

category for persons who are believed not to fit into either of the dichotomous 'white' or 'black' racial groupings, i.e. 'coloured'; while the former applied the 'one drop rule'. This rule, which alludes to the 'contamination' of 'pure' blood, deems that all persons who have black ancestry, regardless of their skin colour or physiognomy, were necessarily classified as 'Negro' (in the 1800s and early 1900s) or, later, 'black' or African American in the United States. The absence of terminology for an interstitial hybrid layer polarises American society and 'simplifies' issues of race to the effect that social roles are clearly defined in binary terms.¹⁷ However, while blacks in America were homogenised under one racial categorisation, intra-racial colour biases were prevalent during slavery and beyond. Judith Berzon (1978) notes the ambiguous existence of racial hybrids in the US, which echo social systems coloureds in South Africa were exposed to: "The mixed blood, caught between two cultures, has had to exist in an indeterminate area between the boundaries of the American caste system." (Judith Berzon, 1978: 4) Instances of antagonisms between light-skinned (mulatto) and dark-skinned blacks developed as a result of white privileging of the former. However, Berzon cautions against accepting as fact the fictional representations of light-skinned blacks as socially disconnected from the black group.

In South Africa, colonisation and apartheid created a legacy of 'coloured preference'. South African society differs from the American social model in the sense that popular, scientific and legal thinking and practice, culminating in apartheid-era segregation, proposed a three-tiered system of classification as opposed to a binary black/white distinction. Here, coloureds act as a veritable buffer zone between both

¹⁷ In the US context, 'mixed' people are recognised, but were never really officially classified to the extent that the Population Registration Act of 1950 legislated 'race' in South Africa.

the 'pure' black and white races. Black American author, Toni Morrison (1993), recognises the supreme position that the distinctively South African practice of racial classification occupies in designating citizenship when she says: "To identify someone as a South African is to say very little; we need the adjective "white" or "black" or "colored" to make our meaning clear." (Morrison, 1993: 47) Morrison here alludes to South African society's over-reliance on racial stereotypes to confer social status or personal worth on an individual. Her observation is astute; in particular, she acknowledges that in the case of the coloured person, dominant society requires that we take that distinction a step further and insert adjectives that describe variations of skin colour, physical characteristics and perceived 'origin' in order to confer identity on the person in question.

Research into passing as an important social experience has been much more developed, and enjoys greater expression in the United States. Here, black authors, who have enjoyed a much longer history in published literature, have been able to give greater voice and representation in the subject. The passing subject is generally introduced through the mulatto figure who evolved from slavery and who, because of his or her mixed racial status, is often depicted as 'tragic'. The mulatto's story has been interwoven in literature and history.¹⁸ Literature's 'tragic mulatta'¹⁹ is especially romanticised when combined with melodramatic portrayals of her attempts to enter white society, either directly as racially hybrid, or discreetly through attempts at passing for white. The passer is sometimes presented as a subversive

¹⁸ See Caughie, P. (1999); Kaplan, C. (2007); Butler, J. (1993); Bennett, J. (1996), and Berzon, J. R. (1978) for detailed theoretical analyses of the passing figure.

¹⁹ The 'tragic mulatta' is described as, "the mixed-race woman who cannot find happiness in either the black or white world and who represents the long line of women—both black and white—victimized by slavery." (Kaplan, 2007: 171)

agent and shown to exploit the terms of white-imposed racial segregation to maximum advantage. More often, though, the mulatta is presented as a presumptuous or opportunist upstart whose ambitious aspirations 'legitimately' lead to a tragic fate. The term 'mulatta' is absent from the South African lexicon, but is effectively represented by the interstitial coloured group. The fictive work by Nella Larsen entitled *Passing* (1929) is a classic American text that has received the extensive scholarly attention associated with US interest in passing and racial hybridity. As I will show also in later chapters, this work is especially illuminating in relation to the South African texts under discussion, and offers an interesting comparison between the relative benefits and pitfalls of passing in the two countries. It demonstrates the irony that although the rewards of passing were potentially higher in South Africa than in the United States, the subject receives much more attention in the latter than in the former. The aversion to confronting the literary passer is not nearly as prevalent in academic writing in the United States. Authors who confront the topic include Toni Morrison (1993); Juda Bennett (1996); Judith Berzon (1978); Judith Butler (1993) and a host of other academic writers.

South African authors like Rayda Jacobs, Bessie Head, Zoë Wicomb, Dalene Matthee, JM Coetzee, and André Brink explore the theme of racial passing in their works. The use of fiction as a means whereby versions of society are presented that allows for critical thinking and dialogue about taboo subjects (and taboo *subjects*) in society. Through representations, omissions and silences around the passing subject – who defies the narrow confines of race, sexuality, gender, economics, and class prescriptions, and erodes the 'integrity' of social institutions like religion, family and law – fiction challenges the reader to confront

the socially constructed identities and the complex histories and psychological effects of passing on passers.

While the topic of passing has received attention within works of fiction, this is largely not the case within South African scholarship. There seems to be a strange discomfort around making 'passing' the subject of attention. Passing for white invokes the sexual aspect of 'miscegenation', whether coerced or conjugal, a taboo in racially puritanical society. While South African academia has dealt with 'taboo' subjects, passing appears to have been bypassed and silenced in scholarship. This might stem from a belief that the subject is too trivial or painful to warrant academic investigation. Passing, as a volatile condition of being, contaminates notions of a homogenous identity constructed along fixed racial, class and gender lines, and threatens the stable pedagogy of dominant society. It is worth stressing once again that elsewhere, the study of passing has encouraged scholarly debate, being seen as an important lens through which to explore a range of social, psychological and historical concerns related to constructions of 'race'. Gayle Wald (2000) argues that within American academia, feminist scholars have successfully utilised passing fictions to "critique racial essentialism, explore the representations of black female sexuality, and ... to reevaluate the previously overlooked or critically disparaged literary production of early-twentieth-century African American women." (Gayle Wald, 2000: 30) From a feminist standpoint, the continued omission of the subject in South African scholarly writing suggests the reluctance of academia to explore socially distinct constructions and performances of coloured female sexuality and the multiple subject positions occupied by coloured women. It also points to the continued marginalisation of coloured women, a very particular social categorisation, post-apartheid.

Generally, then, there has been perfunctory treatment by South African academics of the subject of passing. Many merely acknowledge the existence of the phenomenon, although very little research has been conducted into either the underlying cause of passing, or social and psychological implications for the people involved in the practice. Ian Goldin (1955) quotes Van den Berghe as saying, "...one may safely estimate that anywhere from one-tenth to one-quarter of the persons classified as 'white' in the Cape Province are of mixed descent". (Van den Berghe cited in Goldin, 1955: 4) He goes on to cite Findlay who estimates that: "At least 733,000 persons of "mixed blood" are included in the 1,9 million recorded as whites in South Africa". (Findlay cited in Goldin, 1955: 4) Considering that any number of coloureds passing for white were not exposed as being anything but 'white', it is apparent that these figures have no realistic basis. In a society in which 'race purity' constituted the basis for racial exclusion, it is no wonder that state-funded academia did not pursue the potentially socially disruptive topic of 'coloureds passing for white' with more enthusiasm. This is undoubtedly part of the reason for the relative lack of historical information on people who passed for white in the first half of the twentieth century, which represents the period of Union (1910), as well as the ascent of the National Party into government in South Africa (1948). Logically, it follows that people who wished to attempt to pass for white and reclassify themselves had a very small window of opportunity in which to do so once legislation called for the compulsory classification into distinct races under the Population Registration Act of 1950.

The changing social structure of the country, with its blatantly apparent emphasis on maintaining a racial hierarchy became tangible with the

implementation of apartheid laws and legislation that overtly favoured whites, often at the expense of non-whites. These included any of the numerous laws that governed the movement of non-whites, where they could and could not live, work, learn, worship and socialise; and with whom they could and could not associate, socially, sexually and politically. Identifying as 'coloured' does not necessarily imply the acceptance of legally enforced, state legislated identity and the stereotypes with which this appellation was tainted. For those coloureds who attempted to pass for white though, it does imply that, even if only to opportunistically manipulate it, they chose to participate in a system in which gradations of skin colour assigned status.

Considering the general lack of credible academic research into the phenomenon of passing, and specifically the lack of a gendered interest in the subject, adding to the body of knowledge is the rationalisation for my research into the subject. In one of the few local studies dealing with coloureds who pass for white I encountered, Beryl Unterhalter (1975) asserts that: "Racial passing of Coloureds into the dominant White group in South Africa is a well-known phenomenon, documented by historians, psychologists and sociologists." (Unterhalter, 1975: 53) Yet, this claim is unfortunately not substantiated in the author's scant list of references. Notwithstanding Watson's (1970) study of racial passing within coloured communities in Cape Town, and apart from a number of historians' unvalidated statistics of the actual number of racial passers in South Africa, I believe that there has been a serious neglect of the subject at hand. Even post-apartheid, this perception has not been confronted. Post-democratically, with more opportunities open to black and coloured scholars to do meaningful research into the unrecorded and poorly documented social by-products of apartheid, passing is rarely addressed. Similarly, passers are not the focus of studies to

confront this subject, and the inequalities specifically related to female passers are not addressed. Desiree Lewis (2007) argues that research foci post-apartheid have been to some extent manipulated by external funders concerned with gender transformation policies geared at producing a society considered stable and reformed of colonial and post-colonial inequalities, and ripe for social investment. She notes a trend to focus on specific policy-related research in sub-Saharan Africa that includes “crisis areas” such as ‘violence’, ‘HIV/AIDS’ and ‘masculinities’, but that essentially overlooks the underlying and interrelated social causes for these ‘crises’. (Lewis, 2007: 23) Because post-apartheid gender research, modern history, social commentary and authoritative academic writing gloss over the phenomenon, it continues to remain as if passers have never existed in South Africa’s recent past, or that their experiences are so trivial in relation to other political and social experiences that they do not deserve commentary or analysis. By excluding passers and passing from social discourse, and by continuing to disavow the reality of the phenomenon, historians, social scientists and academics are implicated in the amnesia that seems to surround passing. As noted before, novelists seem to be much more willing to confront the ‘uncomfortable truths’ that academic discourses neglect because of a prevailing sense of political correctness or because of the previous shame and taboo linked to the subject. It would appear that it is only in the often romanticised, safe, anonymous world of fiction that the passing figure receives due attention. The subject seems to lose its taboo status when a veneer of fiction is able to effectively mask the identity of the passer and thereby render him or her suitably innocuous.

Recent studies have included a great deal of research into the broader categories of ‘coloured identity’ as distinct from the racial binaries of

black and white. So much writing on coloured identity²⁰ has been documented, to the extent that academics feel justified to claim that, “the topic has entered the mainstream of South African intellectual life”. (Adhikari, 2009: 7) Yet, ‘passers’, as individuals whose aspirations reveal a great deal about the status and experiences of South Africans labeled as ‘coloured’ caught within rigid racial hierarchies, have been neglected in essentialist descriptive studies and in constructionist research. Both work that assumes the fundamental ‘fact’ of coloured identities, e.g. Adhikari (2005; 2009) and Erasmus (2001), and work exploring why these have become so socially ‘real’, pay scant attention to passing as testifying to laws of racial inclusion and exclusion.

The question of who owns knowledge is particularly pertinent in previously uncharted research such as this, where the canon has chosen to disregard the phenomenon of passing. The histories and experiences of those persons who were implicated in the practice are to be found in oral histories. However, due to the sensitive (i.e. hurtful, embarrassing, ‘unchristian’, ‘sinful’, defamatory, unresolved, politically ‘opportunistic’ or retrogressive) nature of the subject, or due to its simply having been intentionally erased from family histories as a taboo topic, these accounts are not readily available in the private or public domain. Regardless of this, what I would like to suggest is that knowledge in narrative forms be regarded as equally relevant and important as that of prominent scholars and social science researchers, notwithstanding the credentials of non-conventional contributors who have the potential to challenge academic acceptance. In promoting this ‘research from below’ methodology, I concur with the approach assumed by Obioma Nnaemeka. Nnaemeka (2003) advocates the

²⁰ The production of ‘coloured identity’ is ascribed to several schools of thought, including essentialist and constructionist approaches. The merits of these will be explored in greater detail in this study.

salience of practice, but not at the expense of theory, when she says that research should be, “an engagement in which privilege is diffused to allow for an interactive, multilateral flow of voices (from above and below simultaneously).” (Nnaemeka, 2003: 360) In the absence of formal academic interest, it is up to black South African feminists to do their own theorising about subjects that have direct bearing on their representation. As a critic and analyst, I choose not to adopt a conventional ‘literary critical’ methodological approach. I instead use fiction as sources and representations of knowledge about gender and race, while also acknowledging that fiction is always obviously a representation of reality. This approach tends to be neglected in standard non-fictional discourses such as history, sociology, etc. I concur with the challenge set by Lewis (2007) to produce innovative gender scholarship that allows us to “re-imagine our world” by using unconventional genres and content with the “potential to contribute to knowledge that allows us to transcend our oppressive realities.” (Lewis, 2007: 30) Considering that creating awareness around a silenced subject, and not necessarily academic inclusion, is the primary purpose with this research, I strive to include contributors and theorists who are relevant to my study, regardless of and despite of their relative stature within the academy. The role of literature in broaching sensitive subjects such as passing and exposing taboos in a non-confrontational manner can thus be seen as being productive in giving voice to those for whom an imposed silence has been the norm.

‘Race’ and ‘being coloured’ in South Africa

‘Race’ as a construct

If race does not exist, this exposition into the phenomenon of racial passing can conclude right here.²¹ Passing cannot occur in the absence of an antagonistic relationship between people who subscribe to the idea of both a favoured, hegemonic race and its binary counterpart, undesirable, marginalised race. Passing is also rooted in social fictions about the physiological, geographical and innate characteristics of particular groups, and it illustrates how social subjects live and act within discourses that attach cultural meanings to physical bodies. Race as a construct has real meaning in determining how people are defined, and how they define themselves. As a constantly evolving construct, it is impossible, at any given point in time, to define precisely how people relate to race and how they see themselves reflected in some of the stereotypes ascribed to the particular race ascribed to them. While racial stereotypes certainly have longevity, it is similarly not possible to relate these to social beliefs at any given point in history. This is largely because people experience race differently, depending on a host of variables that differ from person to person as a result of individual and collective lived experiences. Bearing this in mind, it is not my intention to try to define either race or identity. Rather, it is to find commonalities and differences of opinion on these, and to draw inferences on what these concepts mean within the context of coloured women passing for white in the novels under discussion.

During apartheid, the emphasis on the 'biological' and 'geographical', respectively, to determine coloured identity is apparent in the infamous Population Registration Act, No. 30 of 1950, amended in 1961 to further divide coloureds into, "Cape Malay, Griqua, Indian, Chinese, "other Asiatic", and "other Coloured"". (Horrell, 1971: 10) It is thus clear that the apartheid state took pains to lump the ill-defined categories of

²¹ As noted before, this study acknowledges the constructedness of race.

persons under one all-inclusive banner and label its members a race separate from a privileged white race, and an objectified black race. Kopano Ratele (2009) concurs with the latter when he says: “The State went into great labours in order to name it [whiteness], separate it from “non-whiteness”, distil its essence, and make it visibly privileged and desirable.” (Ratele, 2009: 162) Ratele draws attention to how notions of racial purity could be manipulated by social subjects, as well as to how much was invested in these notions. He goes on to stress the fragility of racial essences in the context of apparently immutable racial boundaries. Ratele describes these white identities as having been left with “a certain nervousness, embattled mentality and oppressiveness”. (Ratele, 2009: 162) Nevertheless, in race-oppressed South Africa, ‘whiteness’ was a tangible thing, real and valuable to those who possessed it, and highly desirable to those who, especially as a result of the privileges blatantly ascribed to light skin, aspired to it. The latter cannot be truer for those who were ambiguously ‘raced’ under apartheid in a manner that made passing for white (and thereby claiming all the associated privileges of whiteness) possible. But before I can start to unpack this, coloured people need to be situated in terms of where they fit into the social fabric of South Africa’s past and present

A historical overview

The appellation ‘coloured’ is a uniquely South African construct, but the condition of being ‘mixed-race’ is not specific to the country. It became prevalent throughout the colonies, wherever colonial penetration and slavery occurred. The term ‘coloured’ is used to denote the hybrid offspring of the mythicised ‘pure races’ (i.e. black and white), indigenes, slaves, other ethnic groupings, and any combination of these. It must be noted that the evolution of the people referred to as ‘coloured’ has been one that began during the first occupation in 1652,

and culminated in legislation officially denoting the 'race' as 'coloured' in 1948. In other words, historically, it took just under 300 years for distinctions between the offspring of indigenous First Peoples of southern Africa, indigenous southern Africans, colonists, African slaves and slaves from the Dutch colonies who were brought to the country during the colonial era, as well as indentured Indians, and Asians who worked in mines after the mineral revolutions, and subsequent intermarriages between all of these various groups, to be dissolved and to be replaced by one all encompassing 'race'. The complex composition of these groupings demonstrates the presumptuous absurdity of the project under apartheid to define all of these people within one singular coloured identity.

Attention has already been drawn to the intensification of a hardline stance by dominant society on 'miscegenation' as a taboo practise that was required to be policed more and more in South Africa, especially after colonial legislation was enacted. Cheryl Hendricks (2001) relates the development of social attitudes towards 'miscegenation'. She cites the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) approach toward maintaining restrictions on sexual relations between white male colonists and black women as being "half-hearted".²² (Hendricks, 2001: 37) She also relates the "half-hearted measures" by which the VOC attempted to separate the 'races'. (ibid.) She describes early colonial society as being tolerant of white male-black female 'miscegenation', but more so if these liaisons were temporary and did not lead to the inevitable offspring between those unions entering dominant white society. (ibid.: 39) This is in strong contrast to the change in attitude toward 'miscegenation';

²² Hendricks describes two proclamations in this vein: "In 1678 they issued a proclamation forbidding all kinds of concubinage and, in 1681, forbade Europeans to attend parties with slave women or to enter the company's slave lodge." (Hendricks, 2001: 37-38)

that developed in the late nineteenth century with the introduction of eugenics theories²³ that pathologised mixed-race people as degenerate and inferior. Theories and ideas on the degeneracy of mixed-race peoples have been so socially entrenched that the resultant discourse gains a naturalised guise that is presented almost as 'common knowledge'. This discourse is replicated in literature. Here the work of Sarah Gertrude Millen, who utilises Francis Galton's (1869) eugenics theory as the basis for her thoughts on mixed-race peoples in her novel, *God's Stepchildren*, comes to mind.²⁴

In colonial South Africa then, race provided the measure of social standing. The increasing development of derogatory nomenclature and stereotypical associations of these appellations at this time testifies to this. Following their assimilation into colonial culture, the products of 'miscegenation' between Khoi mothers and slave fathers were called 'Bastard Hottentots'²⁵ (Adhikari, 2010: 47) They were also referred to as half-breeds, half-castes, and Griquas (the offspring of white Boer colonists and indigenous women). Regardless of their contested origins, coloureds originated and lived on in racist colonial discourse, stereotyped under derogatory terms like 'gam',²⁶ and 'Hotnot',²⁷ which have survived post-colonially in the dominant racist lexicon, even until

²³ The theory of eugenics was developed and first published by Francis Galton in 1869 in his *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences*.

²⁴ For insight into the theorised 'degeneration' of racial hybrids through 'miscegenation', see Coetzee (1988); Hendricks, 2001: 41; Young, 1995: 115-117; and Blair (2003).

²⁵ A discrepancy in nomenclature exists between Adhikari's definition of the term 'Bastard Hottentot' and that of Marais, who describes 'Bastards' as, "the cross between Europeans and people of colour, with a presumption in favour of the European-Hottentot cross." (Marais, 1968: 10)

²⁶ Afrikaans translation for the Biblical character, Ham, Noah's son, who, as a result of looking upon his father's nakedness invoked the 'Curse of Ham', which in turn justified the slavery of Africans.

²⁷ A derivative of the equally derogatory term that incorporates the indigenous Khoi and San peoples, i.e. 'Hottentot'.

the post-apartheid present, and even within coloured communities, where the discourse has been internalised to the extent that these terms are appropriated to debase people who identify as coloureds. This interstitial grouping was given varying degrees of racialised recognition, based as much on physical appearance and social acceptance, as ideas about biological descent.

Cilliers (1963) describes the hierarchical means by which coloureds were classified by researchers in the 1920s and 1930s:

“In general, three distinct social classes, differing also on “racial” or physical basis, could be distinguished. The upper social class was those who resembled Whites most closely in appearance. Middle class people were those who had so-called “trappieshaar”, i.e. a kind of frizzy hair midway between pepper-corn and straight hair. The lower class were those with “short” hair, i.e. pepper-corn.” (Cilliers, 1963: 27)

This kind of division is entirely in keeping with Millin’s description of the ‘variants’ of coloured people, first and foremost in terms of stereotypical physical features. She describes the protagonist’s brother as being, “a very tall, dark boy, nearly seventeen, ignorant, lazy, disobedient, foul-mouthed and dishonest”. (198) This can be compared to the way that the protagonist’s white husband criticises the lighter complexioned female’s failure to run his household to his exacting standards, by describing her as, “much darker than he had always imagined, coarser featured, decidedly coloured”. (204) It seems that for Millin, who here describes late 1800s rural South Africa, being coloured signifies not only gradations of skin colour, but also affirms the stereotypes embedded in skin colour in colonial society. An allusion to possessing ‘colouredness’ therefore offers the greatest insult.

Millin demonstrates the links between the stereotypes formerly associated with the indigenous Khoi and those associated with what

she determines to be (as do the proponents of apartheid) their mixed-race offspring. The official racial classification was legislated and enforced through the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, which was designed to enable the systematic segregation of all South Africans along 'racial' lines – the racist strategy on which apartheid was founded. However, racist ideology had as much influence in maintaining the racial divide. While the aim of this exposition is not to unpack 'apartheid', its role in the formation of a discourse of 'colouredness' cannot be denied, and so will be a constant underlying presence. In the absence of apartheid, coloureds might perhaps not have been categorised as an independent race, and South African society may have followed the aforementioned American model where any sexual contact between white and black groups resulting in hybrid offspring automatically led to the classification of said hybrid into the 'Negro' racial grouping, i.e. black. Largely through apartheid social engineering, however, coloureds have been firmly identified as a separate racial grouping; placed in the middle of the racial continuum, with the combination of skin colour and physiognomy providing their position relative to the 'pure races'. In white-ruled society, proximity to whiteness (i.e. lighter skin colour and Caucasian physiognomy) directly influenced social status. Thus, within white racist discourse, coloureds were generally elevated to a higher position relative to blacks, notwithstanding the latter group's 'pure' racial status. Paradoxically, regardless of where they found themselves on the continuum, coloureds were generally not accepted (by either white or black groups) as being a distinct, authentic race in the way that blacks and whites were thought of. This is indicative of the prominence of race as a means of determining social status. Colonialism had already paved the way for apartheid in conditioning people to internalise their status in the racial hierarchy without necessarily requiring enforced state control.

However, the inbetweenness and ambiguous positioning of the coloured 'race' in relation to the 'pure' white and black 'races' created 'colouredness' as a volatile category relative to the perceived stability and coherence of 'blackness' and 'whiteness'.

From a gender perspective, in the American model, black women are arguably the most marginalised in society. However, in the South African case, the myth of 'purity' creates ambiguity in the social positioning of coloured and black women. Stated simply, on the one hand, black women are regarded by some as being superior to coloured women because they possess an 'authentic' culture, heritage and history, and 'racial purity'; as opposed to their coloured counterparts who represent 'mixed (read 'degraded', 'inferior') blood', and are perceived to lack a distinct heritage and own culture. On the other, coloured women, with their supposed closer physiognomic and cultural proximity to the dominant white race, may also be considered by some to be superior to black women. Cheryl Hendricks (2001) recognises the role of a national racist discourse in this tension between 'pure' black and 'part-white' coloureds. (Hendricks, 2001: 42-43) It is thus debatable where, on the social scale, coloured women are positioned. It is my belief that in the current political climate, coloured women, unlike their Khoisan predecessors in colonial times, who were relegated to the lowest social tier, are able to forgo the pursuit of 'purity' and engender a culture based on multiple belongings and identities.

Unlike Millin's accounts of a burgeoning intermediate race in the colonial and post-colonial setting, Zoë Wicomb and Pat Stamatélos's novels are for the most part set in apartheid South Africa. Their depictions of coloured characters predicate racial intermediacy, and

allude to the fixity of race within apartheid society. The perception of this rigidity was the premise for maintaining separateness and the hegemony of whiteness. Under apartheid, race is formalised, and the coloured characters in these novels face legal retribution if they transgress their predetermined designation. The racist discourse surrounding the origin of coloureds in shameful 'miscegenation' and the 'degeneracy' and 'impurity' of the resultant mixed-races has undoubtedly had an effect of creating the sense of shame²⁸ that seems to be inherent in perceptions of coloured identity. In the following section, I deal with the evolution of stereotypes about colouredness within particular political contexts and link it to how these have provided the basis for the historically despised, though evolving intermediate identity.

Myth-making and stereotypes of racial hybridity

In a society largely dominated by a Western binary logic, coloureds, with their perceived in-between racial status, pose an anomaly. Eurocentric renditions of colonial history and a lack of representation have provided most coloureds with a homogenous, and very negative perception of their past. Through apartheid 'education', grossly subjective curricula lay the foundation for the inculcation of cultural stereotypes around indigenous peoples. During apartheid, standard two (grade four) learners were taught about the 'development of the earliest inhabitants', the 'San', with the term often used pejoratively as shorthand in school textbooks to denote proto-coloureds:²⁹

²⁸ Coloured rejection of coloured identity is noted by Mohamed Adhikari (2005); Zimitri Erasmus (2001) and Zoë Wicomb (1998) identify the role of shame in the common discourse of coloured identity.

²⁹ Adhikari (2010) concurs that the terms 'San' and 'coloured' were interchangeable when he says: "Often referred to as 'Hottentot' or 'coloured' once they became a part of colonial society, these former foragers became part of a downtrodden proletariat prone to disease and alcoholism." (Adhikari, 2010: 71)

Many years ago these groups [San or Bushmen, Khoi, and Black people] moved into the Cape from the north. They were completely uncivilized. ... To begin with they were hunters, then they became cattle farmers (pastoralists) and finally they grew crops (agriculturalists). Not all of our earliest inhabitants learnt these things equally quickly. They were thus at *different stages of development* (Consul et al., 1981: 11).

The San lived as our [European] ancestors did during the Stone Age. They never developed beyond the stage of the hunter and did not possess cattle or cultivate the soil. (Consul et al., 1981: 20).

It is an unusual language with many clicks. They used very few words. Most San could count only to three. (ibid.: 20).

Old and sickly people who could not keep up were simply left behind. (ibid.: 23).

These bright and cheerful little people loved dancing and singing. At full moon this often went on right through the night. To the beat of monotonous music (singing or hand-clapping) they made all kinds of wild and nimble leaps. (ibid.: 23–24).

They [Khoi] often danced to these monotonous tunes right through the night. The next day they slept. (ibid.: 29).

They [Khoi] were very fond of tobacco and dagga³⁰. (ibid.: 30).

Water was also regarded as something holy – certainly not as something in which to wash! (ibid.: 30).

From the above it would seem that these First Peoples of southern Africa were unskilled and primitive, unproductive, unintelligent,

³⁰ Marijuana

innumerate, inhumane, savage, uncivilised, musical and jovial, animalistic, prone to laziness and substance abuse, and unclean. While history texts have undergone radical revision post-1994, these racist stereotypes taught as 'fact' have not completely dissipated from the South African psyche. It is thus in this unresolved context that many coloured people are reclaiming an indigenous heritage and seeking to reconstitute those negative stereotypes.

One example of rethinking coloured identity has taken the form of Khoisan revivalism. This is a movement that seeks to assert for coloured people authentic heritage and culture with all that that entails, including positively inscribed social identity, religion, traditions, distinct languages, geographical communities, ancestry and origins – which are seriously lacking under the homogenous blanket label 'coloured'. While this may provide people with a certain sense of belonging, it seems that this quest for an essential authenticity and racial 'purity' is not dissimilar to the exclusivity and separatism that hegemonic culture espoused under apartheid. This raises concerns about whether the movement acknowledges culture as being evolutionary and constructed, or whether it relies on the perception of culture as being static and somehow innate – for the purpose of justifying claims of authenticity and purity. It also raises the question of whether such revivalism can in fact envision society as comprised of multiple, but equal identities; or whether it simply wishes to impose indigenous culture in hegemonic terms in the interest of possible economic gain. Michele Ruiters (2009) warns that, "[t]he search of an 'authentic' African identity that is tied to the land, such as Khoisan identity, will not prove those members' authenticity because society, and the state, has not attached any value, other than tourism value, to that identity." (Ruiters, 2009: 124) While Khoisan revivalism has shown

that positive identification for coloureds is possible, it could be argued that it too requires a form of race-change on the part of coloureds seeking to adopt this more positively affirmed identity.

Michele Ruiters's above use of the phrase "tourism value" to describe current Khoisan identity puts a modern-day perspective on a colonial practise. It is reminiscent of the voyeuristic display of Sarah Baartman in Europe in the early 1800s. Far from being a sightseeing expedition, as the word 'tourism' usually invokes, Baartman's was a tour in pathologised black female sexuality, with her body representing the final destination/violation. While the stereotypes listed in the 'history' text cited above fail to broach the subject of sexuality, and especially female sexuality, the subject is never completely veiled. Sander Gilman (1985) recounts prevalent eighteenth and nineteenth century European anthropological views on black female sexuality when he says: "The antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty is the black, and the essential black, the lowest exemplum of mankind on the great chain of being, is the Hottentot." (Gilman, 1985: 83) If the Hottentot female is accepted to be the primordial mother to coloured 'woman', it follows that the coloured female body is similarly the site of sexual subjectivity. The underlying sexual taboo of 'miscegenation' that accompanies the hybrid female is obscured in the rhetoric of 'purity'. The hybrid female, by virtue of descent, is necessarily a product of 'miscegenation' and is seen as a latent perpetrator of future 'miscegenation'. She is also perceived as a potential carrier of further hybrid offspring, and is therefore regarded as a threat to a distinct racial order.

Even though no longer susceptible to 'colonial violation', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1995) 'subaltern woman' lives on in the modern-day postcolonial coloured female. In postcolonial terms, the influence of

class on subject position is undeniable, but race still remains a significant factor in determining social status. The 'triple oppression' caused by the intersection of class, race and sex is experienced acutely by the marginalised hybrid female.³¹ The coloured female is defined not only by her sex and class, but also by her 'race', and her 'lack' (in terms of skin colour, physiognomy, hair type, body shape, etc.) in relation to the white ideal. It is thus not that hard to imagine why coloured women who were faced with this kind of prejudice could conceptualise passing for white as a viable alternative to the marginal subject positions that they occupied.

In addition to this, intra-racial discrimination, as a result of this perceived 'lack' within and between the different social strata located in the coloured community, is also experienced.³² Helene Strauss (2009) acknowledges an apartheid constructed "intra-black hierarchy" as having led many coloureds not to embrace readily the Black Consciousness Movement acceptance of black unity. (Strauss, 2009: 38) In some cases, coloured denial of racial inferiority in light of a self-perceived proximity to whiteness precipitates the drive for assimilation with white culture, and as such, also possibly passing for white, if individual circumstances allow for the option of passing. It may be argued that the imposed classification 'coloured' is, in itself, the cause of much of the marginalisation felt by a number of those persons labelled as such. The term 'coloured' is imbued with connotations of illegitimacy, rootlessness, and racial uncertainty, and the shame

³¹ I am mindful of Yuval-Davis's (2006) recognition of the distinct ontological bases of the social divisions, and caution around essentialising or naturalising 'Blackness' or 'womanhood' or 'working classness', in which she recognises the potential to homogenise social positions, resulting in the potential exclusion of marginalised groups.

³² For definitions of colouredness based on 'lack', see especially Adhikari (2005: 13), Erasmus (2001: 17), and Wicomb in Jolly (1998: 98).

associated with these collective 'inadequacies'. However, rejection of these stereotypes through the conscious self-identification of coloureds is also contested, both by dominant society, and members of the coloured group who identify as such. This is in keeping with Christiaan Beyers' (2009) claim that, "one is often socially included or excluded from a racially defined group based on how one is perceived in society at large, and regardless of one's self-definition to the contrary - even if this self-definition is echoed by a considerable minority." (Beyers, 2009: 81) This raises doubts about exactly how much agency individuals actually possess to alter their identities.

Fictionalising 'colouredness': Millin, Wicomb and Stamatélos

As noted, the three texts under discussion are written from the vantage points of three different women authors, but from within the same geographical location - South Africa. What seems common, though, is not necessarily the case, as the authors occupy radically different social positions within the same geographical space. As such, the authors' responses to constructions of 'race', of 'miscegenation', of 'colouredness' and how they confront passing, especially in relation to coloured women, are highly divergent. The authors also represent characters in a number of locations - rural, urban; and in the Western Cape (seen as the 'birthplace' of coloureds) and Johannesburg, which represents an almost diasporic locality. I have chosen texts from a varied authorship specifically for this purpose, which is to explore comprehensively the phenomenon of passing as perceived and constructed by individuals and the discourses and politics in which they are located within South African society. I have chosen these texts not simply as testimonial sources of coloured experiences (which would be to simplify the forms and role of fiction in any case), but as reflecting

representations of ideas about coloured people and proposed ideas about race.

The novel is aptly described by Pnina Werbner (1997) as, “an institutionalised form of opposition enshrined by ‘enlightened’ modern bourgeois society”. (Werbner, 1997: 7) It is a suitably non-threatening (in its promise of anonymity) and esteemed vehicle for broaching sensitive and socially taboo subjects like racial passing, with its allusions to sexual violation, ‘inter-racial misalliances’ and ‘miscegenation’. Werbner’s use of the word “opposition” alludes here also to the author’s ability to represent complex truths relative to the sanctioned ‘truths’ of their social and political environment. In Millin’s case, for example, this involves foregrounding the strict regulation of racial purity at the height of the circulation of influential scholarly and popular ideas about racial evolution. With Wicomb, who writes as a progressive black feminist in the post-apartheid period, it involves revisiting the effects of racism in ways that transcend existing traditions of progressive historical writing and testimony about racial domination. It is only the relatively anonymous Stamatélos – with her seemingly ambiguous racial background, but unmistakably immigrant European surname, writing in the Cape vernacular Afrikaans, and in a manner that is sympathetic to coloured marginality – whose political perspective remains largely undefined.

Zoë Wicomb (1998) traces the Afrikaans dialect’s rise from “shameful ‘gamtal’” to being “valorized as ‘Kaaps’” in the 1980s, as coming to “assert a discursive space for an oppositional colouredness that aligned itself with the black liberation struggle.” (Wicomb, 1998: 97) By realigning Kaaps Afrikaans with colouredness, Stamatélos subversively reclaims a language that has been usurped by Afrikaner nationalism,

and valorises it within an acceptable form, namely, published literature. She thus dismisses Afrikaners' exclusive claims to the language, and undoes their attempts to "make Afrikaans respectable" for use by whites and to "shake off the very strong associations of poverty and particularly 'colouredness' which clung to the language." (Hofmeyr, 1987: 104)

Narrative within passing novels may likely be influenced by the prevalent social climate in which the author finds herself. In the case of Millin, her pseudo-historical writing style subversively presents racialised fiction as authentic, or as 'factual' in relation to a racist social climate. I will investigate how the three authors represent the intentions behind their characters' feigning 'whiteness' within particular historical contexts. Coloured identities (and specifically coloured female identities) will be key to exploring the discursive, social and psychosocial factors involved in passing.

My study deals with ways of perceiving and representing race in relation to colouredness by focusing on different author's viewpoints and on the distinct experiences of their female characters. Enlisting a feminist lens, I focus primarily on women's gendered experiences in these novels. I show that gendered subjectivities and inclusion inevitably shape and are shaped by racial definition and sense of belonging. At the same time, an understanding of how 'whiteness' sets itself up as an exclusive state of being in binary opposition to 'blackness' is also relevant to this study. Women characters' experiences of and perceptions of passing, I show, reveal the extent to which the binaries and stereotypes associated with gender and femininity are linked to racial categorisation.

As noted before, contrary to what the dominant perception may be, passing is not always black-to-white. Though, dominant society, which posits 'whiteness' as the *only* ideal, would doubtlessly question the reasoning behind any 'rational' white person's desire to pass for black or coloured. Within the current post-apartheid, politically correct social milieu, the proposition that it would be 'abhorrent' to want to be black is untenable and racist slurs like these are no longer permissible in current racial discourse.³³ However, in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, for instance, the character Marion asks: "Should one infer that some people who had been classified white were subsequently, and bizarrely, either insisting on their native heritage or falsely claiming black blood?" (121-2) This seems to have been the normative response from persons faced with the choice of identifying with a 'race' other than (and therefore presumed 'inferior') to the dominant 'race', here and elsewhere in the world where passing for white occurred. I refer here especially to the United States of America, where passing for white was prevalent during slavery and after.³⁴ Catherine Rottenberg describes the paradox that exists between a forced identification with a black identity and living that identity. She says, "black-identified subjects, in order to sustain a nonmarginal existence, are compelled and encouraged to privilege and thus "desire-to-be white", that is to live up to attributes associated with whiteness". (Rottenberg, 2003: 501) This is the case in most (not all) of the passing characters encountered in the novels under

³³ JM Coetzee notes the "nakedness" and "shamelessness" of blatant racism in public discourse prior to 1945, and, based on the racist slurs of a number of public figures between the mid-1800s and 1945, states that: "One no longer comes across judgments like these expressed in public, even in South Africa (as to whether they live on in the private realm, who is in a position to judge?). (Coetzee, 1980/8: 137).

³⁴ Juda Bennett claims: "It has been estimated that tens of thousands crossed the line, or passed from black to white, particularly in the years between 1880 and 1925..." (Bennett, 1996: 2)

discussion, and this point will be developed in detail in the following chapters.

In Nella Larsen's (1929) *Passing*, her permanent black-passing-for-white character, Clare, experiences an existential crisis when she is shown to yearn for the cohesive identity and culture of her black race despite benefiting from the economic luxury of 'whiteness'. This representation disturbs the hegemonic race hierarchy that assumes a priori desire for 'whiteness' over 'blackness'. The novella provides an interesting comparison with South African fiction dealing with women's gendered experiences of passing. Larsen shows that factors such as women's ascribed identities and symbolic meanings, their role as objects in sexual transactions, and their gendered roles in families and communities all affect how and why they navigate the often porous racial barriers. I hope to show that the women characters' gendered experiences in three different South African novels affect their responses to race in similar ways. I will consider the parallels that can be made between South African and American depictions of race and passing within contexts of segregated society in the fictional narrative. The commonalities between the two geographical locations involve disclosing that the climate of racism is distinct, that taboos (legal and mythologised) have been distinctive, and that the stereotypes associated with femininity and race have been similar and shaped by particular legacies. I will therefore draw on the work of post-colonial feminist theorists who have argued that racial and gendered identifications are always inextricably linked.

Women, gender and 'race': Theorising multiple and hybrid identities

A key aim of this study is to shed light on the representation of coloured women in South Africa. I hope to illuminate experiences of

oppression and resistance that are often neglected in the preoccupation with more clearly defined experiences associated with blackness or whiteness, or with racially unmarked masculinities and femininities. I am mindful of the assertion that Grunebaum and Robins (2001) make when they say: "There is no single coloured experience, nor any single voice that speaks in its name". (Grunebaum and Robins, 2001: 168)

There is of course no quintessential coloured, no universal, generalised essence of colouredness or coloured femaleness. As such, I cannot speak for all coloured women, and can only comment on representations of colouredness from the perspective of my apartheid and post-apartheid middle-class background. In my capacity as intersectionally positioned coloured female and researcher, I consider myself an outsider-within, which refers to my position as a researcher and previously defined "other". Patricia Hill Collins (1991) says that black female researchers are more likely to perceive anomalies in the research process by filling in the blanks left by mainstream research and by righting factual distortions where their own experiences and reported experiences do not correspond (Hill Collins, 1991: 51). I am by no means a passer in the sense of the word described in this analysis, and so rely on my knowledge - academic and 'informal' - to guide my research.

From a lived perspective, in terms of the order of social significance of race, class and gender within patriarchal society, issues of race often overshadow gender issues in the South African context. From a feminist theoretical perspective, the intersectionality of these divisions is clear, and race, gender, sex, class, etc. cannot be thought of as separate entities. However, as Yuval-Davis (2006) notes, "in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions that are more important than others in constructing specific

positions.” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 203) This may be true of the process of coloured identity formation. Zimitri Erasmus (2001) places ‘race’ at the heart of coloured identity formation when she explains its genesis “in the middle of colonial racial hierarchy”, as being positioned “in hierarchical relation to both white and black African identities”. (Erasmus, 2001: 24) However, this is not to say that ‘race’ remains the basis of coloured identity, as identity formation is a fluid and evolving process, entangled in infinite social components. In pre- and apartheid South Africa, the goal of freedom from racial oppression negated gendered agency to a subordinate position in society. Women undoubtedly led an active role of resistance in the struggle against apartheid, although their acknowledged contributions have for a long time been relegated to domestic or private roles as maternal, homebound caregivers and aides to male freedom fighters. Moreover, their presence on the frontlines and their vulnerability (ironically) at the hands of *both* sides of male domination has remained largely undocumented in historical records. Post-apartheid, women’s rights and their participation in the public sphere have been given much more prominence, especially as evidenced in the country’s Constitution. Gender struggles are by no means resolved, and gender remains just as central as race and class in contemporary identity politics.

Many postcolonial feminists have been concerned with the ways in which the racially hybrid female subject is necessarily constituted within racial, gendered and sexualised discourses. Judith Butler (1993) reflects on the need for social differences to be thought of as contiguous:

[T]hough there are clearly good historical reasons for keeping “race” and “sexuality” and “sexual difference” as separate analytic spheres, there are also quite pressing and significant historical reasons for asking how and where we might read not only their convergence, but

the sites at which one cannot be constituted save through the other.
(Butler, 1993: 168)

The female passing character in the South African context epitomises the interconnectedness of social divisions in constructing identity. As an exemplar of successful mimicry, the colonial subject embodied in the passing figure is only able to achieve the goal of 'civilisation' and full citizenship (with all the associated privileges it implies) by adhering to the norm of all social divisions, simultaneously, at any given time.

What this implies is that the passer is required to perform and embody multiple identities, even though the public performance is read as a singular 'white' one. This is exactly what could be seen to problematise passing within dominant society, as a practise that exposes for scrutiny the flaws in the construction of 'superior' and 'inferior' identities.

Judith Butler (1993) raises ideas about the performance of race in relation to being able to evade being read as a marked body in relation to unmarked bodies, i.e. normative hegemonic race. Using the black passing female characters in Larsen's *Passing* as an example, she demonstrates the interconnectedness of the corporeal, visual and auditory in making assumptions about race. Butler determines that Larsen's passing characters are able to pass for white because, as light-skinned middle-class women, and in the absence of visual markers to the contrary, they are able to play into society's assumption of 'whiteness'. They are thus able to take ownership of whiteness through performance, and at the same time employ silence to hide the markings of race when required. The implied access to agency that this signifies is another cause for unease for the producers of social subjects, as well as the patriarchal hierarchy.

One of the most contested issues in post-colonial feminism is the notion of 'woman' and what that term connotes. In the same way that there is

not one “totalizing colouredness”³⁵, speaking about ‘woman’ in relation to coloured females is equally inadequate, as coloured femininities are ‘marked’ and experienced by subjects in distinct ways. Judith Butler (1999) addresses the problem of essentialised terminology in feminism and in general, and highlights the intersectionality of gender with social divisions:

If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. (Butler, 1999: 6)

Furthermore, the importance of gender is not always the most prominent social category, especially in matriarchal African societies, and in societies that rank seniority over gender.³⁶ What is often not considered, is the fact that marginalised women in South Africa are becoming increasingly more self-reliant, even in the face of oppressive circumstances. Single mothers and women in female-headed households, through self-employment and with the aid of state (e.g. child grants, disability grants, etc.) and community support (e.g. *stokvels*³⁷), are now more than ever in a position that enables them to negotiate societal oppressions. Far from being content to play the role of immutable archetype of authentic ‘tradition’ or the ‘third world victim’ – as often depicted by Western feminist scholars, development

³⁵ Zoe Wicomb (1998) suggests that “multiple belongings” offer an alternative to devising means to establishing a “totalizing colouredness”. (Wicomb, 1998: 105)

³⁶ Signe Arnfred raises a noteworthy discussion on the disparity that exists between hegemonic Western feminist discourses and African feminist views of ‘woman’ depicted as ‘other’ in an article entitled, ‘Simone de Beauvoir in Africa: “Woman = The Second Sex?”’ *Issues of Feminist Thought*. Arnfred, S. (2002) *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*. Vol. 2.1, pp 1–22.

³⁷ A *stokvel* is a community-owned and community-based savings scheme in which members pool money over pre-determined periods of time.

researchers and economic aid workers – many previously disadvantaged South African women are reclaiming their agency in the public sphere. However, this is not to say that all women are benefiting from our Constitution's claims of gender and racial equality. The South African Commission on Gender Equality³⁸ is the institution mandated through the Constitution to oversee gender equality. Although institutions such as these offer a means for the amelioration of gender-based violations, they may not always be accessible to women who are not educated or of their availability.

Unmarking the body, towards disembodied identity

The role of female sexuality in identity formation is undoubtedly recognised by feminist scholars, but the subject is often positioned after the more virtuous traits of womanhood. Coloured women bear the scars of centuries of oppression that negated them to a position equating that of 'savage', 'wild', 'sexually other' sub-humans in the eyes of a patriarchal colonial aggressor. Here, early eighteenth century 'scientific' probing into Sarah Bartman's 'questionable' humanity is a case in point. Sander Gilman (1985) cites de Blainville and Cuvier's intentions with their research into the Khoi woman's anatomy as being the, "likening of a female of the "lowest" human species with the highest ape, the orangutan, and the description of the anomalies of the Hottentot's "organ of generation"." (Gilman, 1985: 85)

That the sexualised discourse of black female 'immorality' and lack of feminine virtue in relation to the white feminine ideal has abated post-

³⁸ As its mission statement maintains, the Commission on Gender Equality, "strive[s] for the transformation of society through exposing gender discrimination in laws, policies and practices; advocating changes in sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes; instilling respect for women's rights as human rights" through the "transformation of gender relations; redefinition and redistribution of power; and equal access to and enjoyment of economic, social and political opportunities."

apartheid is debatable. So when Simone de Beauvoir (1974) so emphatically states that, “[o]ne is not born, but becomes, a woman”, I cannot help but feel as though she has omitted a part in the process of ‘becoming’, first and foremost, a human subject. Butler (1999) puts it more succinctly when she says, “the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended.” (Butler, 1999: 4)

Western feminism presumes a priori subject position based on heteronormative performances of sexuality, gender and race. However, the recognition and acceptance of coloured female identities in determining individual and group politics, psychological and cultural experiences is contested within male dominated society. Similarly problematic is the issue of visibility, and the question remains whether coloureds (and coloured women in particular) when visible, are viewed as being more than a conflation of colonial stereotypes and racist discourse. Coloured women are often seen to experience a burden of distinct objectification in that their bodies signify particular meanings in relation to racial hierarchies and taboos. While, as feminists show, all women are objectified, and, as many black feminists show, black women are frequently reduced to sexual objects in even more reductive ways, coloured women are faced with the added legacy of being stereotyped as the embodiment of “pathologically corrupted sexuality”, “the essential Other”. (Gilman, 1985: 255) The essentialised coloured ‘woman’ represents the embodiment of the discourse of potential subversive ‘miscegenation’ through hybrid hyper-sexuality. With all of this weighted against her, and with the ideal of ‘feminine virtue’ (a prerequisite for attaining womanhood) the reserve of white women, is *becoming* a woman (in the De Beauvoirian sense) even possible? More importantly, is Western womanhood still desired?

In the colonial context, stereotypes are used a means for the coloniser to exercise social control and ultimately justify taking ownership of the colonised body. It is that very body which is held in relation to the 'Western ideal' as 'scientific evidence' of the latter's 'inferiority' in comparison with Western 'superiority'. "*If everything is discourse, what about the body?*" (Butler, 1993: 28) The discourse surrounding the body as signifier determines the relative position of the native within the racial hierarchy. The indigene female's body especially, has historically been stereotyped as being sexually anomalous, deviating from the Western ideal of feminine virtue and beauty, but yet available to the coloniser. This female body is the primary site of sexualised politics, and through its potential for 'miscegenation', the shameful evidence of warped European desire and 'the other's' pathologically 'depraved' sexuality. (Young, 1995; Gilman, 1985; Hendricks, 2001; Wicomb, 1998) Again, the reference to the violation of Sarah Baartman's body is stark. In the post-colonial context, whilst shedding its slave status, ownership of the body is transferred to the state. Especially in the apartheid era, the body is inscribed with meaning – what it may and may not do, and especially *with whom*. Under apartheid, 'miscegenation' was no longer socially or legally tolerated. 'Miscegenation' constituted a subversive agent, blurring the edges of 'pure race' and introducing a highly problematic and infinite continuum of hybrid 'deviance' within the category 'mixed-race'.

The inscription of identity becomes problematic for the authorities tasked with naming 'race' when visual cues are not compatible with the prescribed identity of the corresponding body. In the case of the coloured person passing for white, other markers are required in order for the state to be able to interpret identity and ascribe or withhold the benefits associated with that identity. Accurate interpretation is

essential for the state to maintain effective control over its subjects. Under apartheid, the unregulated, misidentified coloured female body is especially dangerous as a means of producing undesired, equally subversive progeny. The state is therefore doubly concerned with policing the female coloured body.

The bearing that the body has as a marker of coloured identity makes Judith Butler and her theories around construction, performance, signification and the body extremely important to this research. In the omnipresent racist discourse of the postcolonial setting, *the body is everything*. Biologically and culturally, the body comes to represent what is possible and attainable for human agency, and ultimately civilisation. The hybrid body, as 'in-between' and 'neither/nor' is a conundrum for classification. For coloureds, "the 'essence' denotes not 'pure racial blood' but 'mixed racial blood'; the 'essence' signifies the unclassifiable, the doubtful and the borderline." (Reddy, 2001: 78) The classification-obsessed bureaucrats of South Africa's apartheid state recognised the subversive capabilities of the body, and in a bid to prevent racial transgression, broadened their focus to include the social and political as determinants of race. I will look at the way these bodies (and especially female bodies) are represented; at the ways in which the texts deal with the issue of classifying hybrid bodies; and interrogate the classificatory means that the authors employ in relation to the dominant societal norms at the historical junctures in which the novels operate.

The physical body is perceived as the initial source of determining identity. Beyond the visual, racial identity is constituted in performance. In other words, in addition to *looking* the part, identity is determined through *acting* the part. Coloured women's identities are

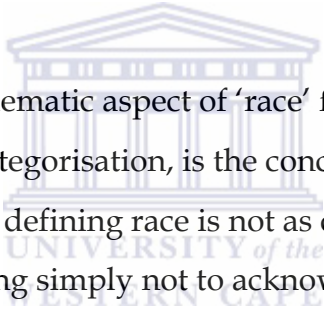
constituted in the sexualised body. Their bodies are thus under constant surveillance, and striking a balance between the two is imperative for the passing female. In a society that employs infinitely complicated hierarchical classifications in order to determine social standing, the passer becomes a subversive entity, with the potential to destabilise the mythical foundation of dominant white society. Usurping the virtuous altruistic white female body, she is a trespasser undermining the sacrosanct receptacle in which white society is founded.

The politics of passing

This exposition is concerned throughout with the politics of assigned/ascribed and adopted/imposed social identities, with how certain contexts, biographical experiences and dominant discourses shape understandings of these identities by certain writers, the characters they create, and the narratives they construct. It is also, as previously indicated, concerned with elevating content found within fiction to 'knowledge'. The study hopes to show the important role of fictions that explore race, gender, coloured experiences and passing in providing a deeper sociological and psychological understanding of these. At the same time, the arguments presented also signal the location and perspective of the writer, i.e. myself, in navigating discourses of race, gender and class in the identity-obsessed context of South Africa.

In my own family, which represents a middle-class, nuclear coloured family, as in the families of many of my coloured friends and acquaintances, anecdotes of flouting repressive race laws, and whispered accounts of light-skinned relatives having disappeared into white society during the apartheid era abound. It is common knowledge that passing for white did in fact occur in any number of

coloured families, especially after the National Party government sought to separate the 'races' systematically when it took power in 1948. But the stories of their assimilation are not documented in the public records, or in the realm of academic research. An obvious reason for this 'oversight' is that white South African academia, supported and funded by the apartheid state, having identified the potential threat of passers to their hegemony, chose not to write them into existence. If we consider that the entire apartheid ideology of a 'biological' or 'natural order' dominance was structured upon a three-tiered racial hierarchy, it follows that racial passers possessed the potential to undermine and disrupt the very theories that kept academics in their positions of authority.



Perhaps the most problematic aspect of 'race' for apartheid proponents of hierarchical racial categorisation, is the concomitant acknowledgement that defining race is not as clear-cut as racist rhetoric would have. By choosing simply not to acknowledge the presence of passers in dominant society, academics were able to uphold their racist theories, defend their stereotyped identifications, and maintain control over hegemonic society. The silence in academic research, even in contemporary work on coloured identities, seems to stem from the perceived triviality or opportunism of passers' behaviour as having sanctioned the racial status quo and the desirability of positions of privilege acquired through skin colour. Within society, passers may very well have been identified, but their presence in the greater white community posed little threat since the 'transgressors' were bound by the racial script to play by white society's rules to ensure their continued privileged place within that society. Play-whites would in fact have helped to bolster numbers in the South African racial

demographic that left whites, who occupied a minority position, politically vulnerable to the black numerical majority.³⁹

Rather than speculate about why coloureds who could did not pass, the phenomenon is much more useful as a means for making meaning of concepts of race and identity formation, especially within a gendered context, in different historical timeframes. Then, as today, individual circumstances vary, and coloureds by no means shared the same social, financial or educational opportunities based on a shared 'colouredness' alone. The link between lighter skin colour and privilege within the coloured community allowed opportunities for advancement that were simply not available to those who did not 'look the part'.⁴⁰ Post-democratically, opportunities are more conducive than ever before for social advancement through educational merit and economic affluence. Yet, the stigma of dark skin and physical traits that associate coloureds with their negatively stereotyped indigenous heritage often remains under the surface. I will explore the nuances of class distinctions in relation to passing in the analyses of the texts, and review the ways in which the three authors present their characters' motivations to pass for white.

Successful passing requires more than just light skin and straight hair. Judith Butler (1993), in her analysis of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, introduces the importance of the roles of performance, including, speech, behaviour and association required for passing to succeed. To paraphrase, she says that the success of the passing characters is related

³⁹ The 1960 census estimates the percentages of the South African population at 68.25% for 'bantu' peoples, 19.33% for whites, coloureds at 9.44% and 'Asiatics' at 2.98%. (Cilliers, 1963: 14)

⁴⁰ For discussions on 'racial' distinctions based on origin and phenotype in colonial Cape society, see Hendricks (2001: 30).

to their being able to both withhold conversational markers of race through silence, and enter into conversations, “which presume whiteness as the norm without contesting that assumption.” (Butler, 1993: 269) This echoes Stamatélos’s adolescent passing character Lorrain’s point of view when she tells her passing protégée that all she has to do to pass successfully is to keep quiet, wear perfume, and to just make as if she is white. (21) The success of the passing act is thus largely attributed to the performance of the passer and her ability to disassociate from her preordained ‘race’ in a manner that irrefutably assumes whiteness as the norm. A successful performance relieves her of the burden of proof of whiteness. For Butler (1993), the power passing represents is constituted in that performance:

It is the changeability itself, the dream of a metamorphosis, where that changeableness signifies a certain freedom, a class mobility afforded by whiteness that constitutes the power of that seduction. (Butler, 1993: 268)

However, in the American context, markers of class difference (such as speech and leisure activity) between middle class black and white America have been arguably less distinct than those between middle class coloureds and even the lower classes of whites in apartheid South Africa. It thus follows that the performance required by coloured South Africans who wished to pass demanded far greater efforts. In the case of the women characterised in the works under review, the authors demonstrate that social factors have implications for women who are, regardless of their race, bound by patriarchal conventions.

Coloured females are situated in a context that sanctions patriarchal dominance and control – whether in the form of fathers’, husbands’, etc. authority. Within a patriarchal, apartheid, heteronormative context, female passing can perhaps be read as an indictment against patriarchal

control. Wicomb's female passer, Helen, having internalised racist ideologies of coloured 'lack', imagines that she is able to attain personhood by ridding herself of a 'shameful' coloured past and thereby finally claim her 'virtue' as a white woman. She perhaps does not realise that white women remain subject to oppression under patriarchy as well. Why is she then condemned for taking what could be considered a reasonable next step in achieving unparalleled agency by passing for white? The reason often volunteered for this condemnation is 'race betrayal', whereby the passer is portrayed as selling out not only her identity, but her entire race for a life of privilege. This view is echoed by Mary Washington, who asks: "And more, where does the woman who passes find the equanimity to live by the privileged status that is based on the oppression of her own people?" (Washington, 1980: 354)

I would like to propose a route much more complex than choosing a pro- or anti-race stance. I suggest that passing be envisaged in the terms by which Carla Kaplan (2007) reads Nella Larsen's novella: "...Larsen uses passing to critique a tradition of treating racial "allegiance" as a moral dilemma rather than the matter of preference, longing, and choice that Larsen imagines it could be." (Kaplan, 2007: xxv) By allowing for the rethinking of the boundaries of race through re-envisioning passing and passers, the arbitrariness of 'race' is evoked. And by acknowledging freedom of choice in determining identity, the agency of those marginalised through 'race' is reinstated.

With this analysis, I hope to expose some of the complex relationships between and within South African conceptions of race, culture and identities, and the arbitrariness of these categories as absolute determinants of personhood. I would like to explore the facets of

colouredness that make it possible, if not desirable, for coloured women to contemplate trading in their culture and identity in order to pass for white. I hope that my analysis of these texts in relation to coloured women passing for white offers insight into both schools of thought maintained by the critics and the proponents of the act. But more than offer cause to revile or revere the practise or the people who participated in passing, mostly I hope to increase awareness and initiate debate around a subject that has, for too long, been allowed to pass unnoticed.



CHAPTER TWO

SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN, *GOD'S STEPCHILDREN*

Sarah Gertrude Millin's (1924) *God's Stepchildren* was published in 1924 and is set over a period between the years 1821 to 1921. For the most part told in the third person, the novel, spanning four generations, deals with a family bound by "tainted" blood spawned of the initial voluntary act of 'miscegenation' perpetrated by the white patriarch, Rev. Andrew Flood. The narrator, whom I think of interchangeably as the author, Millin, becomes the link between the reader and the subject matter. The novel bears testimony to the centrality of the narrator in influencing thought through the use of biased, stereotypical and racist language. The narrative details aspects of the lives of the subsequent generations of 'coloured' characters as they aspire to racial assimilation with whites through the 'whitening' of their 'tainted' blood through further 'miscegenation'. While I examine all the characters influenced by the initial 'mixing', the character I focus on is Elmira, who represents the third generation of Flood's perceived transgression, and the first generation of mixed-race people labelled as 'coloured'. Elmira, because of her ambiguous physiognomy, is able to successfully pass between the coloured and white racial groups. As is the case with all racial hybrids, but more so those with lighter pigmentation, Elmira represents a challenge for classification. The passer's ability to pass unseen poses a threat to the 'purity' of white society. And her very existence seeks to undermine all the presuppositions of the superiority of the white race, by placing the 'Other' in direct competition with the privileged class. Elmira's ability to shed her coloured identity by assimilating into white society leaves her in the paradoxical position of either discarding her 'inferior' coloured identity and all that accompanies it, including her family, or to aspire to a whiteness that she performs with ease, but

which she knows she does not own. By accepting her coloured identity, the passer loses the advantages she stands to gain by 'playing white' in a society that rewards people for whiteness. Millin's either/or approach to coloured passing characters leaves very little room for growth considering the choices available to them, and ensures that their fate is doomed.

Historical context: Colonial to post-colonial South Africa

Written as a pseudo-factual account of colonial and post-colonial South Africa, the narrative is unmistakably influenced by actual events. It is interesting that many of the historical events noted below are woven into her fiction, impact on her characters, and thus create a false sense of factuality in her fiction. The subjectivity of history is accepted, and it is not my intention to interrogate 'fact' or 'truth' within history, or to attempt to rewrite it. Within dominant historical accounts, it is often through the silences and absences within these narratives by which inferences about the dispossessed can be made.

The period in which the novel is set marks the tumultuous transition from colonial to post-colonial South Africa. This transition has had a tremendous impact on the lives of indigenous peoples of South Africa, psychologically, emotionally, socially, physically and economically. Its legacy is persistent, even within the democratic dispensation, where traces of the ensuing schism are marked – especially in those most vulnerable members of society, namely black women. Within this context, black women include all women subsumed under the 'indigenous', 'native', 'racially mixed', or 'coloured' categories. The appellation does not seek to infer 'racial purity'. Black women are most often absent from hegemonic historical writing, and it is often in fiction where authors' representations write black women's experiences into

life. The contextualising of the colonial to post-colonial shift thus bears rendering in order for a more holistic understanding of how what has been omitted, silenced or altered impacts on indigenous identity formation. The purpose of this exposition can therefore be thought of as an attempt to fill in some of the blanks, utter the silences, and to reimagine the narrative of history. It is a response to, as André Brink suggests, "*imagine the real*". (Brink, 1998: 24)

Political wrangling, wars, changes in legislation and natural disasters during this period all had an immense and damaging influence on the social structure of indigenous societies in the country, including their living conditions, working patterns and general mobility rights. With the British having taken control of the Cape colony in 1806, the 1820s heralded the arrival of British immigrants to the eastern part of the country. In 1828, pass controls were implemented for blacks working in the Cape colony. Ordinance 50 of 1828 lifted restrictions placed on the labour mobility of Khoi in the Cape.⁴¹ (Hendricks, 2001: 40) The passing of the Ordinance also meant that Khoi indenture⁴² ceased. 1834 heralded the abolition of slavery, with full emancipation coming into effect in 1838 after a period of indenture. These decrees had a great effect on the composition of a working class in the Cape. Adhikari (2005) views the subsequent integration of the lower or working classes as being a focal point in coloured identity formation: "This identity was based on a common socioeconomic status and a shared culture derived from their incorporation into the lower ranks of Cape colonial society."

⁴¹ According to Worden (1994): "In 1809, a proclamation by the British governor Lord Caledon laid down that all 'Hottentots' (Khoi) must have a 'fixed place of abode', normally on a settler farm as a worker. This was to be registered with the local authorities, from whom passes had to be obtained before they could move out of the area." (Worden, 1994: 67)

⁴² "In 1812 Khoi children brought up on settler farms were indentured for ten years until the age of eighteen, thus effectively immobilizing Khoi families on specific farms." (ibid.)

(Adhikari, 2005: 2) From around 1836, large-scale migration of Afrikaners to the north of South Africa occurred, known in Afrikaner mythology as the 'Great Trek'. Between 1838 and the 1880s, Britain annexed much of the interior of the county in a bid to unify control following the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886.

Devastating wars between the British and Xhosa in the late 1840s were followed by a lung-sickness epidemic in cattle, and famine caused by the Xhosa's extensive crop destruction and cattle-killing between 1856 and 1857. A widespread rinderpest epidemic between 1896–7 further decimated native cattle herds in the sub-continent. This disease placed further strain on food security for blacks in the region. Between 1856 and 1904, the Masters and Servants Acts made committing breach of contract by workers or employees a criminal offence. Horrell (1971) notes that although the laws pertained to all races, "they were held by the courts to be applicable only to unskilled work, performed, for the most part, by non-whites." (Horrell, 1971: 6) Diamonds were discovered in Kimberley in 1867, leading to the British annexation of the diamond fields at Griqualand West in 1871, an area occupied by a large mixed-race population. Worden (1994) suggests that the racial division of labour on the mines and the call for harsher measures of control over black claimants and workers were as a result of increased economic competition between white and black claimants and workers. (Worden, 1994: 38)

The Transvaal was reclaimed by the Boers in 1881, following a rebellion. The Boer War of 1899–1902 led to the toppling of the Boer republics in the Orange Free State and Transvaal. Britain's destructive

'scorched earth policies'⁴³ carried out during the war negatively affected not only whites, but blacks as well⁴⁴, and tainted race relations between the opposing white settler populations. The above and other factors, including colonial taxes, increased encroachment on grazing land, land ownership restrictions, and poverty, pushed blacks to resort to wage labour for survival.

The Union of South Africa was declared in 1910, from which the implementation of a slew of racially motivated segregationist policies flowed. These included the denying of certificates of competency to "coloured workers" for performing 'skilled' work in the Free State and Transvaal under the Mines and Works Act No. 12 of 1911, as well as the Native Labour Regulation Act No. 15 of 1911, which effectively criminalised black workers found to be in breach of contract. (Horrell, 1971: 6-7) The restriction of land ownership and segregation through the Natives Land Act of 1913 meant that blacks were not entitled to buy land outside of their designated 'homelands'. This provision was not applied in the Cape. (ibid.: 3) The Status Quo Act of 1918 imposed a colour bar on mine workers. From the above, it can be seen how, through segregationist legislation, dominant white South African society was rejecting both the liberal Enlightenment religious-political stance, and a system of white control over the indigenous populations that was class-based, in favour of a largely race-aligned form of government. It provides insight into the social milieu during the period in which Millen's novel is set, and no doubt influenced Millen's writing. Tony Voss, in the preface to the 1986 edition of *God's Stepchildren*, concedes that the framework for the novel is based on a version of

⁴³ This term refers to a tactical offensive by the British forces that involved the burning and destruction of Boer homes, crops and livestock.

⁴⁴ Worden (1994) cites the number of black internees who died in concentration camps as being 14,000. (Worden, 1994: 29)

South African history. However, he criticises Millin for her inability to capture or replicate the historical pathos of the time through her writing: "There is no conviction, authenticity or actuality in the picture of the social, economic or cultural life of any group – Hottentots, farmers, Griquas – until we reach the parochial life of Edith..." (Voss in Millin, 1986: 10)

Millin employs a distinctly essentialist approach to coloured identity formation, in which colouredness is presumed to originate through the biological (read 'natural') process of the mixing of blood through 'miscegenation'. 'Miscegenation' implies the crossing of 'pure' 'races' (albeit perceived as morally 'weak' individuals within those 'pure' races) to produce racially hybrid (read racially and physically degenerate) individuals. This racist perception was adapted to theorise what was presumed to be the increasingly degenerative properties of 'black blood' on further generations produced by 'miscegenating' hybrids. This creates what Gobineau refers to as "racial anarchy". (Gobineau quoted in Young, 1995: 113) Other theories focused on hybridity included those on the fertility or infertility of future generations of hybrid types. These debates were irrevocably dispelled by the increase of hybrid populations in the colonies, where evidence of the former abounded.

Robert Young comments on the after-effects of biological racist discourse production when he says that, "long after the debates about hybridity and species had eventually ebbed away, the cultural myth of degeneration lived on." (Young, 1995: 102) The evolution of race theory develops from a biological belief in 'race' as influencing cultural development, to a belief in the interchangeability of race, culture and civilisation. (Young, 1995) Regardless of the development of racialised

and racist thinking, it is the myth-making and stereotyping of race concomitant in racial theory that has the greatest impact on society's perception of race today. What is often lacking in these debates is the gender dynamic simultaneously in operation with race, class and the economics of power in the production of racial hybridity.

In my opinion, more black women, as the 'usual suspects' in propagating a hybrid race, should be at the forefront of propagating new hybridity theories. However, the actual social circumstances under which 'miscegenation' occurs are largely untheorised. Young, discussing Gobineau's theory on attraction between races, positions the white male as instinctively attracted to the female of the inferior race, who is described as being repulsed by the white man. "In the relation of hierarchical power, the white male's response to the allure of exotic black sexuality is identified with mastery and domination, no doubt fuelled by the resistance of the black female." (Young, 1995: 108) While Wicomb's passer Helen experiences the male violation Young describes in just these terms, Millin is loath to implicate white men in the sexual abuse of black women. In Millin's work of fiction, white men are generally presented as being repulsed by black women, and this precedent is only altered in cases of senility, or when under the spell of deceitful black women. Black females are the instigators of the 'corruption' of white men, and resistance to white male advances is not as evident in the novel, except for the repulsion the 'coloured passing for white' character, Elmira displays at her decrepit old white husband's sexual advances.

The novel is set in the pre-apartheid period, and although separation of the races was not enforced by law, hegemonic society's regulatory norms maintain segregation. There exists a vast difference between

passing pre-apartheid, and passing once apartheid's laws were enforced. During the colonial period, a class distinction was more predominant than racially inscribed differences. Through the intra-uterine descent rule, which conferred race through the mother, slavery ensured that the unfortunate and unwanted products of 'miscegenation' were excluded from dominant society. The abolition of slavery put an end, theoretically, to the servant/master dichotomy, although class or economic differences remained firmly intact. Colonially entrenched class distinctions, left unchecked, gradually evolved into race distinctions, segregation, and eventually culminated in legislated apartheid. The novel provides examples of how racial stereotypes inform identity, based on skin colour and sex, but also how the basis for these stereotypes ceases to be as credible when confronted with the passing figure. Adhikari (2005) points out dominant society's concerns about coloureds passing for white when he says, "[t]o white racists, Coloured people also presented the danger of an ongoing infiltration of white society by light-skinned Coloureds and raised the specter of racial degeneration". (Adhikari, 2005: 15) Through her novel of passing, Millin could be described as articulating dominant anxieties about blurring 'pure' racial categories, and giving literary form to the articulation of the 'threat' that passing entails.

Reading Millin within prevailing discourses

Sarah Gertrude Millin, a Lithuanian-born, Jew and an English-speaking white South African female, assumes a 'liberal' standpoint within her fiction. However, 1920s 'liberal' by South African standards still communicates an unhealthy preoccupation with racial purity and with the 'degeneracy' of those perceived as 'impure', as well as with stereotypes based on colour and, in the case of female characters, sexuality. Tony Voss (1986) theorises Millin's position when he

describes her as having emigrated from the Soviet country a 'parvenu'. He argues that a strong sense of racial identity founded in a conservative Judaic religious framework influenced what he calls her "personal racism". (Voss 1986, in Millin, 1924: 14).

The era in which Millin, as a white female author in early 1900s South Africa, writes is fraught with racially-driven stereotypes.⁴⁵ Gilman's (1985) contention about anxiety over that which cannot be controlled may be extended to greater white South African society's commonly unsubstantiated anxiety over 'race'. When that anxiety is fed to an entire nation through state sponsored propaganda, the stereotype is bound to enter into the realm of 'truth'. This often-ungrounded anxiety is related to a combination of perceptions, reality and scientific evidence, and 'factualised' through historical documentation. In South Africa, racial stereotypes were thus reified through official channels as 'historical fact'. This, in turn, was successfully propagated through government-administrated educational institutions. By making these racial stereotypes part of a national curriculum from the lowest grades, apartheid's National Party government ensured that indoctrination was thorough and pervasive across all the races, including those who bear closest relation to the indigenous peoples of southern Africa - namely, coloureds. The socialisation of coloured people (through education) by the pro-apartheid Nationalist government may have had much to do with the way that many coloured people disassociated themselves from

⁴⁵ According to Sander Gilman (1985), in early human development, the stereotype emerges as a response mechanism that helps enable the child to make good or bad associations with situations or people in order to protect the child. These attributes can be negative or positive. The child learns that in order to overcome the contradictions inherent in what is socially accepted as 'good' and 'bad', he needs to distance himself from the bad - over which he has no control. Stereotypes help the psyche to overcome anxieties created by the sense of loss of control when confronted with the 'bad'. 'Good' and 'bad' can also be expanded to include 'us' and 'them', or 'self' and 'other' models. (Gilman, 1985: 16-17)

'Hottentot' or Khoi culture. History texts lay the foundation for the stereotypes around Khoi and San peoples. Texts such as the one quoted in the previous chapter imply that indigenous people were not only lesser in relation to civilised, European people, but also that they were inferior compared to the reader of the text – who is by virtue of his or her education thought of as being 'civilised'. The author thus coerces the adoption of a distinctly European 'civilisation' (*the only* 'civilisation') above any African culture onto the reader through a process of 'othering', which creates in the reader a desire to aspire to that civilisation in order to 'belong'.

This kind of 'knowledge' about African indigenes, often compiled by lay travel writers and visitors to the continent, was exported to colonial European cities, along with evidence to substantiate that knowledge. Here, the exploitation of Sarah Baartman offers a sadistic example of the public display of indigenous peoples for the benefit of 'educating' the European public. Sarah Gertrude Millin, as a writer with a mainly Western readership in the 1920s, is party to this 'education'. *God's Stepchildren* opens with a description of Mary Keeble, a young white English woman whom the English missionary, Rev. Andrew Flood, meets aboard the ship en route to Cape Town. Her name, 'Mary' is no coincidence, and her appearance is likened to that of a "Madonna" (21), and resembling "a little white flower" (25) suggesting piety and virginal purity. This initial description of the white woman's physiognomy becomes a kind of visual yardstick whereby feminine beauty is measured in the novel. Mary's depiction is in complete contrast to the indigenous peoples the Rev. Flood and the reader are introduced to a few pages later:

"little yellow, monkey-like people, with their triangular faces (Mongolian in type), and peppercorned heads, whose little keen black eyes good-

humouredly, and yet mischievously, regarded him as he passed down the street..." (28)

Within these two analogies, Millin's political and social standpoint is introduced as the tone for the novel. She describes the indigenous Khoisan people as being inferior to the western ideal, and ascribes animal, rather than human characteristics to them. As the novel progresses, the Khoisan 'evolve' in essentialist terms into coloured characters, following 'miscegenation' between white colonists and the native peoples of South Africa.

Tony Voss (1986) admits that the book was well-received in the United States at the time of its publication, but that it was, "not at first popular in her home country", South Africa. (11) Whether intentional or not, the novel was marketed as a pseudo-historical rendering of South African society, which lends itself to a presumed authenticity. Millin is thus implicated in the dissemination of knowledge tainted by segregationist ideology, just as the history book cited above is. The reader has no cause to assume anything but an unbiased, truthful rendering, yet many of the same stereotypes detailed in the aforementioned primary school text are mirrored in Millin's work. Both ignore the human agency of those under scrutiny, since in both cases the 'other' is spoken of and for. This is reminiscent of what Franz Fanon (1952) argues: "Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man." (Fanon, 1952, translated 2008: 90) Although Fanon here denies the marginalisation of women through his use of 'man', the contention readily applies to women. Fanon's thoughts, in fact, are replicated in Millin's text in relation to the protagonist and passing character Elmira, and Lindsell's oldest daughter, Edith. In this scene, Edith compares her whiteness with

Elmira's 'lack of whiteness'. Far from delving into her 'being', the white woman concerns herself with Elmira's indigenous ancestry and her physical appearance. She consoles herself in her racial 'superiority' when, according to the narrator, "she would, almost unconsciously, manage to put her thin white hand beside Elmira's vigorous dark one, and hold her head up again with the pride of race." (175) The "material of which Elmira was made" (175) which Edith so melodramatically conjures in her mind represents centuries of colonial stereotyping of the 'other'. Edith is thus determined to be white precisely because Elmira is not.

Michael Green (1991), in his assessment of the most defining theme in the novel, determines that Millin positions 'miscegenation' in the realm of 'sin'. The severity of the original sexual 'transgression' is elevated by the fact that it was not, "a casual sexual encounter, but a deliberate act on the part of the missionary who aimed, superficially at least, to give physical substance to his philosophy of racial equality". (Green, 1991: 4) What is most problematic for this kind of voluntary 'miscegenation' is that it undermines dominant society's racist norms doubly. Firstly, it absolves the black female from her 'guilt' in initiating the sexual act through her presumed innate deceitfulness and hyper-sexuality, as well as for her part in creating subsequent mixed-race progeny. And secondly, it places the agency for the sexual encounter with the white male, who is thus regarded as the sexual initiator. Millin negates this affront by applying liberal rhetoric in the narrative to justify the manner in which the cleric first engages in 'miscegenation'. And she goes a step further by ordaining it through the institution of marriage. Set in 1823, the English missionary's reasoning is completely in keeping with the ethos prevalent at the time, which Robert Young (1995) describes:

In England from the end of the eighteenth century until the late 1840s public attitudes towards racial difference were comparatively benign, and worked very much within the positive atmosphere of the anti-slavery movement. The Enlightenment emphasis on the unity of the human race was allied to an Evangelical Christian belief in the family of man. (Young, 1995: 118)

For Millin, writing from an early 1900s South African white colonial society perspective, this liberal stance has been replaced by an increasingly white supremacist ideology, which was evident in the increased focus on race separation through the implementation of segregationist policies. Green (1991) draws a link between these legislative changes and a societal shift towards a more biologically determinant form of racism, also evident in Millin's conceptualisation of race. He says, "Millin's work of the 1920s would appear to be in line with exactly this development, her own shift from the cautious liberalism of her earlier years to the avowed supporter of apartheid she became finding at this point its crucial ideological hinge on the issue of biological racial determinism." (Green, 1991: 7)

In Millin's novel, three dominant themes masquerade as legitimate reasoning behind racial prejudice. Firstly, I will look at how, for Millin, racial stereotypes are tantamount to 'nature'. Stereotypes are generally depicted as immutable, and manifest as stagnation in the development and growth of her coloured characters. I confront the pervading ideology of biological determinism that allows Millin's characters to develop only inasmuch as to reach their stereotypical plateaus, not beyond. Secondly, I explore the dominant theme of Christianity's civilising mission within the text. I will look at the effect religious ideology has on personal agency within a colonial and post-colonial setting. In the third instance, I delve into the psychological and

symbolic aspects of racial prejudice, which take the form of irrational beliefs that are made 'real' through dominant society's racist propaganda. An idea like the 'black peril' theory provides a good example of how easily racist discourse warps the social imagination. These stereotypes are also densely metaphorical, and I will analyse the complex allusions and symbols that they embed.

Stereotypes of 'colouredness': The intersection of science, religion and sex

In an interview with Ryland Fisher (2007), Wilmot James addresses the question of 'coloured perception'. He says, "... I often find myself thinking that the perception other people have of me is not the same perception I have of myself. I have the feeling that I am being treated like a coloured person in a stereotypical sense." (Fisher, 2007: 63-64) This observation is one that is strongly evident in the representation of the coloured characters described in Sarah Gertrude Millin's novel. Millin's essentialising of 'colouredness' into a homogenous and immutable entity in her characters is typical of the post-colonial racist discourse that continues to inform present-day thinking about coloured identities – as James's suspicion attests.

As described earlier, in South African society, the racial dichotomy is between white and black, with the coloured group positioned in-between these poles. The way that Millin positions people according to 'race' demonstrates the extent to which she is completely unable to conceive of their subjectivity outside of binaries. Coloureds are presented as a problematic, undesirable racial group, pathologised as a degenerate blight on dominant society in its endeavour for purity. Degeneracy is placed in the realm of science and given a biological origin. Coetzee (1980) notes how the easy conflation of scientific racist

beliefs with Christian ideologies served as moral warnings against inter-racial sex during colonial times. He also describes how the notion of 'degeneracy' was applied to the hybrid product of 'miscegenation', in a bid to caution would-be 'miscegenators' against being stigmatised as such through inter-racial sex. (Coetzee, 1980: 143) The novel takes the guise of a tragedy that also presents as symptomatic of the lives of these, God's stepchildren, who are centred round a tragic and inevitable fate. Tragedy is a prevalent theme in the novel, and is what Millin uses as an escape clause for justifying the fatalistic conclusions ascribed to her 'degenerate' characters: Flood's 'miscegenation' leads to mental incapacity (or vice versa – Millin seems ambivalent about which led to which); Deborah falls pregnant outside of marriage by the son of a transient Boer family; Kleinhans's initial ambition and prosperity withers away and he becomes an impoverished old man; Elmira's initial potential for social mobility through access to superior education is dashed and she deserts her husband and child and becomes an adulteress before returning to her parental home to die; and Barry gives up his wife and unborn child to devote himself to redeeming the 'sins of the father' by becoming a missionary among 'his' "brown people". (326) These examples of wasted opportunity at 'coloured upliftment' by well-meaning whites represent Millin's 'proof' of the inability to civilise inferior coloureds, regardless of advantages extended to them.

In the first part of the book, Millin speaks of the union between the Rev. Andrew Flood and Silla as being a 'sacrifice', and a necessary means for the missionary to vindicate himself by succeeding in converting the local Khoi to Christianity. He imagines that by 'assimilating' with the 'Hottentots' that he would be able to prove to his parish that all races were equal before God. Seemingly, this equality does not extend to sexuality, on which this 'assimilation' is dependent, and sexual

attraction between the 'races' is not a subject considered viable by the author. The neighbouring missionary's wife reflects the author's inability to broach the subject of sex between Silla and Flood when the narrator admits: "she had almost even dared to mention his unborn children; still, to that she had not been able quite to bring herself". (62) Coetzee (1980) comments on the lack of mutual sexual desire portrayed between races: "To gauge the force of transgressive desire we have no recourse but to measure the force with which it is repressed, that is, the force of the distaste with which the white man in a state of desire for the black woman is represented." (Coetzee, 1980: 155) Instead, on introducing the hybrid progeny of the Rev. Flood and his Khoi wife Silla, the narrator merely declares: "When Silla and the Rev. Andrew Flood had been married nearly a year their first child was born." (66)

The 'miscegenation' between Flood's daughter, Deborah, and the son of a Boer, Hans Kleinhans directs the second part of the novel. The latter is described as being an, "uncouth young giant of about twenty-two", "illiterate", and "unsteady". (90) Millin refers to their attraction as following "natural impulses", thereby adding an air of uncontrollable 'animal' attraction to the relationship. The unequal power dynamic between the races is shown in the manner in which, although Hans Kleinhans openly displays his affections by, "meeting Deborah after school, taking her out, his arm, after time, openly about her waist, unashamed" (90), he "would not think of marrying a brown *meisje*⁴⁶" (92). Millin thus suggests that although white males may use black women for sexual gratification, mutual attraction and the social sanctioning of such relationships through marriage is the reserve of white women. And although physical attraction is tolerated, the

⁴⁶ Girl

physical sex act remains unspoken. It is Deborah herself who describes it later as an “adventure”. (130)

The second generation of Flood’s sexual transgression is represented by Deborah’s illegitimate son, Kleinhans. His relationship with the Lindsell’s coloured housekeeper, Lena Smith, is deemed socially acceptable since they are both racially hybrid – although the narrator had previously expressed Kleinhans’s resolve, “to have no woman but a white woman to wife.” (108) Their marriage becomes the fulfillment of the envisioned wish expressed in the exchange between Deborah, the missionary, Burtwell, and his wife when they learn about her relationship with the white suitor.

Deborah: “You say black is not for me; you say white is not for me. What is for me then?”

Mrs Burtwell: “The same as you are.”

Deborah: “The same as I am! Where are they?”

Mrs Burtwell: “They will be found one day.” (91)

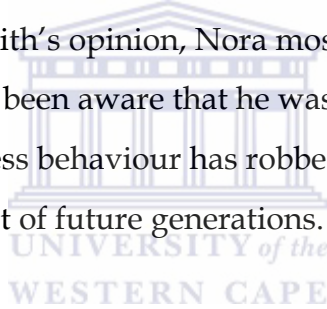
Although the marriage between Kleinhans and Lena is between two coloured people, Millin suggests that a colour-heritage power dynamic exists within the ‘race’. Kleinhans’s marriage is presented as a marriage ‘upward’, since Lena is described as having, “ancestral superiority over Kleinhans”. (127) Her ‘superiority’ is ascribed to her having more refined European features due to the influence of a German father and coloured mother who possesses Malay, slave and white blood. The status distinction is decided on the maternal side, since both fathers are European, and it thus seems that within this dynamic, Millin ascribes more status to slave than Khoi ancestry.

Third generation character, Elmira, is a classic, melodramatic depiction of the ‘tragic mulatta’: a beautiful, almost-white woman, raised in luxury, educated alongside dominant society and acultured to

whiteness – thus alienating her from her own ‘race’ – is dramatically ejected from that society through her ‘race’ being exposed, and doomed to a life of misery in search of belonging. Elmira’s relationship with Henry Krell is the first instance in the novel where mention is made of ‘love’ in conjunction with a mixed-race relationship. Regardless of this though, Millin essentialises the coloured female character when she says, “it would have been contrary to nature if Elmira had not loved him.” (164) Although the narrator acknowledges the white man’s intention of marrying her (presumably only because he is unaware that she is coloured), an admission of love is not reciprocated. Elmira’s skin colour makes it possible for her to infiltrate dominant society and her performance of ‘whiteness’ allows her to gain social acceptance. However, this concession is only possible while she succeeds in performing ‘whiteness’ in a manner that masks her coloured identity completely; and most notably within a patriarchal society, through securing male association. Her exposure as a play-white represents the end of the relationship with the white male and all the concessions that the association with whiteness brought. After being exposed, however, Elmira is offered an alternative to the humiliation of being relegated to a life of abject colouredness when Lindsell, the wealthy old English widower whose farm her father manages, proposes marriage to her.

Elmira’s son Barry looks, “unquestionably like a white child” (229), and he becomes a successful passer. Millin debates whether or not, with Barry’s superior social status as a university educated and financially wealthy man, he may be deemed fit to conclude the success of his passing by marrying a white woman and producing children. She ascribes Barry’s decision to forgo his teenage vow never to marry and transfer his ‘flawed’ blood to his children to having lived for nine years in England where race was, “only a matter of casual consequence”.

(283) For Millin, Barry's blood, however, remains 'flawed' and she cannot relinquish the idea of 'miscegenation' as 'sin', and the products of 'miscegenation' as carriers of the 'tragedy' of that degraded blood. As with Elmira, Barry's ability to pass for white is what allows him access to the privileges of whiteness. However, unlike Elmira his 'superior' male status guarantees him direct access to those privileges. As a passer, Barry cannot be portrayed as being completely confident in his status. He is denied sexual agency – the birthright of the white male subject within patriarchy – and the means by which his white wife, Nora, becomes pregnant is not given any consideration in the novel. Barry's marriage to the Englishwoman without disclosing his 'race' is described by Edith as, "the sin Barry had committed in marrying a white girl." (283) In Edith's opinion, Nora most likely would not have married Barry had she been aware that he was coloured. Millin suggests that his careless behaviour has robbed Nora of her child's 'purity of race' and that of future generations.



Millin's exclusion of emotional and physical intimacy leaves a schism in the narrative that prevents the reader from experiencing the potential for desire or sexual intimacy that exists between the races. In this instance, what is left unsaid is what is particularly conspicuous. The intimacy involved between man and woman in creating life; the nurturing of the foetus for nine months in the womb whilst undergoing bodily and hormonal changes; the physical and emotional act of childbirth; the risk to the mother and child especially in the event of birthing complications in the absence of medical technologies and expertise; the mother's role in the act; and the psychological complexities of the relationship between mother and newborn child are just some examples of what Millin intentionally excludes from the narrative. In her description of the first generation, instead of projecting

potentially humanising aspects of the relationship between Flood and his new wife, the racist male view is the only one given voice.

According to Millin: "He had sacrificed his coming child's white heritage – if not his body, the purity of his blood" (66). The birth of this child is presented as a catastrophe and the catalyst for the moral degradation of Flood. It awakens in him the realisation that the sacrifice he made for his religious vocation cannot be the means by which he had previously hoped to redeem his congregation, but rather represents the opposite, and his ultimate defeat. In the second generation, the pregnant teenager Deborah (not the white male father) is ostracised as a result of her sexual relationship with a white man who does not intend marrying her. Her pregnancy is characterised fatalistically, and no regard is shown for the physical or psychological implications to the adolescent girl or the unborn child. The narrator says that, "she had come back from Kadesh carrying within her body the burden of future generations." (294) However, she does not address the burden that raising a child as a young single mother entails.

Young (1995), deconstructs Gobineau's claims on the 'supremacy' of the white race and its influence on effecting civilisation through racial fusing with 'weaker' races: "Education, missionary work, even colonial occupation are all equally useless in transforming the basic capacity of the race. Unless, that is, the strong race starts to interbreed with the weaker one." (Young, 1995: 106) Millin's views are thus in keeping with the racist discourse prevalent at the time.⁴⁷ Instead of converting, and thereby 'civilising', those placed under his missionary care, Flood's failure to impart Christianity to his native charges results in his 'regression'. This is what Blaire (2003) labels "going native", which he

⁴⁷ Gobineau's (1853–5) *The Inequality of Human Races* was translated into English in 1915.

describes as being a trope of white-to-black “racechange”. (Blaire, 2003: 582) Millin describes Flood as being, “in many ways, a savage”. (77) She portrays his transition after Silla’s departure in relation to caricatured views of the appearance, culture and customs of the Khoi. As such, he is “dirty and unkempt and wild looking” (77); and “Cachas shared her milk with him, and he ate the roots she ate, and smoked the same tobacco she did, and he slept and lived in his clothes without ever removing them”. (99) It is significant that Flood mimics the behaviours of Khoi *women*. It seems to suggest that the author places the blame for his racial degradation at the hands of the black woman, that homogenised figure who, through her deviant sexuality, initiated his ruin.

Regardless of the failure of his converting mission, and despite the fact that Flood is apathetic, even to the point of complete detachedness from the reality that he has paternal responsibilities towards his two children: “He could not feel as if they actually belonged to him.” (68) Millin nonetheless, and inexplicably, ordains for more children to be fathered by Flood, despite his obvious contempt for them, and for their ‘Hottentot’ mother: “A year later another child was born – a girl.” (66) Three years later, Silla bears yet another child, which is introduced in a similar perfunctory manner by the narrator, “...there was another baby, and he was sickly from birth.” (69) The death of this child is the turning point for the missionary who comes to the realisation that although an assumption of brotherhood among the races exists, that, “no one would suffer this practical manifestation of the principle.” (74) Millin reveals the failure of Flood’s attempted civilising mission when Silla, despite her Christian marriage to him, leaves her husband and their remaining children, Isaac and Deborah, and ‘regresses’ back to a life with the Khoi. The author thereby suggests that ‘civilisation’ is ultimately not possible,

and that base native tendencies, what she describes as “wildness” (88) and “savage” (78, 82, 93) tendencies, are too strong to counteract. Millin determines that despite the ‘civilising’ influence of white culture, it is impossible for indigenous people to ‘rise’ to the level of European culture. Silla represents what the black female figure symbolises within racist colonial discourse: the agent for the sexual corruption of white men, and wholly degenerate temptress. Silla’s desertion of her husband and children thereby ‘proves’ Millin’s biological determinist racist theories on the ineducability both socially and spiritually, of the native, especially the female native, in light of her unassailable ‘natural’ instincts. Silla’s ‘fate’ is not dissimilar to the famous Khoi interpreter, Krotoa Eva, who assimilated into colonial Cape society, married a white man, and eventually deserted her children. Elphick (1975) describes the ‘factual’ basis for Millin’s beliefs when he contends that, “[i]ndeed, Eva’s tragic life had helped spawn the belief that Khoikhoi could never successfully absorb the higher aspects of European culture.” (Elphick, 1975: 203) Elphick thus contextualises Millin’s representation of Khoi women in the colonial discourses common at the time.

The Western civilising mission

Silla’s maternal desertion represents the point at which Millin introduces the word ‘coloured’ for the first time to describe Flood’s offspring, suggesting that her understanding of coloured identity formation is grounded in the biological, through the act of ‘miscegenation’. The author seems ambivalent about the relationship between father and children, and his, “passionate desire to make his children such restitution as was still possible” (74), is contradicted by the description of a feeling that he had, through his “vanity” ironically, “lost everything to give them nothing.” (75) It takes the conviction of the neighbouring missionary (Rev. Burtwell) to assure Flood that his

half-caste children can yet be civilised through Christian schooling and socialisation with whites. Millin diminishes their capacity as human beings, but the assertion is made all the more unsympathetic by her use of the word “savage” in relation to them, and even more so because the assertion, “[t]hey, too, are savages,” (78) is made by the man who fathered them. This phrase comes to take on significance later in the narrative when Deborah is banished from her benefactor’s care, pregnant with an illegitimate child. The notion of educating indigenous people is regarded as a futile exercise and one to which Millin adds a distinct biological dimension. Flood admits that, “the girl, Deborah, was not unintelligent, though the boy was slow.” (73) This admission is not without social implications. What is interesting to note here is that within the colonial power dynamic, the black male character is disregarded as a potential sexual partner for white women, and thus he is allowed to remain largely ‘wild’ and uncivilised, lest he become a viable suitor with the potential to corrupt the virtues of white femininity. Black women, on the other hand, are allowed to be tamed through schooling, religion and ‘civilisation’ in order to make the assertion of social control over the black bodies (that are regarded as the possessions of white males) more socially acceptable. Paradoxically, the socialisation cannot be complete, as black women must remain sufficiently ‘other’ in order to differentiate them sufficiently from the white ideal to solidify that difference.

In the colonial context, sexual stereotypes are a means for colonisers to ‘prove’ their, “incontestable right of access to black women’s bodies”. (Gqola, 2001: 51). Simultaneously, black women are also required to prevent the physical manifestation of racially hybrid offspring, and further racial ‘degradation’ through ‘miscegenation’, but do not possess the means for this, or the agency to oppose white male sexual control.

Implicit in this is also the gender stereotyping suggested here – the coloured girl as a precocious, sly, female who will have the guile to be a successful and worldly temptress. It also reinforces stereotypes of coloured women who emasculate coloured men and, unlike ‘proper’, pure-bred Victorian ladies, are able to use their sex to survive as independent agents in the public sphere.

The concept of arrested development is a biologically determinist view commonly held by early nineteenth century scientists. Peter Blair (2003) contends that, “[a]ccording to this theory, childhood precocity is followed by a mental stasis that sets in at puberty, and this retardation was compounded by the notion that puberty occurred earlier in Africans than in whites.” (Blair, 2003: 595) Millin goes as far as to say this later in the novel, when Burtwell reveals that, “[s]he seemed to learn quickly, too, but only to a certain extent. *Inevitably* a point would be reached where a solid barrier of unreceptivity would hinder *all* further mental progress” [emphases mine]. (83) While the stereotypical view of the mental stagnation of blacks is unfounded, Millin’s Rev. Burtwell in fact theorises that it may be as a consequence of the, “traditional hardness of their skulls”. (84) With the onset of puberty, Deborah is described as being a, “fully-developed young woman” (84) and this effectively marks the end of her ability to be socialised, and the start of her biologically predetermined (read interchangeably as sexually active) life. Her sexual development precedes her emotional development and overpowers her intellectual growth. Not being white, she lacks the virtues of ‘proper’ white femininity. This transition from childhood precocity to fully sexually developed woman is described in biological terms, as a fact: “And, as naturally as any animal, Deborah looked about her for a mate.” (85) With this assertion Millin removes all sense of Deborah’s human agency and debases her, and by association

the 'half-caste' or 'coloured', to the level of animal. This racist view is repeated when, two generations later, Barry considers that he "had heard of Europeans who could hardly regard these brown and black folk as quite human." (295) Moreover, Deborah is represented as a female animal, likened to a bitch in heat, with an instinctive prerogative to search for and mate with any available male. She is conceived of as manipulating her sexuality to lure hapless white men. In this instance it is once again blood that conveys the 'natural' instincts in the half-caste when Millin says that it is "[n]ature welling up strongly through Deborah's blood". (86) Her 'nature' is 'affirmed' after an affair with one of her Khoi students comes to light, when, after four years of living with the missionary's white family and despite her mixed-race heritage, she admits, "I am wild, too". (88) Deborah's 'nature' and 'wildness' here are read in relation to sexuality. Deborah's self-admission to uncontrollable salacious primitive hyper-sexuality, the chief cultural stereotype of 'Hottentot' women, absolves Millin from racist stereotyping in light of 'scientific evidence' circulating in dominant Western race theory at the time.

Deborah's admission can be read as the culmination of socialisation for blacks in colonial culture – the realisation by the 'other' that civilisation is the reserve of whites, and that the most the 'other' could hope to achieve is 'respectability'. The way in which the mixed race female is socialised is said to be through imitation of the white missionary family's culture: "She had, as most half-caste children have, a capacity for imitation. She copied the manners and habits – even the gestures and intonations – of Mrs. Burtwell." (83) However, Millin essentialises the differences between Deborah and the white family as being the result of the difference in their skin colour. This is in keeping with the contention Robert Young (1995) makes when he argues that, "Western

culture has always been defined against the limits of others, and culture has always been thought through as a form of cultural difference.” (Young, 1995: 93) Although Deborah’s mimicry and imitation of the codes of white civilisation are regarded as markers of intelligence, Deborah is shown to be fully aware that ‘civilisation’ is not possible and that she lacks the agency to contest her ‘fate’ when the narrator states: “This was her position in life, and Deborah accepted it.” (85)

Burtwell and Deborah share a paternalistic relationship that positions the Christian missionary as the saviour of Deborah’s ‘heathen’ soul. The relationship is characterised by Burtwell, who says, “[i]t is our work to drive that wildness out of you, Deborah.” (88) Burtwell thus suggests that the Christian mission is dedicated to eliminating Deborah’s promiscuous sexuality by maintaining control of her soul. Her body ironically becomes a site of struggle for ‘purity’, although the pursuit of purity is considered futile within racist discourse, since Deborah, being racially hybrid, is the embodiment of ‘impurity’. Deborah’s inability to control her ‘wildness’ culminates in a sexual relationship with a young Afrikaner. Millin, once again pits nature against free will when she says, “[a]nd even more readily than she had gone with ‘Kon’gap, Deborah now went with Hans Kleinhans. She followed merely her natural impulses”. (90). It comes as no surprise when, a few months later, after having manipulated her ‘hyper-sexuality’ in order to trap this hapless white man – “he chose to be attracted *by* Deborah” [emphasis own] (90) – the teenager is pregnant. What is surprising, however, is that it is in fact the missionary’s wife who shows resolve when she insists that Deborah be sent back to her father. Burtwell reluctantly agrees with his wife’s contention that after five years of schooling, and despite their Christian support and sacrifice for her

'upliftment', that Deborah has reverted to her 'nature' and remains an "unprincipled savage". (93)

The stance Millin takes in relation to the race, sex, gender dynamic between the characters is fairly progressive in the case of white women in the novel. Since the realistic societal power stratification (both in the novel's fictional mid-1800s and even in Millin's 1920s) is skewed toward male domination, the author possibly seeks to subvert the status quo in favour of white female emancipation, albeit in a fictional setting. The white women have uncharacteristically substantial authority over their own lives, to the extent of sometimes being relatively independent from male subordination. Examples of these women include Edith, who is represented as being independently wealthy without the usual requisite male support; Mrs Burtwell, who counters her husband's authority and acts as the guardian of social order within the microcosm of the family unit; and Mrs Gadd, who becomes an autocratic figure in the Lindsell household. In contrast to these proto-feminist white women, the coloured women in the novel are bound by a doomed existence as a result of their race, class and sex. Relationships between white and black females are grounded in stereotypes of black difference and 'lack', especially through stereotypes of deviant black female sexuality, and arrested development theories. The black-white dynamic remains largely unspoken, since black autonomy is negated by Millin's use of third person narration.

Negotiating colonial coloured masculinities

After Deborah's expulsion from Burtwell's mission station, she returns to her father. Flood's progressive mental collapse has left him unresponsive, apart from a few moments of mental decline, which the

author uses to emphasise the apparent importance of maintaining racial order, even to the mentally ill. When Deborah mentions that she is pregnant with a white child, for instance, Flood suddenly becomes lucid and responds with sage-like clarity that, “[t]here can be no more white children.” (98) A year after the birth of her son, Kleinhans, Flood dies, and Deborah and her son settle in Kokstad, a community comprised primarily of San, Khoi and mixed-race people. Millin presents a different formula for racial stereotyping with the eighteen-year-old Kleinhans. His character is described as the antithesis of the ‘black half’ of his ancestral heritage. Millin says:

Heaven knows what germ in his distant white ancestry had quaintly chosen to establish itself in Kleinhans’ character, but it happened that he was, by nature, a husbandman. In that community where work was universally despised, Kleinhans vigorously farmed his land; he wrought in wood and iron, he was sober, he was frugal, he was religious. (103)

Millin discounts, or is unable to fathom, the significance of her coloured male character’s achievements despite South Africa’s racialistic social structure. It is notable that all of his positive traits are attributed only to the ‘white half’ of his ancestry. Millin’s use of the word “distant” is odd, as Kleinhans’s father is Dutch, and his mother half-white, half-Khoi. By creating a successful, industrious, Christian character, Millin hopes to illustrate that his ultimate lack of autonomy is based on innate characteristics related directly to the half-caste’s ‘flawed blood’, and that regardless of the nature ascribed to his ‘white blood’, he is doomed to fail. The author directs the reader’s attention to the normativity of whiteness that justifies racial discrimination against black races. She focuses on how the half-caste’s desire for whiteness and to be accepted into white society cause him to despise coloureds, colouredness, and the ‘impurity’ within his blood – which is symptomatic of the ‘tragic mulatto’ trope. Millin contends that Kleinhans’s perceived ‘failure’ at not being white enough makes him bitter with hate for himself and all

those who are responsible for his 'lack'. What she does not explore is the emasculation of coloured males amid their marginal position in society as members of a landless, disenfranchised, proletariat.

Kleinhans decides that the only way to escape his predestined lot is to start a new anonymous life among people to whom he is not known as a coloured person. He hopes that by distancing himself from those who know his racial origins he will be able to pass for white and thereby achieve the social success he craves.

Because being white was considered the superior social position in dominant colonial South African society, 'passing for white' could be thought of as a viable means for coloured people to benefit from the associated privileges attached to whiteness. 'Passing' is thus symptomatic of a society that places little or no value in non-white races and justifies its perceived racial superiority through an equal and opposite oppression of non-white races. Millin interprets her coloured characters as having two distinct sides, due to their racial composition. Blood is attributed free will when Millin says, "Kleinhans's white blood felt a longing for its kind". (109) She thus ascribes his desire to pass for white to the 'white blood' in his veins. Millin discounts the double bind in which coloured men are placed in South African society due to the simultaneous hierarchical operation of race, class, and gender discrimination. Millin represents Kleinhans's social exclusion as being grounded in his sexual exclusion from white females, whom he feels entitled to because of the 'white blood' in his veins, but from whom he is denied because of his 'black blood'. Although male in a patriarchal society, and although economically successful, he is rendered virtually emasculated as a result of his social, political, economic and sexual exclusion from dominant society as a result of his proscribed race. Millin is unable to conceive of a coloured person seeking to be viewed

as equal regardless of being marginalised through skin colour. She thus cannot envisage or represent a fictional coloured character with ambition, and reverts to the use of commonly held coloured stereotypes of clamouring for 'whiteness' to define coloured identity.

Recurrent themes within the trope of passing

Belonging is an aspect of identity that is close to any discussion of race, but especially so in a discussion of coloured politics. Millin's thoughts on inter-racial acceptance are made apparent in the sketch of the relationship between Deborah and the Burtwell family. Already before her admission into the missionary's household, her father suggests that the only feasible way for her to be admitted is in the guise of servant: "He [Flood] had an undefined idea that only in a position of service would it be seemly for his daughter to remain in a white household". (81) The fixity of race is demonstrated when, after four years of social conditioning within the private sphere of the household, she remains in a peripheral position with the members of the family: "She might learn with them, play with them, eat with them, live with them – but never could she belong to them". (85) The finality of the word "never" suggests that it is an immutable fact.

Deborah's conflict of identity is demonstrated in her relationships with both white and Khoi suitors. Neither 'races' are deemed acceptable by the missionary and his wife, who suggest that she would be better off with mixed-race men. In the second generation, belonging is even more incoherent. Millin thus attempts to demonstrate how closer identification by the half-caste with white society leads to greater inner conflict. Kleinhans, being neither Khoi nor white, but mathematically more white than Khoi, determines his white ancestry to be the more favourable of the two. His disdain for his mother's "brown society"

(108) and his yearning to be accepted and to belong to white society lead him to the diamond fields of Kimberley. Here, unknown in an anonymous environment, he faces the test of his ability to pass for white. He is identified immediately as a “Bastaard” (110) and dismissed as a second-class citizen. It is not his colouration that betrays his racial ascription in the end, but rather his voice. Millin, in a dramatic revelation on the inner workings of South African society expounds, “[l]et him hear but the echo of it, and the South African will recognize that sombre note”. (110)

The humiliation continues the next day when he is expelled from a whites-only establishment. With racial segregation in effect, the barman makes clear to Kleinhans that his “place is in the canteen next door”. (112) After being accused of illicit diamond buying, his misfortune culminates in being beaten unconscious for being found in the company of a young white girl who had asked him to help recover her lost goat. For Millin then, it seems as though inter-racial belonging is not possible and that passing for white is a senseless pursuit as the ‘black blood’ will always out the ‘imposter’. This is shown to be the case even where the combination of light skin and economic success facilitates racial passing and thus the ability to pass from the periphery to the centre of society. While the passer demonstrates the porousness of racial classifications, belonging is not easily imparted. The threat of being unmasked as an impostor prevents the passer from adopting the sense of unqualified entitlement that is the privilege of whiteness. In addition to this fear of discovery, Millin theorises that the passer’s unease is inevitable and inescapable, as what is felt is in his blood – essentially inferiority to whites.

Thus, the second theme that pervades Millin's work is blood. Blood signifies the marker of race, and represents an essence from which, according to Millin, one cannot hide. (105; 247; 299) Blood, though common to all peoples, is what separates them racially. Millin espouses the theory of the innate degeneracy of racial hybrids derived from 'miscegenation'. Her concern with degeneracy is noted when Lindsell's oldest daughter Edith says: "It ['miscegenation'] should never have been allowed to happen in South Africa that – that white children should have come into the world with shame and sorrow in their blood". (271) The visual cues that are generally available to onlookers usually provide sufficient evidence of race and identity, since people take for granted that race is worn as colour, on their bodies. However, for the passer, additional information is required for successful classification.

The passer, who deceptively hides his blackness in his blood, is a danger to 'racial purity'. Millin, relating the encounter between the outspanned Boer and Kleinhans, says that: "They looked not so different as they stood there beside one another, the Boer and Kleinhans. But the blood of savages and sin ran in Kleinhans' veins." (110) 'Seeing is believing' is not enough in the case of the passer. The way that Millin's novel situates its passing characters, offers good examples of the way in which narrative, in its presentation of visual reality, informs and justifies racial thinking. In what is shown to be a generational 'progression' in human development towards a white ideal, the characterisation in terms of stereotypes diminishes (but does not completely cease) as 'white blood' overpowers 'black blood' through 'miscegenation' upward. This is a contradiction in racist thought since, in Lindsell's case, his "meagre" (205) blood is later strengthened by Elmira's 'black blood', and proves strong enough to

seemingly effect a miracle by enabling him to produce a child. In the case of the racial hybrid, there is a mingling of the blood, but there is no synthesis, the blood remains divided between the 'good blood' which rarely and only in exceptional circumstances manifests (103, 262), and the dominant 'black blood' that represents the sinfulness and evil of the savage who is implicated in 'miscegenation'. (110)

The metaphorical mingling of blood, effected through 'miscegenation', is what, for Millin, ultimately undermines racial purity of both the black (here taken to be embodied by the positively ascribed noble savage stereotype), and the Western ideal of whiteness. Important to note in Millin's theory of degeneration, is what Blair (2003) proposes in relation to the potential success of coloured aspiration: "...for Millin, outcomes in society are biologically predetermined by the *proportion* of "white" and "black" blood flowing in a person's veins." [emphasis own] (Blair, 2003: 595) This is noted in the generational increase in individual autonomy as a result of 'diluting' the 'black blood' with 'white blood'. Regardless of the proportion though, the mere presence of black blood inevitably precludes belonging and dooms the bearer of black blood to failure.

As noted at the outset, 'miscegenation' is a dominant theme in the novel, and Millin discusses at length the product of 'miscegenation', as well as the parties involved in 'miscegenation', but never the *act* itself. Neither the full extent of desire between races, nor the physical sexual act is presented in the novel, as though these are too horrific to contemplate. Desire takes the form of romantic curiosity. For example, in Elmira's schoolgirl conversations about coloureds, there is "something excitingly illicit in the idea of these strange begettings of mixed colours." (143) Similarly, Lindsell's sexual desire for Elmira is

watered down: "He could not hold himself back from going to the dairy. He could not command himself when he was there." (176) Later, when he has acquired her as his wife, Lindsell expresses his sexual lust for Elmira by lavishing gifts on her while exhibiting her in white society: "He felt an urge to buy for her that raked him like a lust." (193) Smothering her with gifts thus becomes a metaphor for the overwhelming sexual lust he feels for her, but which, strictly speaking, is taboo in the racist society in which Millin writes. The only way Lindsell can openly express his lack of sexual self-control in relation to Elmira is through lavishing gifts on her. For Millin, the urge to possess the coloured woman through purchase is more acceptable than through sexual conquest. While on honeymoon in Cape Town, they provide a spectacle for onlookers. The relationship between the obviously darker-complexioned younger woman and the old white man is described as being "romantic and exciting" (193) and "thrilling". (194) Onlookers become willing voyeurs in the public display of the conflation of social taboos that are, if not denied, generally kept hidden outside of the public domain.

The role of education as a civilising agent, is both an enabling tool in the passer's socialisation, and by withholding it, a means of excluding potential passers from dominant society. Elmira, like her father, is implicated in the act of attempting to pass for white in order to gain access to privileged white society. In her case though, it is not voluntary. Adam Lindsell first suggests that Elmira try to pass for white in order to be accepted into a convent school in a neighbouring town when she is eight years old. From a gender perspective, it is interesting to note that Hans, who is only a year younger than Elmira, is not given preference to be schooled. This is uncommon within patriarchal society, as male children were commonly afforded formal

education over their female siblings. The reasons his parents provide for withholding education are that he is dark of complexion and that the only available school in the area was for black children. The impression Millin thus creates is that race exceeds education and gender in social importance, as they would rather forgo the education of their dark-skinned children, than have them taught alongside black children. The decision to educate the light-skinned female child is based on gender roles, with the male child being valued for the labour potential his body represents. The female child is considered a burden, as her labour, based in the domestic sphere, does not have financial value. So, while Hans may be able to contribute financially by performing manual labour without having to have had formal education, Elmira, by comparison, is unable to do so. The author emphasises coloured racist practices that reify the racial hierarchy in South Africa, when in effect, it is her racist standpoint that denies 'racially superior' coloured children to be socialised alongside black children, who are considered 'socially inferior' to coloureds. Elmira's siblings are all darker than her, and thus do not possess the means by which their sister, with her appearance of desirable whiteness, is able to move backwards and forwards between the different social domains. Unlike her, they are unable to gain access to a privileged upbringing. Although afforded superior education, Elmira's academic progress is marginal. Millin reverts back to the stereotype of mental deficiency in coloureds that was skipped in the previous generation of Flood's line. Elmira's mental ability is described in terms similar to Deborah's at her age, as a 'race between coloured and white brains'. (cf. 84) As noted before, Millin seems to be postulating that 'degeneracy' that manifests as a result of 'miscegenation' decreases as black blood is diluted by white blood. However, Millin's blatant gender bias is not lost in this oversight of generational 'progression' to whiteness. In the second

generation, represented by Kleinhans, there is no mention of the mental stagnation that the female characters, Deborah and Elmira display. Kleinhans, in fact, becomes a successful farmer and is described as being a “moderately prosperous man”. (108) The fourth generation in the person of Barry, is also intelligent and hardworking, and exhibits none of the characteristics that seem to hinder the mental progress of the female characters. What seems to set apart the educability of coloured males and females is the pubescent coloured female’s preoccupation for securing sexual partners – a ‘trait’ seemingly not shared by her male counterparts.

While all the themes operate at various intersections and intensities within the passing novel, the theme of shame is the one that is most pervasive, and often the most unsettling. It is in children’s discussions of ‘colouredness’ that the most disturbing associations of ‘coloured degeneracy’ are introduced by Millin. An episode is related in which one child reveals that her father hates coloureds more than black people because of their apparent lack of racial purity. She pathologises coloured bodies as ‘unpure’ or ‘polluted’, and debases coloureds to the level of ‘animal’. The narrator says, “I heard him tell mother that he couldn’t stand mongrels. He says they’ve got all the bad of both sides.” (143) In relation to this, Elmira is confronted with the question of what she would do if she found out that she was coloured. The question takes on a rhetorical guise, as Millin does not offer Elmira’s response. The child who poses the question declares that she would rather drown herself than be coloured. The psychological implications for the young coloured girl faced with grossly negative identifications like these are not addressed by Millin. Elmira’s home life is fraught with similar ambiguities of social positioning. Conflict arises when the dominant societal behaviours she is taught at school are not mirrored at home.

Elmira, as an interloper between the two, is unable to juggle between the realities of both social conventions, and meet the expectations demanded of each, in turn, since they often require her to act in contrary ways. At school, Elmira is taught in the art of white feminine virtue that is the birthright of white females, while at home her brother labels her a, “Bastaard just like us”, and a “blacky”. (144) Although immature, she is able to appreciate the nuances of race that associates privileges and positive identifications with ‘whiteness’ and negative ones with hybrid or black identities. In Elmira’s childish reasoning, white society gains favour in her esteem, and although she, “...dreaded being at school, she dreaded more still being at home.” (143) The same feelings of shame, hate and self-loathing that the previous generations of Flood’s descendants harbour for their native and coloured heritage, are reproduced in and repeated by the passing child:

She was ashamed of her father and mother, she hated her brothers and sisters. There was always at the back of her mind the thought: “If the girls knew!” She kept herself apart from them. She had different manners, different standards, different hopes and ideas. She felt herself to be white. She felt them to be coloured. She would not associate with them. (143)

This admission marks a turning point in the narrative, as Elmira is no longer passing involuntarily, but shows intent at race-change. The shift is accompanied by increased feelings of shame and guilt.

Shame is a theme explored by Wicomb and Stamatélos in relation to passers, and especially their female passing characters. This shame may be linked especially to the coloured female body, recognised (by the coloured passing female) as both the product of and possible ‘vessel’ for further mixing. Shame is experienced in the ambivalence between the belief that the passer has shrugged off colouredness for a higher social status, and the realisation that skin colour cannot expunge the womb

from which she came, and what her own womb has the potential to reproduce. Through her fictional characters, Millin attempts to 'prove' that colouredness is despised not only by the dominant race, but by those who are themselves raced as such. Thus, in the same way that Elmira despises her dark-skinned family members for their colouredness, so too do they despise her for accepting whiteness, which for them is represented as being unattainable. By denying coloured identity, she rejects their colourdness and by implication, disavows them. Her identity no longer fits the schema provided at home, and she seems unable or unwilling to identify as coloured. After years of associating with privileged white society, Elmira believes that she is superior to her siblings and parents because of her light skin. For Millin, whiteness is the obvious choice for someone faced with that option. Much like the passing character Helen in Wicomb's novel, Elmira, having chosen the privileged life over her own family and identity, becomes deluded. Through passing for white on a daily basis, her dual life has eroded her ability to distinguish between the two roles and any reality of who she is. So complete is her performance of whiteness that even her parents buy into the illusion of her superiority. When Elmira contracts scarlet fever at school and they are sent for, Lena confronts the notion of racial superiority. She questions the import of race in the face of her daughter's death: "What does it matter when she is going to die that we are brown and she is white?" (145) In this assertion, she both denies the significance of race and acknowledges racial superiority. Millin is unable to forgo the racial hierarchy, even in the face of the death of a child. Kleinmans tries to postpone their visit in order not to expose his daughter's coloured identity. The very real possibility of her death notwithstanding, Kleinmans vainly clings to his daughter's chance at claiming whiteness for him.

It is not surprising, given the fatalistic trend in the narrative, that her parents' visit leads to Elmira's expulsion from the convent school. Despite the Christian rhetoric of equality, racism seems to pervade the institution, especially when undesirable race threatens the school's economic survival. The nun's racist behaviour is masked by a veneer of religious righteousness toward Kleinhans and his wife and their daughter. Instead of allowing them immediate access to their sick child, she directs them first into her office where she asks them twice whether they are Elmira's parents, before asking them whether they would like to see their daughter. This vindictive taunt takes the form of extracting a confession from them in order to expose their sinful deceit – Millin's belief in the sinfulness of 'miscegenation' is not lost in this analogy. However, the nun's malicious demonstration of her power in asking them to wait outside the sick ward in order to announce their arrival to the sick child is a deliberate attempt to shame Elmira and her parents for their subterfuge. Whether or not this is a subversive attack on Christianity (and Catholicism in this instance) is debatable, since Millin is Jewish, but her depiction of malicious racism within the Church in this instance would perhaps suggest it. (cf. 49-50) The child's reaction to her parents' visit is predictably melodramatic. Elmira, in a delayed response to the hypothetical question posed to her by a schoolmate before⁴⁸, on being revealed as coloured, rejects all association with her coloured parents: "She was wishing that she might die. Her heart was bitter with shame and misery." (148) The act of passing into white society, and the constant vigilance and deception required to secure that position, is now undone. Although passing was not her choice initially, Elmira adopts whiteness and in so doing, rejects her coloured identity. However, since whiteness was foisted on her by her parents,

⁴⁸ "What would you do if you found out you had coloured blood in you, Elmira, with that dark skin and all? I'd drown myself or something, wouldn't you?" (143)

she feels justified to hold them responsible for having burdened her with the shame of colouredness she feels as a 'white' person, and for being stripped of the privileged way of life she had been made accustomed to.

Stereotypes of black female hyper/sexuality pervade Millin's passing text. Mental stagnation is not all that her female passers have in common. More significantly, they also share a premature sexual maturity that impels both women to search for sexual partners at puberty – a trait that seems not to affect the coloured men who are represented. According to Millin's biologically determined schema, the female characters seem to be 'naturally' more prone to mental stagnation, precocity and premature sexual maturity. It seems then, that it is not race, but gender and the preoccupation with stereotypes of 'degenerate black female sexuality' that informs Millin's discourse of coloured identity. This is not an uncommon perception, and Scully (1997) notes the origin of these myths of, "black women's rampant sexuality", as having, "a long history in Cape colonial discourse, dating from at least the late eighteenth century." (Scully, 1997: 174) It is thus no wonder that Millin emphasises the stereotypes of 'deviant' coloured female sexuality to justify the objectification of coloured women who dare to usurp white feminine virtue by passing for white, in order to dupe white men.

Shortly after her marriage to Lyndsell and the birth of their child, Elmira deserts both for a commercial traveller. This is perhaps a ploy by Millin to demonstrate the lack of virtue 'inherent' in coloured women. Elmira's desertion signifies much by way of coloured female stereotypes and their 'lack' in comparison to white women. It shows the inability of coloured women to remain in monogamous relationships;

that they revert to type – inevitably the prostitute – in the sense that their overly-sexual ‘nature’ is too strong to be subdued through the Western concept of marriage. Coloured women are bad mothers who place their own desires ahead of their children’s needs. Their primitive intellects deem them unable to think beyond their immediate wants, which typically revolve around their insatiable sexual desires. They are led by irrational sexual impulses that make them incapable of securing their own futures. In the absence of the salvation to be found in white men, the coloured female’s fate is biologically predetermined.

Corrupting childhoods: The involuntary passer

Adam Lindsell first proposes to her parents that Elmira’s skin colour makes it possible for her to attend a school reserved for whites. Having succumbed to the passing imperative in the past, but failed, both are open to the suggestion. Lindsell takes an uncharacteristic personal interest in Elmira and her education, and acts as self-appointed benefactor to her. He provides the means for her parents to bridge the gap created by their exclusion from white society by accompanying Elmira to register her at school. He fulfills a role her coloured parents are incapable of performing, and acts as a buffer between coloured and white society. After he suggests that Elmira might pass for a white child, he endorses it suggestively and appeals to their racial aspirations when he says, “[b]ut it’s a pity for Elmira. She is a beautiful child.” (140) He also appeals to their sense of social and economic aspiration for Elmira, and by vicarious association, themselves.

There is very little indication that Lindsell has the child’s education at heart. Millin ascribes his interest in Kleinhans’s coloured family to “boredom” or his “natural perversity”. (140) He shows no concern for the education of any of the other children, which implies that his

concern for Elmira's socialisation in white society is due purely to her lighter skin and because she is "a beautiful child". (140) His preoccupation with Elmira begins even before she is born, with the speculation on what her colour might be. After her birth, Lindsell notes that the child is whiter and prettier than his own children (131), and a year later, declares to his wife that while Elmira is a coloured child, "she is quite the most beautiful child [he] ha[d] ever seen." (135) This disturbingly paedophilial fixation on Elmira (and especially on her complexion and beauty) foreshadows his sexual pursuit of her in her adolescence. He is perhaps already at this stage setting in motion the passing imperative in Elmira that will later help lure her into marrying him, and allow him to take ownership of her body and reproductive function. This is confirmed later when Lindsell, after having proposed to Elmira, thinks back to her as a baby: "He recalled Elmira's round and golden babyhood. Good Lord! She had attracted him from very infancy." (182) His sexual perversity leads him to inscribe her infant body with promiscuity by suggesting that *she*, the infant, had attracted him, the adult male. In a warped way, he thus diverts sexual agency from himself onto Elmira. As Lindsell's obsession with Elmira grows, his attentions do not go unnoticed by Edith, who confronts him about buying Elmira gifts. When he acknowledges an ongoing interest in her, she realises that her father's intentions are of a sexual nature. (168) Elmira is perceived as a threat to the racial hierarchy precisely because her light skin colour and physical features position her, as Gqola (2001) contends, in direct competition with white women for the sexual attention of white men. (Gqola, 2001: 51) For Edith, her father's sexual dalliance with a young, coloured female has comparative age, class and race implications on her own position as a 28-year-old, unmarried, white woman in a rigidly patriarchal, post-colonial setting. Elmira disrupts Edith's racial framework that dictates that white women,

regardless of age and social status, possess greater status than coloured women.

Millin's perspective does not allow her to explore the psychological, psychical and social implications faced by the passer, which are multiplied, as in this case, where the passer is a female child. Elmira is offered no input in the decision to choose her racial identity. Following her successful integration into white society, Elmira is shown to have adapted her identity to the dominant race. Millin again hints at the stereotypical notion of the propensity for imitation coloureds possess that she uses elsewhere in relation to Deborah, as a child in the employ of the missionaries, and the coloured population of the Cape at the turn of the twentieth century. (83, 249) The child is silent and voices no objections to being removed from her family. As a female child in a largely male dominated society, added to which, the fact that a white male is at the behest of this decision, she is unlikely to have the agency to make her own decisions. Elmira's value is in potentially being able to uplift the family's social status by association through marriage into a higher social class. Without the benefit of social acceptance and the status that a desirable marriage brings, hetero-normative colonial society does not generally offer women the agency for financial independence. Intrinsic to this is the manipulation of female sexuality to secure a suitable male benefactor. For Elmira, faced with racial and class disadvantage compared to white women, her sexuality, commodified in her body, becomes the only means by which to advance socially. Millin exploits this patriarchal colonial social status quo to emphasise the stereotype of coloured female hyper-sexuality, and posits social advancement as opportunism. In the same way that the fate of the mixed-race child, Deborah, rests with the white male

missionary, so is the fate of the coloured child, Elmira, decided by the white male, a trend that continues into her adult life.

Elmira is shown to thrive in the school environment, even amid fears of being outed as an impostor and thus being expelled from school, and by implication, from white society. Her initial concern at being found out gradually diminishes, as she becomes acculturated to the school institution and its prescribed social norms. Millin places emphasis on the fact that the fear of being found out never completely disappears, though, and that the child is constantly aware of the fact that she, as a trespasser, is not entitled to any of the white privileges or roles she asserts as a passer. Although this role is initially unsolicited, she is nevertheless faced with negotiating two conflicting identities. The child endures the guilt of having to lead two distinctly different and conflicting lives – life at home with her parents and siblings who are positioned as inferior to her taught culture, and one at school in which her coloured identity and culture are despised and vilified within her immediate society. The pressures she experiences for the sake of passing for white are absent from the narrative, and Elmira is presented as an opportunistic passer, unlucky to have been born coloured, and willing to challenge her doomed fate by adopting a more eminent race.

Without the hope of receiving the benefits and privileges afforded her as a white member of society, Elmira sinks into a state of depression. She resentfully accepts her position as 'fate', while at the same time refusing to acknowledge her coloured identity by isolating herself from her family and surroundings. Lindsell again instigates Elmira's future when he suggests that they place her in a boarding school further afield, and offers to apply to the school his daughters attended in Cape Town. The full irony of his, "What do you lose by trying?" (151),

becomes apparent later in the novel, when the ambiguity of the word 'trying', as used colloquially in the phrase, 'try for white', as applied for passers, is contextualised. Within colonial society, social mobility is tied to skin colour. The emphasis on giving Elmira an education seems to suggest that education is valuable only for whites or those who are able to pass for white. Conversely, formal education is futile for anyone who is not white. This is qualified by the fact that none of her brothers and sisters had been afforded the opportunity to receive schooling. Millin's ploy of providing affirmation of this view of racially ascribed social mobility, serves to add credibility to her racist assertions.

On being accepted at the new school, Elmira shrugs off her depression, creating an impression that her happiness is tied to whiteness and material advancement:

... she became quite friendly with her family. She laughed and played with them as if she really cared for them. And indeed she was so happy with renewed hopes and expectations that she loved everybody.
(151)

Education is the passer's point of entry to white society, and as such, being enrolled at school infers access to whiteness. Since Elmira's expulsion was not as a result of her racial performance, the lessons learned from the expulsion from white society makes her more determined to succeed at passing than ever. Millin describes Elmira as being, "more sophisticated now" (151), but there is a sense that this refers more to her sophistication in the art of deception than to her refinement as a virtuous young woman.

This raises the stereotype of the coloured woman as devious, cunning, precocious, a natural temptress and survivor. Compared with coloured male passers, who have agency (albeit limited) through their

masculinity, female passers are all the more ruthless in their pursuit of whiteness. Elmira seems to have realised the multi-dimensional nature of successful passing which requires the passer to have more than just an outward, or physical appearance of whiteness. She learns that her mannerisms, financial status, and being able to convey an impression of carefree privilege, are as important in creating a well-rounded impression of whiteness. She understands that, as a female, achieving autonomy through irrefutable whiteness is not possible without securing a white male through marriage.

Commodifying the black female body: Mothers, workers and sex objects

The intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality that pervades greater colonial society is witnessed microcosmically in the domestic sphere at the level of the family. Scully (1997) regards the post-emancipation period as one that offered freed black women choice in their sexual roles. She notes however that these choices were "circumscribed by law which rendered them dependent on men, by the economy which made it difficult to secure personal autonomy with economic independence, and by pervasive notions that women should be sexually available." (Scully, 1997: 140) Similarly prescribed social roles for white females in late nineteenth century rural South Africa are grounded in this patriarchal system.

The influence of class means that women from affluent families may be exempted from waged labour. They primarily serve a reproductive function, and fulfill the role of aides in the domestic sphere. Millin describes the domestic lives of Lindsell's unmarried daughters in 1880 as consisting of doing needlework, baking, reading and horse riding, explaining that, "[w]omen, if they did not marry, did nothing else."

(137) This leisurely lifestyle is reserved for rich white women though, and is in sharp contrast to the domestic lives of coloured women, who are not excluded from participating in waged labour. This has been the case for Lena, Kleinhans's wife, who is first introduced as "the pretty little coloured girl, [who] was acting as a kind of mother's help." (123) Being described as a "girl" (though she is about twenty-five years old at the time) is indicative of the paternalistic relationship prevalent in settler society that usurps the autonomy of the 'other'. Lena has had to work during her unmarried life, and subsequent to her marriage. Once married, due to her lack of sexual control, her reproductive role dictates that she raise a large family. Lena's character is modeled on a moralistic view of women as virtuous, silent gate-keepers of society.

Pamela Scully (1997) emphasises the ambivalence of Cape settler discourses around women's morality when she says:

On the one hand women's maternal feelings were believed to be central to female identity as nurturer of society. Yet on the other hand this belief in the purity of motherhood coexisted with an assumption that female sexuality needed to be contained since unleashed it threatened to degrade society and tempt men into immorality." (Scully, 1997: 57)

So, while she is legally married, and therefore 'respectable' through the monogamy inferred, the fact of having seven children attests to the sexual availability of coloured women – as opposed, for instance, to the conservative nuclear families of white colonials represented. It is perhaps a combination of the aforementioned, and her own aspiration to the elevated social status attached to bourgeois white femininity, that helps to justify Lena's support for her daughter to pass for white. She is ambivalent about the idea of her young daughter marrying a "hateful-looking old man" (171), but is swayed by the fact that he is white and wealthy, and that the family status will increase by association through

Elmira's marriage. The negative association of maternity with the sexual availability and 'miscegenation' (with all its connotations of degeneration, sinfulness and the transfer of 'bad blood', etc.) of coloured women is in conflict with the increase in status thought to be attributed to motherhood in dominant society. As such, maternity seems to lose some of its prestige when applied to coloured women.

Regardless of all her renewed efforts at assimilating into white society, Elmira's race is exposed when Lindsell purposefully discloses her coloured identity to her young white suitor's father. The widower's perverted intentions for appropriating Elmira cause him to sabotage her marital plans. Elmira is once again expelled from white society, but this time the repercussions of her exposure stretch further than just a rural convent school. Elmira has not only lost her social position, but also the means by which she could have escaped her colouredness and gained legitimate social standing, i.e. both through education and through marriage to a white man. The narrator, in a moment of what appears (at the outset) to be compassion, admits that the hostile past that Elmira fears was, "...not even, justly, her own past; it was the past of others." (164) However, this 'sins of the fathers' ideology is the basis for much of the author's racist reasoning around coloured genesis and 'miscegenation'.

It is yet again within a state of utter despondency that Lindsell comes to Elmira's rescue, offering her employment. Having lost her privileged status, she is required to revert to her coloured role as productive wage earner. It is precisely this vulnerability that Lindsell exploits in his plan to appropriate the coloured woman: "She was without hope; in a mood where she did not care what she did, hardly, indeed, what happened." (165) Lindsell regards his plan as though a business transaction, with

both the arguments for and against the union duly noted. Once he has decided to marry Elmira, his perceptions of her 'black blood' change, as the idea of possessing Elmira sexually becomes his primary goal. He shares his plan with Kleinhans in a shrewd bid to garner his support before proposing marriage. Within a hierarchical patriarchal framework, the white man is positioned in a superior position with respect to the mixed-race man. Although, as her father, Kleinhans still lays claim to Elmira in her unmarried state. Lindsell uses the biased power dynamic to secure Kleinhans's collaboration in the 'transaction'. This exchange demonstrates the racial hierarchy in patriarchal society, and the lack of female agency in negotiations involving female bodies. In a very surprising moment of insight into the reality of the race dynamic in colonial South Africa, Millin demonstrates the frustration Kleinhans feels as a member of a minority group in a repressive society, when he curses: "Damn them—the white people". (173) This uncharacteristic retort is the first instance in which Kleinhans has verbally condemned white superiority. Even being beaten unconscious on the diamond fields did not evoke admonition of his white assailants. Colouredness, and the coloured community, have until now, always been the scapegoats for the inferiority inferred in the label 'coloured'. This is a turning point for the mixed-race figure. Whereas before, the notion of assimilation into white society was his ideal, now the realisation has finally dawned on him that his marginal status emasculates him and unconditionally precludes his admission to white society.

Kleinhans's powerlessness to oppose Lindsell's threats of eviction paves the way for Lindsell to follow through with his plans to marry Elmira. At 63, he proposes to the seventeen-year-old. The marriage proposal, conducted as a business transaction, compares the needs of

men and women in terms of age, belonging, and wealth, and spells out her alternatives. In doing so, he emphasises the uneven gender hierarchies that enable white men to define sexual roles. Lindsell trivialises romantic love as an unnecessary emotion and argues that Elmira would be happy regardless of not loving him. He suggests that marriage to a wealthy white man would be the means to unquestionable belonging, along with the accompanying class and status as a member of white society, and financial independence. Lindsell argues that in marriage, age is not of importance for men, and that she would stand to gain so much more from a small sacrifice of being married to an old man for a brief part of her life than what she could hope to gain from the life and 'fate' towards which she was inevitably heading if she did not accept the opportunity he was offering. He suggests that, regardless of the advantages which her ability to pass had afforded her in her upbringing in the past, she is ultimately 'fated' to the doomed existence of marginalised coloured women.

Sexuality and her body become the coloured woman's 'currency', exchanged for the reward of social status in being the possession of the white man. Lindsell hints at Elmira's recent failed relationship, and suggests that no respectable white family would consciously consent to associate with her coloured family. 'Respectability' here refers to an upper class status, and Millin thus suggests that the passer is not likely to achieve 'respectable whiteness' unless through him. Surprisingly, Millin challenges the racial hierarchy when she concedes that whiteness can in fact be acquired through manipulation of coloured female sexuality. In a final bid to win her over, Lindsell offers Elmira the choice of where to live.

In the transaction, there is complete silence around the extent to which Elmira may have been primed by her parents to accept the offer of marriage in light of Lindsell's threats to her family's future on the farm, and she is not shown to have an opinion in the matter. The reader can therefore not be certain what Elmira's position is; whether she agrees because the old man's offer sounds attractive to her, or if she is simply following her parents' commands; or whether she agrees because she is afraid of what he may do to her family if she objects. Apart from her noticing Lindsell's old skin and silently registering her hatred of the appearance of the old man, she acquiescently accepts his proposal. While Millin does not offer any further insight into Elmira's thoughts on the proposed union in the weeks leading up to the wedding, Lindsell is provided with the opportunity to voice his opinions, first with his daughter Edith, and later, with his son-in-law. He speaks for Elmira when he says, "from Elmira's point of view, she finds certain qualities in me that recommend me to her as a husband". (192) His choice to marry a younger woman, regardless of her social background is grounded in white patriarchal privilege. From a social perspective, he is flattered at the prospect of proving his virility and is prepared to 'risk' the outcome of a union between Elmira's impure/inferior race and his pure/superior race. Two months later they travel to Cape Town to be wed, and in conclusion to the success of the transaction, Lindsell transfers the stock he promised Elmira. The purchase of the black female body through the legitimating institution of marriage results in the transfer of the status of the white male and concludes the transformation of the black female body into an uncontestably white body - theoretically.

In Cape Town, Lindsell parades his new possession around the city, enjoying the attention their mismatched presence evokes. The mood

Millin creates through her use of language when she describes their honeymoon in the Cape is reminiscent of Sarah Baartman's journey to France to be exhibited in public in the early nineteenth century. Just as Sarah was displayed by the white man, so is Elmira exhibited as though chattel. There is a sense that whatever freedom Elmira may have possessed as a coloured woman has been relinquished through the 'purchase' of whiteness. Nothing is said of the time spent in private, but Lindsell's 'lusty' and 'frenzied' behaviour in public is most likely an indication of the perversion that happens behind closed doors. Millin describes the effect that Elmira has on Lindsell during this period as one in which his ability to reason is diminished. He is powerless to curtail his spending, and lavishing gifts on her takes precedence even over his obsession with his health and longevity. The narrator says of their relationship during that period:

And the more he gave her, the more he wanted to give her. He threw his money over her in a frenzy of prodigality. He felt an urge to buy for her that raked him like a lust. ... And he could not bear her out of his sight, and he could not restrain his delight in exhibiting her as his wife.
(193)

For Lindsell, marriage to Elmira is tantamount to ownership of her. In a post-colonial, patriarchal, rural South African setting, this is not surprising, but in addition to the usual gender hierarchy, with the intersection of race and class within the heterosexual marriage, the position of the black female is tenuous. The conditions of white male ownership become amplified as the status of the black woman is elevated by the white man's claims over her body. Scully (1997) attests to the simultaneous racial and sexual domination by white men over black women in the post-emancipation Cape. This social hierarchy, "saw black women's bodies as the property of men, and more specifically the property of white men." (Scully, 1997: 172) Elmira's 'reward' in the marital transaction is that, despite the incongruous

circumstances around her marriage to Lindsell, she is accepted at face value as a white woman in white society.

The terms of the transaction remain in the control of the white man, and a scandal involving Elmira's brother being convicted of manslaughter leads Lindsell to evict the Kleinhans family from the farm. He essentially reneges on his promise to provide a guaranteed existence for the family provided they help facilitate Elmira's submission into marriage. Again, Elmira accepts her husband's decision as fate and makes no protest even though this time it involves the banishment of her family. Their eviction leaves Elmira isolated, as, apart from Lindsell and the servants in the house, she now has no contact with people. This is symbolic of the absolute self-relinquishing that is required from the coloured female who 'passes over' and 'gives herself' to the white man. Since her family has never been portrayed as being particularly important to her, these spontaneous visits may be perceived as potentially resulting from her character development. Whereas before, Elmira is depicted as being ashamed of her coloured family, she now visits them on a daily basis. Even if her change in behaviour is based on opportunistic intentions to evade Lindsell and to provide her with a means to pass the tedium of her days in Lindsell's homestead, it is still a significant change. Her obsession with maintaining the façade of whiteness is gradually eroded through this contact. The author alludes to the fact that Elmira realises the absurdity of trying to maintain her pseudo-white status within the isolated confines of the 'white' home. This new insight manifests in Elmira as carelessness about maintaining the pretence of superiority and performing whiteness. Millin suggests that the increased contact with her coloured relatives causes Elmira to slide back into degenerate colouredness. This is not dissimilar to Wicomb's character, Helen's admonition of John's visits to his relatives,

described as his creeping “right back into the nest of jolly hotnos.” (150) Lindsell finds her behaviour remiss, and chastises her for not maintaining her appearance: “Elmira did not even satisfy his eye. He saw her suddenly to-night as much darker than he had always imagined, coarser featured, decidedly coloured.” (204) He compares her to the ideal of whiteness when he says: “You ought to pay more attention to your complexion than other women”. (204) The comparison serves as a reminder to Elmira that she is not white and will never measure up to that ideal, regardless of how hard she may try to mask her origins. This evokes Bhabha’s “almost the same but not quite” contention in relation to mixed race persons who may look like white people, but who always betray their origins. (Bhabha, 1994: 127) The incident between Lindsell and Elmira raises an interesting psychological dynamic where the white man has the power to voice criticism against perceived inferior racial attributes. In these two incidents, Millin reproduces the social order, which constructs the white man as having the power both to confer goodwill/whiteness and to retract that goodwill/whiteness and its associated privileges at will.

Female agency in the patriarchal context

In marriage to a white man, Elmira has finally achieved the goal she has strived toward throughout her life, in trying to pass for white in the society into which she was socialised. She has been rendered indubitably white, by association. The irony of the ‘achievement’ is that in order to reach that state of racial transcendence, she has given up the freedom to enjoy the privileges of whiteness, since her marriage in effect confines her to a microcosm of white society, and she is unable to participate in greater white society. Elmira resigns herself to her ‘fate’ as Lindsell’s wife and accepts her incarceration on his farm as a ‘natural’ course of affairs, “with an abandoned sense of fatality”. (195)

Again, there is no sense that Elmira has any agency with regard to her life, and a fatalistic air of complacency is maintained: "She did not ask herself whether she was happy or unhappy. She went on with life" . (195) This assertion contradicts the sense that while she aspired to whiteness, her happiness hinged on the desired association with whiteness.

While Elmira's white aspirations are constructed as being fanciful attempts to evade the drudgery associated with colouredness, Deborah positions passing for white as a necessary means for survival. Deborah suggests that aspiration to whiteness has taken on a political dimension following incursion by colonial whites into the coloured enclave of Kokstad with the onset of the nationalist sentiment of unification. Whereas before there was a suggestion that romantic love played a part in determining social position through interracial relationships, Deborah suggests that passing for white can no longer be construed as a whim. The idea that passing is an absolute necessity for survival in the new social order is proposed when the narrator says, "...nothing, she felt, mattered except to be white." (196) Deborah preempts the increasing marginalisation of coloureds that the state's escalating emphasis on racial signifying, segregation and eventually apartheid will bring.

The author, in portraying Elmira as being ambivalent about her fate, suggests that the realisation has dawned on her that she will never be in a position to be completely accepted as white – at least not in the greater social context, outside of the farm. Until recently, characterised as being, "as acquiescent as a dumb animal" (203), and "a creature of spiritless acquiescence" (205), Elmira becomes a character whose

newfound agency is reflected in her bold verbal confrontation with her white patriarch husband:

What good has it done me to be married to you? I am living on the veld the same as I did when I was with my father and mother. I have no friends. I don't go anywhere. What is the use of the clothes you buy me if no one sees them except the Kaffirs? ... Why is it better to be Adam Lindsell's wife than Kleinhans' daughter? You said when you asked me to marry you that I should be the most important woman for miles around. Who thinks I am important. The sheep in the kraal and the meerkats on the veld? Who comes here? Who knows me? (207)

This argument essentially solidifies the constructedness of race by suggesting that the idea of 'race' has a definite spatial aspect, and that it requires legitimate spectators to affirm or reject a person's belonging to a specific racial category. She realises that having traded her sexuality for race, she has unwittingly entrapped herself in a diluted version of 'whiteness' she had not anticipated. However, she has no recourse to escaping her fate through protesting her position, as she is by this stage pregnant with Lindsell's child. She is effectively trapped by the child growing in her body, and by her reliance on the white man for the social legitimacy of the child. But she is also aware of the power she has over him through the reproductive power of her womb.

Elmira's pregnancy effects a change in the power dynamic between husband and wife, with Elmira realising the power of motherhood. She is presented as ungrateful and unworthy of the veneration motherhood implies. Regardless of this, she is unable to evade her biologically predetermined female role as nurturer, and Millin says that, "she could not fail him maternally." (217) The child is a reminder of the sexual transaction she entered into with Lindsell, and of the failure of that contract in affording her whiteness. She is also conditioned to recognise the fated degeneracy that the birth of the child implies, a fact that is

reiterated at the end of her life. The baby binds Elmira to Lindsell through their shared genes, and prevents her escape from him in light of her aforementioned maternal obligations to the child. Millin does not present any of the passer's anxieties around the unborn child's ability to pass, as does Wicomb in her passing character, Helen, or Larsen's passing mothers. This may have to do with the fact that Lindsell, as a wealthy white male who is cognizant of Elmira's race, has the uncontested power to confer his race on his child, or withhold it, regardless of that child's semblance of whiteness.

Unlike Helen and John, Lindsell does not risk losing his racial privilege through the birth of a dark-skinned child. Lindsell considers it extraordinary that he could father a child at his advanced age, and is even willing to overlook the racial hierarchy in order to effect that miracle. With the birth of the child, Barry, the ideal of whiteness is closer than it has ever been in the generations of Flood's descendants. The child's whiteness is regarded as a wonder, and his maternal grandmother, Lena, affirms this when she says: "Yes, he is a proper white child, Elmira. Yes. Thank God, he does not take after our family at all. He is really white." (213) With the birth of the child that has brought status to the coloured family through this irrefutable claim to whiteness, Lindsell's betrayal and his expulsion of the Kleinhans family from the farm appears forgotten by Lena. When Kleinhans confronts Lena about her duplicity, she is presented as being weak for having forgiven Lindsell for his treatment of them. Millin employs the stereotype of the deceitful coloured woman for suggesting that this arrangement is temporary and that if they are patient, his death will provide the means for the family's upliftment through Elmira's association with the white man. Lena encourages Elmira in persevering in this relationship and suggests that if Elmira continues to use her

body as a means of sexual exchange, they will eventually receive both social and financial reward. However, Elmira, chooses not to suffer the continued sexual degradation under Lindsell, and instead defies her mother's hopes by abandoning him. Through this defiant act, Elmira accomplishes what her white predecessor was unable to. Elmira's abandonment of her husband and child is presented by Millin as 'reversion to type' by the coloured woman who is presumably overcome by the perverse sexuality that is the proof of her 'lack' of white feminine virtue. However, it is probably the greatest display of female agency portrayed in the novels under review - which is ironic, since the repressive patriarchal colonial context does not, presumably, lend itself to engendering female agency - let alone black female agency.



Concluding remarks

Throughout the novel, the author's sentiment on 'miscegenation' and coloured racial impurity are made clear, but nowhere more so than at the end of the novel, when Barry goes to see his dying mother. The repetition of the warning of procreating and thereby extending the line of 'black blood' is never more admonished than when Elmira, on her deathbed, warns Barry of the burden the passer must needs endure, that, "[i]t is better for people like us not to be born". (318) This forewarning comes too late, as Barry's wife is, unbeknown to his dying mother, of course already pregnant with his child. Barry, as the most removed from colouredness of all Flood's descendants, takes to heart the warning. He uses his agency to disavow his unborn child and thereby curtail Flood's shameful line of 'miscegenation'.

Homi Bhabha (1994) notes the importance of fixity in the construction of the 'other' and lists the stereotype as the most salient feature of

colonial discourse. He says that the stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated..." (Bhabha, 1994: 94-5) The frequent use of repetition in the novel – a ploy generally used to reiterate Millin's various racial stereotypes – serves as a warning to both black and white society of the dangers of racial admixture. It also serves to warn those capable of passing of the folly of trying to maintain that impossible ideal by sketching a grim picture of what awaits those who try to rise above their predestined station in life. The threat to racial purity is greatest in the latter generations, in those in whom the black blood is less visible, in those who are able to pass unseen in white society.

Although perhaps not immediately visible externally, the passer's flaw is hidden (here Millin demonstrates Elmira's adulterousness and Barry's cowardice) and may manifest as weakness and degeneration in unsuspecting future generations, like Barry's unborn child. The gendered contrast is significant, with females being sexualised and males emasculated. Millin preaches racial purity at all costs, but in so doing, and through her examples of repetition through the generations, creates a predictability within the narrative that compromises her creative ability as an author.

Millin's novel invites us to consider the meanings of passing in contexts where racial thinking may no longer be as entrenched in a formal sense, but may still play a role in popular performances and understandings of belonging and identity. While passing may no longer be practiced among coloureds in South African society, the economic advantages whiteness held prior to democracy, that served as part of the opportunistic reasoning behind opting to pass, arguably still exist

today. Coloured people are still marginalised for their non-conformity to dominant – whether white or black – society. Mohamed Adhikari (2005) refers to the perceived coloured deficiency when he speaks of coloureds as being ‘not white enough, and not black enough’. In today’s social milieu, the drastic option of passing for white is no longer a means to gaining acceptance into the dominant society, but it may have been replaced by the less permanent substitution of coloured identity in order to create an appealing identity with more positive connotations.

What is known as ‘coloured identity’ is still fraught with many of the same negative associations as pre-democracy perceptions of coloured identity, held by both by coloureds and ‘non-coloureds’. While decidedly less extreme, the act of an indefinitely-raced individual trying to fit into either end of what may be regarded as the desirable end of a binary model requires a substantial amount of self-manipulation. Posturing identity relies less on perceived racial hegemony, but is based on a classist model, in which economic superiority, not skin colour and therefore ‘race’, determines inclusion into the desired society. However, in the stratification of coloured communities post-colonially, economic superiority and light skin colour were (and to some extent still are) largely synonymous. While passing was available only to light-skinned coloureds, and since light-skinned coloureds were most often privileged in terms of economic opportunity, passing became a predominantly petit bourgeois occupation. It follows therefore that light-skinned coloureds who have an economic advantage over working class coloureds due to the likelihood of their having benefited from a legacy of inherited advantages, with their educated middle-class coloured status, are more likely to be prone to identity posturing today. Both concepts contain elements of mimicry, and since passing has progressed to identity

posturing post-apartheid, it is relevant for one to be able to trace the development of post-colonial and apartheid coloured identity to what it is today, in order to understand why mimicry still exists as an integral part of coloureds gaining acceptance into society.



CHAPTER THREE

ZOË WICOMB, *PLAYING IN THE LIGHT*

In *Playing in the Light*, Zoë Wicomb introduces two generations of racial passers, representing the parents of the female protagonist, Marion, who grows up 'white', and only in adulthood discovers the truth about her parents' origins: that they passed for white and that she is therefore coloured. Through a third-person narrator, the novel traces Marion's experiences as she makes sense of her new identity in relation to others in the narrative.

Subsequent to her closeted upbringing, Marion has difficulty engaging people socially, and as such has few friends. Her mother, Helen died young from cancer, and her aging father, John, whom she visits on weekends, lives in her childhood home in the Cape Town suburb of Observatory. We are also introduced to her maternal grandmother, and to John's parents. Marion is the owner of a small but successful travel agency in Cape Town, employing three agents, Brenda Mackay, Tanya de Wet, Boetie van Graan, and a general office worker, Tiena, whose surname is not volunteered. The presence of her boyfriend, Geoff Geldenhuys seems precarious at best, in light of Marion's anti-social tendencies. Marion's existential questing in relation to her social and political world commences when she starts experiencing panic attacks while following Truth and Reconciliation Commission⁴⁹ hearings on television. The attacks grow in severity when she perceives, in a newspaper article, the resemblance of a female freedom fighter to a family servant from her childhood, Tokkie - who is in actual fact

⁴⁹ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to investigate, through the testimony of perpetrators and survivors, politically motivated crimes and human rights violations committed during the apartheid era in South Africa.

Helen's mother. Brenda becomes key in Marion's efforts to discover who Tokkie is. Brenda lives in Bonteheuwel, a working class coloured township on the Cape Flats, in a cramped house with her extended family.

Marion's quest takes her and Brenda to the small mission station of Wuppertal, where the woman they are visiting notes an uncanny resemblance between Marion and Mrs Karelse (Tokkie). This is the moment Marion first becomes aware of her 'mistaken' identity. Being privy to Marion's new identity, Brenda becomes a confidante. Once her parents' secret is revealed, she reunites with John's sister, Elsie, who offers insight into their decision to pass for white. Elsie represents someone who, with her light skin, had the opportunity to pass for white, but chose not to. While in the process of coming to terms with her parents' 'race-change', Marion travels to Europe and the United Kingdom. Here she encounters the incongruity of skin colour, which she has relied on in the past as the basis for the ascription of identity. Her distance from South Africa and 'race' enables her somehow to realise her own and society's obsession with this pervasive construct. She also meets with an acquaintance and former racial passer, Vumile Mkhize, who helps contextualise passing in a different light. As one of the last hurdles in grappling with her newfound identity, Marion addresses the repressed memories of her childhood.

Explorations of coloured identities

Where Sarah Gertrude Millin's (1924) *God's Stepchildren* purports to represent the perspective of 'the coloured', in her novel, *Playing*, Zoë Wicomb complicates the very notion or assumption of 'a coloured perspective'. Often, she does this by portraying her characters in a manner that allows the reader to gain insight into their lives at an

intimate level. While Millin's characters are frequently conceived as embodiments of coloured stereotypes, Wicomb acknowledges the construction and histories of these stereotypes, and interrogates them in great detail. To a far greater degree than Millin, then, she contextualises the responses and personalities of her coloured characters and cultivates them as complex human beings who are both shaped and constrained by certain discursive, political, economic and social forces.

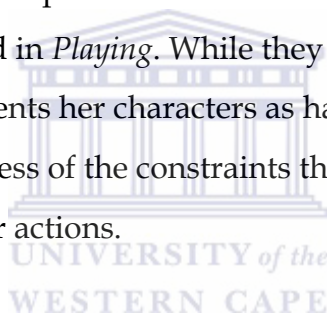
As discussed in the preceding chapter, Millin's representation is totally embedded within biologically deterministic racial discourses prevalent at the time that she wrote in the 1920s. Wicomb writes in a post-apartheid era, and as a coloured woman who self-identifies as black, very obviously subscribes to a different political consciousness. As an author of fiction, published cultural commentator, lecturer of English literature, and literary critic, Wicomb is not only familiar with, but is immersed in critical reading and writing. This knowledge of the socio-political and historical background of coloured identity formation and the marginalisation of coloureds in racial, gender and class terms is reflected in her fiction. The author's insight generates critical thinking about coloured identity in post-apartheid South Africa, and this in turn is reflected through her fictional characters. This suggestion is conveyed in an article that traces the origins and course of a pervasive sense of shame experienced by coloureds as being intrinsic to their identity – a theme that is pervasive in *Playing*.⁵⁰ It must be stressed, however, that while the racial identities of authors may affect their vantage points, their political positions are not automatically determined by their racial identities.

⁵⁰ For insight into the discourse of coloured 'shame', see Zoë Wicomb's article entitled 'Shame and Identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa', (91-107).

Published in 2006, and set in the mid-twentieth century and the late 1990s, the novel's characters move between apartheid and the post-democracy 'New' South Africa. In many ways, the abrupt narrative shifts from one period to another mirror the author's refusal to create a neatly bounded and chronologically coherent sense of South Africa's political evolution. Instead, Wicomb shows how South African history, which by its very nature is contested, disavows itself and haunts the present and the future - often in different guises, but yet recognisably so. Just as the legacies of the past haunt the present and will be sure to inform the future, Wicomb's characters are made up of layers of interconnected identities that are informed by the past and the present, and fluctuate as they act and react to their ever-changing environments. In this way, Wicomb points to the constructedness of identities, and especially 'coloured identity', which has historically been conceived of as an immutable character created *by* a superior race *for* an inferior miscellany (who are thought of by the paternalistic benefactor as being a gratefully receptive, homogenous, childlike, heterosexual male), and kept in place by a coercive system of control and self-policing.

In some ways, therefore, *Playing* is a response to *God's Stepchildren*, in that it essentially answers the question one of Millin's characters melodramatically asks the young passer, Elmira: "What would you do if you found out you had coloured blood in you, Elmira, with that dark skin and all? I'd drown myself or something, wouldn't you?" (143) But it is far more than a response to a novel that so obviously testifies to prevalent dominant discourses on racial hybridity. It also suggests the manner in which political and social circumstances shaped the psyches of a small minority of coloured people who tried, by passing for white, to evade marginalisation. Wicomb's novel provide insights into how and why some people followed through with the drastic decision to

attempt to obliterate their coloured identities for life in white society, despite both the legal risks, and all that they had to forgo in the process of racial reclassification. Wicomb also sheds light on the psychological anguish passers experienced in order to safeguard their illicitly acquired white identities so as not to be exposed as frauds, while attempting to gradually dissolve into white society. The author portrays passing characters as people who take advantage of the agency (that was greatly denied Millin's characters) they are afforded to escape the marginalisation to which they are subjected as people ascribed to an inferior 'race'. The most important difference between the two approaches to coloureds passing for white is that the fatalistic sense of impending doom and despair that is such an inescapable theme in Millin's work, is muted in *Playing*. While they still exhibit a great deal of angst, Wicomb presents her characters as having a degree of self-determination, regardless of the constraints their prescribed racial positions place on their actions.



Coloured identity formation: A historical context

Saul Dubow (1987) contextualises the growth of segregationist thought in the wake of industrialisation that followed the mineral discoveries in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Segregationism thus supplanted the imperial liberal 'civilising mission' and the scientific racist beliefs of the colonial era. He proposes that rapid urbanisation as a result of the growth of a black wage class and a decline in self-sufficiency with the collapse of subsistence agriculture through detribalisation, precipitated an ideology of separate development. (Dubow, 1987: 78-80) Just over a hundred years after the abolition of slavery in South Africa, combined white Afrikaner and English rule had resulted in a united front of proponents of racial segregation. It was a period that saw increased urbanisation of blacks fleeing from the

artificially designated and economically unsustainable native reserves, which apartheid propaganda turned into 'black peril' hysteria among whites. This influx, it was reasoned, demanded increased measures of racial segregation to quell the 'swamping' of urban centres.

White paranoia about 'black swamping' and the sexualised obsession with 'inevitable contamination' of the 'pure races' replaced the liberal assimilationist notion of class equality through civilisation with an ideology of 'racial' segregation. The development of racist discourse, while it can be traced, is complex, variable and does not necessarily follow in a linear progression. It is largely dependent on the invention/interpretation of the historian.

Playing is set between the turbulent early 1950s and the equally oppressive 1970s, and post-apartheid South Africa. There seems to be a close correlation between the evolution of coloured identity in South Africa and the corresponding political atmosphere. Through her characters, Zoë Wicomb portrays the changing racial mindset of South Africa by showing how differently 'raced' and gendered people think about colouredness. The novel explores the identities of a multifarious and ambiguous grouping of people occupying the periphery of society, faced with political and social uncertainty as a result of their interstitial positioning.

The policy of apartheid, which incorporated not only spatial segregation, but segregation in all social spheres, as well as total exclusion from political participation by blacks, was entrenched in legislation following the 1948 National Party election victory. The formation of the National Party under Hertzog in 1914 and his subsequent election into a coalition government with the Labour Party

in 1924 bolstered the coloured elite's white assimilationist aspirations. Hertzog's plan to incorporate coloureds with whites in order to keep them from aligning with the black majority failed in its assimilation goals, but succeeded in creating a hierarchical racial divide between blacks and coloureds. According to Ian Goldin (1987): "By the 1930s the exemption of Coloureds from influx controls and from legislation governing urban segregation had in the Western Cape increased the material divide between people defined as African and those classified as Coloured." (Goldin, 1987: 166) The bolstering of a coloured elite by the white ruling minority may have been encouraged in order to strengthen state support. Also, the endorsement of the countless cases of coloureds passing for white after the institution of Nationalist rule may be seen as a means by the state of augmenting numbers with appropriately socially conditioned near-white members who would, if successful, in a relatively short space of time, be assimilated into and be physically indistinguishable from 'pure' 'white' society. Goldin theorises that the Nationalists' goal with separate development and segregation of coloureds was to prevent the passing of light-skinned coloureds, who most often occupied the coloured elite classes, into the 'white race'. The aim of this was to ensure the preservation of a coloured elite stratum, and thereby provide the coloured working class with a model of coloured status to which they could aspire. The means by which this was effected, was through the Population Registration Act of 1950, which prohibited coloureds from passing for white, but ironically also legitimised those coloureds who were already successfully passing for white. Measures such as these are indicative of the arbitrariness of racial classification. Even though the fictions of purity continued to be adhered to in apartheid ideology and in the minds of many South Africans, the reality of what constitutes 'race' in

South Africa is an affirmation of the absurdity of trying to keep separate that which is already inextricably mixed.

At the heart of the marginalisation of coloureds through political and social exclusion is the dissolution of the ideal of assimilation that occurred as legislated apartheid took hold in the 1940s. Adhikari argues that the “Coloured petit bourgeoisie”⁵¹ “wanted little more than to be judged on merit, to exercise citizenship rights, and to win social acceptance within white middle-class society.” (Adhikari, 2005: 68) He overlooks the fact that conformity to a Western ideal could not be achieved in the absence of, to a large degree, looking the part. Aspiration to a dominant ideal was strongly associated with colour prejudices, and racism and classism *within* the coloured group meant that assimilation was the domain of those who looked white enough to conform physically. Wicomb foregrounds this when the light-skinned Mrs Bates assures the light-skinned Helen that she, “with her lovely copper hair, belonged in that set of socialites, the coloured elite...” (129) Elusive assimilationist ideals drove aspiration toward Western ‘civilisation’ and coloured respectability, and sustained cooperation with whites in South Africa. Coloureds can be forgiven for being duped into believing that their quest for ‘civilisation’ and ‘respectability’ would one day lead to social and political equality with the white ruling class – albeit to the exclusion of blacks, for whom assimilation was not offered as an option. The ‘coloured elite’ was composed of a predominantly lighter-skinned, educated, and therefore generally economically advantaged minority within the greater coloured group.

⁵¹ Adhikari defines this group as representing about five percent of the total coloured population who, “consisted largely of artisans, small retail traders, clerics, teachers and a handful of professionals in the earlier decades of the twentieth century”, and who were, “assimilated to Western bourgeois culture, on the whole sharing its values, aspirations, and social practices.” (Adhikari, 2005: 68)

Not as drastic as passing for white, coloured elitism represented an alternative, but ultimately less economically rewarding avenue for coloureds seeking social advancement. The advent of apartheid signified the end of the myth of immanent equality between whites and coloureds, at least until the results of the 1994 democratic elections in the Western Cape⁵² demonstrated that perhaps assimilation was still at the forefront of coloured aspiration for some.

Wicomb contextualises the history of 'race' for her passing characters by touching on the protracted history of the congruency of skin colour and inferiority or pride in the novel. Far from being conceived overnight, racialism was prevalent in all spheres of society, well before the advent of legislated apartheid. Helen's mother sketches one of the oldest perceptions of coloured identity depicted by the author. The young Tokkie, in the context of the early 1900s, reassures Flip Karelse that her aunt is, "white as driven snow with good red hair" (135) in an attempt to legitimate her social value through associations of European ancestry. Tokkie's references to blood are reminiscent of Millin's views on biological determinism, and blood as the carrier of past shame. Reflecting the gender biases of a heavily patriarchal society, as a dark-skinned female, she feels obliged to provide her pedigree, while Flip, being light-skinned, male, educated and successful, is spared the humiliation. Apparently oblivious to her racial justification, he dismisses it by saying that he cares nothing for blood or skin. In the rural village, social status is largely determined by skin pigment, and because they are regarded as incompatible due to their mismatched skin tone, the dark-skinned woman is vilified as a witch for having snared a light-skinned husband. The fact that Tokkie has internalised

⁵² The ANC lost the Western Cape to the National Party in the 1994 national democratic elections, which is described as the 'coloured vote' since coloureds constitute half the province's population.

the inferiority signified in dark skin is revealed when Helen is born with light skin and straight hair and she describes the child as “the chosen one”. (132) Wicomb mimics Millin’s representation here, and conveys through Tokkie a similar pride and elation in light skin that Elmira’s Khoi/English grandmother expresses in Elmira, and later in her great-grandchild, Barry. By giving birth to a pale-skinned child, Tokkie has vindicated her own dark, ‘impure’ and inferior blood. The author thus acknowledges the intensity and persistence of biological determinism, even in light of the dark-skinned woman’s experiences to the contrary.

Within the 1950s, the period Wicomb’s passing protagonists inhabit, the idea of coloured assimilation into white society, as espoused under Hertzog’s leadership in the 1930s, has all but expired. However, it has not completely dissipated in the minds of some coloureds, for whom absorption into the dominant society remains a subversive possibility. Maurice Hommel (1981) identifies a political stance that developed from this assimilationist ideal as “Colouredism”, which he describes as a “divisive tendency” on the part of coloureds. (Hommel, 1981: 172) Coloured social mobility was confined to an oppressive space. The coloured ‘elite’ developed as a result of being able to play the system of apartheid to full advantage. By accepting the concessions white society offered, coloureds paradoxically conceded to oppression and relinquished any possibility of a united black opposition to white domination. The 1950s is marked by legislated apartheid’s unrelenting separation of people according to ‘race’ imposing on the oppressed a level of acceptance of a status quo grounded in subordination. It is in this oppressive milieu that the storyline in *Playing* unfolds.

The author presents several views relating to the racial categorisation of coloureds during this period. The Traffic Department superintendent provides a state institutional view when he relates that, "it simply did not make sense for a coloured cop to reprimand his betters; and motorists were, after all, predominantly white." (127) According to the traffic official, coloureds are inferior to whites. John concurs with the superintendent's racist assertion with a prevaricating, "[j]a-nee Oubaas".⁵³ (127) Wicomb shows how, by joining a state institution, John accepts the white supremacist ideology of the state. The Bates', where Helen lodges on her arrival in Cape Town, are middle class, elite coloureds, whose status determines them to be "respectable". (129) Mrs Bates ascribes worth to hair and culture relative in their approximation to the white ideal, which is represented as the requisite condition for respectability and admission to the coloured elite. Vumi Mkhize, the black character whose family passed for coloured prior to democracy describes the racism of the "lighter-skinned scum" who openly referred to the black family as "kaffirs". (205) Wicomb's representations of various conceptions of colouredness are in keeping with the apartheid racial hierarchy that placed coloureds in a marginal position between 'superior' whites and 'inferior' blacks. The absurdity of the rationales behind those racial classifications, and the rigidity of the social positions that they implied, are confronted by the lived realities of the passing characters she describes.

The dominant white liberal view of colouredness, especially as it pertains to female coloured sexuality, is portrayed by Carter, the municipal councillor Helen approaches for the affidavit 'proving' that she and John are white. (143) He registers her nervousness under his

⁵³ *Yes, indeed, Oubaas*. The Afrikaans 'Oubaas' translates into 'old boss', and is a form of endearment, and a respectful form of address for the older and more senior white man.

sexual gaze as being sexual desire, thus absolving himself from any sexual transgression by attributing it directly to the coloured woman and her sexual deviance. Helen realises, as soon as Carter correctly 'races' her, that invoking religious piety and female virtue is of no use, since these are the reserve of 'pure' white women. By the second visit to the offices, she is "reminded of her obligation", as a coloured woman, to appear sexually available, and that her role (as the shameful 'miscegenator') is to "show willing" and to "cooperate". (143) With the basis of coloured female identity entrenched in colonial society and slavery, coloured women's identities are largely still bound in their bodies, as receptacles for male power. Gabeba Baderoon (2011) implicates slavery's ongoing effects on black female identity when she notes the sexual violence endemic to slavery as having, "left profound effects on notions of sex and race in the country." (Baderoon, 2011: 218) Wicomb shows how colonial stereotypes of perverse coloured female sexuality that inevitably lead to the corruption and contamination of white males have persevered and are still in operation in the mid-twentieth century. However, by providing a context for Helen's sexual violation at the hands of the white male, she challenges this stereotype.

The period around the 1950s saw the implementation of apartheid policies that strove to entrench separate development of the races politically, socially and sexually. Policies were designed especially to legislate identities in order to root out the transgression of racial boundaries that led to the unlawful benefiting by non-whites of privileges reserved for whites. Significantly, during this period, coloureds were disenfranchised when they were removed from the common voters roll in 1956. A decade later, following the Sharpeville shootings of 1960, the state banned the ANC and PAC, police were authorised to negate judicial processes, South Africa exited the

Commonwealth, and increased international sanctions furthered the country's isolation. Worden (1994) describes the 1960s as a period characterised by quiescence due to economic stability and the effectiveness of state control. (Worden, 1994: 113-114)

While Helen continues throughout the novel to condemn dark skin to an inferior position – she describes Elsie as “lacking in ambition” (166) and John's family as a “nest of jolly hotnos” (150) – a shift in racialised thought occurs with the marriage between the dark-skinned Fourie and John's light-skinned sister Elsie. This shift is presented from the perspective of John's mother, who admits that while she may have had “reservations about Fourie, they were quite dispelled by the image of her girl being so comfortable, so modern.” (111) John reiterates this sentiment when he says that Fourie's education enables him to provide adequately for his wife. However, John is conflicted between this and a combination of his vanity at having been mistaken for belonging to the ‘superior’ race and his inability to resist Helen's racist resolve that allows him to enjoy the ‘benefits’ of white privilege. Helen's rigidity in her racist beliefs is set against John's mother's reassessment of the relevance of skin colour as a marker of human character in light of Christian values and the opportunities afforded coloured people through education. Wicomb, by contrasting these views, adds gendered and generational dimensions to racial discourse, and shows how racist assumptions are transforming in the 1960s with intellectual advancement countering the biological as sole determinant of social mobility and status. This change in political consciousness that recognises the agency of coloureds in their self-determination is a forerunner of Black Consciousness thought that influenced coloured identity in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Soweto uprisings of 1976 occurred amid an upsurge in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) that ideologised a reconscientising of black psyches through the development of a unified social identity amid apartheid's artificial categorisations. As Strauss (2009) argues: "By refusing to acknowledge the terms within which apartheid attempted to fix race, the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s and 1980s did important work to expose the slipperiness and arbitrariness of racial signification." (Strauss, 2009: 37) For political activist and proponent of Black Consciousness in South Africa, Steve Biko, blackness constituted an attitude, not necessarily 'race'. The movement, "included all of those oppressed by apartheid, thus extending the term to bring in 'coloureds' and Indian South Africans, but excluded those whose collaboration with apartheid structures ... still defined them as 'non-white'". (Worden, 1994: 117) This mirrors the relationship between John and Elsie's family. Fourie tolerates John's political ignorance and his opportunistic passing for white, but John's increasing support of the apartheid state (he enlists as a police reservist) impels the family to finally exclude him. Elsie ascribes the expulsion to the primacy of political allegiances in an oppressive political climate. She says, "then this was a place of black and white, not a place of fairness, no room for concessions." (172) Elsie's support of black consciousness endures into the post-apartheid period in her aversion to speaking Afrikaans.

Contextualising coloured identities within the novel

In *Playing*, Wicomb covers two distinctly different periods in terms of coloured social identity formation, namely pre- and post-apartheid, as represented by the two generations of protagonists in the novel. These periods are associated with marked differences in the way coloured identities are represented and perceived, both by coloureds and within dominant South African society. These changing perceptions clearly

reveal the social, political and cultural sources of 'coloured identification'. The contentious nature of the term as unitary was demonstrated with the Nationalist government's attempt to divide the 'race' into sub-groups under the Population Registration Act, No. 30 of 1950, thereby further hybridising the already hybridised 'other'. The purpose of this racial sub-division seems to have been to remove traces of the colonial European progenitor and to emphasise the hybrid's geographical origins or the slave or post-colonial immigrant sexual causation.

Socially constructed as hybrids, and thus not 'racially pure', but lacking the subject position afforded citizens, coloureds rarely constitute 'proper' subjects, and are consigned to live a 'neither, nor' existence on the margins of culture. *Whose culture?* remains the ill-defined question. Racial passers demonstrate the fluidity of identities, and challenge the notion that 'race' and 'culture' are unitary concepts owned by a hegemonic monopoly or exclusive sector of society. Passers not only recognised the fluidity inherent in a colonial/post-colonial society, but that culture can be mimicked and transmuted to the extent that even the state-imposed regulators of culture may be unable to identify a transgressor.

The absurdity of trying to police identity is demonstrated to full effect when one realises how easily the state can be duped by performance – even when that performance is unintentional. In *Passing*, this irony is demonstrated perfectly when John, is appointed by a traffic superintendent who, "speaks passionately about job reservation" and reasons that, "[i]t was important to keep up standards." (127) The

official, who is described as being “a plattelander⁵⁴ himself”, is deceived by John’s rural Afrikaans accent and light skin colour, and mistakes him for a poor white farmer come to the city to find his fortune. The irony is that the state is complicit in an even greater deception. The fabric of colonial/post-colonial identity, while constructed as authentic, constitutes a mutation of the colonial metropolis. This calls into question the authenticity of white colonial identity and the inalienable claims to its hegemonic position. Lawrence Grossberg (1996), using the United States as a model, argues that modern society is multi-ethnic and incorporates various cultural practices. In South Africa, this is even more evident in the number of national languages, ethnic divisions, and religious affiliations that make up our society.

Naming coloured identities is problematic, not only because of what and whom these define, but because of the way in which colonial discourse has codified these to regulate both those subsumed within the label and those deemed racially ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ to coloureds. Coetzee (1988) remarks on the pathological discourse that shrouds coloured people as the degenerate remains of the initial mixing of ‘pure’ ‘white blood’ with ‘contaminated’ ‘black blood’. He says: “The hybrid is further damned in that the two bloods in his veins are debased to begin with”, suggesting that prior degeneracy is assumed in those involved in inter-racial sexual relations. (Coetzee, 1988: 156) Through this discourse, coloureds, who are represented as the repositories of the degenerate traits of both parents, internalise negativity and shame that typifies the hybrid identity. Yet, it is not so straightforward to simply ‘race’ a people, who clearly share a multitude of sociological traits with the ‘dominant race’, as ‘other’ – especially

⁵⁴ A farmer; of rural origins.

when 'othering' also relies on visible markers of physical difference that are not always apparent. Grossberg proposes *différance* as a possible theory behind the negativity that dominant society projects onto the subaltern identity: "...the subordinate term (the marginalized other or subaltern) is a necessary and internal force of destabilization existing within the identity of the dominant term. The subaltern here is itself constitutive of, and necessary for, the dominant term." (Grossberg, 1996: 90)

In South Africa, an almost codependent (though uneven) relationship developed between the dominant (white) culture and the people described as 'coloured'. Historically, having been socialised in relation to a paternalistic white minority through colonisation, slavery and then apartheid, and due to the virtual absence of a positive proto-coloured history or myth of origin, coloured people perceived their identities to exist only in relation to racially superior whiteness – and vice versa. In addition, having been privileged (in relation to blacks) by the white-run government through the provision of marginally better basic services, education and social rights, labour preferencing and greater social mobility, many coloureds bought into the idea of a three-tiered racial hierarchy. This created a situation whereby many coloureds saw themselves as naturally entitled to partake in the othering of blacks as being 'racially inferior' to coloureds. Especially in the Western Cape, in which coloured people constituted the majority racial group, the apartheid government sought to distance the two 'inferior' racial groupings in order to prevent amalgamation on a political and social level that could potentially lead to their leadership being overthrown by a united and numerical majority. In addition, inter-racial breeding between coloureds and blacks would destroy the pretence of a 'black purity' imperative and thereby pave the way for political unity and

social amalgamation into a larger and even 'more degenerate' class of hybrids.

The threat that the potential of racial unification spelled was disastrous to white autocracy. Goldin (1987) demonstrates the state's desire to eliminate the dualism that had until then only distinguished between whites and all other non-Europeans by imposing three distinct racial classes. He reveals that the Cape census of 1904, "distinguished between three 'clearly defined race groups in this colony: White, Bantu and Coloured'" and that the coloured group comprised of "'all intermediate shades between the first two'". (Goldin, 1987: 158) The premise of escalating state-controlled separation of the 'races' and inter-racial sexual surveillance is attested to by the passing of an amendment to the 1927 Immorality Act, which extended the ban on extra-marital sex between blacks and whites to all non-whites in the Immorality Amendment Act, No. 21 of 1950. Although 'the coloured' is believed to be made up of both coloniser and colonised, the black or indigenous components of coloured origins have been all but erased from historical discourse. Adhikari (2005) argues that the marginality coloureds experienced, and especially so those like the coloured elite who experienced more social mobility, led to inconsistencies that, "reflected ambivalences inherent in the way in which Coloured people perceived themselves as a group and the manner in which they related to other social groups." (Adhikari, 2005: 80) The advent of apartheid had the effect of creating closer identification between coloureds, regardless of class differences, as they were forced through apartheid social engineering to share geographical space, and excluded from interaction with other racial groups through the implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950. In the same way, pre-apartheid coloured identities had been influenced through contact with whites, blacks and

immigrants, who often shared common living spaces in the Western Cape – although it is often only the proximity of whites that is valorised in coloured identity formation. (Soudien: 2001: 127-8)

Michele Ruiters (2009) concedes a spatial aspect of coloured identity formation post-apartheid. She suggests that social identities built around the displacement of coloureds to racially designated areas persist despite the removal of apartheid legislation due to the “shared trauma of forced removals and being confined to coloured residential areas.” (Ruiters, 2009: 109) Homi Bhabha (1994) notes the situational nature of subaltern identity, and that symbolically, the hybrid occupies an in-between space. Geographically, and in South African terms, this theory became tangible in apartheid town planning. Coloureds, who occupied the margins of dominant society, were situated in-between whites and blacks, as a veritable buffer zone, but rarely ‘belonging’ to either of the ‘pure’ spaces bordering them. While the racial categorisation of coloureds by the apartheid state into an oppressed hybrid space, between the empowered minority and the subjugated majority, may not leave room for true agency, the alternative that some coloureds chose in order to escape their serfdom also did not allow for complete freedom because of the vigilance that passers were compelled to maintain.

In describing the evolution of coloured identities during the early 1950s and post-democracy (both being racially significant times in South African history due to the respective advent and abolition of apartheid), *Playing* traces the transformation of perceptions of a homogenous coloured identity, into the multiple and often opposing identities that are perceived in a democratic South Africa today. By representing coloured characters as unique individuals who share elements that

constitute colouredness, and by acknowledging the influence of state policy in constituting perceptions of a cultureless coloured homogeneity, Wicomb disputes coloured essentialism.

In his explanation of coloured identity formation, Adhikari writes:

... social identity...can no more be imposed on people by the state or ruling groups than it can spring automatically from miscegenation or their racial constitution. (Adhikari, 2005: 179)

Adhikari's view that the state, as an outside influence, has a largely insignificant influence on identity may not take into consideration the unrelenting influence of the apartheid state in regulating social control by defining 'race' and, by implication, identity. While I fully agree with his contention that coloured identity is not a product of 'miscegenation', and while I also agree that identity evolves from the experiences of individuals and the shared experiences of the collective group, it is important to acknowledge the role of the state, and the effects of forty-six years of apartheid domination, preceded by nearly three centuries of highly exploitive colonial rule, in shaping coloured identities.

Unlike *GSC*, set in a period when the term 'coloured'⁵⁵ had just been yoked to refer to a distinct 'race' of racially mixed or 'miscegenated' people, *Playing* is not directly concerned with 'miscegenation'. During the period that the novel is set, the mixture of 'pure races' that supposedly resulted in the coloured 'race' has already occurred and been firmly entrenched in South African society, with the homogenous 'coloured' having been given a legally distinct 'racial' status. With

⁵⁵ Adhikari (2009) identifies the period following abolition and during the mineral revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century as being the forerunner to the creation of the appellation 'coloured' to denote people from an assimilated colonial working class, and that this term became the standard nomenclature from the late 1880s. (Adhikari, 2009: xi)

regard to the conception of 'coloureds' in a post-colonial context, prior 'miscegenation' is thus already assumed, and the shame associated with that prior sexual contact is intrinsic to coloured culture, especially in relation to coloured women whose identities are linked with sexual complicity.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Zimitri Erasmus (2001) notes that *shame* is often intrinsic to what it means to be coloured, and that this persists in post-apartheid South Africa. At the heart of this is the often unstated (especially in respectable, polite, coloured company), but nonetheless concomitant acknowledgement of a sexual undercurrent that pervades the perceived origins of coloured people as being distinct from their 'racially pure' originators. Zoë Wicomb untangles the complex of repressed 'miscegenation' in the psyches of coloureds seeking 'respectability' in post-apartheid South Africa when she posits that, "it is after all the very nature of shame to stifle its own discourse." (Wicomb, 1998: 92) She ties together shame with all the negative connotations of coloured origins – 'miscegenation', degeneracy, impurity, contamination, female concupiscence and pathological sexuality – and notes how these have been embodied in the coloured female body. The coloured female body, as the scapegoat for hybridity through 'miscegenation' thus becomes the repository for the shame of the entire coloured 'race'.

Coloured by choice? Choosing identities post-apartheid

The shifting notion of a heterogenous coloured identity to a multiplicity of identities, especially after the inauguration of a democratic government, has had a destabilising effect on the assumed uniformity of the category constructed as 'coloured', and positive self-perceptions among many coloured people. Coloureds now have greater freedom to

redefine or contest their historically ascribed identities, and have the agency to occupy the public and private spheres without feeling compelled to assume or defer to the cultures of the dominant 'races'. At the same time, the abolition of apartheid laws and the dismantling of apartheid state apparatuses do not by any means constitute the total transformation of society into a unified democratic entity. Apartheid ideology and discourse continue to exist even without its tangible laws and structures, and will survive for as long as people ascribe to racially defined ideas and practices.

Ruiters (2009), suggesting that coloured identification in the present is radically different from apartheid forms, argues that many coloured individuals are no longer forced to adhere to the apartheid structures of 'race', class, space and language that bound the group prior to democracy. She suggests that coloured people are reimagining old identities in new terms instead of either adopting new identities or espousing a unified, generic, national identity. (Ruiters, 2009) By choosing a coloured identity, an individual may feel locked in a position of marginality and in-betweenness that alienates her from the larger oppressed black majority. Choosing a black frame of reference may mean trading a coloured identity in favour of a dominant social position – just as many coloureds aspired to white culture pre-democracy. Choosing indigenous or slave identities may be associated with a hankering after an ethnically 'pure' idealised past, or an exoticised myth of origin. While on the other extreme, choosing a white identity may not only alienate the coloured person from the black majority, but also from her own cultural heritage. It seems that identity choices will remain challenging for people described as coloured in South Africa until identity is no longer discursively defined by 'race', until old constructions and stereotypes are transformed into positive

conceptions, and society is allowed to become truly non-racial. This belief in reconstruction is even more imperative within the coloured group, where past experiences of political betrayal have left some people disillusioned with their right to be acknowledged as citizens while identifying as coloured, on their own terms, within their own country.

Of course, the self-directed changes to coloured identification occurred long before 1994. The Black Consciousness Movement allowed for coloureds to exchange their stereotyped racial designation for a more broadly defined notion of blackness, which in turn fostered a stronger sense of solidarity with blacks in the struggle against apartheid. Glenise Lewendal (2004) notes the difficulty for coloureds, post-democracy, to continue repudiating colouredness and to hold onto non-racialist ideals and the notion of a unified black consciousness:

Since 1994, statements like 'we 'coloureds': are now being discriminated against' have become very prevalent. Shades of black are carefully compared, as is evident in statements made by 'coloureds' that they are 'not being black enough' in the 'new' South Africa, and were 'not white enough' during apartheid. (Lewendal, 2004: 141)

Lewendal theorises that the "middleness" associated with the category 'coloured' leads to new feelings of shame. However, she contends that shame is prevalent in all identities. Lewendal uses the example of 'white guilt' as an example of the manifestation of shame felt by white South Africans post-apartheid.

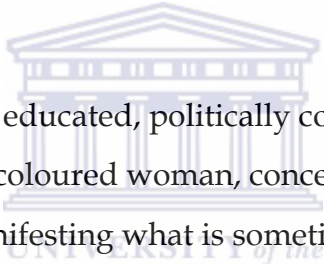
In a scene between the coloured, Brenda and Afrikaner, Boetie, who is reading a newspaper report about a hijacking in Johannesburg, Wicomb illustrates how white guilt is averted, post-apartheid, when the white male blames the new democratically-elected government for the

apparent anarchy pervading society (as evidenced by the hijacking incident). Brenda responds by questioning Boetie's complicity in supporting the policies that the previous dispensation effected:

You don't think that years of oppression and destitution and perversion of human beings, thanks to the policies that you voted in, have anything to do with you?

Boetie wags his finger. Now listen here: first of all, I never voted for apartheid... (36)

From this altercation between the two characters, it is clear that 'white guilt' is not necessarily always claimed as shame by whites, but may as readily be denied or transferred. 'White guilt' can be denied, but this is not the case for most coloureds, for whom shame is carried outwardly, on their skin.



Brenda, as a university educated, politically conscious and therefore progressively-minded coloured woman, conceives of herself as being 'black', rather than manifesting what is sometimes perceived as general coloured apathy towards political participation. Maurice Hommel (1981) warns against this perception, arguing that while this may be the trend in "modernizing societies", a lack of participation by people in higher economic positions could be variously interpreted. He contends that those benefiting economically from the concessions of apartheid may be less likely to actively oppose the status quo. However, he also proposes a relationship between education and political awareness, suggesting that non-participation may be interpreted as a form of protest by socially aware classes of coloureds against an unjust system. (Hommel, 1981: 165) As an educated and thus socially mobile woman, class-consciousness may also be a factor in Brenda's decision to opt for embracing a black identity.

The role of education is paramount to reconstituting coloured identity, as it provides access to resources and political will previously denied through a lack of or the provision of inferior education. Ruiters suggests that identity transformation is, “an elite process because it is driven by people who have the ability to generate public debate”. (Ruiters, 2009: 110–111) However, the pursuit of upward mobility through improving educational qualifications is sometimes considered tantamount to treachery, especially when that pursuit is by women, and their roles in the public and private become blurred. Wicomb demonstrates this when Brenda’s sister ascribes her alienation from her mother directly to the influence of education: “...she reprimands Brenda for being squeamish, for what she calls her sister’s airs and graces. Is that what they learn you at university?” (65) There is an impression, within this confrontation, that Shirley is loath to alter the status quo. Education is placed in a subversive light, especially in its potential to disrupt shared coloured identities. Shirley perceives the personal and social advancement education affords Brenda, and which is not available to her, as a working class coloured woman. Adhikari (2005) notes what the change in political dispensation meant for middle class and working class coloureds after the democratic elections in 1994:

Civil rights such as the franchise and freedoms of expression and association, which have clearly enhanced the lives of the Coloured middle-classes, have meant little to their working-class counterparts, who remain mired in poverty and feel marginalized. (Adhikari, 2005: 179)

On the other side of the spectrum, is white privilege under apartheid, afforded regardless of education, and based solely on skin colour. Brenda tries to raise her white colleague’s awareness of the opportunities he received at the expense of non-whites through apartheid policies that privileged whites:

Look, since we're talking about morality, would it not be more honest to say that you didn't know any better, that you didn't understand the implications of accepting jobs and salaries that others were barred from, a choice of schools and places to live and play that discriminated against others, that came at the expense of cheap labour, of those who didn't have the vote? (36–37)

The irony of Brenda's accusation is that historically, coloureds were not above reproach in terms of labour preferencing based on 'race'.

Certainly some coloureds, and especially middle-class, lighter-skinned coloureds, benefited directly from apartheid policies, to the exclusion and expense of both the majority of poorly educated coloured men and women who did not qualify for the concessions that light skin brought, and the greater black majority of South Africans.

With the National Party's introduction of the 'Coloured Labour Preference Policy' (CLPP), brought into effect officially in 1955, coloureds were offered a tangible means by which to 'prove' their 'superiority' to blacks through improved economic and social circumstances. Vivian Bickford-Smith (1989) notes the significance of the CLPP for the Western Cape⁵⁶: "The coloured labour preference policy has long been viewed as an attempt at maintaining an area of South Africa where Africans would not outnumber whites, and which could be a last-resort white homeland in a radical partition of the country." (Bickford-Smith, 1989: 172) The CLPP, so-called pass laws and influx control measures worked together to keep blacks out of the province, thereby ensuring greater availability of jobs for coloureds. The regulation of labour, in particular through this policy, essentially provided coloureds with an incentive to further disassociate from

⁵⁶ The Western Cape is the region where the majority of the coloured population resided (and still do), and thus represented the geographical region which benefited most from the introduction of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy.

blacks and to perceive their relative privileges in relation to blacks. Despite the reference to 'labour', the Coloured Labour Preference Policy had much broader social aims than what the name suggests. Ian Goldin (1955) describes its far-reaching effects, when he says that the policy:

... extends to all aspects of social control within the state's domain. 'Coloured' people relative to Africans, are granted relatively better education, housing, sport, health, culture, freedom of movement, occupational mobility and training as well as many other advantages. (Goldin, 1955: 87)

Goldin concludes that, "[t]he ultimate aim of this [coloured labour preference] strategy ... is to encourage the 'Coloured' bourgeoisie and as many others as possible to align themselves with the dominant class against the subordinate masses." (Goldin, 1955: 9) The result of measures like the CLPP was that a false sense of security was created in the minds of coloureds, what Vernon February (1981) calls a, "misguided anticipatory socialization". (February, 1981: 168) He compares coloured South Africans with the French colonised who were both socialised to aspire to an ideal of being embodied in white dominant society. However, this socialisation, by its very nature, precluded full citizenship, which remained a whites-only privilege. February says: "No matter how civilized or Westernized and educated, he is still ranked lower than the poor white, or the Greek and Portuguese urban proletariat or peasant turned immigrant." (February, 1981: 169)

Although a tactical means of sowing division between the racially oppressed groups, apartheid's assimilation rhetoric would have been perceived by some coloureds as acknowledgment by whites of a shared heritage, progression towards acceptance and 'belonging' in white society, as well as 'proof' of their relative 'racial superiority' over blacks

who were regarded as being 'racially inferior' in apartheid's three-tiered racial hierarchy.

Wicomb takes care to provide a critically realistic portrayal of modern-day South Africa in her fictional representation of society. She sketches post-apartheid white South Africa as a destabilised world, historically rooted in outmoded apartheid beliefs that secured racial superiority, and peopled after the demise of apartheid by those who struggle to define themselves in the context of a new dispensation. The contradiction between the enduring taught racist stereotypes and post-apartheid lived experiences of dominant society is hinted at when Marion contemplates searching Brenda's desk in order to settle a completely irrational feeling:

The terrible thought of looking in the drawers of Brenda's desk occurs to her, but she restrains herself; there is no evidence of anything irregular. Give them a pinkie, and they'll grab your whole hand, her mother always said." (16–17)

The "them" referred to represents the collective 'other' excluded from the dominant group through racist ideology. Self-identifying and perceived as an Afrikaner, Marion does experience forms of discrimination, but more so at the intersection of class and gender, rather than along racial lines. Marks and Trapido (1987) describe the imperial tendency of British colonial powers in South Africa in the late 1900s and early twentieth century to extend scientific racism to non-English colonials who were (albeit to a lesser extent compared to blacks and coloureds) ascribed with racial inferiority. (Marks and Trapido, 1987: 7) Liberal English, left-wing supporters were able to distance themselves from the racist apartheid policies whose creation was largely ascribed to Afrikaners. They were able to take the moral high-ground while effectively still benefiting from the apartheid policies that

ensured white privilege regardless of class or origin. Wicomb shows Marion to be as sensitive to the class distinctions between English and Afrikaner South Africans in the 'new' South Africa as Helen was as a passer during the heyday of apartheid. Marion values hard work and persistence, which are regarded as Afrikaner character traits, and shows contempt for the self-indulgence attributed to the "indulgent, effete, English types". (3) Marion attaches importance to European pioneering, traditions and colonial heritage, which she describes in the Clanwilliam Hotel as being "sumptuous" and "redolent of colonial times". (82) This is in stark contrast to her disdain for her own and the personal pasts of those around her. These racially ascribed qualities in the passer demonstrate both the effectiveness of racist discourse and the social constructedness of 'race'.

Wicomb also demonstrates that class differences occur between metropolitan whites and their colonial counterparts. The latter are presented as a 'creolised' (and thus inferior) form of metropolitan culture, marginalised by the former as being unsophisticated, less developed or stagnant through its severance from the original, 'pure' (and thus superior) culture. The author describes how, while race wars occupy greater society, intra-racial battles over class occur simultaneously. This is shown in the relationship between the white municipal councillor, Carter, and his new English supervisor. Carter's detachment from the metropole is evident in his anxiety about not being able to distinguish between lower and higher classes of Britons. He is, however, able to distinguish between class in South Africa, "through the colour of their shirts", no less. (138) Carter claims that this is, "how the criminal and the lower classes betrayed themselves, how they could be distinguished from the decent citizen". (138) The irony is that he betrays his own detachment from the colonial provinciality and

demonstrates his outsider status through his inability to predict the weather. Being over-dressed in the heat, his white shirt turns grey – the colour “favoured by the lower classes”. (138) In a final twist to the absurdity of this classist farce, Wicomb implicates more players when she reveals that Carter’s wife is responsible for ‘supervising’ the amount of bleach added to the final rinse by the servants – whom she deems, through their ‘racial inferiority’, cannot be trusted to perform this all important, class defining task. Carter lacks none of the decisiveness in his ability to adjudge ‘race’ though. On first meeting Helen, he immediately detects that her nipples are brown (through four layers of clothing), that her cheekbones are prominent, and deduces that she is thus not white. Wicomb shows how the hierarchies of class, ‘race’ and gender intersect with the public and private spheres and that complex relationships exist between the players who occupy these spaces and ultimately influence their social positions.

Wicomb’s subject-matter, complex narrative technique and characterisation draw attention to post-apartheid South Africa as being distinguished by various and often conflicting notions of ‘race’ and coloured identity. Liberal façades and radical hopes that suggest that ‘race’ does not matter are presented alongside lived realities of internalised racism and continued racial anxiety. After the revelation that she is actually coloured, Marion expresses her understanding of the arbitrariness of ‘race’ – that in the new social climate it is no longer the currency whereby identity is measured.

However, Marion is unable to grasp what the difference is between the past and the present and who she is without the signifier of ‘race’ to delimit her sense of self, her past and her future. She tries to articulate this racial turmoil when she says: “It may be true that being white,

black or coloured means nothing, but it is also true that things are no longer the same; there must be a difference between what things are and what they mean." (106) The narrator explains: "The difference – that is what Marion cannot get her head around." (106) She seems to be conflicted by the presence of the 'new' and a psyche that has developed through a lifetime of being brought up in an overwhelmingly racialised and racist environment. Marion suggests that the solution to the problem may be to go back and forth between races and identities: "Perhaps I can now keep crossing to and fro, to different places..." (107) Brenda trivialises Marion's anxieties at discovering her newfound race by telling her that colouredness does not have to be perceived as a "tragedy". (102)

In this way, Wicomb comments ironically on Millin's essentialist belief in the doomed fate of coloureds and the implication that they have no agency or self-determination. Geoff displays contradictory views about Marion's newly discovered 'colouredness'. When Marion first tells him about her discovery, he uses liberal white rhetoric in an attempt to dispel the significance of Marion's anxieties about 'race'. According to the narrator: "He [Geoff] says that it doesn't matter, that he along with the entire country has got beyond all that old stuff about race, and that she too should put it behind her." (105) His liberal façade, however shows cracks when he insists on being present when the black businessman, Vumile Mkhize, whose car Marion accidentally scraped, calls at Marion's office after hours. Geoff's insistence on protecting Marion reveals an enduring irrational white fear about 'black peril', embodied in the black male.

This fear takes on sexual connotations when white women are concerned, enlisting the pervading stereotype of the black male as

sexual threat to vulnerable virtuous white women. Geoff expresses similar racial anxieties on the dangers of visiting coloured spaces: “The townships are dangerous even in the daylight, he says, although he has never been to one.” (78) Geoff’s racial generalisations are an indication that his liberal views are at best a thin veneer coating an irrational racial antagonism towards black and coloured people – in effect a form of apartheid’s *‘swart gevaar’*⁵⁷ paranoia. In the post-apartheid environment, the ‘white’ male characters – Boetie, Geoff and John – employ similar ‘liberal’ masculine attitudes that mask an underlying angst about the tenuousness of their social positions amid faltering racial hierarchies and diminished patriarchal control over women. Wicomb alludes to the superficiality in the ‘shift’ in white male racial attitudes post-apartheid, and links it to their fear of being labelled racist and consequently “left behind” (19) amid democratic political, economic and social reform.

This mistrust is not the preserve of white males though, and the rural middle class coloured, Mrs Murray, declares her mistrust of blacks when she states that, “the decent coloured people of Wuppertal voted for the Nationalists” and “don’t want to have anything to do with violence”. (96) Mrs Murray’s black prejudices are conveyed in physical terms. Her beliefs are strongly reminiscent of Millin’s views on ‘flawed blood’, and the essentialising of coloureds in heavily racialised language. In a gesture of seeking racial affirmation for her racist views, she ironically turns to Brenda for support when she characterises the coloured woman in terms of her physiognomy. She describes the dark-skinned Mrs Karelse as being, “[q]uite a dark-skinned woman, you know, although with good features and wavy kind of hair, but nice and smooth.” (94) Wicomb uses descriptions such as these to show how black female bodies are subjected to especially careful physical scrutiny

⁵⁷ ‘Black peril’

in racial classifications. Helen, being light-skinned, is attributed with being, “a real beauty, fair with long hair...” while the light-skinned John is described as being, “quite a presentable chap”. (95) However, coloured women seem to experience the most invasive critique of their physical characteristics, a tendency that harks back to colonial times. Although gendered power dynamics may have shifted post-apartheid, it can be argued that South Africa remains a patriarchal society that emphasises physical appearance and femininity as being at the forefront of women’s attributes, as opposed to intellectual or economic power, or the physical strength by which men are appraised.

Hair and skin colour, the two most ‘reliable’ and therefore most often used phenotypical markers of ‘race’, were considered jointly to provide a basis for distinguishing between different ‘races’ in a ‘scientific’ manner. Hair provided a particularly arbitrary marker in racial classification, with the infamous ‘pencil test’⁵⁸ offering a humiliating case in point. Cilliers (1963) gives a commonly held view of the relationship between skin colour and hair. Following on from colonial categorisations, he places more significance on the power of hair to mark ‘race’, since indigenous peoples were generally not dark-skinned:

The upper social class were those who resembled the Whites most closely in appearance. Middle class people were those who had so-called “trappies haar”, i.e. a kind of frizzy hair midway between pepper-corn and straight hair. The lower class were those with “short hair”, i.e. pepper-corn. Special derogatory terms applied to these people and were in common use amongst Coloureds themselves. (Cilliers, 1963:

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⁵⁸ A ‘biological’ component of the test to determine ‘race’, whereby a pencil or pen was inserted in the applicant’s hair to test for straightness. Hair straightness was presumed to signify a white identity, provided that other factors relating to physical appearance and social acceptance were also in place.

The title of Pat Stamatélos's passing novel, references hair directly, which is an indication of the significance hair holds for the would-be passer. She notes the relationship of having straight hair with authentic 'whiteness' when her adolescent passing character, Lorrain, straightens her friend's frizzy hair in order to aid her performance of whiteness. Although it sounds far-fetched that these arbitrary 'markers of race' could be used as the basis for a group's social development, Zimitri Erasmus (2001), as a South African scholar who defines herself as coloured, echoes this sentiment. She discloses the fact that she had internalised these beliefs through her perceptions of self, shaped by living in an environment in which notions of the superiority of an Eurocentric aesthetic dominated: "[T]he shape of my nose and texture of my hair placed me in the middle on the continuum of beauty as defined by both men and women in my community. I had neither 'sleek' hair nor *boesman korrels*⁵⁹." (Erasmus, 2001: 13)

Glenise Lewendal (2004) shares similar conceptions of entangled coloured female body politics when she hints at the conflation of what is perceived as femininity and the white ideal of beauty:

I have to acknowledge how the racist and sexist culture shaped the ways in which I thought the 'feminine' body should appear in terms of body shape, colour of the skin and texture of hair. (Lewendal, 2004: 142)

The "racist and sexist culture" that Lewendal speaks about here is not specifically race-defined, i.e. coloured culture, or dominant culture's perceptions of what coloured culture entails. Elements of racism and sexism pervade both. Both for Erasmus in terms of beauty, and for Lewendal in terms of femininity, the attributes associated with white females represented the aesthetic ideal to which some coloured females

⁵⁹ The derogatory description of the hair of African indigenes, which was often described as peppercorn hair.

strove in order to gain social acceptance, and which was only possible by 'erasing' the outer markers of blackness. Hairdressers all over the Cape Flats – and indeed upmarket salons servicing white and black women who choose to have their hair straightened – are still in the business of straightening and relaxing unruly or *kroes*⁶⁰ 'coloured' hair. However, the stigma attached to the perceived 'lack' in coloured women of *not* having naturally straight hair (and that thus 'necessitates' hair straightening) has abated. While the politics of hair in a post-apartheid society is less tangled and women have the agency to choose whether to straighten or to leave their hair natural, or even to shave it all off, female passers were not afforded this luxury.

In *Playing*, the importance of possessing the 'right' combination of Caucasian physical characteristics is made apparent throughout: "Quite a dark skinned woman, you know, although with good features and wavy kind of hair, but nice and smooth." (94); "...they say she was now a real beauty, fair with long hair -" (95); "Helen's mother doted on her pale-skinned, skinny child with rosy cheeks and tints of copper in her hair" (132); and, "The grandmother seems lighter, more European looking, although her eyes are slanted; her hair is grey and wavy..." (173) Wicomb alludes to the necessity for *both* features to operate simultaneously when Helen expresses her relief that her baby daughter has been born with "pale skin and smooth hair", relief which is turned into irrational anxiety at the thought that, "the child's hair would grow into a mass of frizzy curls." (125) For Helen, like all passers, the unborn child, with its unpredictable genetic features, once born, has the potential to out her counterfeit identity.

⁶⁰ *Kroes* refers to the frizzy, kinky or Afro hair type generally associated with coloureds and Africans.

Even in the post-apartheid period, perceptions of the inferiority of coloureds persist, and are linked to their perceived lack of culture in relation to white cultural achievements. Facets of local coloured culture are denigrated as being inferior by Mrs Murray, and Khoi rock paintings are thus not deemed worthy of the “fashionable” status they have received post-apartheid. (93) She represents the political opposite of Brenda, who values coloured culture (79) like the rock paintings Mrs Murry trivialises, and is indifferent to European colonial history (82). Wicomb juxtaposes the two female characters’ divergent perceptions of coloured identity, demonstrating the variation in representations of evolving coloured identities, spatially and generationally. Ironically, yet maybe also predictably, it is John, the coloured male still passing for white in the ‘new’ South Africa, who is presented as having retained the most racist mannerisms. During apartheid, and under the direction of Helen, his unstable positioning as a passer demands vigilance and duplication of white mannerisms. He insists that his racist language and behaviour post-apartheid are a consequence of the normalised discourse of racism during apartheid. He denigrates coloureds by referring to them as “bergies”⁶¹ (12), “hotnos too lazy to work” (14), “hotnosmeid” (59), “uppity coloureds” (124); and blacks as, “kaffirs of the new South Africa.” (13)

John, unlike Helen, is not afraid of being unmasked as a fraud. John’s experiences as a successful play-white has progressed into racial arrogance, which translates into overcompensation in his performance of whiteness post-apartheid. With a diminished focus on ‘race’ as the measure of social status post-apartheid, John is no longer as secure in

⁶¹ The Afrikaans word, ‘*bergies*’ translates directly to ‘small mountains’, but the term is a racial signifier, with its origins in colonial history, for coloured people who often sought refuge from a repressive society in the caves of Cape Town’s Table Mountain.

his identity, which has remained fixed. Marion recognises her father's instability when she says:

He has no idea, she thinks, none at all of the terrible injury he has done to her, to his family, to himself. His belief in the might of whiteness surpasses everything else; he does not know that the world around him has changed, that it has lost its pristine, Reckitts Blue whiteness." (155)

It is clear that John does not identify as coloured, and his passing has evolved into an almost complete race-change. Through his racist beliefs – stereotyped racist language, thoughts and actions – it could be argued that he has in fact come to represent *white* internalisation of racism and the unyielding nature of racist ideologies noted earlier.

The impact of apartheid policy in shaping distinct forms of colouredness and provoking 'passing' is reflected in Wicomb's fictional representations. Whilst visiting his parents, John learns of their imminent forced removal to a smallholding demarcated for coloured occupation under apartheid's Group Areas Act, he tries to contextualise what this means for his new identity and that of his daughter when he deliberates that, "Bergplaas was just not a possibility, not amongst those raggedy hotnos. It was a stunning thought. His little golden girl could not be exposed to that." (113) He vows that: "He, John Campbell, would never be bullied like that by the law; and as for his child, his little mermaid, she would hold the world in the palm of her pretty hand." (114)

John, whose coloured consciousness has already started to disintegrate, appears incapable of relating to or empathising with his parents, and contemplates the situation as though an outsider. John sees himself as a white male with all the entitlements that this entails, completely out of touch with the realities dispossessed coloureds faced as a result of the

oppressive system from which he is benefiting. He finds it abhorrent to expose his “little golden girl” to the “raggedy hotnos” of the coloured settlement, but does not consider the psychological or financial implications of the eviction on his aging parents, thinking instead of himself: “What on earth would he [John] do?” (113) By the time they leave for Cape Town, John’s resolve to pass for white permanently is complete.

John’s initial *laissez-faire* attitude to life, and lack of insight into the apparent finality of choosing to pass for white, is demonstrated when the greater political signification underlying the simple act of meeting his brother on a public train platform finally dawns on him. He is confronted by the stark realisation that apartheid society prohibits all inter-racial association, public and private, and that choosing a white existence is final. By closing the blinds and switching off the light in the train compartment, he symbolically shuts out his family and any future association with colouredness. Yet, even despite his complicity in unscrupulous racialised behaviour, John is presented in a sympathetic light when compared to Helen – as a man deceived and finally emasculated by his overly-ambitious wife. The gender bias within a highly patriarchal society is demonstrated by the manner in which John accepts whiteness as an entitlement with ease, while Helen feels compelled to earn her place in white society through “vigilance and continual assessment”, at the expense of her relationships with her family. (131) She is unable to shed her marginal status, regardless of the alterations to her outward characterisation. Helen’s paranoid pursuit of ‘respectable whiteness’ leads her to suspect that her neighbours are coloured, play-whites. Her performance of whiteness has merged wholly into her sense of self and she is unable to distinguish between reality and the subterfuge of passing for white. Because of the ‘racial

inferiority' she ascribes to colouredness in her deranged state of mind, and because she cannot identify which are and which are not play- whites, she reasons that it is best not to associate with any of her neighbours. This characterisation places Helen in an unsympathetic light that is only alleviated by brief moments of vulnerability that the author allows. It is ironic that it is precisely that selfishness – which is perceived by Helen as selflessness – in trying to circumvent the burden that 'race' places on coloureds through passing, that eventually erodes their relationship. However, the unremitting presence of the gender hierarchy that compels Helen to act in specific ways that allow her to demonstrate respectable feminine virtue and self-control in order to access power are brought to play by Wicomb. The addition of performances of gender on an already overburdened repertoire of 'race', 'class' and 'culture' causes Helen's mask to crack – literally. But perhaps the idea that Helen has more to gain from being a white woman than John has in being a white man (versus coloured) is not compelling enough to induce empathy for Helen's instability in the reader. John takes refuge in the belief that raising Marion with the material benefits of whiteness will redeem him from abandoning his coloured identity: "They must raise the child without the burden of history." (152) The "burden" is revealed to Marion when she uncovers her parents' secret, and the selfish futility of their 'sacrifice' is exposed.

Helen, in contrast to John, on her arrival in Cape Town, quickly recognises the distinctions within white society, is aware of the "many shades of whiteness" (128) that ranges between "respectable whiteness" (131) and the "raggedness" (129) of poor whites. She blames John's complacency at being satisfied with being mistaken for a rural Afrikaner for their lack of prosperity: "What's the point of working hard, of building a new life, if your husband is determined to be

backward, a poor white?" (10) Helen regards mastery of the English language and culture as an antidote to the threat of being deemed a 'poor white'.⁶² Yet, she is unable to comprehend that it is the combination of their working class status and lack of formal education, paired with their location in a lower socioeconomic neighbourhood, and not necessarily John's refusal to conform to 'decent' English whiteness, that deems them poor whites. In the same way that play-whites threatened the social order, so too did poor whites, who often lived in close proximity to coloureds, blacks and other minority groups in Cape Town's inner city residential areas at the end of the nineteenth century, well before apartheid legislation segregated people according to 'race'.

Colonial fears of degeneration through interracial contact (especially sexually through 'miscegenation') explored in the previous chapter, continues in apartheid ideology regarding physical and moral 'degeneration' feared through close inter-racial living arrangements. 'Race purity' was once again being undermined, but now, in light of the potential for more evenly matched economic and social competition between the 'races', carried more of a threat to the social order. Whereas before, an ethnic distinction existed between Khoi and slave 'subordinates' and 'superior' whites, here was a situation in which the playing fields were virtually level in terms of language, education,

⁶² Poor whiteism was exacerbated by the Great Depression of the early 1930s, which saw an influx of rural tenants and small-scale farmers who, rather than compete for work with coloured and black labourers as sharecroppers, relocated to towns and cities in search of work. (Worden, 1994: 59) However, their lack of relevant urban skills placed them in a precarious position with regards to employment. Since coloured and black workers commanded lower wages and possessed the advantage of experience, poor whites were again in a position of competition with the 'lower' classes.

occupation, Western social mores and values, and (with the exception of Muslims) religious affiliations.

While the sexual threat to white women and men pervades colonial 'black peril' discourse, and is documented as the core for apartheid policies like segregation, the sexual risk attached to being black *and* female in white dominated society is often silent, gagged by shame. In the novel, Wicomb reveals a patriarchal hierarchy that oppresses black women in distinctly sexual terms, and of which black men, who enjoy social superiority in relation to black women, are largely ignorant. Helen is muted by her own insecurity and the shame of the sexual defilement she unflinchingly bore in order to transcend her 'inferior' coloured identity. Even long after the sexual violation has been perpetrated against her, Helen feels condemned to silently carry the shame of her 'complicity' in the sexual act that allowed her to win them their 'freedom' from marginality. The humiliation Helen endures is portrayed almost as a test of her resolve to achieve 'whiteness'. It is a turning point in her racial choices, and represents a painful means to an end in acquiring agency. At this point, she could just as easily have deferred her decision, but by persevering, the extent of the desperation coloured women faced as an oppressed class is brought fully to bear. Instead of abandoning the plan to reclassify, Helen dons the mask of the subordinate and performs the role of 'sexualised other' that is demanded of her by the white male. Wicomb presents the reader with a context that is aimed at invoking empathy with the flaws in the woman's character, as opposed to simply judging her as being opportunistic.

Helen, who had thought through every step meticulously, had not imagined that the plan would include humiliation of this kind. She admonished the sad face in the mirror of her powder compact, coaxed

it into smiling, for sacrifices had to be made and she had no one to rely on but herself. (140)

She realises that in a patriarchal hierarchy, even though John is positioned above her, that as a coloured male, he is socially emasculated. She thus takes it upon herself to win their agency by performing colouredness under the white male gaze. However, she does not allow the gaze to penetrate beyond the “pancake make-up” she wears, and she assumes a disembodied role in order to distance herself from her actions and endure the degradation. The mask represents Helen’s control, her defense as a sexualised object. Coating her face in make-up serves also to mask her coloured identity, and at this point, she has already begun to develop an alter ego that is unrecognisable, even to Helen. In reality though, she cannot distance herself from what she perceives society determines her identity to be. Invoking the piety of Christianity to justify her actions, she portrays herself as a martyr in her willingness to endure the ‘sacrifices’ necessary for their future. She bears her role as ‘woman’ alone, being both the root of the burden of shame and the bond that holds society together:

She could not rely on Campbell to lift a finger; it was left to her to make the sacrifice. She found a ready example in Christ, who died on the cross before rising as the Saviour, whose love washed away the past, the old misdemeanours, and who would not object to renewal. (142)

Helen’s delusions about ‘obliteration’ are essentially a psychological defense mechanism against the sexual trauma that she anticipates from Carter. She thus forfeits her coloured body, in which she places no value, and sees the “degradation that Carter seemed intent on meting out” (142) as a necessary part of the purification process, in the obliteration of her tainted coloured identity. In the same way that Jesus’s crucifixion and death led to his rebirth as the immortal saviour, so Helen expects to cast off her defiled coloured body and to re-immerge, reborn in the purity imagined in whiteness.

Once she has determined the “necessity of whatever had to be done” (142), Helen’s confidence in her plan is returned, albeit short-lived. During the ensuing after-hours visits to Carter’s offices, she experiences the extent of what that ‘sacrifice’ entails. Helen appeals simultaneously to the man’s social and moral sense when she pleads: “Please Mr Carter, this is not right. I’m a married woman; the body is the temple of the Lord.” (143) But when the official insinuates his knowledge of her ‘true racial identity’ by remarking on her “luscious blackberry nipples”, Helen realises that she has been exposed. (143) In terms of sexualised racial discourses, Helen’s body, marked by its light skin, is a signifier of prior ‘miscegenation’, and thus female ‘promiscuity’, which justifies colonisation of her body. According to Pamela Scully (1997), “when race, class, sexuality and gender were put up against one another, a woman’s sexuality was determined by her race: class and culture could not “rescue” her”. (Scully, 1997: 175) Until this point, Helen has thought of herself as being only at a *gender* disadvantage to the white male. She thus feels justified in using her voice to appeal to Carter’s Christian morality to protect her ‘virtue’. But when ‘*race*’ enters the equation the disadvantage is doubled, and she realises that any further attempt at appeal is futile. She thus concedes to his demands:

Thus Helen was reminded of her obligation. Trembling in her petticoat, she understood that she would not get away with being simply the object of his attentions, that the price was to show willing, that she would have to cooperate. (143)

‘Although Wicomb does not expand fully on what is meant by Helen’s obligation to “show willing”, the phrase contains infinite sexual connotations that almost seem to suggest that she is required to *live up to* the stereotypes associated with the role; namely, promiscuity, immorality, deviousness, and sexual complicity, among others. (143)

After the first meeting exposes what his sexual expectations of her is, Helen tries to appease her actions by thinking about her mother's fortitude. However, her resolution to attain 'whiteness' at any cost is complete when she recalls the poverty she endured in a family financially supported by an uneducated, widowed coloured mother.

But the image of that bed, the narrow canvas fold-up that precisely fitted a stretched adolescent body with arms held close to her sides, was sobering. (140)

Even though she had not envisioned her plan taking this direction, the thought of returning to that state of abject poverty is enough for Helen to forgo her Christian morality. Like other passing women in this study, including Elmira, Lorrain and Clare, evading poverty is the catalyst for their seemingly brash decisions to pass. They are united in their desire to achieve social mobility – apparently at any cost to themselves, and despite the risk of physical abuse, alienation or condemnation by society at large. Meg Samuelson (2007) argues against the feminising of sexual violence as being, “produced as an experience peculiar to women”, that makes it a “women’s issue” divorced from articulated male experience and thus denied social relevance. (Samuelson, 2007: 121) In Helen’s case, the inferiority of her gender is conflated with her diminished class and ‘race’ status to completely quash the social relevance of her abuse. Silence is synonymous with coloured female subjugation.

The paradox of Helen’s obligation to “show willing” is that she is simultaneously required to do so in disembodied silence. (143) She is made to endure four trips to Carter’s office before he ‘rewards’ her with the affidavit ‘proving’ her ‘race’. Helen’s body is thus yielded to Carter as sexual barter for her ‘racial freedom’: “I trust, Mrs Campbell, that

this will do the trick, he said in a businesslike fashion.” (144) By giving her the affidavit, Carter concedes the release of her sexual obligation to him, but by calling her ‘Mrs Campbell’, he intimates her continued objectification and lack of freedom within patriarchy. He reminds her that although she may be eligible for the benefits entitled to her newly acquired ‘race’, that ultimately she remains the possession of a ‘lesser’ male, in the form of her coloured husband. Her possession of the piece of paper that confirms her as being accepted as ‘white’ in ‘white’ society confers on her a voice. The affidavit reunites her “obliterated” body with her newfound voice and agency, so that after her ‘race-change’ she, “spoke with such civility, such ease”, that her racial identity is no longer contestable. (145) For Helen, in the battle between ‘race’, sex, culture and class, ‘race’ surpasses all other signifiers of identity. Her ‘freedom’ is subject to maintaining the façade of authenticity and she gradually loses her voice as she realises the impossibility of the task.

For a woman within patriarchal society, the marriage contract confers rights through the male to whom she is bound. Helen is therefore trapped in an ambiguous position. She essentially needs a husband to confer social standing on her, but at the same time, John is presented as the one preventing her from achieving full social potential. In the same way that Elmira becomes socially accepted through her white husband in GSC, so Helen assumes the status of her husband. Unlike Elmira though, Helen does not abandon her husband and child to make a fresh start elsewhere. Whether it is as a result of her lack of financial means, whether she is trapped by maternal obligations or the burden of ‘respectability’, Helen’s decision to stay with John is contrary to the self-serving nature which characterised her actions before. Perhaps Marion’s insight into the dynamics of her parents’ situation is the most enlightening:

Playing in the light? Perhaps not, Marion thinks. More like hiding – hiding in the light. For without education, which brings not only knowledge and understanding of mores and manners, but above all confidence, that timid pair in the surrounding glare of whiteness must surely have been recognised as play-whites. (124)

A lack of education is perhaps the primary reason for Helen staying with John. Unlike Elmira, who is comparatively well educated and who is socialised in a white boarding school environment, and in the concomitant privileges of whiteness in childhood, Helen becomes privy to dominant society's social mores only at a relatively late stage in her life. Her socialisation occurs primarily in her work environment since she doesn't trust herself to have friendships. Although relatively dominant in the private domain, Helen lacks the self-confidence to 'try for white' on her own. By occupying multiple positions in society (i.e. hegemonic white society), she becomes exposed to discrimination along class and sex lines as a 'white' woman, as well as within the 'coloured' group, where the female is the subordinate sex in terms of race, 'gender' and class. Helen cannot completely shed the feelings of inferiority that her colouredness signifies, since the couple is essentially still unsocialised in what being 'white' entails. At home, in the presence of their daughter, they keep up the pretense of what, under Helen's direction, they determine to be 'whiteness'. Living in a working-class, racially ambiguous area, the house she lives in metaphorically comes to represent her prison.

The home as site of unhomeliness for the passer

In the novel, Wicomb uses the 'home' as a metaphor for belonging and social identification – in gendered and racialised terms. Since colonial times, coloured women have been the custodians of white homes,

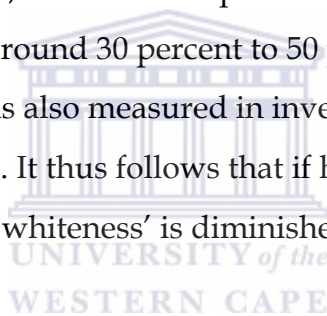
replicating for themselves post-colonially the respectability of the homes they maintained as slaves and servants. While Millin is at pains to represent the role of coloured women within the white domestic space as restricted to a servile function (81), she also demonstrates the folly of social transgressions attempted by coloured women who do not 'know their place', in the characters of Deborah and Elmira. For Elmira, the home becomes a temporary space, as she drifts from place to place as a passer, until she returns home, to die with her coloured family. The home ideally represents a space of belonging, but for the passer, it often comes to symbolise an unwelcoming or even threatening place, and an unstable space to occupy. In *Kroes*, the home betrays the passer, and Patty is remanded to jail when she is found trespassing in a white area. However, the ultimate transgression occurs when a passer returns to the original home and is unmasked. In Nella Larsen's *Passing*, her passing character Clare is caught socialising in the home of black acquaintances by her racist white husband who immediately recognises her belonging in the home. He identifies her as a "a nigger, a damned dirty nigger!" (79), before she falls to her death out of a sixth floor window.

The house, in patriarchal society, represents the domain of the female. The house takes on a significant role in *Playing*, as Wicomb distinguishes between the various houses in the novel and makes them almost complicit in moulding the characters that occupy them. The Campbell house is the one that is most significant, not only because it is the home of the protagonists, but because it also proves to be the most problematic for its occupants. The two-bedroomed Observatory house is introduced by the narrator as a, "cramped tin-roofed terraced house". (4) Although small by middle-class white standards, the size of the house is not the only issue of concern, but more so, the permanence it

comes to represent. Helen initially envisions it as being a temporary residence before moving up the slope of the mountain, to a bigger house that would befit their elevated 'white' status. However, the house is a reminder that Helen's ambitious plan to reach that goal was never realised, neither in her lifetime, nor after.

Marion compares their house with that of a childhood friend's home, situated above Main Road, which comes to represent the dividing line between the working and middle classes. Annie's home becomes a yardstick by which Marion evaluates the 'lack' her own house is thought to represent. In Marion's childhood memories, her house signifies the restriction of her movement and expression. The house, having only a very narrow verandah separating the front door from the pavement and the street, is blamed for Marion's confinement indoors, "even in summer". (9) In reality, the house is a scapegoat for keeping Marion from befriending people who could out her racial identity, and out of the sun, lest her tanned skin betray the family's imposter status. Helen's admonitions acquire a sinister air, as childish disobedience is threatened with the force of racial inferiority: "Did she want to end up like mad Mr Moolman ... burnt pitch black like a coloured..." (9) Marion's realisation that, "other people did not live in silence" (61), makes her envious of Annie's house. With its protective verandahs and unrestricted, noisy life, it constitutes the opposite of her home environment, and the epitome of a *home*. Helen too, is envious of the Boshoffs' home, since the houses above Main Road represent her original intent, of owning a detached house, "up the slope of the mountain where they could see the curve of the bay" (130), and as such, unmitigated acceptance and belonging in 'white' society. The houses on the hill serve as uncontestable proof of racial authenticity.

Helen comprehends that she cannot be considered white by apartheid law if she associates with coloureds. For this reason, she immediately moves out of the coloured boarding house when she and John are married and into servant's quarters in a white area where they are not known, before moving into the house in the white suburb of Observatory. What Wicomb impresses on the reader is the absurdity of the 'logic' of 'race'. John Western (1996) confirms Helen's suspicions when he describes the likelihood of the area being inhabited by a more affluent class of coloureds who were able to pass for white. He notes that, "[i]n Observatory ... the White population fell by one-third from 1936 to 1960, while the Coloured population increased by almost half; during the same period, the Coloured portion of the total Observatory population rose from around 30 percent to 50 percent." (Western, 1996: 52) Helen's whiteness is also measured in inversely proportionate terms in relation to an 'other'. It thus follows that if her neighbours are actually coloured, her 'whiteness' is diminished.



The Observatory house is an oppressive, silent prison, in contrast to the house in the coloured working class township on the Cape Flats where Brenda Mackay lives. The house in Bonteheuwel represents the social reality that likely awaited Marion and her uneducated and unskilled working-class parents if they had not opted to 'try for white'. The two-bedroomed Mackay house, presided over by its Moravian Mission matriarch, with its six occupants, is completely devoid of privacy, and in this case, silence constitutes a luxury. In the same way that she was envious of Annie's 'normality' as a child, so Marion is resentful of Brenda's social skills, which she condescendingly attributes to the close living arrangements of people in townships. Bonteheuwel is not romanticised by Wicomb, who describes an undercurrent of latent

violence – *skollies*⁶³ loiter on street corners, the Mackays' doors are locked, windows can not be left open at night, since thieves remove burglar bars through open windows, and parked cars and drivers are not safe at night. While the two houses do not share the commonality of silence, both are complicit in restricting their occupants' freedom of movement. Ironically, though, this is the house in which the protagonist feels most at home, despite the cramped, noisy, dangerous portrayal of the home by its occupants. Stamatélos's Patty experiences a similar 'homecoming' in the cramped homes of working class coloureds she visits with, where shared experiences translate into a sense of homeliness and belonging.

More than just a desire to find belonging in homes, passers are denied the shared experiences of cultural life. Helen longs for the social cohesion by which the coloured community is characterised, but at the same time feels repulsed by this desire, which threatens to negate not only her theories of 'white superiority', but also the 'progress' she has made in severing her ties with the coloured community and attaining the superior status of 'whiteness'. This desire to go to the dance is similar to an incident in *Passing* in which the permanent passer Clare Kendry expresses a desire to go to the Negro Welfare League dance to be with black people from whom, as a passer, she is socially disconnected. Whereas Clare defies the danger of being exposed as a play-white and goes to the dance, Helen cannot face the possibility of going and 'reverting to type', as it were. In an attempt to overcome this perceived flaw in her consciousness and to stem this errant nostalgic desire, Helen conjures up stereotypical images of the jollity, loudness and vulgarity of coloured culture from which her race-change has acquitted her. Helen's indecision about what constitutes 'authentic

⁶³ Gang members

whiteness' translates into debilitating apprehension, and she opts to adopt conservative private and public lives that limit social contact with white society, so as to minimise their chances of being exposed as racial 'frauds'.

The passer in the throes of the 'wicked city'

Playing is set in urban Cape Town, but the protagonists represent the exodus of rural inhabitants for the economic opportunities offered by the city. Wicomb employs a common theme to South African writers, what Vernon February calls, "the black man in the throes of the wicked city". (February, 1981: 82) February identifies a racially ascribed pattern within South African fiction, in which 'race' is the determining factor in the plot. He satirically paints the racial hybrid's fate as involving a formula that describes, "the 'Cape coloured' from the rural area and his fall from grace, in which the centre of action is invariably Cape Town, the natural habitat of this species." February continues: "Their crises are sometimes almost similar to those of the Afrikaner youngster, in that they take place within in the trinity of Church, language and God." (February, 1981: 82) At the outset, it appears as though Wicomb is following the same path, with the coloured characters' move from their country homes and simple ways of life constantly being challenged, and their morality and religious values assaulted by the corrupting influences of life in the city. However, for the light-skinned couple, an alternative reality becomes possible, which is accompanied, in varying degrees in the two characters, by its own set of moral dilemmas. The author uses the city and specifically the ambiguous characterisation of the city as a place of both potential possibility and corruption. The city is conceived of as a mystical place where opportunities for anonymity and new beginnings exist, where rural life can be traded for

sophistication, and where a desirable city life can be bought in material goods.

The narrator conveys this in the description of John's arrival in Cape Town from the farm: "John had come to Cape Town only a few weeks earlier, and just as everyone had said, the city was indeed a promised land of hustle and bustle and the clink of coins." (53) For John, the city means opportunity for employment; but for Helen, it means an opportunity to reinvent her racial identity completely. The first step in Helen's transformation is anglicising her surname from the Afrikaans 'Karelse' to 'Charles'. The necessity for this change is three-fold: It helps distance her from both her rural and possible slave origins; it destroys any traceable link to coloured heritage, which allows her to develop a new, anonymous, and therefore uncontested, identity; and it adds a measure of sophistication and class status that British acculturation is presumed to hold over an Afrikaner status. At this point in her reinvention, Helen's moral conscience directs her actions and she still relies on "God's understanding and forgiveness", but only until they are "established in their new lives." (129) She justifies her name change politically, as a means of detaching from her identity the injustices of slavery, apparently attributed to Afrikaners, not the English. The first signs of Helen's delusion are already occurring, as her decision to change her surname is based on the relationship between what she determines to be desirable physical attributes and an undesirable language: "It was simply a way of claiming her liberty, especially since nice coloured people, those with at least good hair, would have nothing to do with Afrikaans." (128) Another reason why she rejects her Afrikaans surname is that the possessive 'se' in 'Karelse' shackles the bearer of the name to a slave, and hence, an unmistakably *coloured*, past. To add credibility to her new identity while in pursuit of the ultimate

echelon of whiteness, Helen decides to replace her Moravian and John's Dutch Reformed religious denominations with the Anglican faith. In the city, even religion becomes contested, and the 'proper' faith becomes an achievement in the passer's arsenal of identity signifiers. Before, colonial laws like the refusal of baptism and marriage to slaves invoked religion as a means by which to deny slaves of civil rights. The author here shows how religion is used as a strategic means by which to claim the privileges otherwise withheld from non-whites in an oppressive society.

Like Vernon February, Millin describes the romantic rural setting as a safe haven for her naïve coloured characters in *God's Stepchildren*, and is also acutely aware of the potential threats that an urban move presents. Wicomb transposes her characters from the seemingly benign safety of the farm, to the city, yet unlike February and Millin, refuses the neat juxtaposition of rural innocence and urban corruption. The reality of what pastoral South Africa represents for these two authors of fiction is clear in their treatment of the rural setting. For Wicomb's coloured characters, rural life signifies poverty and lack of opportunities for mobility due to poor mission school education and urban migration that denuded the countryside of the labour potential vital for sustainable economic growth. She shows what a capitalist economy demands from the proletariat, in realistic terms, and how personal growth and prosperity are subject to breaking ties with rural life and moving to the city. Millin, in contrast, seems intent on exploiting the naïveté of her rural coloured characters who most often display a childlike need for the guidance and protection paternal white colonial culture presents. Coloureds are portrayed as being indebted to colonisers for imparting a modicum of civilisation, and thereby an opportunity for improving their lot. This characterisation reinforces

racial thinking in confirming that coloured people *belong*, as childlike primitive types, in the country. As such, the move is not encouraged, and where it does occur, it is not endorsed and signifies a character flaw.

In *Playing*, it is only in the character of the poorly educated and unstable John that the farm is romanticised to present a mythical place of purity and virtue as is depicted in his visit with his young daughter to his parents' farm. It is during this visit that the reality of both his decision to pass for white and the inescapable reach of apartheid's grasp, even into the most remote areas of rural South Africa, is shown. In John's distorted perceptions of his identity, he is torn between his Afrikaans, coloured, humble 'boer' / farmer origins and his newfound 'white', state-employed, successful city self. His yearning for the country is further confused by his wife's class aspirations. The narrator alludes to John's waning ability to reason as he vacillates between his various identities: "Of course he belonged to this land, to the farm, and the next morning he would be out there with Pa, milking the cows, setting the cabbage seedlings." (109-110) His naïve idealism is reiterated when the narrator admits that, "he had no trouble envisioning the impossible". (111) A page later this reverie of his invented life in the city is challenged by the admission that, "here [on the farm] he could be himself, as they said, although he was not entirely sure what that meant." (112-113)

Wicomb is clear about the effect of external influences on social identity, and does not ascribe John's indecisions solely to his decision to pass. She thus reiterates the point that identity is not static, but that it evolves over time and space. However, she also demonstrates how, under the influence of apartheid, identity *was* deemed a homogenous

entity, and since the performance of identity was monitored by the state, migrating between various identities was forbidden under apartheid law.

Reassigning 'race' post-apartheid

Zoë Wicomb effectively demonstrates the constructedness of 'race' and the arbitrariness of racial classification through the (as yet) unwitting passer, Marion, who represents a well-educated Afrikaner female living in a post-apartheid South Africa. With her initial introduction to the reader, as a representative of the post-apartheid subject, the author offers a sense that social change is merely cosmetic, and that a radical shift in apartheid rationale is perhaps far from imminent.

Marion's lack of political awareness is revealed in the thinly-veiled racist diatribe in which she reasons with herself that, "five, ten years ago, before the elections, when things were supposed to be so bad ... well, the city wasn't a haven for ragged people standing around and harassing car owners." (28) For Marion, the change in political climate is measured not in the promise of positive social change for all that democracy brought, but rather the potential for capitalist gain. While she is not averse to benefiting from the opportunities a free market economy has ushered in, she resents some of the consequences of democracy, like the invasion of the subaltern in what she still essentially regards as *her* space. Marion's romanticised version of the city's past is a deluded perception indicative of how effective the apartheid state was in sustaining that whitewashed façade for a privileged society that operated in near isolation from marginalised race groups.

Marion's ignorance of the reality of greater South African society is not surprising, since history was strongly prejudiced to favour the dominant group and realities were concealed in such a way as to not only distort, but to obliterate the truth. Marion's encounter with the "ragged people" of Cape Town echoes a scene in *God's Stepchildren*, when the English missionary, Rev. Flood, first disembarks in Cape Town and the narrator discloses that, "[h]e had no time to see the Hottentots (brothers to those distant, more savage people to whom he had come to minister) who were swarming around them." (27)

Portraying two completely different historical eras in Cape history, these two scenes constitute the 'progression' in coloured representation from a position of enslavement (marked by the invisibility of the indigenous people) to a status that today is advocated by the Constitution as being free and equal (marked by their embodiment and voices). A comparison of these coloured characters in Millin's and Wicomb's works offers insights into how coloured characters are represented in social and cultural terms. It seems that while constitutional changes provide coloureds with opportunities for advancement, relatively little has changed over the last seventy or so years in terms of how coloureds are often perceived in dominant society.

Considering that Helen is clearly the more dominant of the two parents, it is surprising that John's pseudo-Afrikaner leanings should have prevailed against Helen's predisposition for anglicising their lives. The child, Marion, is described as growing up "confident in her whiteness". (132) John is enamoured by the superficial identity that Marion adapts to so easily: "The posh school brought the miracle of new knowledge, the lovely drawn-out vowels and Boere songs". (132) That the child is not developing deeper facets of her identity through tangible family ties

and history does not seem to concern John. In the same way that Elmira's parents in *GSC* take pride in her performance of 'whiteness' and live vicariously through their daughter's 'achievements', so too does John marvel at the manifestation of this mythical construct, 'whiteness'. The legacy that Helen bequeaths to her daughter is a freedom from racial persecution, and Helen, although dissatisfied with her own life, believes that her "achievement was her legacy to Marion, a new generation unburdened by the past." (150) The full irony of being 'unburdened by the past' becomes apparent later, as Marion is forced to confront the effects of her parents' ill-conceived decisions regarding race when her coloured identity first becomes apparent. For John, old age and years of lies and deceit has culminated in an ambiguous identity.

John's rural origins as an Afrikaans-speaking farmer, and his appointment in a state-owned law enforcement agency, may have contributed to his alignment with Afrikaner nationalism. Although the specifics are not detailed in the novel [John's sister intimates his defection when she says: "Your father, turning himself into a Boer⁶⁴..." (166); and John openly admits to it when he tells Marion: "...I'm not talking about that lot, about terrorists. Remember Sharpeville, remember the kaffirs here on our own doorstep in Langa? Well, I was one of those who volunteered as a reservist to defend South Africa against the blarry Communists." (14)] John's passing leads to his becoming an agent for the apartheid state, which represents the ultimate betrayal of not only his coloured family, but also the country's unified black heritage. John's decision to become a reservist, especially in light of the deferential, almost cowardly manner in which he is otherwise characterised in the novel, says much about the influence of

⁶⁴ Meaning 'farmer'. In this context, 'Boer' may be 'coloured' slang for 'policeman'.

social control on white masculine identities in apartheid South Africa. Although not a focus of the novel, the silences around the social expectations with which men are faced, is symbolic of the unspoken demands of occupying the dominant male position.

Like her father, Marion's self-confidence in her 'whiteness' grows proportionally to her sense of entitlement and ignorance of the realities experienced by the perceived 'lesser races' from whom she is segregated in apartheid South Africa. The young Marion has already started associating likes and dislikes in racial terms. The loft at her grandparents' house is repulsive because it "smells like the babbie's⁶⁵ shop". (112) Arguably the most racially significant act in Marion's young life, and one that is repressed in her memory until after her coloured identity is revealed, is her betrayal of her childhood friend, Annie Boshoff. After it is publicly revealed that the child's father was involved in an extra-marital affair with a coloured woman, and he admits to being coloured and a play-white, Helen announces that, "[t]he Campbells could have nothing to do with them." (194) Helen reveals the means by which a 'superior race' is constructed in relation to an 'inferior race' in racist ideology when she effectively re-races Annie as "strictly speaking, coloured" (194). Marion's response at first is to plug her ears with her fingers while Helen derides the Boshoffs' 'inferior race', but within the overwhelmingly racialised home environment, she finally relents and internalises the 'threat' to her elevated racial status by renouncing her friendship with the child in a symbolic act of dismissal.

They did not speak; their eyes met briefly. Annie held out the scrapbook, passed it through the bars of the security gate, and turned

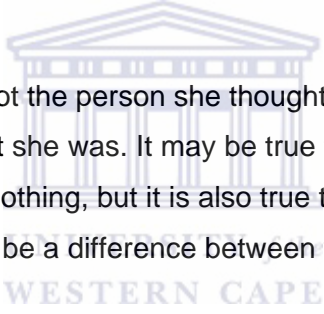
⁶⁵ A derogatory term used to denote an Indian or Muslim shop owner.

to leave. Marion shut the door. Before returning to her bed, she dropped the scrapbook into the dustbin in the backyard. (195)

The scrapbook comes to represent a shared identity, and by discarding it, the child Marion displays an adult cognition of white racial 'superiority' over the converse, 'inferior' black races. Through her simple child's act of relinquishing friendship on the basis of 'race', the foundation of Marion's adult racial beliefs is laid.

Having been exempted from the marginality apartheid society conferred on coloureds, in a post-apartheid setting, Marion is initially unable to comprehend the reasoning behind her parents' decision to pass for white. Marion contemplates three possible reasons, including that they thought themselves to be "dissidents"; that they were anarchists who had successfully escaped identification; or that they "thought only of their own advancement." (122) Marion perceives passing in the terms generally associated with passers as opportunists, cowards, deserters, and 'traitors' to their 'race', and decides that the latter is the obvious choice. Wicomb here demonstrates how 'race' is still inextricably linked to perceptions of entitlement when Marion cannot at this point align the desire for upward social mobility with inferior colouredness. The author alludes to a fundamental entitlement of being white, namely that the justness of white privilege is a given. In her encounter with her father's sister, the adult Marion begins to come to terms with the magnitude of having lived in racial ignorance her entire life. No longer the child with fingers stuck in her ears, Marion acknowledges as much after listening to Elsie's version of her parents' decision to pass for white: "... your poor father had nothing: no people, no politics, no wife to speak of, and because he thought of skin as the alpha and the omega, he grew up stupid and couldn't think properly about the world beyond passing for white." (171)

Marion is finally able to reconcile the inconsistencies in her past and make sense of her parents' behaviour. She understands how her father's lack of education, combined with the lack of opportunities available to non-whites in an oppressive society, constitute the main reasons for his complacency in remaining a play-white. Marion is thus forced to confront the paradoxical significance and irrelevance of 'race' and identities based on 'race'. While still denying the import of 'race', Marion nevertheless begins to envisage just how entwined it is in the day-to-day lives of people, but especially so for those not aligned with the dominant 'race'. The narrator explains how the change of racial perception has affected Marion's relationship with her white suitor, Geoff:


She is, after all, not the person she thought she was, let alone the person he thought she was. It may be true that being white, black or coloured means nothing, but it is also true that things are no longer the same; there must be a difference between what things are and what they mean. (106)

Wicomb manifests these differences in individual reality in Marion's heightened 'race' consciousness after she uncovers her parents' coloured identity. Whereas before, derogatory language and racial prejudice had not registered as offensive, she is now more sensitive to racial undercurrents in language and in people's attitudes and behaviours. One of the most noticeable of these changes in her level of racial intolerance is marked in the difference in her reactions to John's use of racially prejudicial language before and after learning of her parents' race-change. No longer able to remain complicit in, or distance herself from racial prejudice directed at the subaltern, Marion feels forced to take a stand in the politics of 'race' in South Africa. Early in the novel, when talking about being an army reservist, the narrator admits that, "there is no point in talking politics with [John]." (15)

When John says, “[t]hey kill you in your own garden, hack your head off with your own blunt spade. Haven’t you seen in the papers?”, Marion dismisses his stereotypical ‘black peril’ reasoning, with a resigned, “Ag Pa”⁶⁶. (13) This is in contrast to the politicised stance Marion takes after her racial reassignment. Now, John’s, “[d]on’t give my things to these lazy kaffirs”, is met with an uncharacteristic defiance: “Christ, Pa, ... don’t you have any manners? It wasn’t a kaffir, it was a hotnot⁶⁷ – she shouts the words at him. We Campbells can’t mind hottie se kind⁶⁸, can we now?” (182) Essentially, the outsider has become the insider. Marion attributes the change to having had a “personality change” or “finding” herself. (182)

After her coloured origins are exposed, Marion’s journey of self-discovery transports her to the colonial metropolis, where her sense of self is recontextualised. In London, Marion realises how distorted her racial frame of reference is. The social markers, which, in South Africa are embodied in skin, are not as overt here. Her encounter with an English woman on a train draws attention to her lack of understanding of the dynamics of class-based society:

The woman makes her feel foreign: here she doesn’t know the signs, can’t tell, as she would at home, whom to give the cold shoulder, whom to cut short. (199)

In this class-based society where ‘race’ plays a secondary role, Marion’s personal ideologies, so subsumed in the worth of skin colour, are unsettled. Wicomb engages the character of the successful black

⁶⁶ Oh Dad.

⁶⁷ Dennis Walder (1998) succinctly describes the origin and significance of this highly derogatory word: “‘Hotnot’ is an offensive version of the earlier ‘Hottentot’, given by early travellers to describe the indigenous people of the Cape, supposedly in imitation of a word in their songs, and more recently applied to any mixed-race or coloured person by whites, hence even among the people themselves a term of abuse.” (Walder, D. in Attridge & Jolly, 1998: 213)

⁶⁸ Directly translated from the Afrikaans, the derogatory, ‘hottie se kind’ means, ‘child of a Hottentot’, i.e. coloured person.

businessman, Vumile Mkhize, to provide an alternative to Marion's perceptions, both of race in post-apartheid South Africa, and racial passing. His presence on business in Scotland is symbolic of the economic transformation of commerce and black social mobility brought about by democracy. The country represents neutral ground, and apart from colonial ties, remains distant from the racial history that South Africa is imbued with. Marion criticises Scottish society for exhibiting racial prejudice when she and Vumi, "are stared at by staff and expensive clients alike" at a restaurant in Glasgow. (199) However, her reaction is perhaps mistaken, as Marion, who has become hyper-conscious of racial nuances, is unfamiliar with the foreign culture. Nevertheless, in Scotland, Marion experiences some sense of freedom from the language and prison of race, and she finds herself relating private thoughts and honest racial opinions to the black man. Paradoxically, she inadvertently experiences the invisibility that erstwhile passers sought as the key to becoming visible. She also relates personal details about her life, something she had never considered doing as a white woman in South Africa. In turn, Mkhize's acknowledgement of his parents' passing for coloured during apartheid is done in a matter of fact way that suggests that while he is not necessarily proud of what they had to endure to ensure a marginally better life, he realises that, "people do what they can to survive". (206) Unlike Helen and John who tried at all costs to obliterate their past, the Mkhizes' passing was purely a means to an end within a racially restrictive society, and that, "with the doors shut, they made sure that their children knew about their forebears, their Zuluness..." (205) Vumi describes how when apartheid ended, "my mum just took her wig off, right there among the coloureds, and now they're living nice and comfy in a black neighbourhood." (206) For Mkhize, passing is entirely pragmatic, and the experience does not seem to have affected him in

any deeply psychological way. There are even fewer testimonies of those classified black who passed for coloured, than coloureds passing for white in the historical records and academic texts. It is likely that retaining a coloured identity in the post-apartheid setting was no longer regarded as beneficial to blacks who adopted this marginal (but somewhat more privileged) 'race' during apartheid. For coloureds passing for white, on the other hand, the investment in belonging to the white 'race' appears to have been far deeper and existential.

Mkhize is presented as a person for whom ethnicity is all-important, but for whom race is inconsequential. Wicomb seems to propose that cultural roots and heritage be preserved, but that one's economic position within a class-based society is what ultimately determines status in a post-apartheid society. The author represents an ideal of non-racialism in a post-apartheid society that is a far cry from Millin's and 1920s dominant society's biologically deterministic assumption that one's destiny and potential are inextricably bound in race.

Imagining 'race' post-apartheid

In *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb confronts the idea of 'racial identity' by questioning how and why the social value ascribed to people is quantified through the arbitrary concept of 'race'. The novel opens with a seemingly random occurrence – a dead guinea fowl drops out of the sky and lands dead at the feet of the protagonist, and (the as yet unwitting to herself and the reader) passer, Marion. This random event sets the scene for Marion's classification – by the reader. However, just as the dead bird becomes hard to classify hanging upside down with its telltale spotted plumage rendered unreadable, so too does Marion's classification on the external or physical get inverted. Marion is described as an independent woman, living on her own, as being

hardworking and privileged, but yet thrifty. It is the narrator's initial description of the woman in strongly classist terms that allows the reader to make inferences about her race. The description of Marion's wealth and material possessions as "marker[s] of her success" (2) infers an upper middle class status, which adds to cementing her racial membership. Thus, even from the first encounter with Marion, her character is typecast in terms of privilege and entitlement. Marion's use of othering terms like "the girl" (1) and "such people" (1) in reference to her black housekeeper serves to convince the reader of the protagonist's affiliation with the dominant racial grouping. Wicomb, who admits that apartheid South Africa is "a world shaped by colour and the mystery of roots" (124) makes a point of not classifying Marion in distinctly racial terms. What the author seems to suggest is that there is no urgency in 'racing' Marion, as she is already 'obviously' white, and thus beyond reproach. Through the deliberate omission of 'race', she foregrounds how the production of whiteness is nevertheless 'naturalised' in a racially biased society. By the end of the first page of the novel, Marion's 'race' is already almost unmistakably defined, but she is finally classified by paternal descent when she describes her father as being a "boer" (4), the appellation traditionally describing an Afrikaans farmer. By initially withholding 'race', Wicomb challenges the classification imperative so routine in apartheid South Africa and enduring in post-apartheid society. At the same time, she demonstrates the primacy of whiteness as the dominant identity in South Africa, even post-apartheid, and by allowing the (as yet unknown to the reader) passing character to be read as 'indubitably white', she demonstrates the subjectivity of racial classification. Marion's assumed racial origins instill in her an identity that is reminiscent of the sentiment Voortrekker history entrenched in the minds of Afrikaners in South Africa, as a pioneering race. The adult Marion consciously embodies these ideals

and stereotypes. She sees herself in strongly Afrikaner terms as someone who, through hard work and determination, “presses on” (3) to reach her goals, even amid the barriers created by a patriarchal society, and repressive, working-class parents. Through Marion’s subsequent unmasking as an unintentional play-white, Wicomb also illustrates the ‘dilemma’ of losing a privileged identity and having it replaced by one regarded as less valuable, and even despised not only within hegemonic society, but by the very people to whom the identity has been ascribed.

Although racial passing may be outmoded, ‘passing’ does take on other guises. Wicomb exemplifies this with the character of Brenda. Certain expressions of being coloured shifted after and even before 1994, being a critical year in South African history. Wicomb demonstrates how society conditions coloured women to play down their intellectual ability in the work context, suggesting that while the subaltern female may well be admitted to the private sphere, she remains constrained by her ambiguous obligation to fulfill her role as both racial and sexual ‘other’, and ‘prove herself’ worthy of the position despite her ‘flaws’. After being appointed, Brenda admits to not disclosing all her qualifications on her application, citing that she had not mentioned an Honours degree for fear of being judged overqualified and thus unsuitable for the clerical position. After the admission of ‘guilt’, she assumes an over-dramatised submissive role, reminiscent of a colonial master/servant relationship.

Brenda lifted an uncharacteristically pathetic, tearstained face to her employer: she had a mother to support, a brother to get through college; if Marion felt that she could not be trusted after her lie, she would of course understand. (27)

However, far from being submissive and ashamed, Brenda subversively performs the stereotype to her advantage, playing the willing victim and thereby invoking Marion's white guilt for her own benefit. The university graduate is positioned in relation to her comparatively poorly educated white colleagues. Brenda uses a similar form of passing to gain advantage over Boetie, but with the white male, she adds a sexual component. By playing the acquiescent coloured female who is prepared to learn from his 'superior' white male experience, she manipulates his inflated sense of his own aptitude to relieve herself of tedious work. When compared to their post-colonial counterparts, coloured women in the new-South African context still do not have complete agency in what is still essentially a patriarchal society. They do, however, have access to greater social mobility due to the advantages that a class-based system offers. Marion's travel agency becomes a kind of microcosm for the new-South Africa, providing a portal into the different relationships and dynamics at play under a 'new' political dispensation. Brenda represents an educated post-apartheid coloured female, who, although still constrained by a patriarchal society, has evolved in the process of social transformation brought about through democracy. She is not as bound by her skin colour as her colonial, post-colonial and apartheid predecessors, but achieves social mobility through education.

Brenda is more emancipated in her choices and is freer to assert her opinions, although Wicomb shows that unspoken conventions still exist. These are demonstrated in Brenda's mock-deferential treatment of her male colleague, and the suggestion that she must "mind her manners" (84) when she is a guest in the company of Marion. Brenda's measured actions suggest that she is versed in the performance of identity, and that she is aware that, "South Africa's racial hierarchies

require subjective shifts relative to the power dynamics at play in the intercultural encounter.” (Strauss, 2009: 37)

Somewhat lacking in Wicomb’s representation of coloured women in her novel, is the role of female sexuality. Brenda is represented in an almost asexual light, and while her intellectual capacity is foregrounded, there is no sexual interest, apart from Marion’s mistaken assumption about an affair with her white ex-lover. In this respect, the other authors in this study provide a more rounded picture of the construction of coloured female identities. Even Millin, in the conservative 1920s, touches on the taboo subject of black female sexuality – albeit in a stereotypical and biased way. This is therefore a puzzling omission in Wicomb’s work, which otherwise provides a comprehensive representation of the intersections of race, class and gender in inscribing identities of coloured women in a post-apartheid setting. But without the inclusion of sex in this dynamic, the novel’s delineation of the extent and limits of female agency remains limited. While Wicomb might be deliberately excluding sex in order to refuse the set formulae for rendering coloured female subjectivities and experiences, she may well be suggesting a revolution in sexual stereotypes of black women. What is surprising is that black male sexuality receives more attention in the person of Vumile Mkhize, who graphically vocalises inter-racial sexual desire to, “see, no, touch fiery-red pubic hair”. (205) The primordial ‘knowledge’ of white male sexual license over the black female body that Carter displayed in relation to Helen appears to have abated in the post-apartheid context.

Within the microcosm of the office setting, the cleaner, Tiena, embodies the role of the stereotypically inferiorly educated, submissive coloured female. Marion first introduces her as, “that idiotic cleaner and tea-girl,

Tiena” and refers to her as, “the stupid girl”. (17) Tiena is described as “foolish” and, “not the world’s best hand at banter”, who carries an, “expression of permanent surprise”, and with her “passion gap”⁶⁹, acts and looks the part of the apartheid era stereotypical coloured female. (34) Her lack of education has in effect stripped her of her adult status in a class-based society, and she is relegated to the level of ‘girl’. This is similar to the term ‘meid’⁷⁰, which has traditionally been the designation of non-white female domestic workers employed in white Afrikaner households. (Marion first uses the word ‘cleaning girl’ in the first page of the novel, to refer to her housekeeper.) Marion’s biting description of Tiena and Brenda’s conspiratorial friendship across class lines alludes both to Marion’s antisocial tendencies, borne from a guarded upbringing, and her outsider status as a white woman. This becomes ironic later on, when Marion discovers that she is in fact ‘coloured’, and has been unwittingly passing for white.

Brenda, too, is described in sexually innocuous and diminutive terms as, “a slip of a girl who looked no more than sixteen”, as having a childlike “wide and innocent smile”, which is supplemented with, “nice teeth she has too”. (19) Brenda’s class distinction is thus exposed offensively in an almost equestrian allusion to the condition of her teeth. Although described as an “asset to the business” (27), her virtue has had to be proven first, as though over a probationary period. In using the word ‘girl’, the narrator’s use of adjectives to describe Brenda becomes contradictory: “The girl has turned out to be reliable and conscientious”. (18) By juxtaposing Tiena and Brenda, the author points

⁶⁹ The supposedly fashionable practice among some coloured people of extracting the top four front teeth.

⁷⁰ Directly translated from the Dutch as ‘maiden’, this word has strongly derogatory connotations when used to describe non-white, but especially coloured, women. The *Tweetalige Skoolwoordeboek* (1964) translates the word ‘meid’ as, “maid-servant; (coloured) servant-girl”. (Bosman et al, 1964: 180)

to the fact that even post-democratically, and regardless of the level of their education, coloured women are still judged and discriminated against on this arbitrary basis, suggesting that, while they are in the process of being reimagined, old colonial stereotypes have not completely dissipated. Coloured women still occupy a peripheral position, and are required to prove themselves worthy and capable of participating in 'white' society before being considered for access to the centre.

Because Wicomb tends to downplay sexuality in this novel, her female coloured characters largely escape unscathed from the pervasive sexual stereotypes that label coloured women. The role of sexuality is foregrounded much more in the next chapter, where the dynamic between race, sex and immorality is illustrated in greater detail. The discourse of black female sexuality as a thinly veiled veneer for immorality is developed within the apartheid and the segregationist American context respectively, and the societal consequences of exhibiting black female sexuality (read immorality) are laid bare in Pat Stamatélos and Nella Larsen's works of fiction.

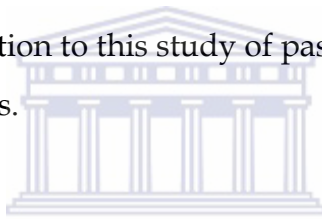
CHAPTER FOUR

PAT STAMATÉLOS, *KROES*

Published in 2005, *Kroes* is a partially biographical novel by a female South African, Pat Stamatélos. The setting for *Kroes* is suburban Cape Town and urban Johannesburg of the late 1950s to late 1960s. The protagonist, and central passing figure, Patricia (Pattie) Peters, narrates the story. The storyline is simple, moving in a linear fashion, and told in the first person from the point of view of the protagonist. It details the life of a coloured girl who loses her mother at a young age and is sent away from her remaining family members to live with her two maiden aunts in another town, after which she goes to university for a year and thereafter moves to Johannesburg in search of work. Here she meets and starts a relationship with a Greek man, which is 'illegal' in South Africa under apartheid law. The pursuit of this relationship becomes the impetus for her to pass for white as she is persuaded by the foreigner to try to get herself legally 'reclassified' white in order for them to be lawfully married.

Stamatélos's novel is strikingly similar to Nella Larsen's 1929 novella, *Passing*. In fact, the two novels share similar themes, biographical influences and subject-matter. Both works of fiction present pairs of females who are socialised in the same socio-political context. They share a similar class status and the same gender and race, and more significantly, have the ability to pass for white, but who present differing views of race through the choices they make. Larsen's novella is set in the United States – late 1920s Chicago and New York during

the Harlem Renaissance⁷¹ – much earlier than Stamatélos’s work. When comparing the two novels, it becomes evident that the settings of both South Africa’s turbulent 1960s and the North American Harlem Renaissance context are characterised by strictly enforced segregation in mainstream society, paired with heightened racial consciousness and renewed hope for non-racialism between the races, especially among the intellectual blacks and more liberal white classes who moved in some of the same social circles. While the protagonist in *Passing*, Irene, is a middle-class black woman, the circumstances of the passing character in the subtext, Clare Kendry, echoes much of what unfolds in the storylines of *Kroes* and indeed Millin’s *God’s Stepchildren* also. These commonalities and differences between the texts under review make *Passing* a relevant addition to this study of passing fiction by South African women authors.

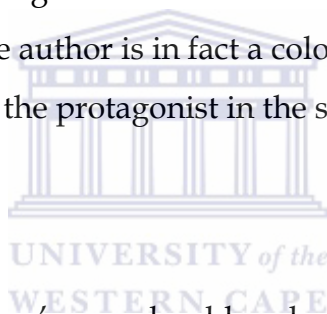


The ‘truths’ of ‘race’: South Africa, with reference to the United States

The frequent ambiguity of what constitutes ‘truth’ in the apartheid South African social context is explored in *Kroes*, Pat Stamatélos’s work of ‘fiction’. She alludes to this in the book’s inscription: “Truth is stranger than fiction, and sometimes it is pure fiction”. The author is, judging by her surname, possibly of Greek descent or intermarried into a Greek family. The author’s details at the back of the book are fairly vague, describing Pat Stamatélos ambiguously in geographical, not racial terms. She is described as having been born in Goodwood, Cape Town, and as having gone to live with two aunts in the Strand at the age of eight, after her mother’s death, and then to Johannesburg –

⁷¹ The Harlem Renaissance refers to a period of burgeoning cultural production among black American writers, artists and musicians. It helped raise awareness of black identity within the United States, and was centred predominantly in the Harlem area of New York City between the 1920s and 1930s.

essentially the novel's storyline. Stamatélos writes in *Kaaps*, the *kombuis-Afrikaans*⁷² generally used by working-class coloureds, which is generally regarded by dominant society as inferior, a bastardised form of 'pure' Afrikaans as used by white 'Afrikaner' South Africans. Stamatélos's choice of writing in the Cape vernacular Afrikaans at once manipulates the reader to 'race' the author as 'coloured', and therefore, an 'insider' writing about 'coloured experiences', since knowledge and use of this 'inferior' dialect is largely rejected by dominant white society, and may thus be accepted as being 'race'-specific. It also has the effect of manipulating the way that the reader perceives the authenticity of the subject matter. However, the 'evidence' of the author's racial positioning is inconclusive and the reader is left wondering whether the author is in fact a coloured female passing for white, as she positions the protagonist in the semi-autobiographical novel.



For the reader, the author's race should perhaps be inconsequential to the plot, but as the novel's subject matter is set in the heavily raced social milieu of apartheid South Africa, the author's 'race' is of significance. Or is it? Is Stamatélos essentially dismissing race through omission? By positioning herself in these ambiguous terms through her silence as either a white author passing for coloured or coloured author passing for white, and in its semi-biographical guise representing a coloured female passing for white, Stamatélos introduces into the novel a subversive subplot that challenges the traditional notions of authenticity in literary authorship and lays bare the role of performance

⁷² 'Kitchen-Afrikaans' refers to a prototypical form of Afrikaans first used by the slave diaspora and native people in the colonial Cape, and later by those classified as 'coloured', and is a combination of various languages and dialects with Dutch as the basis.

in identity. In the course of my research, it became clear that I needed to learn more about the authors of the works under review in order to gauge their personal subjectivities in relation to their texts. I was also curious about the authors' race, their political ideologies, aspects of their social lives, and in Stamatélos' case, about whether or not the novel was autobiographical, and whether the author represented a passer in real life. While finding information on Wicomb and Millin was straightforward, this was not the case for Pat Stamatélos, about whom very little has been written by way of biography. I was able to contact her via email, and the results of those 'conversations' are detailed in the appendix to this chapter. The reason that so little information about the author is available in the public domain is because she chooses to maintain her privacy vehemently. In her correspondence, she admits that she in fact never intended for the novel to be published, that "some things are better left unsaid", and as such has never discussed it in a public forum. She wrote *Kroes* as a means of cathartic expression of dealing with a difficult time in her life. While Stamatélos admits that the geographical details in the work and some of the characters and storyline are true to life, she asserts, "*Kroes* is NOT biographical, but also more than fiction." Ultimately, author's race and whether or not she is or was involved in passing is irrelevant to this research. But what is significant is how the representations of the fictional characters are mirrored in the author's lived experiences. In attempting to compile a 'complimentary archive' to the void that exists in theorisation about the passer and the passing narrative, these conversations are important sources of insight into how fiction can act as a point of reference not only to experiences, but also to ideologies and symbolism that occur in the real world. The novel, *Kroes*, can thus be read as a work of fiction passing as fact, or a factual account passing as fiction. But whichever way the narrative is perceived, the inscription

rings true: "Truth is stranger than fiction, and sometimes it is pure fiction".

The impetus for *Kroes* is a quest for uncovering and proving the existence of a legitimate white lineage, in effect a 'racial truth' for the protagonist, which would confer on her the legal and social status essential to reclassify as 'white', and which would in turn enable her to legally marry her Greek immigrant lover. This situation is contrary to Wicomb's protagonist in *Playing in the Light*, Marion, the unwitting passer, whose quest it is to make sense of the significance of racial identity as she is forced to question the importance society places on race when her coloured heritage is unexpectedly exposed in her adult life. Marion, and Millin's Elmira in *God's Stepchildren* are more similar in that neither is initially offered a choice in their roles as passers. Nella Larsen's Clare Kendry is portrayed as the light-skinned child of an alcoholic mixed-race father and a black mother who abandons her husband and very young daughter. After her father's untimely death, the fifteen-year-old is made to live with her white, staunchly Christian aunts, who forbid her from disclosing her black race to anyone and thereby revealing their brother's shameful 'miscegenation' and making public this 'disgraceful' fact. For the legal and economically dependant minor, very little choice exists but to comply, but she soon realises that passing for white offers more opportunities than for a black girl with meager financial means. At eighteen, being the age of consent, Clare elopes with a wealthy white man who is oblivious of her past and unaware of the fact that she is racially classified as black. Twelve years later however, she is still a successful passer, but she still yearns for the company of the black society that is denied her.

Reverting back to one's 'true' race presents a dilemma for the passer, but it is not impossible, as Wicomb's black character Vumile Mkhize describes as his family's "impertinence" (206) at reverting to their own race and culture when apartheid ended. With 'race' purportedly having lost its dominant status as social marker of superiority in a post-democratic society, racial passing is no longer a viable means to achieving social advancement. On the contrary, with black economic empowerment, affirmative action appointments and racial equity laws in the workplace that steer economic growth, the logic of socio-economic empowerment on the basis of race might seem to require that erstwhile passers reclassify themselves as coloured or black. Gayle Wald (2000) offers a similar argument within the American context, when she intimates that being racially classed as "black" aids rather than impedes social mobility, and that it, ""pays" to be a member of a racially ethnic group" in the post-civil-rights United States." (Wald, 2000: 184). If South African society moves towards the idealistic goal of non-racialism, a shift of emphasis from race- to class-consciousness should theoretically be expected until a truly 'colour-blind' stratum within society is produced. It is interesting to note, however, that the generations of racial passers absorbed into white society during the years before and during apartheid and still living undetected in post-apartheid 'white' society seem not to have discarded their erstwhile illicitly acquired racial classifications in order to benefit from the potential opportunities their newfound 'previously-disadvantaged' racial classifications offer.

Although Distiller and Samuelson (2006) suggest that post-apartheid white society attaches legitimating value to Krotoa Eva as the 'mother' of white South Africa, I cannot say that this sentiment is as pervasive as

they seem to suggest. It could be that passers were so successful at their deception that later generations are unaware of their heritage – that they are inadvertently passing post-apartheid. Not reclaiming ‘colouredness’ may also point to the idea that perhaps ‘class’ has not yet superseded ‘race’ in terms of normative social desirability; and that perhaps social status still adheres to a historically ‘authentic’, if not pigmentocratic, hierarchy. It would also appear that the cultural ‘shame’ attached to coloured racial hybridity has in fact not dissipated with the onset of the racial equality rhetoric ushered in by a seemingly more tolerant ‘New South African’ rainbow nation society with its ‘unity in diversity’ ethos. All this seems to indicate that the ‘shame’ of being identified as ‘coloured’ or being exposed as being hybrid remains as pervasive today as it did at the height of passing in South Africa. While this remains the norm, rejecting hybrid identity and hybrid culture will continue to relegate coloureds to a position of marginality. Until coloureds lay claim to the identities and assert positive associations with coloured culture, identifying as coloured will continue to be associated with the shame and degradation of second-class citizenry.

Learning to perform gender and ‘race’

As in South African society, the social construct of ‘race’ and its inevitable appendage, racism, are palpable presences in the work of fiction. The difference between people who are perceived as ‘white’ and those identified as ‘coloured’ comes to represent the difference between autonomy and servitude. From a young age, Pattie is schooled in and systematically reminded of the racial status quo in apartheid South Africa. However, the reasons for the discrepancies are generally left unexplained by her aunts. She is thus conditioned to accept the inequity

of the country as the norm, regardless of the sometimes blatantly arbitrary nature of the laws, both institutionalised and socially sanctioned, that govern different 'races' in society. For example, as a child, Pattie is taught that white people occupy the front seats of buses, while coloureds are relegated to the rear or upper level of the bus, out of sight, as it were.

The influence of apartheid laws on her life is pervasive, but not always clear to the pre-adolescent child. When signs that display "Europeans Only" are placed in buses to formalise the until now unwritten 'rules' of a social hierarchy that keep the races separated, her aunt exemplifies the impotent rage typical of marginalised minorities confronted by institutionalised racism: "It's a fancy word for the damned white people".⁷³ No further explanation is needed and she simply says: "And then I knew".⁷⁴ Knowing is tantamount to accepting, and Pattie can conceive of no choice but to follow the lead of her aunts and accept her 'plight' as a coloured female. Pattie's aunts seem to adhere to an institutionalised theory Hommel (1981) describes as 'colouredism', which relates to "a kind of cultural awareness by those Coloured people who accept the notion that they are a separate and distinct social group, and that therefore they must rely on Coloured institutions as a means to uplift themselves." (Hommel, 1981: 51) The humiliating reality of the "Whites Only" admonition is displayed later on in her adolescent life in the scene in which a white taxi driver expels her when he discovers that she is coloured and thus by law not allowed to occupy his vehicle. Her lack of agency here is a precursor to her exclusion from dominant society. (The irony of that previously uncontested acceptance becomes evident later when, living and passing for white in

⁷³ "Dis 'n hoge woord virrie donnerse wit mense". (15)

⁷⁴ "Toe weet ek." (15)

Johannesburg, Pattie encounters a sign saying “Whites Only” in a lift and is amused by how easily her light skin allows her to subversively undermine the law that underwrites the sign.) The aunts, although outspoken, remain disempowered through their lack of political will and their financial disadvantage.

Stamatélos’s use of maiden aunts to raise the child after the death of her mother and the abandonment of her father is not dissimilar in plot to Millin’s *God’s Stepchildren* or Larsen’s *Passing*. In the former, the ‘mixed-race’ child, Barry Lindsell, is taken in by his spinster half-sister after his coloured mother’s abandonment and his white father’s death, in order to ‘save’ him from being raised as coloured by his mother’s family. However, the influence of both his aunt’s and his perceived ‘superior’ race and economic access distinguishes Stamatélos’s and Millin’s characters in the way that the stories unfold. Whereas Barry benefits socially by association with his white aunt, the light-skinned Pattie, who similarly has a ‘white’ father, takes on the inferior class, race and economic status of her aunts. In *Passing*, the maiden aunts who raise Clare Kendry are described as “good Christians” who, after her father’s death, “did their duty and gave [her] a home of sorts.” (18) Because they subscribe to white racial superiority rhetoric, they transform Clare’s outward racial identification to white. But within the confines of the domestic environment, they still regard her as black and therefore inferior. Their decisions about their niece are indicative of the socially disruptive effects racially hybrid characters have on dominant society’s ability to categorise. The aunts lack the financial means to support Clare (in the manner to which she feels entitled *as a white person*) and thereby the means to maintaining control over her beyond her coming of age. Clare admits that the reason for her leaving her past behind her is in

order to, “be a person and not a charity or a problem, or even a daughter of the indiscreet Ham.” (19) For Clare Kendry, passing for white is merely the means to achieving financial wealth and independence, which, over and above simply being perceived as ‘white’, is ultimately her ambition. Her attitude is very similar to Helen’s epiphany of the “many shades of whiteness” that exist as strata within dominant white society, which reminded her that, “there was no need to settle for anything other than the brightest”. (128)

In fiction, as in the social psyche, passing from a lower to a higher social status group is most often represented as the only feasible direction of racial passing. Wicomb depicts this pervasive belief in the search for references to passing that Marion undertakes at the library:

What they [Marion and the librarian] could not understand, what does not make sense, is why those who had or who achieved the desired status of white identity, with all its privileges, would then repudiate that identity. ... They cannot imagine circumstances under which people would freely and voluntarily admit to being coloured... (122)

The inconceivability of people willingly aligning themselves with colouredness addressed by Zoë Wicomb’s protagonist in *Playing* is confronted in *Kroes*. The coloured characters in *Kroes* have, for the most part, internalised the discourse that helped shape the myth of colouredness as an immutable reality. Passing for any race other than the one conferred at birth, is regarded as traitorous to the coloured race. The effectiveness of apartheid propaganda on the clearly ambiguous sense of coloured ‘identity’ is revealed most vividly through Pattie’s maiden aunts, who simultaneously reject white racial superiority, and regard ‘race’ fatalistically as a ‘human’ defining characteristic – ultimately that which determines what they are able to achieve in life.

The aunts' belief in the existence of a defined racial hierarchy and their pursuit of racial 'purity' are revealed in their thoughts about the black-passing-for-coloured character, Mona. Mona has married Pattie's father, Will, after the death of his first wife, the women's cousin. By definition of South African law under apartheid, Pattie's father is considered 'white' by virtue of *his* father having been classified as 'white', even though his mother was classified as 'Cape Coloured'.⁷⁵ Using the derogatory '*meid*'⁷⁶, when referring to Mona, they accuse her of not being coloured as she positions herself, but *half* Tswana. They thus criticise her not for being 'black', which constitutes the other end of the continuum that privileges white purity (and therefore what is desirable), but for her apparent hybridity. At the same time, they maintain that, because she is black, it is shameful and unbecoming of Will's social status for him to have married her. The author thus presents the reality of coloured racism, with these women utilising the same racist lexicon as their oppressors, and demonstrating the multiple roles coloureds play, in varying degrees, as simultaneous oppressors and oppressed within a repressive environment. The mistrust brought about by centuries of marginalisation, enforced segregation and exploitation is manifested in the racial intolerance revealed by these women when they argue that Will, the white-passing-for-coloured character, is just as 'black' (by association) as the black-passing-for-coloured character represented by his second wife.

In the same way that dominant society measures the worth of a person

⁷⁵ This represents a change in racial determination through the intra-uterine law observed in the times of slavery at the Cape, which conferred race through the mother.

⁷⁶ The term '*meid*' is from the Dutch, meaning 'young woman', but it has been employed in racist colonial South African discourse to refer in a derogatory manner to coloured women and black women in white household employ, and post-colonially, derisively, to South African coloured and black women in general.

by their skin colour, the coloured women reason that regardless of the black woman having married a white man (which elevates her status by association in the tiered hierarchy of South African society), she still has no right to regard herself as their equal.⁷⁷ That Mona was formerly required by law to carry a 'pass',⁷⁸ is irrefutable 'proof' to them of her undeniable racial inferiority in relation to their race. Pass laws enabled police to expel from an area a black person who was unable to produce a 'pass' and who could not provide valid evidence of his or her 'right' to be there. It may be viewed as a tangible sign of society's refusal to confer citizenship to black men and women in South Africa, and ultimately demonstrated the skewed views that dominant society held with respect to blacks in society. The comparative 'freedom' coloureds enjoyed from the legal requirement to carry 'passes', is thus justified as 'proof' to the two aunts of coloured people's fundamental belonging in dominant society, and by way of reasoning, their position of superiority over blacks. The relative privilege of coloureds is internalised by these women as being a legal right, accorded them as a result of their elevated social positioning. According to the rigid racially defined beliefs of the women, Will had no 'right' to marry into another 'race', especially as he was, by law, 'white'. However, his perceived rejection of the two sisters, as exemplified by his reluctance to marry either of the unmarried coloured women, is presented by the protagonist as the aunts' thinly veiled attempt to justify this rejection as being racially-inspired. The aunts are ultimately unsupportive of any racial passing within society, be it for black, coloured, or white. That the irony of 'coloured racial purity' is lost on the aunts who defend colouredness

⁷⁷ "Sy het eers met die pass galoep, nou dink sy sy is ons equal!" (97)

⁷⁸ The 'pass', an identification document issued to black South Africans in the apartheid era, contained information relating to a person's right, by law, to be allowed to live and work in certain areas. It thus aided the regulation of the movement of blacks, especially within and between urban centres where more opportunities for work existed.

and their racial 'purity' is evident when Kitty admonishes that their blood is 'brown'; that they don't pollute themselves with the blood of other races; that they know what they are and that they stay within their racially defined boundaries.⁷⁹ Centuries of colonial domination and years of apartheid oppression have inculcated in them the notion of purity as the ideal racial state, and hybridity as pathology.

Negotiating the boundaries of female respectability and sexuality

Occupying the lower social strata, coloureds experience the economics of race keenly. However, especially coloured females, who, because of their social position in relation to men experience triple oppression, see passing for white as an escape from this abject marginality. Nowhere is the economics of race as blatant as with young passing characters who, by virtue of their sex, race and class, possess neither the social or financial advantages to attain wealth. Young female passers are often characterised in a deceptive and opportunistic light as employing their sexuality to 'lure' unsuspecting white males who are misled by these devious tricksters in order to appropriate the men's wealth and status. This stereotype, which emerges in the colonial setting, is immortalised for posterity in works of fiction. The desperate economic circumstances in which the young Lorrain's family in *Kroes* finds itself, and indeed the majority of non-white people living in South Africa during this period in history, is a direct result of being disenfranchised as a result of their race and skin colour. Even the teenaged Lorrain is conscious of the opportunities she has had to forego because of her 'inferior race', and what, by disassociating herself from that 'race', she stands to gain by passing for white. Despite the obvious material advantages of choosing whiteness, Pattie, at this point, resigns herself to retaining her coloured

⁷⁹ "Ga! Ons bloed is bruin. Ons bevuil ons nie met ander nie. Ons wiet wat ons is en hou by onse djaart." (97)

identity. However, her experiences in the white world, and the precariousness of fixed identity to which Lorrain's passing and initial racial unmasking has made her aware, remain undeniably felt under the surface of her pale skin. By juxtaposing the two characters, who both have the potential to pass for white, Stamatélos emphasises the inescapability of 'race' in a race-burdened society.

Juda Bennett (1996) identifies this sentiment in Larsen's two female characters who are similarly positioned in the novel *Passing*. She says: "Using twin characters who can both pass, Larsen creates a dialectic between the racial transgressor and the racial conservator." (Bennett, 1996: 24) Ironically, without the burden of shame and respectability that Pattie, within her conservative familial surroundings is subjected to, Lorrain is able to transgress the barriers of race and colour much more easily. She thus seemingly has greater agency than the racial conservator character, Pattie. Within the constructs of racialised capitalist society, financial gain is the only means for social advancement for those not born into wealth. Disenfranchised coloureds, with little means for attaining financial independence, are thus prohibited from advancement. Choosing to remain coloured and disadvantaged, or to pass for white and benefit from the opportunities this presents, is not as immediate a concern to the relatively cosseted Pattie. In contrast, Lorrain, whose future is already at this young age virtually pre-determined by her social circumstances, stands to gain much more than her friend. Passing for white thus holds more allure as, comparatively, she has very little to lose by way of traditional coloured 'respectability', and much to gain in white anonymity. Nevertheless, the reader is conscious of the impending tragedy that Lorrain's life is heading towards. Her association with a rich Jewish shop-owner's son,

and her lack of moral guidance and parental supervision, point at a predictable, pre-scripted fate for the precocious, but as yet emotionally immature teenager.

Of the three South African novels under discussion, *Kroes* is by far the most outspoken in terms of coloured female sexuality, and even so, Stamatèlos is circumspect with regards to inter-racial sexuality. As noted before, the subject is almost completely ignored by Millin who describes her proto-coloured and coloured female characters' sexuality in purely biological terms. In *Playing*, Wicomb describes the dangers that face coloured females who employ their sexuality to progress socially, but largely evades the complications that inter-racial sex and openly displaying female sexuality brings. The role of female sexuality in the performance of race is explored first-hand in *Kroes*. Pattie discovers early on what the combination of overt female sexuality and diverting from expected racial subject positions can lead to, through Lorrain, who acts as a socialising agent in the absence of adult guidance (and sex education) being provided by her aunts. She introduces Pattie to the largely unspoken possibilities available to light-skinned coloured girls who are willing to risk the deception. Through Lorrain, she also learns about the risks that accompany racial transgression.

Lorrain is described as being everything Pattie wants to be but feels she can never be because of what she considers to be her physical 'deficiencies' in adhering to the desirable European aesthetic: beautiful (by Western standards), with straight, long hair, lovely eyes and perfect teeth. Besides the physical, Lorrain is also described as being intelligent, friendly and popular, and most significantly, according to Pattie, looking 'white'. The precocious and worldly Lorrain serves as the

primary source of the sexual 'knowledge' that Pattie's conservative aunts withhold from their niece. Through Lorrain, promiscuity and the use of female heterosexuality are shown to be requisite for coloured women attempting to pass for white. The thirteen-year-old, light-skinned Lorrain inducts Pattie into a world from which she had until now been restricted by apartheid segregation laws and social mores. The misconceptions that apartheid's separate development strategies and their accompanying propaganda brought to bear on inter-racial interaction are evident in the misconceived fears expressed by the protagonist: "Ek weet goed waar die bruin mense mag en nie mag swem nie. My anties het my mooi geleer, hulle weet van dié dinge."⁸⁰ (20) She expresses the understanding, enforced from a young age by her aunts and social norms, that physical characteristics do not constitute racial position, and that dominant society determines racial identity. Lorrain, on the other hand, challenges this notion, and believes that creating an ocular illusion of whiteness through a combination of the physical and performance is the key to the transformation of perceptions of race. It is this belief that induces Lorrain to chemically straighten Pattie's curly hair before venturing into dominant society as adolescent play-whites. Lorrain convinces her that by using her mother's hair straightener, no one will be able to tell that she is coloured, not white. For Pattie, the distinction between the two 'races' is more complex, and she is unable to regard herself as equal to her white peers based on physical appearance alone. While she concedes to Lorrain's simplistic reasoning, she wrestles with her own self-doubt and self-perceived inferiority. She admits that she is scared and does not know how to *be* 'white', and contends: "Wat praat 'n wit kind?

⁸⁰ *I know very well where the coloureds may and may not swim. My aunts taught me well, they know about these things.*

Miskien sal hulle hoor ek is bruin, miskien sal hulle ruik ek is bruin.”⁸¹ (20–21) She is finally convinced that Lorrain’s reasoning was in fact correct when she looks at herself in the mirror after the hair straightening process and notes the transformation as being not only of her hair, but of her ‘race’. Her newly-straight hair allows her to buy into the belief of ‘race’ as physical. The fact that she has confounded racial identity with physiognomy becomes apparent when she discloses: “Binne ‘n halfuur het ek wit geword.”⁸² (21)

In the company of the white children later, Pattie’s trepidation dissipates completely when she concludes that her assimilation has been successful and that she is not conspicuous in the group. This revelation is contrary to the racist propaganda she has until now been led to believe, and is complicated even more when the boy who has partnered her fails to uncover her racial deception, and makes an innocuous sexual advance by kissing her. The enjoyment of the boy’s affections is fleeting, as she still fears being unmasked, and her lack of sexual knowledge causes her to naïvely fear falling pregnant. She reverts to the taught coloured female respectability of her aunts’ admonitions about the consequences of stereotypically ‘loose’ coloured female sexuality (read sexual impropriety). Their disparaging views on Lorrain’s mother’s promiscuous tendencies and the warning she got when she first started menstruating⁸³ are examples of Pattie’s sexual education under the tutelage of the conservative older, but sexually repressive spinster aunts. This kind of bewildering sexual messaging,

⁸¹ *What do white children talk about? Maybe they’ll be able to hear that I’m coloured, maybe they’ll smell that I’m coloured.*

⁸² *Within half an hour I had become white.*

⁸³ “Kitty sê ek moet nou oppas, ek kan nou bybies kry, ek moenie my voete onder ‘n klong se kombes insteek nie.” (19) *Kitty says I have to be careful now, I can have babies now, I mustn’t put my feet under a boy’s blanket.*

combined with her naïveté and Lorrain's misguided advice on sex, causes her to panic when the boy kisses her. For coloured females, whose bodies often ambiguously represent both the only valuable commodity they possess, and the physical carriers of shame, 'choices' around their bodies and sex are limited to either 'respectability' or 'shame'. Pattie's distress is doubled by her newfound experience of the potential for racial deception and sexuality that her physical body, as a hitherto untapped resource, holds. As she struggles to comprehend the repercussions of the corporeal experience with the white boy on her coloured identity, she decides to eliminate both racial and sexual taboos from her life by 'choosing' respectability. As with Larsens's protagonist, Clare, Pattie, as a legal minor, is imbricated in her aunts' identity. She is bound to her guardians through bloodlines and the law, which dictate that her immature body is not hers to control. In the same way, the missionaries in GSC claim control over Deborah's body until her sexuality/pregnancy indisputably reveal her progression from childhood/innocence into the realm of the sexualised adult world. It is only as an adult, that the coloured female body is reunited with the severely limited self-determination patriarchal society allows, and that the conflict between respectability and shame may be resumed.

Although racial segregation has resulted in an almost complete lack of inter-racial contact for these coloured children, as noted before, Pattie is well aware of the social and political implications of apartheid regulations as they pertain to coloureds. Her lack of first-hand social interaction with whites, coupled with apartheid's conditioning of 'lesser races' showing deference to whites, has created in her a sense of inferiority. As a result, she feels that she does not know how to 'act white'. However, she is very certain that merely being able to pass for

white physically does not qualify coloured females to enter into white society permanently through the institution of marriage. When Lorrain tells Pattie of her boyfriend's plans to study medicine and asks what she thinks of the possibility of Lorrain as "mevrouw dokter"⁸⁴ (24), Pattie pragmatically perceives the un-reality of the situation. She argues that the white youth will never marry Lorrain, and warns her friend that she should be wary of being reported to the police and being caught socialising with whites.

Lorrain's encounters with the white teenager are reminiscent of Millin's protagonist, Elmira's, experiences at sixteen with the brother of a white schoolmate. However, in Lorrain's case, her exposure as a play-white, which leads to the dissolution of the inter-racial relationship, comes not as a result of deliberate external intervention, but through a chance incident over which she apparently has no control. The accident between her white boyfriend, Peet, and the car in which the Cupido family is being transported to yet another new home is apt in its depiction of the lack of agency the coloured female passer possesses. Lorrain's humiliation is magnified by the vivid visual characterisation Stamatélos invokes when describing the scene of the motor vehicle accident. Lorrain is represented in the strongest stereotypical terms, by association, with the jolly, drunk, theatrical driver; the loud, hysterical, cursing mother, complete with screaming toddler and hair curlers in her hair; the sullen older brother with cigarette tucked behind his ear in the brutish fashion of coloured *skollies*⁸⁵; and the poverty of the group displayed in their dress and shoddy household furnishings tied to the overloaded and battered old car. In this exchange, the visible poverty and dispossession of this working class group of coloureds is linked to

⁸⁴ *Mrs Doctor*

⁸⁵ Hooligan or layabout

the inferiority conferred on colouredness (as a lesser state of being in the dominant construction thereof) and the shame felt by those identified as such. By contrast, the white teenaged Peet, even at this young age, already displays power over the 'racially inferior'. His dominance is entrenched in his access to economic means and he controls the situation with a display of adult self-assurance, by offering (indeed, *being able to offer*) to pay for the damage to the other vehicle. In this scene, Stamatélos displays the skewed power relationships at play in apartheid society, and the 'natural' sense of entitlement that being white in racially deterministic society bred in the dominant group.

For Pattie, the experience of being exposed as play-whites is treated as inevitable. She says: "Dit is die wet. Dit kon nie anders nie."⁸⁶ (28) Lorrain, however, remains resolute in her determination to gain access to the benefits of white society, and uses this humiliating experience as a lesson in her aspiration to become a successful passer. She reasons that if she was good enough for one white man, that she would be good enough for another. That the character Lorrain is already at the age of thirteen perfecting the art of exploiting her sexuality to pass for white, is testimony to the enduring appeal of the stereotype of the 'sexually deviant' coloured female. Without the economic means to escape the poverty most often associated with colouredness during apartheid, her female body is commodified and her sexuality becomes the most viable means by which the dispossessed Lorrain is able to transcend the racial inequality that her marginalised social position almost guarantees. Opportunistic, even to the point of blatant dishonesty, Lorrain nonetheless succeeds in her deception because she is physically able to manipulate people into believing that she is white. The confidence she

⁸⁶ *It's the law. It could not be helped.*

derives from the successful forays into the 'white' world she has access to by virtue of her looking and acting 'white' supersedes the risks attached to passing. Through these experiences, Lorrain gains insight into the currency of racial passing and the choices available to her as a play-white. It is thus not surprising that her next white boyfriend, a Jewish businessman's son, is said to enjoy the company of coloureds⁸⁷ and therefore does not require her to maintain the vigilant deception.

The author's choice of Lorrain's suitor as a Jew, who represents an oppressed minority group within dominant white society, is perhaps significant in terms of a history of anti-Semitic persecution, and the social position of Jews as 'lesser' whites within the White Anglo Saxon Protestant paradigm. However, in this racial, sexual, class and economic dynamic, Nathan Friedman is undoubtedly in power. He does not assert control over Lorrain verbally, and he says very little in the exchange at the carnival. When Lorrain introduces Pattie to Nathan, the narrator comments that he says nothing, but instead uses his body language to assert control over Lorrain when he pulls her towards him.⁸⁸ This seems to suggest that the transaction between the two involves the commodification of the coloured female body/sexuality in exchange for the white male's race, class and economic status. While in his company, Lorrain retains her vernacular Afrikaans speech and does not conceal her associations with coloureds from him (she arranges for Pattie to meet them at a local whites-only carnival). She is thus not at risk of being 'found out' as she was with her previous suitor, since Friedman appears aware of and unperturbed by the fact that Lorrain is

⁸⁷ "Ek het al gehoor hoe die mense praat: Die klong is al tussen die bruin mense, ..." (32) *I have heard the people talking: The boy is always around the coloureds, ...*

⁸⁸ "Nathan se niks, druk Lorrain net styf teen hom vas. Lorrain lag en vermaan hom kamstig om hom te gedra." (33) *Nathan says nothing, just pulls Lorrain's body close. Lorrain laughs and jokingly chides him to behave himself.*

coloured. Within the transaction, she is still required to look the part in terms of her physiognomy and to perform normative whiteness in order to access the privileges of white society. However, Stamatélos contests white racial hegemony, and subverts the necessity for the coloured female to renounce her coloured identity completely by offering her the agency of association.

Similarly, in Nella Larsen's *Passing*, she confronts the absurdity of race and racial 'passing' by asking whether it is still considered to be 'passing' when the passing figure's race is known to the other. She introduces a black female character, Gertrude, who married a white schoolmate, both being fully conscious of the other's respective racial designations. The narrator says:

For Gertrude too had married a white man, though it couldn't be truthfully said that she was "passing." Her husband—what was his name?—had been in school with her and had been quite well aware, as had his family and most of his friends, that she was a Negro. (24)

Set in 1920s Chicago, this seems quite bold and progressive in highly racialised and segregated American society. However, the narrator immediately reifies race – significantly through the black character Irene, who examines both the white man's and the black woman's initial decisions for the inter-racial union, retrospectively:

It hadn't, Irene knew, seemed to matter to him [Fred] then. Did it now, she wondered? Had Fred—Fred Martin, that was it—had he ever regretted his marriage because of Gertrude's race? Had Gertrude? (24)

This middle-class black character voices what is accepted to be dominant American society's view on inter-racial marriage, and through this uncertainty, reveals her own insecurities about belonging to a 'lesser race'. Although perhaps no more tolerant of inter-racial

relationships than apartheid South African society, the United States appeared more inclined to enforce social policing subversively through restrictive social norms, rather than overtly, as was the case with South Africa's legally enforced state of 'apartheid'. Lorrain remains determined to disassociate herself from her prescribed coloured heritage in order to access the economic privileges available to whites by choosing the company of white men, and passing for white. However, the author offers a somewhat more 'progressive' take on the manner in which the teenager is able to pass for white. She allows the character to retain at least some of her coloured identity in her speech and associations, thereby disrupting the normative 'necessity' for coloureds to relinquish all coloured family and friends, and to mimic 'white' behaviour and speech in order to be accepted into white society. Unfortunately, Stamatélos does not develop the character any further, and the reader is thus not privy to the outcome of Lorrain's attempted racial passing. She thus remains, in the mind of the reader, the flawed coloured female character who, with her Lolitaesque deviant hypersexuality, and her dishonest, lying, manipulative 'nature', presents the coloured female in stereotypical, if not nearing pathological, terms.

Sander Gilman (1985) contextualises this gendered view of sexuality within race. He identifies the influence of Darwin's 'great chain of being', which positions black races as antithetical to white races. (Gilman, 1985: 83) On this scale, 'Hottentots' are viewed as the lowest form of being, and paternalistic society places the Khoi *female* at the base of the scale. The stereotype of an almost primitive innocence rooted in unselfconscious sexuality, precedes the stereotype of the black female manipulating a calculating and deviant sexual knowledge. Gilman contends: "The nineteenth century perceived the black female

as possessing not only a “primitive” sexual appetite, but also signs of this temperament, “primitive” genitalia.” (Gilman, 1985: 85) While the display of the historical sexualised ‘otherness’ of indigenous African females (as epitomised by the living and posthumous display of Sarah Baartman) may only very recently have become politically incorrect, coloured females, as the modern day descendants of Khoi women, remain shrouded in sexual shame. The coloured female, (and here I use the essentialised singular) instead of progressing gradually from immaturity in childhood, to maturity in adulthood, graduates abruptly from childhood to a being thought to be governed by her deviant sexuality – as was represented by Millin in both her coloured female protagonists. The erstwhile naïve girl-child is conferred with devious hyper-sexuality, which becomes her dominant characteristic alongside naïve simplicity in adulthood. In *Kroes*, Lorrain represents Pattie’s antithesis, in that she is not governed by the pursuit of coloured respectability, and is thus free to express her sexuality, even in pre-adolescence. Although their physical features suggest a similar potential for racial transgressing, the two characters, when their respective upbringings are compared, present an indication of the extent of the control ‘respectability’ exerts on the pursuit of social mobility and coloured female sexuality.

The sexual division of labour, as it occurs within patriarchal society, dictates that the female is responsible for the home, and implied in this is the socialising of children within the family structure. Even the absence of a father figure within the patriarchal framework of the family unit does not constitute mitigating circumstances in the allocation of responsibility for the socialisation of children. As such, the cause of Lorrain’s ‘deviance’ is placed squarely on the inadequacies of

her mother, Pearl, who is depicted as being morally loose and unstable: “Kitty en Maggie het Lorrain se ma geblameer vir Lorrain se voute.”⁸⁹ (28) Cheryl Hendricks (2001) echoes the relevance of this sentiment when she says, “There was a pervasive belief that one’s moral and physical attributes were inscribed in one’s blood and passed on intergenerationally.” (Hendricks, 2001: 41) The aunts describe Pearl as having a weakness for men, and as one whose problematic relationships with men and her financial instability cause the family to move frequently. In much the same way that Millin describes the ‘flawed blood’ of coloureds as being passed on from one generation to the next, so too are Lorrain’s flaws described by the aunts in biological terms as having been inherited from her mother.⁹⁰ Pearl, in turn, represents the preceding generation of ‘flawed blood’. The conspicuous absence of a father figure within the family unit gains significance, as not one of the three children are claimed paternally. The obvious lack of ‘respectability’ that this apparently ‘dysfunctional’ family (by Western, heteronormative, patriarchal standards) represents makes them prone to being regarded as what Zimitri Erasmus (2001) refers to as “half-cast outcast”. (Erasmus, 2001: 13) Erasmus alludes to the limited choices available to coloured females as being either respectability or shame.

Neither Lorrain, nor her mother, however, seem to subscribe to the ‘choices’ proffered coloured women. Their unapologetic lack of shame for conducting their lives in a manner regarded as ‘unrespectable’ by both white society, and the marginalised coloured society that they inhabit, reinforces the pathological conception of these women. It is also a reminder of the racially unifying nature of patriarchal oppression of

⁸⁹ *Kitty and Maggie blamed Lorrain’s mother for her flaws.*

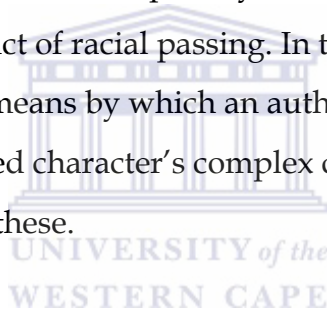
⁹⁰ “Kitty en Maggie het Lorrain se ma geblameer vir Lorrain se voute.” (28) *Kitty and Maggie blamed her mother for Lorrain’s faults.*

women. The author's use of coloured females to voice criticism of the women's actions and circumstances may suggest coloured support for dominant society's racist stance towards coloureds and specifically coloured women. By positioning the mother and daughter in this light, Stamatélos perhaps attributes more agency to these coloured women than what their social reality in fact allows. She underestimates the influence of social factors beyond their control on the 'choices' available to coloured women. By suggesting that coloured women who don't strive for 'respectability' do so willingly, and reinforcing this stereotype by using 'respectable' coloured women's voices, the text seems further to disenfranchise Lorrain and her mother. Both Lorrain, and to a greater extent her mother, are not afforded the agency to voice any justifications underlying their actions. Instead, their actions speak for them. Lorrain's flawed nature is ascribed to the influence of her mother, and to her being 'too beautiful'.⁹¹ In the latter instance, not only behaviour but also physiognomy become contributing factors in the often fatalistic destinies of 'wayward' coloured women.

The 'tragic mulatto' in American history is in many ways akin to its South African counterpart, the 'coloured', and because of her abject marginality, more so with the coloured female passer. A stereotype conceived by a racially dictated and racist society, the tragic mulatto is doomed to any number of tragic ends as a result of his or her impudence at daring to transgress the racial barriers put in place by dominant society in order to safeguard the sanctity of 'racial purity'. Judith Berzon (1978) describes the 'tragic mulatto' in fiction as being: "characterized by an inability to control his own fate. She is either a character ... who does have stature and dignity, but is prevented by

⁹¹ "Ek het altyd gesê daai kind is te mooi." (31) *I've always said that that child is too beautiful.*

external forces ... from being her own mistress; or she is the victim of her own internal struggle between her mixed blood and her own unsatisfied yearnings." (Berzon, 1978: 104) She thus suggests that there is a proportionate link between a mixed race character's social standing and the extent of the tragedy he or she is likely to experience in life. By this reasoning, death is a common outcome for those who presume to usurp the position within society reserved for the white race. Death is often used as an easy way out for authors who broach risqué subject matter, especially where characters are depicted in racially taboo situations that deem them 'problematic' within the dominant social norms. In the 'tragic mulatto' trope, death is often presented in melodramatic means, and can be portrayed as a predictable end to the socially transgressive act of racial passing. In this manner, death becomes the ultimate means by which an author can circumscribe attention to the coloured character's complex circumstances and agencies in the face of these.



Lorrain is not subjected to the fate usually associated with the trope of the tragic mulatta, but by being prematurely removed from the narrative, the reader is denied resolution. It is therefore interesting that this character is not developed more; an examination of her personality and experiences would expand authorial insight into her character's choices, and, therefore also the evaluation evident in the point of view of the text. However, by not offering a conclusive ending for Lorrain, the reader is left wondering what the character's fate should be, and perhaps imagines an ending that is more positive than the ill-fated endings often afforded passing females in fiction.

The ambiguities of passing

In the character of Pattie, Stamatélos moves away from the stereotype of sexual deviance, and presents a more balanced and refined coloured female character. Pattie rejects the benefits associated with being white, obtained solely through skin colour – expressed when her response to Lorrain’s invitation to stay with her and her white boyfriend at the carnival is met disparagingly with an assertion that the carnival is reserved for whites only.⁹² Although this seems to suggest a complete rejection of inter-racial relationships, in her subsequent interactions with white classmates at university, it appears as though the lengths Lorrain had to go to, in order to manipulate her relationships with white men, is what Pattie takes exception to, not necessarily the actual relationship. In this instance, Pattie chooses respectability over shame, but as the character evolves, the author demonstrates how her questioning of the reductionist belief in a dichotomous relationship between respectability and shame allows her to develop autonomy. The author thus challenges the notion of fixed coloured identity, and allows the protagonist the agency to show that these do not represent the only two choices available to coloured females.

Not as limited in her agency as Millin’s, and even Wicomb’s coloured female passing characters, Pattie steps out of the mould. After the initial introduction to inter-racial relationships at thirteen, Stamatélos re-introduces the more mature protagonist to the possibility of relationships across the colour bar when Pattie enrolls at university. Still largely governed by her conservative upbringing and the naïve beliefs advocated by her spinster aunts and the closed community in which she grew up, the reality that respectability is not the converse of shame starts to dawn on her in this ‘liberal’ environment. Her

⁹² ““Die plek is net vir wit mense,” sê ek en draai om en loop weg.” (33) “*This place is only for whites,*” *I said, and turned and walked away.*

experiences at university serve as preparation for the adult 'choices' available to her within apartheid society. She admits that her adjustment to the 'white' art department is great, especially with regards to the intimacy allowed, if not *expected*, in her interactions with the white students.⁹³ The most striking adjustments involve the relinquishing of commonly held coloured stereotypes, often internalised by coloureds as inherent deficiencies and inherited flaws. She appears to have internalised a 'black as pathology' stereotype, which manifests as an anxiety with maintaining personal hygiene. Cheryl Hendricks (2001) describes the colonial origins of the stereotype when she says:

The image of black in general as diseased/contagious is one that emerged from Europe's initial encounters with Africa and which persisted in South Africa in mutated forms during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." (Hendricks, 2001: 40)

The internalisation of the enduring stereotypical association of coloureds with dirt, disease and contamination is demonstrated by Pattie's irrational speculation about what the white students surmise when they share cups and cutlery with her.⁹⁴ Her preoccupation with imagined white perceptions about the (lack of) hygiene of coloureds first emerges as an anxiety about interacting with the white children on the beach, where her main concern involves having her racial identity exposed through what she smells like to them. This irrational preoccupation emerges again on her first day at university, when the run from the train station raises her self-consciousness about how she

⁹³ "Die aanpassing by die kunsskool is groot. Nog nooit tevore het ek so 'n intieme assosiasie met wit mense gehad nie. Ek sit langs hulle, gesels en lag met hulle, en sit selfs aan tafel met hulle in die koffiekroeg." (58) *My adjustment to the art school is great. Never before have I had such an intimate association with whites. I sit next to them, talk and laugh with them, and even sit with them at the coffee bar.*

⁹⁴ "Wat dink hulle as ek uit dieselfde koppies drink, met dieselfde messe en vurke eet?" (58) *What do they think when I use the same cups that they use, and eat with the same knives and forks they use?*

imagines she must smell to her white classmates:

“Daar’s ‘n meid in ons klas,” sal hulle die aand aan tafel vertel. “Sy was laat vir die eerste klas. Sy ruik na sweet.” Die ma en pa sal wonder hoe ek dit kan bekostig.⁹⁵ (57)

This self-confessed obsession also points to the extent of the paranoia she experiences trying to fit into this foreign white world. Her anxieties revolve around concerns that she does not conform to the expectations of the ‘white’ institution, that she smells different to the white students and that her class and economic means are suspect. Besides these, she is also concerned with being exposed as a passer within academia. She fears being exposed as a fraud in this academic setting, as her admission that her opinion always sounds insignificant in comparison to the white students’ attests.⁹⁶ All of these anxieties compromise her sense of belonging. What she fears most is being uncovered as an imposter in white society, and despite her coloured identity being publicly known, or perhaps because of it, being ostracised because she is ‘lacking’. In essence, a social and education system that entrenched coloured subordination, combined with internalised stereotypes of coloured inferiority, prevent her from reaching her full academic potential. Towards the second half of her first year, she has registered the limitations her race places on her academic pursuit within the political confines of apartheid South Africa and admits that she is afraid to involve herself in the socialisation that is inferred in the academic setting.⁹⁷ This fatalistic attitude to social mobility is echoed by Maurice

⁹⁵ “*There’s a coloured girl in our class,*” they’ll recount at the dinner table that night. “*She was late for the first class. She smells of sweat.*” The mother and father will wonder how I can afford it.

⁹⁶ “*My hande word weer klam, my opinie klink altyd vir my so insignificant vergeleke met hulle s’n.*” (59) *My hands start getting sweaty again, my opinion always sounds so insignificant to me, compared to theirs* [the white students].

⁹⁷ “*Ek is bang om weer betrokke te raak. Ek bly stil as ek moet praat en bly weg as ek moet gaan. Dis beter so, dink ek, ek hou my op my plek.*” (72) *I am afraid to get*

Hommel (1981), who recognises that social stratification does exist within the coloured group, but says: “Coloured people can move up and down in their own group, but they can never move out of their group into ... white society.” And that, “social mobility ... is relatively meaningless until the political structure is radically changed.” (Hommel, 1981: 4) Seemingly, being from a lower working class background, her expectations to achieve the height of academic success are unattainable. In the same way that Wicomb’s passer, Helen, succumbs to her anxieties, so too does Pattie at this watershed in her academic career. Although the second year student, Sonny, embodies ‘proof’ that coloured advancement is possible, there is a sense that Pattie’s failing her first year of university harks back to the stereotype of diminished black (female) intelligence so prevalent in Millin’s work. However, unlike Millin’s depictions of a ‘biological lack’, Stamatélos presents the social realities of cultural integration that often precipitate failure by coloureds to advance in settings such as these.

The university’s art school provides an idealistic sub-culture within hegemonic society, and is by no means a realistic representation of the rest of the country’s segregated societies. Within this sheltered environment, belonging is measured in the ability to afford the fees to attend the school, in being able to assimilate into the culture and environment, and to a lesser extent, in a student’s artistic talent. Being able to pay the fees is in itself an exclusionary measure, as most non-white students lacked access to the finances required to finish high school, let alone pay for university studies. They were also regarded as potential earners within the family unit, and thus forced into the workplace through circumstance. The author acknowledges this when

involved again. I shut up when I must talk, and stay away when I must go. It’s better this way, I think, to know my place.

she describes the protagonist's best friend as being the most intelligent student in her class, but who, due to her family's poverty, is compelled to discard her aspiration of going to university, and to seek employment instead. As a result of poverty, and because of the cost of both primary and secondary education, there was a high drop-out rate of school learners even before matriculation.⁹⁸ Academic pursuits were thus the exception, not the norm, in coloured working class society of the apartheid era, but even more so among females. The roles of most working class women within the coloured patriarchal sub-society precluded tertiary education, since this largely constituted an elite male domain. Based on census figures from 1960, Hommel cites: "In the case of females, 52.20% worked as domestic servants". (Hommel, 1981: 108) Stamatélos's depiction of a dual female-headed household arguably makes the female protagonist's access to education more likely than if the family had been headed by a male, or if there had been a male sibling with whom Pattie had to compete for education. The same can be said of Wicomb's character, Brenda, in *Playing*, who benefits from the tertiary education afforded her in a similarly female dominated environment. The naïve acceptance by Pattie of the liberal façade that constitutes the art school is in keeping with the coloured apathy brought about by a lack of political consciousness and agency. The fact that she unquestioningly accepts her place – a position that can easily be considered 'token' – as the only non-white student in her class at the university, to the exclusion of black and less privileged coloured students, may be perceived as being stereotypically opportunistic. She does not interrogate the fact that access to the institution may have been granted her because of dominant perceptions that her marginal position (as a result of both her 'inferior' sex and race) does not pose any real

⁹⁸ Muriel Horrell (1971) records: In 1969 there were only 1446 successful [coloured] matriculants. (Horrell, 1971: 69)

threat to the status quo.

Driving home with the Muslim second-year art student after attending a party at a white student's home, the reality of the South African socio-political landscape is broached. When Pattie defends hegemonic society, insisting that all whites are not the same, Sonny interjects with his perspective on the underlying political reality:

“Wil jy bet?” kom dit van Sonny. “Daai was 'n lekker paartie, maar wie staan in die kombuis? Die meid, wie anders. Ek luister hoe hulle oor equal rights praat terwyl die meid al agter hulle aanloop en optel. Jamie se ma kla teenoor sy pa dat die meid al weer Sondag wil af hê en dis die tweede Sondag in een maand. My ore is oop, ek hoor sulke goed”, sê hy dik.⁹⁹ (67)

Regardless of Sonny's private political perceptions, his public political silence is an unstated demand within the academic structure, despite its liberal veneer. He remains compelled to conform to the status quo despite Pattie's claim about equality within the university: “Hier neem niemand aanstoot nie, niemand word bakleierig nie. Dis oop gesprekke en elkeen kry kans om op sy soapbox te klim.¹⁰⁰” (58) Pattie's inferences of equality among the students remain unjustified allegations, made without her having tested her own hypotheses through staging open political defiance within the educational institution. She does broach the subject of inequality between coloured and white and the role of the law in apartheid South Africa by saying:

“Julle sien die gereg as iemand wat julle beskerm. Die bruin man sien

⁹⁹ “Want to bet?” said Sonny. “That was a good party, but who's in the kitchen? The meid, who else? I listen to their talk about equal rights while the meid walks after them, picking up after them. Jamie's mother complains to his father that the meid wants the next Sunday off, and that it's the second Sunday in a month. My ears are open, I hear these things”, he said irritably.

¹⁰⁰ Here, no one takes offense, no one fights. They are open discussions, and everyone gets a turn to stand on his soapbox.

die gereg as iemand om voor weg te hardloop. Die wet stuur die bruin mense van bakboord na stuurboord. Julle mag nie grond koop nie, julle mag nie huise bou nie. Die gereg sê gaan daar, dan gaan ons. Die gereg sê Whites Only, dan bly ons. So dis die kleur van die vel wat tog die verskil maak.”¹⁰¹ (60-1)

The white students counter her arguments about the partiality of South African law by saying, “Now you’re talking politics.” (61) While they are curious about the non-threatening, light-skinned, respectable, female coloured Pattie, they refuse to confront the country’s political state and acknowledge the injustice of a law that protects them while oppressing the majority of coloured and black South Africans excluded from the privileged position in which Pattie finds herself. The admonition ends with the white students reclaiming their dominance by looking at the clock on the wall and deciding that it’s time to go. By leaving, they dismiss Pattie’s attempt at broaching the politically sterile environment of the university that grounds their sense of self-privileging, which in turn reasserts their dominance and control.

Pattie is left alone with a white Afrikaner student, Jamie, who responds to her apology that she talks too much with an acknowledgement that she spoke the truth. However, when he qualifies this acknowledgement by saying, “Kyk na jou”¹⁰² (61), it becomes apparent that despite his liberal rhetoric, he does *not* in fact understand her political reality. Her physical resemblance to the dominant norm induces sympathy for her marginalisation in this white male student, and demonstrates the role of the male gaze in determining subjectivity and its resultant, visibility.

¹⁰¹ *You see the law as something that protects you. The coloured man sees the law as something to run from. The law sends coloured people from pillar to post. You can’t buy land, you can’t build houses. When the law says go there, we go. When the law says Whites Only, we stay. So, skin colour does make the difference after all.*

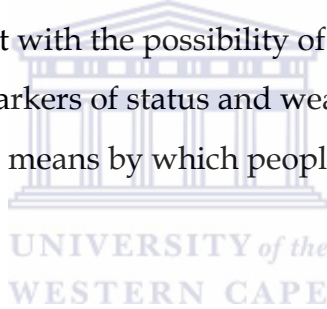
¹⁰² *Look at you.*

In reality, her presence is most probably tolerated because, as the only non-white person in the first-year class, her life circumstances are regarded as being 'exotic' to her white classmates who are otherwise segregated from other 'races' – apart from their servants whose marginality most often deems them invisible. Pattie fulfills the role of racial anomaly amid the white spectators who include her in their exclusively white intellectual spaces. However, the patronising inclusion of the 'other' on their terms justifies their superiority and foregrounds her 'difference'. The display case is exchanged for a soapbox, and unlike her nineteenth century predecessors, Pattie is exhibited not to demonstrate her sexual deviance (this has already been proven), but in the twentieth century instance, her intellectual capacity is in question. When she relates the conversation to her aunts later, Pattie discloses her ignorance of the oppression of the majority of blacks by disregarding her aunts' confrontational opinions of the discussion in favour of the students' when she says, "Maar die studente het geluister. En verstaan."¹⁰³ (61)

Post-apartheid social theorists on coloured identity politics, such as Mohamed Adhikari, acknowledge the fluidity and constantly changing nature of coloured identity. This is reflected in *Kroes*, and the metamorphosis of the central character's identity can be traced as the novel progresses from her childhood into adulthood, especially as her geographical and social influences change. The protagonist's short-lived romantic liaison with the young Afrikaner student ends in a manner that seems to be the norm in literary 'society'. Class differences between the 'races' is emphasised and used as a measure of keeping differently raced people separated and alienated. In the case of

¹⁰³ *But the students listened. And understood.*

coloureds in the 1960s setting, where poverty is practically a given,¹⁰⁴ being light-skinned is not necessarily enough to secure acceptance. The lifestyles enjoyed by white society, education, and economic mobility this class status allows, effectively keep would-be imposters and passers from intrusion. The protagonist recognises the signs and admits: “Hulle waarsku mense soos ek oor haar en die ander se bevoorregte lewe. Dis liggies wat sê: Bly weg as jy arm is, you are out of your depth.”¹⁰⁵ (63) Even without the legal barriers instituted to formalise the separation of the ‘races’, hegemonic society is able to keep people in their designated roles. This is demonstrated in the novel, but implications for potential inter-racial relationships are highlighted in the portrayal of this friendship. A party at the student’s home increases Pattie’s disillusionment with the possibility of romantic love between the ‘races’. Tangible markers of status and wealth, not solely skin colour, are the divisive means by which people of different ‘races’ are kept apart.



In considering inter-racial love in the twentieth century South African novel, Vernon February (1981) says that it is, “generally characterized by an absence of any romantic associations or feelings of nostalgia or remorse”, and that, “[t]here is no folly or any form of spiritual intimacy.” (February, 1981: 57) Stamatélos’s novel is thus a departure from the overtly racist novel that relies on stereotypes of degeneracy and sexual anomaly to characterise especially the black female character. While the physical side of the relationship is restricted to a

¹⁰⁴ Citing 1970 census data, Hommel, (1981) states: “Out of a total labour force of more than 450,000, 63% could be classified as labourers earning less than R60 a month.” (Hommel, 1981: 108)

¹⁰⁵ *They [diamond earrings] warn people like me about her [fellow white student] and the others’ privileged lives. They are lights that say: Stay away if you’re poor, you are out of your depth.*

minimum, the fact that the female character is placed within a mutually agreeable relationship is a vast departure from the typified passing novel. The intimacy between the two characters is presented as innocent, devoid of sexual intent. This naïve treatment instead conveys a sense of impotence in the characters' agency within greater society. After Jamie reveals that his parents had decided that the more conservative Stellenbosch University environment was more suited to the family's political ideology, Pattie realises that her presence in his home was what precipitated this decision to have him transferred. Her impotence is emphasised when Pattie admits that their hands are tied and that they can do nothing to change the situation.¹⁰⁶ (70) She accepts the dissolution of the relationship as inevitable, and after his admission, her resolve is to break all ties with him. Jamie, for all his liberal rhetoric, is unable to fathom the implications of pursuing an inter-racial relationship. He is in fact oblivious to the legal repercussions of being non-white, as his lack of prudence when inviting Pattie to the party, ordering a 'white taxi', offering to take her home himself, and appearing intimate in public, suggests. When he asks the taxi driver, "Lyk sy miskien vir jou bruin?",¹⁰⁷ it is indicative of his inability to align Pattie's anomalous physical skin colour with the legal, political and social implications of the race it nevertheless signifies in apartheid South Africa. His conception of what colouredness entails is here reduced to skin colour and physiognomy. Pattie, on the other hand, is versed in the distinctions between coloured and white race, and fatalistically perceives Jamie's parents' racist reaction to their relationship. She tries to explain to him the social implications his mother probably envisions, and cites the scandal, the negative implications, possible prison sentences, and impossibility of the two

¹⁰⁶ "Ons word skielik stilgemaak deur die wete dat ons hande afgekap is. Ons kan niks aan die situasie doen nie."

¹⁰⁷ *Does she look coloured to you?*

races merging in an inter-racial relationship within this context.¹⁰⁸ Pattie justifies their parting in cynical racialised terms: “Ek weet dat as ek en Jamie nie by dieselfde plek kunsstudente was nie, sou hy nooit op enige ander plek twee keer na my kant toe gekyk het nie. Ek sou net nog ’n meid gewees het.”¹⁰⁹ (71) In the end, she seems to accept as justification for the failure of their relationship her racial inferiority, not his parents’ racism. Her undisputed acceptance of the predestined ‘fate’ of the shameful and inferior coloured female is solidified with the incantation, “Jy’s ’n meid, Jy’s ’n meid, Jy word weggesmyt!”¹¹⁰ (71)

The main passing character in *Kroes* is different from the other two South African novels under review in the sense that the coloured women have rural origins, and move to the city in order to pursue ‘white’ lives. Although Pattie hails from a suburban setting, her social circumstances necessitate a move to the city. Her motivation for the move differs from the other women’s, in that she goes to Johannesburg in order to gain social freedom and financial independence, not specifically with the intention to pass for white, and certainly not with the idea of opportunistically passing for white in order to elevate her status. Pattie’s first observations of the socio-political differences between Cape Town and Johannesburg are racially inspired. They include the noticeable increase in the number of black people in the northern city, and the location of the boardinghouse they rent a room in, in a ‘white’ area. The influence of capitalism in determining racial norms is greater in Johannesburg, where people earn higher salaries

¹⁰⁸ “Sy dink aan die skande, die implikasies, die tronkstraf, die ganse onmoontlikheid daarvan.” (71)

¹⁰⁹ *I know that if Jamie and I had not been students at the same art school, he never would have given me a second glance in another place. I would have been just another meid.*

¹¹⁰ *You’re a meid, You’re a meid, You get thrown away!*

and thus have greater spending power than their counterparts in the Cape. The tangible economic advantages of being white in this city thus also influence people's desire to pass for white in order to benefit from economic privileges bestowed on whites.

Pattie's first deliberate attempt at passing for white in the anonymous city is purely recreational. It entails watching a film at a 'white' cinema with a housemate. Uncharacteristically, it is Pattie, not the housemate, who accepts the invitation from a Greek man, despite her adolescent resolve not to transgress the country's racial segregation laws. The women's confidence to attempt the act of passing is bolstered by the darkness that the cinema provides, but the darkened surroundings are not enough to ward off the fear of being caught intruding. However, after the incident, in retrospect, the ease with which they managed to pass for white is a source of amusement to the two. With the deepening of the rift created by pervasive legalised apartheid, the adult Pattie becomes more receptive to the potential for social advancement her skin colour holds. The conflict created within her coloured psyche manifests as shame for deserting her identity and abandoning those who advanced her and who, by virtue of their skin colour are prohibited from reaping the advantages she is able to because of hers. The coloured characters, discussing Pattie's sister, Kay's impending marriage, list the problems of housing, work, and the financial responsibilities and familial obligations to an extended family structure that coloureds face in apartheid society. In Johannesburg, divorced from the obligations of her extended family, and with her first taste of economic independence, Pattie experiences a shift in loyalty to her race. The anonymity of the city and her ability to blend in with her new environment and pass for white in a whites-only cinema is a turning

point as it reveals what apartheid discourse has concealed from her for most of her life – that the concept of ‘race’ is a construct maintained by hegemonic society to ensure its continued domination and keep the marginal oppressed. Her housemate contextualises the moment of enlightenment: “Fanny verseker my ‘n mens maak net asof jy daar hoort en niemand sal iets sê nie.”¹¹¹ (80) The realisation comes with an understanding that belonging is not strictly the domain of skin colour, but that access is also decided by racial performance and one’s perceived class and financial means. The centrality of performance in the definition of whiteness is demonstrated when Sotos, the Greek swindler who, unfamiliar with nuances of South Africa’s three-tiered social structure, assumes Pattie to be ‘white’. The narrator describes his ploy as follows: “...dit was sy gewoonte om meisies by ryk ou Grieke af te laai. As die meisie gewillig was en sy het die aand oorgebly, het hy ‘n goeie tip verdien.”¹¹² (84) Once he realises his mistake, he is compelled to offload the coloured woman on a poor Greek immigrant, instead of with a rich old Greek man, as was his *modus operandi*. Her hybridity has decreased her value, a fact perceived even by a man who is unfamiliar with South Africa’s racial hierarchy. This characterisation is echoed by Vernon February (1981) in his discussion of the degradation of both colonised blacks and coloureds in colonial and post-colonial society: “No matter how civilized or Western and educated, he is still ranked lower than the poor white, or the Greek and Portuguese urban proletariat or peasant turned immigrant.” (February, 1981: 169) Sotos, the Greek peasant, turned immigrant, has assimilated the values of a racist, patriarchal South African society, which not only devalues women, but debases coloured females *because of their race*.

¹¹¹ “Fanny assures me that you just act as if you belong there, and no one will say a thing.”

¹¹² “... it was his habit to palm off girls to rich old Greek men. If the girl was willing and she stayed the night, he earned a good tip.”

As amusing the passing incident appeared to the two passing characters at the cinema, the risk involved is always on the periphery of the passer's consciousness and the gravity of the legal implications of playing white is explored in much greater detail in *Kroes* than in the other novels. In *God's Stepchildren*, the inter-racial marriage between Lindsell and Elmira in the late 1800s, while by no means sanctioned by society, is nonetheless legitimised through the legal institution of marriage. In the period in which *Kroes* is set, apartheid laws had formalised the social taboo on inter-racial sexual contact.¹¹³ These laws aimed to regulate sexual intercourse and prevent the continued dilution of the 'purity' of the white race through 'miscegenation', that social scourge that was theorised first to have led to the formation of the coloured race. As noted before, Lindsell's considerable financial means influences society's tolerance, albeit not acceptance, of the union. In late 1960s South Africa, where apartheid laws are institutionalised and pervasive, the protagonist's lover in *Kroes*, a working class Greek immigrant, has no such advantage. However, he recognises the benefits financial standing can provide when he says, "[g]eld kan als koop",¹¹⁴ after Pattie's first attempt at reclassifying as white fails. Racial tolerance varies *between* and also *within* racial groups. Pattie describes the Greek community as being supportive of her, but is wary of the coloured reaction to the news of her relationship. This inter-racial tolerance also extends to the black community, and Judith Berzon, commenting on black perceptions of passing in the United States, says that, "to blacks, passing may arouse ambivalent feeling of envy and disapproval,

¹¹³ These laws include the Immorality Act of 1927, and its 1950 amendment, which extended the embargo on inter-racial sex to include not only black Africans, but all non-whites; and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and its 1968 amendment which sought to include persons married outside of South Africa.

¹¹⁴ "Money can buy you anything"

contempt and admiration.” (Berzon, 1978: 141) While in *Passing*, passers’ true racial identities are shown to be guarded by the black community,¹¹⁵ in *Kroes*, passers are often depicted as traitors to their race, those whose ‘downfall’ is not only predicted, but welcomed, as the aunt’s retort that play-whites, “deserve what they get”, testifies. (91)

In all of the novels under review, racial segregation is generally accepted as the norm. Although opportunistic passing is tolerated to a degree, passers who benefit from the exploitation their misread/misrepresented skin colour produces, especially when perceived as being at the expense of those who cannot (as a result of their class, skin colour or physiognomy) pass, are generally not. In *GSC*, even though the male passer Barry’s half-sister protects his identity, she threatens to reveal it when the possibility of ‘miscegenation’ with his white wife arises. Since Wicomb’s passing couple, Helen and John, are both coloured, the threat of ‘miscegenation’ is non-existent. Wicomb provides the reader with two divergent coloured points of view. There is a marked shift in the way that John’s family view his racial orientation once the full extent of his intention to pass for white comes to light. Although not intent on outing the pair, they nonetheless express political distaste for their decision to support apartheid’s political ideals by passing for white. Helen’s brother utterly renounces her, but her mother, on the other hand, endorses her light-skinned daughter’s decision to pass permanently, and even goes as far as aiding her cause by ‘passing’ for a servant in the ‘white’ home of the passing couple once a week. As noted before, in South Africa, much larger economic disparity separates white and black than is the case in the

¹¹⁵ “It’s a funny thing about passing. We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it.” (Larsen, 1929: 39)

United States, and it is perhaps not surprising that social advancement based on arbitrary skin colour is not supported by the coloured community here. *Kroes* also demonstrates the differences in attitude towards inter-racial relationships between older and younger generations. The protagonist's aunts are openly opposed to all forms of racial passing, and whereas her sisters do not attempt to pass for white, they are supportive of Pattie's inter-racial relationship and plans for race-change.

By placing Greek culture in the apartheid South African context, the absurdity of the latter society's racial obsession is highlighted by the author. The character, Laki, being from a country that does not have a history of colonialism, and is not as ethnically diverse as South Africa, is unable to comprehend the import society places on race and skin colour. Unlike South Africa, Greece does not deny citizenship to any sector of its society based on ethnic or racial criteria. With its ancient history and cultural traditions, it is an ethnically and culturally cohesive society, defined primarily by nationality, not race. The difference between the two cultures' identities is highlighted by the comparison the protagonist makes between herself and Laki. She describes them respectively as, "n Griek van Sparta, ambagsman van beroep, en ek, Pattie Peters, bruin meisie van die Strand, klerk van beroep."¹¹⁶ (83) What is conspicuous in this description is the difference in the order of identity markers. Whereas Laki is first and foremost defined by his nationality, then his geographically-defined ethnicity, and then his profession, Pattie is primarily defined by her race/colour, then her sex, followed by her geographical origin, and then her profession. Even more striking is the use of the diminutive 'girl' to

¹¹⁶ *A Greek from Sparta, artisan by trade, and I, Pattie Peters, coloured girl from the Strand, clerk by profession.*

describe her gender, which effectively removes her sexuality. The pursuit of coloured 'respectability' lends itself to the female denying her rights as a sexual being, and instead projecting an impression of childlike innocence. Reverting to the diminutive term emphasises the immaturity presumed if not demanded by society, and consequently ascribed to, coloured women, even by themselves. This is characteristic of a paternalistic society, which orders gender hierarchically, according to racial stereotypes.

Perhaps to a lesser extent, geographical origin and a person's home environment nevertheless influence perceptions of self-worth and respectability. Stamatélos's description of Pattie's place of origin is significant in that it allows for additional racial markers to be alluded to, for further interpretation by the reader. The importance of geographical origin can be traced back to colonial slavery at the Cape, when stereotypes were attributed to persons according to their place of origin. Where a slave came from was thought to relate to the way that he or she behaved, and furthermore, to his or her potential for labour. Cheryl Hendricks (2001) lists geographical origin as being a decisive factor in the subdivision of the slave population, and suggests that racial stereotyping originated in the seventeenth and eighteenth century colonial Cape. She says that, "...origin, which overlapped with phenotypical features (a key component for racial distinctions), differentiated the slave population internally." (Hendricks, 2001: 37)

Geographical origin still signifies much in South African culture, since most previously disadvantaged people from the lower economic strata have not been able to relocate from the areas to which they were relegated under apartheid. Inferences and generalisations about a

person's character are often still made about where he or she comes from.¹¹⁷ The importance of geographical markers in apartheid racial discourse becomes clear in the altercation with the white taxi driver in *Kroes*. The driver is immediately alerted to the fact that Pattie is coloured when he inquires after her destination. The incongruence between visual markers and racial classification is highlighted when he asks Pattie to repeat her required destination, which he immediately links with her race: "Wat sê jy? South End? Is jy Coloured?"¹¹⁸ (66) Although he cannot at the outset classify her based on her external features, and, in fact uncharacteristically requests the 'subordinate' coloured to define her own race, her address serves adequately and indisputably to define her racially. In racial discourse surrounding coloured culture, uncertain biological origin carries shame, which is often exacerbated by geographically 'inferior' origin. Where one comes from, and the home in which one lives has similar control over coloureds, who often try to negate this shame through obsessive cleanliness in the home. In their mission-educated past, coloured respectability and Christian values were inextricably linked, and valued by coloureds, as the 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' creed dictates in Wicomb's Christian mission-schooled coloured characters like Helen, Mrs Murray, and Mrs Mackay.

Stamatélos depicts the racially stratified bias that society retains with respect to origins when Pattie first moves to Johannesburg, and the boardinghouse where her sister stays: "Dis 'n ou buurt en van die huise

¹¹⁷ Pattie describes the poor-white area she first lodges in as being unsafe to walk alone, with alcoholism and rowdy neighbours. "Nee, wat, die area is nie so goed nie. Die bure suip en lol. Ek is bang om alleen daar te loop,..." (133)

¹¹⁸ *What did you say? South End? Are you Coloured?*

is verwaarloos, maar dis tog beter as my buurt in die Strand.”¹¹⁹ (74)

The protagonist fails to explain conclusively why the suburb in Johannesburg is considered ‘better’ than the one in the Cape. The reader is thus left to decide whether what makes the white neighbourhood ‘better’ is simply the fact that its residents are white. The reality of the ostensibly poor-white neighbourhood is revealed later on, when she admits that the area’s social ills enable coloureds to live there despite the country’s enforced segregation laws. She admits that neither the neighbours nor the owners who rent the properties to non-whites object to the non-white residents because they maintain the properties and pay their rent diligently, and because their white neighbours on both sides of the house are most often under the influence of alcohol. The impact that class and economics have in regulating apartheid laws is exposed in this instance, where absent white landlords are able to derive financial gain from non-whites illegally occupying homes in white areas that are perhaps not appealing to more affluent classes of whites.

The last signifier in the comparison between Laki and Pattie is occupation. A traditionally male domain within patriarchal society, work is not the preserve of women within dominant South African culture. However, this situation is complicated in cases where histories of slavery and economic exploitation intersect with the gender hierarchy. With their origins firmly entrenched in colonial slavery, most coloured women have historically been all too familiar with labour, and were compelled by their social circumstances to participate in the wider economy, their bodies regularly employed as the means of production. The lack of choice of variously raced, classed and gendered coloured

¹¹⁹ *It’s an old neighbourhood and some of the houses are neglected, but it’s still better than my neighbourhood in the Strand.*

females to remain in the realm of the private sphere is explored in *Kroes*. Poverty and a lack of male support force women out of the traditionally female domain of the home and kitchen, and into the workplace, where exploitation is rife on all levels, especially financially and sexually. There is thus no homemaker role for the subaltern woman in South Africa, since the symbolic, political or social absence of male figures often require women to head the household.¹²⁰ Due to the colour bar and job reservation for whites, opportunities for self-advancement were simply not available to coloured or black women who possessed educational qualifications comparable to white women or men during the apartheid era. In addition to the racial restrictions placed on coloured workers prior to and especially during apartheid, the emergence of capitalism post-colonially, is undoubtedly one of the catalysts for racial passing, especially for women. Coloured women workers in the 1950s to 1960s found themselves in a precarious position in relation to white and black women workers, within racially stratified workplaces. Coloured women were not entitled to earn higher 'white' salaries, which were often racially reserved; and were simultaneously at risk of being replaced by lower paid black workers. (Berger, 1987) The economic disparity that arose out of this illogical situation undoubtedly justified coloureds' passing for white, either full-time, or intermittently when opportunities to benefit financially from skin colour arose. What are considered to be racial norms thus vary between both race and class categories. While white women were fighting for the right to be emancipated from the domestic sphere, black women were denied the exact opposite of what many may have considered to be a luxury, by comparison. Often, their only contact with the dominant conception of the domestic sphere was their role as servants in the homes of white

¹²⁰ The symbolic, political or social absence of male figures relates both to their 'existential' disempowerment under racism, and to structural subordination.

employees. Both Pattie's mother and her eldest sister are domestic workers in white employ. It is with a sense of romantic nostalgia that she remembers, as a child, accompanying her mother to work, to do laundry in white women's homes. Maggie brings the reality of her mother's sacrifice to bear when she says: "Djulle ma was 'n bruin vrou, of vergiet djy nou? 'n Plain washer woman wat oor die wit mense se baddens gebuk het met die bybie oppie rug."¹²¹ (134) The reclassified-white adult Pattie, as a clerk, has moved from the traditionally domestic sphere into the private, male-dominated realm. That she is increasingly positioned alongside white women as opposed to black/coloured women is significant. She is shown to be losing touch with a coloured reality, and by implication, her ascribed coloured identity. At the same time, her paradoxical position is illustrated as she finds it impossible to empathise with the self-entitlement her white co-workers assume she shares with them through their (presumed) shared sex, race and class.

Unlike the other novels reviewed in this study, *Kroes* is distinguished by the deliberate disassociation by some of its coloured characters from their 'European' heritage. The apparent shame of the Peters family's white ancestry is atypical of the normative coloured assimilationist ideal. Hommel (1981) suggests that assimilation with white society was dangled like the proverbially carrot before coloureds in a subversive attempt to quash the forging of political and social alliances with the greater black majority in the period preceding and following directly after Union in 1910. He says: "Hertzog and his government found it politically expedient to call for the assimilation of the Coloured people with the whites on a limited basis." (Hommel, 1981: 55) Millin's coloured characters are ashamed of and vehemently deny their

¹²¹ *Your mother was a coloured woman, or have you forgotten now? A plain washerwoman who bent over white people's baths with a baby strapped to her back.*

indigenous origins, and in *Playing in the Light*, acceptance of an African heritage only comes in the second-generation unwitting passing figure. In *Kroes*, the characters seem reluctant to acknowledge their white ancestry, and there is a pervading sense of shame and aversion about acknowledging what the protagonist refers to as the '*wit streep*' or 'white streak' that runs through the family. The story, set for the most part in the 1960s, represents a period in which apartheid's grip is felt strongly in the coloured community, with the implementation of petty apartheid laws and forced removals under the Group Areas Act of 1966, and generally a politically turbulent time in South Africa's history. Vernon February contextualises the ethos of the period, when he says:

The sixties proved to be a period of great destruction. Sharpeville was a watershed in South African history. Yet, notwithstanding increasing international pressure, the apartheid measures became more rigid. (February, 1981: 101)

The violence apartheid engendered, as witnessed in the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, became an undeniable social reality for all South Africans. The political apathy and complacency which many coloureds had until then allowed themselves to be deceived into – because of their relatively privileged social position – having been duped by promises of immanent assimilation into white society, was shattered by the magnitude and sheer violence the apartheid apparatus was capable of, as witnessed in the shooting of 69 black protesters including men, women and children at Sharpeville on 21 March 1960.

The assimilationist ideal and hope for the franchise is still strong in the older coloured generation, but seems to have waned by the mid-1960s. In the novel, Bob, the husband of the aunts' cousin, believes that change

in the political climate will occur with the coloured franchise. He says: “Ons sal hulle ytsmyt, die hele donnerse klomp. Wa hoor djy van ‘n party wat so lank inbly? Dis lankal time for a change.”¹²² (51) The irony is that he still sees coloured political involvement in terms of coloureds being appendages to white power, and he clings to the hope that the white opposition political party, the Progressive Federal Party, will bring political change and offer coloureds full citizenship. The catalyst for an (albeit fleeting) coloured politicisation later in the novel is an incident in which a young coloured schoolboy, wrongly arrested for a suspected robbery, dies of an alleged asthma attack while in police detention, hours before the real perpetrators are arrested. An altercation arises between the aunts and Pattie, in which the latter chooses the side of the police, while the aunts condemn their actions. Their diverging experiences are at the heart of their opinions. Here, the politically motivated necessity for ‘choosing sides’ is demonstrated. February (1981) concurs that for coloureds during the period surrounding the Sharpeville massacre, “Apostasy was severely attacked, abstinence turned one into a quisling – a favourite term of abuse for dissidents.” (February, 1981: 89) This is echoed in the exchange between the aunts and Pattie:

“Die seun is van natural causes dood,” skerm ek.

“O, nou glo djy wat hulle sê!” roep Maggie verontwaardig uit, so asof ek nou ‘n verraaiër is.¹²³ (95)

The fact that women, who have generally been less politically active than their male counterparts, are drawn into the political debate alludes to the gravity of the time. Whilst their involvement is not necessarily in

¹²² *We [franchised coloureds] will throw them [Nationalist government] out. Where have you heard of a political party that stays in power for this long? It's high time for a change.*

¹²³ *“The boy died of natural causes,” I defended.*

“Oh, now you believe what they say!” Maggie exclaimed indignantly, almost as though I was now a traitor.

the form of direct protest or party politics, women's activism within their spheres of influence, marks a shift in the country's political climate. As a consequence of their heightened political involvement, the 'natural' social order or hierarchy of the races is questioned and undermined within the domestic sphere. In the fictional microcosm of the novel, this translates into increased distance between coloured and white cultures, as the altercation between the two generations of coloured women illustrate. The generation gap between the coloured women is also apparent in that the older women, who have experienced life under a more 'liberal' dispensation prior to legally sanctioned apartheid and endured the effects of more than a decade of legislated oppression under the Nationalist regime, have a basis for comparison and thus cause for increased resistance. The great uncertainty created by the violent political circumstances of the time, seem to increase cohesion and race pride within the traditionally pigmentocratically divided coloured community in the novel. When Pattie asks whether her mother is the source of the apparent 'white streak' in the family, one of her aunts remonstrates: "Ga! Ons bloed is bruin. Ons bevuil ons nie met ander nie. Ons wiet wat ons is en hou by onse djaart."¹²⁴ (97)

Pattie, who has been protected from the full extent of apartheid oppression by her sheltered upbringing and the privileges begotten from her light skin, and for whom passing for white provides a potential escape from the reality of apartheid, is decidedly less motivated to be politically active. Perhaps because of this, she is uncomfortable with revealing to her family her decision to cross the colour line and marry a white man. Her feelings of shame at

¹²⁴ "*Bah! Our blood is brown. We don't pollute ourselves with others. We know what we are and we keep to our own backyards.*"

abandoning her coloured culture stem from the realisation that she has benefited from the privileges that certain of her family members made possible, even to their own detriment. Her older sister, for instance, is forced to leave school to relieve the financial burden of her schooling so that her younger siblings can be educated; and her aunts take her in when her father is not prepared to raise the young child after his wife's death. The aunts' reaction to Pattie's confession to going to 'white' public places, "Ma djulle is alte voorbarig! Soek djulle miskien die wit boyfriend?"¹²⁵ (96), is reminiscent of Millin's *GSC*, in which the missionary's wife condemns the mixed-race Deborah for showing interest in male suitors outside of her racial 'type' and admonishes her to keep to her own 'race'. In both cases, the racial threat manifests in the psyches of the caregivers when potential for inter-racial sexual interaction becomes imminent. Even though the concept of 'miscegenation' is obsolete in 1960s South Africa, the underlying belief in race 'purity' retains its prevalence, ironically, even in an essentially hybrid society. In the case of both Pattie's paternal and maternal grandparents, the unions are between white men and coloured women. The evolution of the hybrid 'coloured' into a distinct 'race' in South Africa brings 'miscegenation' back into the racist discourse.

All the connotations of race pollution and pathology thus return, and manifest in the psyche of the hybrid progeny as 'shame'. Pattie's father is faced with the shame of growing up being a "half-white" (101) hybrid, being of a coloured mother and white father. This shame is exacerbated by the fact that he marries a coloured woman, who is not considered (by his white father) to be a suitable partner. The arbitrary nature of the circumstances is ironic both in that his father had also

¹²⁵ "But you are presumptuous! Are you perhaps after a white boyfriend?"

married a coloured woman. The only difference between the two sets of grandparents is that Pattie's mother is classified as coloured, not white, by virtue of her mother's race because her parents appear not to have been legally bound by marriage at the time of her birth. The change in the racial situation in South Africa with the onset of apartheid is exemplified by this change in his father's racial tolerance. The marriage at the turn of the century, although most probably not socially sanctioned by white society, is nevertheless legal and socially accepted because of the husband's race. The way that the marriage between the white Lindsell and coloured Elmira in *GSC* (which Millin sets around 1890) is depicted, offers an idea of the social perceptions of inter-racial marriage and 'miscegenation' during this period. In *Kroes*, within one generation then, there appears to have been a considerable shift in perceptions of race. Within a historical context, South African nationalist rhetoric around Union called for a unification of the two divergent white nations to the exclusion of the country's non-white 'races'. Within an increasingly more racially stratified South African society, dominant racist discourse vilified racial admixture and 'miscegenation' in favour of 'maintaining' racial 'purity' through the enforced isolation of different 'racial groups' which was expected to be achieved through apartheid geographical segregation.

The economic advantages of passing appear secondary when race pride within the family is strong. The influence of family values on the potential passing figure is undeniable, and the decision to pass permanently seems often to hinge on the strength of this relationship. It should be borne in mind that the concept of 'family' does not necessarily refer to the traditionally Western conception of the term that adheres to a nuclear structure. Cilliers (1963) goes as far as making this

an attribute of coloured family structure when he says that, “[a]nother feature of the composition of Coloured households is the high incidence of individuals other than immediate members of the families concerned.” (Cilliers, 1963: 25) In *Kroes*, a comparison of the two adolescent passing figures shows the influence family has in their decisions regarding race-change. The protagonist admits to the differences in their home lives when she compares the two girls: “Daar is geen standvastigheid in haar [Lorraine] lewe nie, ook min liefde. Die aandag en stabiliteit waarna sy smag, kry sy by ons, in ons pondok.”¹²⁶ (19) Pattie is fostered by her aunts, but this unconventional extended family unit yet provides a supportive environment conducive to creating a sense of belonging for the child. Not so, Lorraine, whose primary motivation, even at the age of thirteen, is to marry into a rich white family in order to sever connections with her dysfunctional working class coloured family as soon as possible. In the same vein, she can be said to be a victim of the national discourse that portrays dominant society’s mythical family structure within the home as being automatically ‘functional’ and thus more appealing than her transient, unstable and undesirable point of reference. This accounts in large part for her character as appearing ‘unhomed’. She is in essence in search of a home, and a male figure that has been so conspicuously absent from her life. Cilliers distinguishes between the familial organisation of “lower class” and “higher class” coloureds, claiming that the former lends itself to “[m]other-centred and/or mother-dominated families”, while the latter exemplifies a “more father-dominated and equalitarian family pattern”, which he goes on to qualify as a phenomenon ascribed to the “history and disorganized social conditions of working class Coloureds.” (Cilliers, 1963: 26).

¹²⁶ “There is no stability in her [Lorraine] life, also little love. The attention and stability that she craves, she gets from us, in our hovel.”

What the academic fails to recognise is that the history of lower class coloureds is linked and largely shared by more affluent coloureds, whose origins are founded in the same colonial legacy of serfdom. The following are examples of these legacies that serve to contribute to what may be perceived as dysfunctionality within modern coloured family structures: the physical, mental and emotional impact of slavery on slaves; the manner in which slave families were separated in their countries of origin and in the foreign colonial setting; white paternal denial and disassociation from slave/Khoi/coloured mothers and their children; the uterine descent rule which enslaved even free mothers' children through apprenticeship; the denial of the right to legal marriage between slaves; and the emasculation of men and increased self-reliance of women in the absence of male figures in both slave and post-emancipation societies. In *Kroes*, the lower working class coloured families represented seem to follow Cillier's 'family pattern', and are mostly of the mother-headed variety. These family units include Pattie's aunts, her widowed sister, her father's second marriage, Boytjie's family, Lorrain's family and Pattie's landlady in Johannesburg. In the case of Pattie's father's second marriage, even though he is employed, the woman controls the means of production.

If the coloured women in the novel are portrayed as independent, their male counterparts are largely not. The absence of strong coloured male characters is offset by the primary white male character, Laki, in the latter half of the book, and by the young white male suitor in her university class. For the most part, the coloured men, where present, exhibit what can only be considered various weaknesses of character: Pattie's father fails to keep the family together after his wife's death; her

religious bigot uncle has a weakness for young girls; her brother Stewie is sent to a reformatory as a result of disobedient behaviour; her sister, Kay's husband dies, and though his death is not intentional, nevertheless leaves both mother and baby destitute; Lorrain's father is absent; the family friend, Spykers is a drunk, with a predilection for young boys; Gert is a loudmouthed buffoon; the Muslim second year student, Sonny, questions the dominant status quo, but only in the safety of a coloured female audience; and Boytjie's brother is portrayed as being a poor but hardworking family man, but is nonetheless unable to support his wife and children. The only significantly developed coloured male character placed in a positive light is the educated, emotionally sensitive and socially conscious Boytjie, who, regardless of his poverty, takes responsibility for his life and the lives of his family members. However, all of these men, regardless of any resolve to lift themselves out of their stereotypically defined social position, remain emasculated by the state. The white immigrant Laki, on the other hand, is shown to be effortlessly ambitious, hardworking, generous, good-natured and caring, reliable, family-orientated, assertive and emotionally strong, the epitome of masculinity. Although the law is not sympathetic to his inter-racial relationship, he is able to manipulate the status quo with his superior financial and dermal position in apartheid South Africa.

Stamatélos, in her characterisation of coloured men as weak and impotent, undermines the need for coloured men within the family unit, as coloured women seem to have largely usurped the traditionally Western concept of the role of men as protectors and providers. As the family unit may be regarded as a microcosm of society, the implication is that coloured men are deemed superfluous in modern society. This is

in keeping with Vernon February's (1981) assertion on the irony the coloured male character in literature, positioned in impoverished coloured communities, faces when he says:

“One abstracts a picture of the ‘coloured’ who is completely emasculated by society, humiliated, yet ironically expected to reveal himself as a voice of authority at the point where he himself is being humiliated.” (February, 1981: 145)

While this may be the reality for men in poor coloured communities, February's homogenising of coloured male characters into an archetypal figure is problematic, as is Stamatélos's use of multiple characters who possess the same degenerative traits. Both are complicit in the continued stereotyping of coloured men by portraying characters who conform to, instead of challenging, albeit unevenly, the hegemonic status quo. Stamatélos, by positioning the white male in a positive light as a protector and provider, perpetuates the myth by creating a parallel between superior and competent white masculinity and incompetent and inept coloured masculinity. The coloured female who chooses to pass for white is thus justified, and any coloured female light enough to pass for white by implication becomes suspect in her decision to choose a racially ‘inferior’ partner. This is depicted in the situation Wicomb sketches of John's light-skinned sister who marries a dark-skinned teacher in what Helen decries as “an error of judgment” on her part. (167) By choosing a dark-skinned partner, she chooses colouredness and spurns the possibility of passing for white, and the economic and social advantages that this potentially entails.

Evaluating ‘passing’: Point of view in *Kroes*

To borrow from the American academic Juda Bennett's term, “voluntary negro”, in reference to the occasionally passing character

Irene in Larsen's *Passing*, coloureds like Wicomb's Elsie who were light enough to pass, but who chose not to do so may similarly be thought of as 'voluntary coloureds'. (Bennett, 1996: 24) In *Kroes*, after her experience of passing with her childhood friend, Pattie rejects the option of benefiting from white privilege that Lorrain chooses, and resigns herself to being a voluntary coloured. Her aunts have a prominent role to play in her decision to choose colouredness, as they promote racial pride and reject racial transgression in any form, or to any end. So strong is their influence over her that when she becomes involved with the Greek man and seeks to reclassify herself as 'white', she is so filled with guilt and anxiety at the prospect of what their response to her decision will be that she puts it off for as long as possible, even until well after she discovers that she is pregnant with the white man's child. It is only in her conversations with Boytjie's mother, Smiley, that the fear that she has sacrificed her past for an arbitrary, yet permanent identity that will transform her sense of self indelibly, comes to the fore.

The older coloured woman emphasises the link between one's identity and the past, deducing that one's history is an inescapable part of identity. She says: "Van jou past kan niemand weghol nie. Jy is jou past en jou past is jy."¹²⁷ (222) Pattie faces a struggle similar to her male American counterpart in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, who fears that in passing he has, "chosen the lesser part, that [he] ha[s] sold [his] birthright for a mess of pottage". (Johnson, 1912: 257) The manner in which the 'decision' is taken to reclassify her race raises questions about Pattie's 'voluntary passer' status, and just how *voluntary* that decision to reclassify is once the process is set in motion. Since Laki is

¹²⁷ "No one can run away from their past. You are your past and your past is you."

the one who initially suggests the reclassification and since he is also the one who possesses the financial means by which to effect the 'race-change', Pattie's agency is ultimately undermined. The white transgressor does not stand to lose aspects of his or her identity or past, and the repercussions from State institutions like the law or police to punish persons found guilty of committing acts of racial transgression are not as severe as for the white transgressor.

Examples of racial coercion by 'well-meaning' whites abound in other texts, as, for example, in the case of GSC's Elmira, initially encouraged to pass for white by the wealthy, white landowner Lindsell, who also fulfills the roles of employer and landlord to her family. Although she is depicted as someone who passes voluntarily, the decision to become a permanent passer is negotiated by males, in the form of the decision-makers, Lindsell and her father. Even the passing coloured male seems powerless to make the final choice about their status. At age seven, Elmira's son Barry, chooses to pass for white when his father dies, opting to retain the racial status of his half-sister in order to continue to benefit from the association of whiteness. Though, in this case, the child is not a 'voluntary passer' as he does not have the final say. It remains Edith's choice to accept the child into white society or not. In the case of John, in *Playing in the Light*, he is initially a 'voluntary coloured' (i.e. someone who has the ability to pass for white, but who chooses to identify as coloured) when he is appointed as a 'white' traffic officer through a case of mistaken racial identity. He feels ambivalently both flattered to be mistaken for white and entitled to the position, and compelled to accept the job since he has a family to provide for, and since employment prospects for uneducated coloureds are scarce. Under these circumstances, the occasional passer is easily swayed to

becoming a permanent passer. The voluntary coloured faced with the abjects marginalisation that being coloured encompassed, and realising what the reality of the seeming permanence of apartheid meant for coloureds in South Africa, it seems could easily be coerced into becoming a permanent passer.

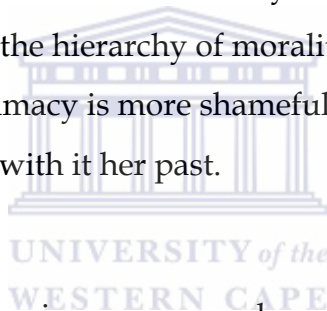
The adaptability of coloureds in the way that their median social position allows them to align themselves, almost at will, (depending on their political resolve and skin colour) with whichever part of their opposing identity or culture they choose to, is often considered opportunism. While permanent passers are easily labelled opportunistic, in the same way, voluntary coloured passers were undoubtedly regarded as foolish by those who could and chose to pass either recreationally or permanently. This is certainly the case in fictional representations of passing. Millin's passing character Elmira, Wicomb's Helen, Larsen's Clare Kendry, and Stamatélos's Lorrain are all positioned in an opportunistic light in their desire for the wealth, entitlement and comfort that they associate with being white. What is also common to all of these characters, regardless of their differences in age and their origins, is that they strongly desire a life opposite to their poverty-ridden coloured childhoods. Also common to the women, is that living in patriarchal societies, they require the aid of men to attain acceptance in white society. The promise of assimilation, which permeated the colonial political landscape, is at last denied the hybrid at the point when the requisite degree of 'civilisation' has been attained and full citizenship is imminent. In their realisation that full citizenship rights are unattainable by any means but perceived whiteness, the passing figure is born.

Hommel (1981) recognises the limited influence of status within the various strata of the coloured group, and says: "Overshadowing the existence of status groups within the Coloured population was the fact that colour was by far the most important criteria of status in South Africa, ..." (Hommel, 1981: 48) The denial by hegemonic society of what possessing pale skin and respectability promised is what makes these characters pass without the characteristic guilt that coloureds resigned to colouredness often feel. In effect, they are merely taking what was promised and then revoked, and because of their marginalisation and poverty, they feel that they have nothing to gain by remaining coloured, and everything to gain by passing for white. The narrator in *Playing* intimates as much in declaring: "Besides, Campbell was a respectable English name, or possibly Scottish, as his father seemed to think; they would just be taking their rightful place in the world." (130) So too does Clare Kendry reason when discussing her reasons for passing for white with her black childhood friend. Having been removed from the black community she grew up in to live as a white person with her bigoted white aunts when her mulatto father dies, she is determined to claim what she feels to be her birthright, and her 'rightful place in the world'. She compares what she has lost with what she can gain by being white. She admits that her hunger for the material was born in seeing not only what her black peers experienced in material wealth and their racially cohesive lives, but in realising that her circumstances as a poor half-caste female denied her of partaking in either, and that by retaining this categorisation, she would perpetually be denied. She says: "You had all the things I wanted and never had had. It made me all the more determined to get them, and others." (19) Clare, who is coerced by her aunts into becoming a passer, comprehends her dependence on them for her livelihood while a minor, and realises that it is a necessary but temporary setback in her

aspiration to wealth. She blames her aunts, and the way that they, employing religion, dehumanise her as the sinful product of 'miscegenation', for her decision to pass permanently in this manner: "It, they, made me what I am today. For, of course, I was determined to get away, to be a person and not a charity or a problem, or even a daughter of the indiscreet Ham." (19)

Clare is cognizant of the potential threat that the aunts' anti-miscegenation stance may have posed to her plans of transcending her social status. She feels that she was compelled to become deceitful, and transforms the void left by her abandonment into material gain by not only passing, but in choosing a very wealthy man to help her permanently transcend her social standing through marriage. In *Playing*, Helen has only to think back to the poverty of her youth to remember why she is willing to sacrifice her religion and morals to pass for white. Whether through omission or lies, and whether an occasional or permanent passer, the act of passing confronts the passer with moral dilemmas regarding his or her given 'race'. *God's Stepchildren's* Elmira, as a childhood passer, develops an almost schizophrenic dual personality as she attempts to justify the undue entitlement she enjoys from her parents over her darker-skinned siblings. Having been socialised in dominant society through her schooling, she appears to have internalised their hierarchical racial beliefs. She thus feels justified to command privilege as her due because of her light skin and Caucasian features when she denies her coloured heritage by insisting that, "I'm not the same as the rest of you." (144) Lorrain has successfully managed to translate the independence she has been compelled to learn amid the instability of her home life into self-confidence. However, she is aware that whiteness also requires material

wealth, and that achieving successful passing demands that skin colour be congruent with financial status. Since confidence is not enough, she finds it necessary to supplement the poverty her coloured self is still subjected to as a female minor, with acts of petty theft. Pattie, on the other hand, is able to depend on her aunts to provide for her, and is thus able to enjoy the innocence of childhood more and for much longer than her friend. Her upbringing as a coloured female has a more prescriptive effect on her morals and she is not able to part with her coloured identity as easily as the other passing figures seem to be able to. Once the decision to pass is taken, she vacillates between following through with it, but it is the unplanned pregnancy, and the threat of her child's status as illegitimate that eventually convinces her to pass for white permanently. In the hierarchy of morality then, her unborn child's potential illegitimacy is more shameful than relinquishing her coloured identity, and with it her past.



Permanent racial passing is a more complex act than simply deciding to swap one's race for a more desirable or beneficial one. It entails careful planning; a great deal of deception for most; vigilance in light of the constant danger of discovery by the oppressed as well as dominant society and its regulatory bodies that hold the threat of expulsion; it usually necessitates a physical relocation to disassociate from prior acquaintances; and most importantly, it requires the psychological detachment from one's roots that enables the passer to sever ties with family, friends and the familiar willingly and permanently. Passing for white successfully is an affirmation of the constructedness of race, and the promise of assimilation realised. In the fictional representation of passing, the author is responsible for portraying the passing character's psychological make-up. The passing figure must first and foremost

believe that she is able to succeed at the deception. This requires dedication and self-confidence, or a deluded sense of identity. In the case of Lorrain, she exudes fearless self-confidence, and is determined to pass by any means necessary, regardless of the risks involved to achieve her goal. Pattie, on the other hand, is less certain of herself. Although her straightened hair temporarily provides her with an alter ego capable of being as self-confident as Lorrain, and she pretends to have conversations in front of the mirror with the white boy she befriends as a play-white, her general psychological state appears to be stable.

The female passing characters in the other novels under discussion all exhibit signs of psychological unravelling. Helen, whose mental state has been discussed in detail in a previous chapter, presents a potent example of the destabilising effect the passer's conflicting identities have on the individual's psyche. Elmira also is disengaged from reality by her desire to pass for white in order to escape her coloured identity. Judith Berzon (1978), in her discussion on the mulatto passing character in American fiction, emphasises the passer's psychological state when she says: "Whether or not the passer can achieve a healthy identity, then, is a central motif in the literature about this phenomenon." (Berzon, 1978: 149) The ambivalence that the coloured passing character faces as a result of her attempt to benefit from the opportunities open to her due to her light skin, while still maintaining the relationships and immersing herself in coloured culture, is what exposes the schism. Stamatélos presents the adult passer, Pattie, as being at odds with her coloured and white selves throughout the novel. While she is at times fiercely proud of her colouredness and how her family has persevered despite their marginal social position, she also feels ashamed of her

coloured roots, and shamed by the deception she is guilty of in trying to hide her new 'white identity' from members of her coloured family. Shame, guilt, fear of exposure, anger, inferiority, disdain of coloured identity and stereotypes, acceptance of the racial status quo, and complacency are all emotions that the passer must navigate in order to reach self-actualisation and to achieve the "healthy identity" Berzon speaks of.

In fiction, the reader is able to make inferences and draw conclusions about the subject matter. But the author is largely responsible for portraying the psychology of the passer, as either balanced or irrational, and the portrayal cannot be free of his or her biases and racial ideologies. Stamatélos seems as ambivalent about race as the protagonist she portrays. Pattie appears to have been caught off guard by the magnitude of her decision to follow through with the race-change. Once her application to be reclassified is approved, she admits to herself: "Die geld is meer. Wat nog? Niks, besluit ek. Ek is nogsteeds ek. Ek lyk dieselfde, voel dieselfde. Eintlik weet ek nie hoe 'n wit mens voel nie, of hoe hulle dink nie, besluit ek."¹²⁸ (142) For Pattie, passing for white represents an existential crisis in which her privileges and experiences as a 'white' female are not available to her coloured family and friends. By joining hegemonic society, she becomes party to the privileges upon which the oppression of her erstwhile social group, including her family and friends, are based. What defines her new reality is an arbitrary document that provides the bearer with the concessions 'whiteness' brings. As 'coloureds', Pattie's siblings are prohibited from her life. Her older sister, Kay, who moves into her

¹²⁸ "The money is more. What else? Nothing, I decide. I am still me. I look the same, feel the same. In fact, I decide, I don't know what a white person feels like, or how they think."

'whites only' apartment with her baby after her husband's sudden death, lives with her 'illegally'. Fear of being caught harbouring coloureds in a white area causes Pattie to expel her sister from her home. The detached severity of this and other situations that highlight the racial inequality between the 'white' and 'coloured' sisters is sometimes downplayed by the author. When Kay finds out that Pattie's white citizenship has been approved, she 'jokes' that she hopes that Pattie doesn't mind having a *meid* for a sister.¹²⁹ In another instance, Pattie offers to act as referee for her sister and to write her a testimonial in her application to work as a live-in domestic servant in a white home: ""Die mense kan my bel om te check. Ek sal hulle vertel hoe wonderlik jy is en hoe eerlik en hoe..." Ek kan nie verder nie, ons bars albei uit van die lag. Dis vrek snaaks."¹³⁰ (138) By accepting the dominant race, Pattie also unwittingly accedes to the implicit racism of hegemonic society. She thus becomes guilty of complicity in white racism by appearing sympathetic to and leaving unchallenged racist epithets articulated in her presence – like when one of her new white colleagues complains about her husband's salary in relation to the high cost of living, saying that they cannot be expected to survive on the salary since they are not "kaffers". (142)

The author tries to mask the offensiveness of these situations with humour and empathy, but in doing so, perhaps reveals an outsider status. Not only is Pattie unable to maintain her identification with coloured culture as she gives up her coloured identity for a white identity, but in the process, she also risks having her South African

¹²⁹ ""Ek hoop nie jy mind dat jy 'n meid vir 'n sussie het nie?" terg sy [Kay]. Ons lag en Faantjie lag saam." (131) "I hope you don't mind having a meid for a sister", she teased. We laugh and Faantjie laughs too."

¹³⁰ ""The people can call me to check. I will tell them how wonderful you are and how honest and how..." I can't anymore, we both burst out laughing. It's dead funny."

identity replaced with a foreign Greek identity. Laki imposes his Greek patriarchal culture, deeply rooted in religion and tradition on Pattie, who is unable to resist his dominance. Although she rejects his suggestion of race reclassification at first, she is coerced into going through with the deception in the end. His cultural dominance is pervasive as he insists that she join the Greek Church and that they marry according to Greek custom when Pattie's reclassification is approved. He also decides, unilaterally, that they should move away to make a new start without what, according to him, is the burden of her coloured friends and family, once married. The reclassification that was initially envisioned by Pattie to restore her agency in order to be allowed to marry the white man and regain the rights to which she would be entitled as a white woman, has not restored her autonomy within a patriarchal social milieu. Her frustrated ambivalence toward choosing her family over marriage is summed up in a morbid analogy that portends the future: "Óf ek bloei dood van verlange vir my mense, óf ek dood van die seer sonder Laki. Maar dit voel vir my dood sal ek dood..."¹³¹ (242) While certain aspects of the story are progressive and realistic, the narrative seems simplified in the way that potentially disruptive characters, and situations arising from them, are not allowed to fully develop.

One of the most disruptive conditions that can arise for a passing female intent on keeping her coloured identity secret is pregnancy. For the passing character, the unborn child's genetic composition is something over which she has no control. The unborn child thus represents a threat to her (usually hard-won) 'white' status. Judith Berzon describes this fear experienced by passers as the "black-baby

¹³¹ "Either I bleed to death with yearning for my people, or I die from the hurt without Laki. But it feels to me that perish I will ..."

myth". (Berzon, 1978: 143) She says: "Even if he does not fear the birth of a dark-skinned baby with kinky hair, a wide nose and bulbous lips, he may fear exposure through the birth of a baby that does not look quite white." (Berzon, 1978: 143) This fear is well documented in the last generation of passers in *God's Stepchildren*. Barry, expressing to his English wife his fear of the degradation that his 'mixed' blood represents, says: "Colour! Don't you understand? Your own child will have it in its blood." (293) For Millin, it is not so much the fear of what the product of 'miscegenation' will look like, as the fear that the flawed genes that 'impure' or contaminated 'black blood' will be allowed to reproduce indefinitely, posing a threat to the purity of future (possibly unsuspecting) 'white blood'. Zoë Wicomb's coloured passers, being permanent passers in a post-colonial setting, are less concerned with 'miscegenation' and infinitely more concerned about the colour and physiognomy of Helen's unborn child. More so Helen than John, since she is the proponent of their permanent passing, while John is sufficiently deluded into believing that he is still only passing opportunistically and that he possesses the agency to reclaim his coloured identity at any time he wishes. For Helen, the unborn child represents an unwelcome and unplanned threat to her plan, and her anxiety about what the child will look like is a barometer of her psychological state:

"...by the time the child arrived with pale skin and smooth hair she was too addicted to anxiety to be relieved. Helen foresaw further problems: the child's hair would grow into a mass of frizzy curls; she would be slow to learn, mentally retarded; she would become a kaffirboetie..." (125)

Helen's anxieties are founded on an internalisation of dominant society's perceptions of the degradation inherent in 'mixed blood'. The female, considered the weaker or flawed sex, bears the burden of both

race and sex in reproduction. The motile sperm of males are often thought of as the agents of reproduction, and the female egg the passive receptacle. However, it is the female who must accept responsibility for any negative traits in the child she gives birth to, whether physical, mental or behavioural, while the male genes are thought to be responsible for any positive traits in the child. In *Kroes*, however, the fear of the latent genetic flaws and risk of incongruent physical traits in the child, are not articulated, perhaps for the simple reason that the unborn child is not allowed to survive. The usual concern about miscegenation and anxieties about the unborn child's physiognomy are not explored. What is of importance to the passer in this narrative is the child's legitimacy, as she is not yet married to the father when she learns about her pregnancy. The 'discovery' of her pregnancy is made while in detention under the Immorality Act after having been arrested in Laki's home for her 'illegal' association with a white man, just hours prior to her reclassification being approved. She decides to withhold the news of her pregnancy from him until after they are married so that, by her reasoning, his decision to marry her is made voluntarily instead of out of a sense of paternal duty. The irony is that concealing the truth about her pregnancy from him and the truth about her race-change from her family impacts negatively on her pregnancy, and she neglects her health and the health of her unborn child in the process. It is this 'irresponsibility' over worrying about telling her coloured family the truth about her reclassification as white that is eventually implicated in the reason for the child's tragic premature stillbirth. Laki says to Pattie on the way to the hospital: "Jy worry en netnou is ons baby dood."¹³²

Unlike traditional tragic mulatto works of fiction, the tragic outcome in

¹³² *You worry* [about your coloured family], *and just now our baby dies*.

Stamatélos's novel is shifted from the 'racial transgressor', to those around her. Death is a pervading theme. It is depicted as a constant threat to these marginalised members of society who are excluded from the protection of the State. Indeed, the novel opens with the untimely death of the protagonist's mother, and intermittently throughout the narrative, death is a constant presence – her aunt dies, her brother is stabbed and beaten to near-death, her baby is stillborn, and her fiancé also succumbs to a tragic end. The protagonist relates the fatalistic history of her family's struggle for survival when she says: "Mamma se broer het in District Six gebly. Hy is een aand deur die skollies beroof en gesteeek. Die volgende dag is hy dood. Mamma en Dadda moes kos gee om die kinders aan die lewe te hou. Die een dogter is jonk dood, aan tering, toe een broer. Nog 'n broer is met die mes dood."¹³³ (187). Although not a tragic mulatto in the traditional sense, the protagonist is mired in the tragedy of those around her. Pattie internalises the misfortune and death of those around her as being directly or indirectly related to her, and believes that these deaths have occurred as a form of 'punishment' for her rejection of her race. Death is also depicted in a manner that suggests that socially corrupt or religiously immoral behaviour results in death. When her brother is left in a critical condition after a fight in the coloured township in which he lives, Pattie says, "Die duiwel maak my wys dat die Here my straf omdat ek nou wit wil wees, Hy het my mos nie so gemaak nie. Miskien het ek die bybie ook verloor as straf."¹³⁴ (252) Her reasoning is such that these incidents are God's vengeance for her having turned her back on her coloured community, and because she has rejected God's 'intention' for

¹³³ *Mother's brother lived in District Six. One night he was robbed and stabbed by thugs. The next day he died. Mother and Father had to provide food to keep the children alive. One daughter died young, of tuberculosis, then a brother. Another brother was knifed to death.*

¹³⁴ *The devil tells me that God is punishing me because I want to be white now. He didn't make me this way. Maybe I lost the baby as punishment as well.*

her 'race' to be 'coloured'. This is perhaps a harsher punishment for her than being killed herself, as she is left to carry the psychological burden of guilt for the deaths of those close to her.

Through Laki's untimely death, the author removes the potential for concluding the protagonist's 'race-change'. Ultimately, Pattie is not able to realise her belonging through the institution of marriage. Where apartheid fails to ensure the separation of the races, death is most effective in its finality. The manner in which Laki's death is presented is significant in that he dies while en route to collecting money for a wedding gift for Pattie. By implication, the institution of marriage is thus implicated in his death, and inter-racial marriage and the potential for 'miscegenation' is circumvented by his premature death. Laki's death is perhaps also the end of Pattie's racial 'transgression' as he represents the impetus for her passing. In the absence of the catalyst, there is no motivation for her race-change. It demonstrates the instability of racial categorisation, and challenges the fixity of race. By ending the novel at this juncture, the author evades the question and the reader is left uncertain about Pattie's future. Will Pattie now revert back to being coloured, and will she be content to do so in light of her experiences of privilege as a white woman, or will she continue the path originally chosen for her by her deceased fiancé?

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Examining the three works of South African fiction in this exposition has allowed me to trace the progression of female coloured identities and to explore this in relation to forms of agency and resistance, especially to the racial and gendered status quo. In particular, I have attempted to shed light on how coloured South African women, who often appear to be deeply complicit with the racial status quo, have made active and often difficult choices – even within the constraints of the social worlds they inhabit. Their choices can be seen as forms of defiance and subversion of fixed and imposed identifications of class, gender, and particularly race.

Such defiance, I have stressed, is particularly significant when we consider the fixity of racial categorisation in South Africa's political history, and, of course, the persistence of fixed categorisations in popular perceptions and ideology, even in post-apartheid South Africa. The gains made through challenging imposed feminine identities are not easily quantifiable, but may be assessed through the manner in which literature represents passing women, who are compelled to go to the extreme of forsaking the person that they are for a performance of an identity perceived as more desirable. Writers are sometimes able to express that which is avoided, silenced and altered in people's lived realities. They are thus situated in a prime position to challenge staid perceptions by posing often-difficult questions, and by making novel suggestions.

Representation has therefore been key to my goal of discovering suppressed and neglected stories and interconnected experiences of

race and passing within the South African landscape. The study has focused especially on narrative formulae, on symbolism, and on central themes found within this genre. These are reviewed in the subsections that follow.

Representation

Who can speak for the coloured passer? This question is asked in relation to the author of passing fictions, as real-life coloured passers have all but disappeared from our recent history. Since case studies into the elusive subject are rare in South Africa, fictions of passing present a means of making sense of 'race', as these works allow readers to inscribe their own 'truths' on the passing characters' motives for passing. The representation of transient passing-for-white characters who do not fit into pre-cast racial moulds allows the readers of these fictions to start to re-imagine 'race'. This is the primary motive for looking at this outmoded practise that surely has no place in post-apartheid society.

In this reading, I have employed female South African authors from various backgrounds in order to get a representative view on the theme of passing for white in fiction. At the start of this study, I was certain that the 'race' of the authors would be indicative of the manner in which the passing characters were represented in their fictions. However, an author's political affiliations, personal history, age, class, sexuality, gender, geographical origins or religious affiliation have as much bearing on their writing, and thus do not deem their representations any more or less authentic. Even if the story is historically contextualised and the socio-political milieu is realistically portrayed, the subject matter remains subjective.

The effort to represent coloured character's complexities as comprehensively as possible is well-demonstrated in Zoë Wicomb's passing narrative. At John's sister's house Marion experiences shame at her parents' past and at the ignorance her privileged 'white' upbringing entitled her to. It is also here that she experiences a turning point in her self-identification when Elsie points out her own filial obligation to respecting her parents' representation: "They are my own Ma and Pa; they are not for display." (174) Although she is referring here to the photograph of her late parents, Elsie's comment alludes to the historical misappropriation of the coloured body, voice and identity as the 'Other'. The allusion to the shameless public display of Sarah Baartman is not lost in this analogy. Marion recognises that her past is not reconcilable with her dead grandparents, essentially 'strangers' she has little memory of and no tangible affiliation to. What Marion realises through Elsie's defensive assertion of her parents' privacy is that she is not able to claim ownership of them, or to assert the right to representation of them.

On the other hand, the coloured female, Brenda, talking to Marion about literature, says: "To live vicariously through other people's words, in other people's worlds, is better than not living at all." (163) She betrays her own belief that her life, which for her constitutes the poverty and mundane essence of colouredness, is considered, "not living at all", as she admits later when she says, "[m]ine is the story of everybody else in Bonteheuwel, dull as dishwater." (217) In Scotland, Marion contemplates the thought of her life produced in the public realm, exposed for public consumption: "And if, she wonders - in a drunken state, say, or old age - she were to be lured into telling her story, which part, which anecdote would be selected to bear the weight of presenting her to the world? How sure you'd have to be that the

story you tell is indeed of the you that will prevail." (204) Brenda's confession that she has been writing John's biography – "I found that your father's was the story that I wanted to write, the story that should be written" (217) – is made in a way that suggests that she is entitled to do so. Brenda, by assuming to be the voice for the coloured passing-for-white character, presumes her right to be in a position to relate John's story, and by presuming this, suggests that the passer, Marion is racially inauthentic, not qualified to take the role as narrator of her father's life story. She says as much in the confrontation in which Marion insists that she knows her father's story: "Actually, Brenda says, I suspect you don't." (218) Brenda identifies racially as coloured, geographically as Capetonian, she is from a poor economic background, but is university educated, and therefore feels herself justified, through her authority of shared experiences, to represent him. She in effect becomes the coloniser post-apartheid, commodifying John by capitalising on his story of passing, which is, in the post-apartheid setting, "ripe for investment". (218)

Wicomb thus challenges the notion that representation is legitimated by those positioned as insiders, as opposed to the privileged subject speaking for or as the 'other'. By rejecting the coloured woman's suggestion that she should write John's story, Marion reconstitutes her indeterminate 'race', not in reference to skin colour, but in terms of reconciling her parents' race-change with how that choice has influenced her. By rejecting Brenda's claim on her father's story, she reclaims their story as her own, regardless of her 'race'. In so doing, Marion takes ownership of her parents' and her own colouredness.

A gradual shift in acceptance of coloured culture into mainstream South African society has been witnessed post-democratically. More

coloureds are being heard on radio; presenting television programmes; seen in television advertisements; and a television series, depicting a range of coloured identities, "Colour TV", was aired on national television, but enjoyed only one season. To a large extent though, the coloured people, and coloured characters on television are still not represented in ways with which working class coloured people can readily identify. There is a sense that acceptance of coloured characters into mainstream culture can only be achieved by being seen to display respectability through conventional appearance and social mannerisms, and by adhering to dominant norms like using standard forms of language. However, tabloid newspapers like *Die Son* and the *Daily Voice*, written in colloquial Afrikaans dialects that represent many working class communities in the language to which they are accustomed, are reaching vastly dispersed coloured and other working class communities, and are experiencing unparalleled economic successes as a result. Thus, in popular culture, coloureds are enjoying greater and varied representation, but as yet, not to the extent that dominant cultures are.

The valourisation of the language variant that most working class coloureds communicate in, *Kaaps*, also needs to be addressed if coloureds are to feel truly represented in a plural South African society. To this end, for the first time, a colloquium on this variant of the Afrikaans language was held in an academic setting. The University of the Western Cape hosted the two-day symposium on 19–20 July 2012, which covered the historical, social and syntactical background of the language, and the stereotypes and stigma traditionally attached to using the language, and to the users of the language. Also discussed, was the potential for its use in education and promoting literacy as a mother tongue language, in the economy, and in popular culture. While

the reach of these discussions is yet to be ascertained, the main message of the symposium was a positive one. A call was made to break the associations of inferiority with the language and its users, and to promote empowerment and inclusion through acknowledging that not just one, but a continuum of language variants exist in Afrikaans.

While coloured females are by no means fully represented, they too experience more diverse representation in the media and popular culture post-apartheid. Simultaneously reviled and revered for their perceived transgressions, coloured women, as imagined in dominant and popular discourses, are still often presented as bound by their bodies and their sex. These representations are not always free from stereotypes of female weakness, lack, or overt sexuality. For example, in a popular South African soap opera, *Isidingo*, broadcast during prime time week-nights by the national broadcaster, only one coloured female is represented. 'Lolly de Klerk' is presented as an ambitious, socially mobile, self-reliant character who challenges the patriarchal order by capably heading up a male-dominated television newsroom. However, this is incongruously offset by the character's name, expressed in flippantly diminutive and sexualised terms that undermine any esteem she potentially commands through seeming to challenge gender roles in the workplace. She is regularly subjected to thinly-veiled sexual innuendos by colleagues within the workplace, most notably by a white male colleague. In addition to this, in a display of continued sexualisation of the coloured female body, she is presented to the viewer writhing provocatively in a pile of gold in the opening sequence that introduces the programme.

The sexualised coloured female body as site of difference

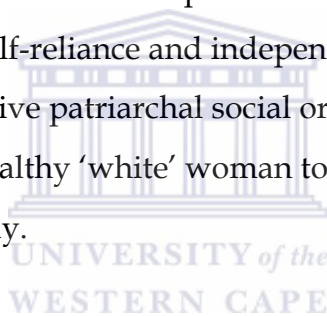
If we view the female passing characters under review in chronological order, a pattern of similarities and progression of changes in the way they are perceived should emerge. Views of 'race' evolved in complex and uneven ways as South African society moved through phases in history. Before segregation became legislated through apartheid in 1948, and 'race' became entrenched through definitive categorisation and documentation through the race register, South African society relied on a system of racial gradation based on biological assumptions about the visible body. Deborah Posel (2001) ties notions of social status to the body when she says: "Readings of bodily differences were closely tied to judgments about socioeconomic status and culture, on the assumption that biological differences were naturally associated with different ways of living." (Posel 2001: 94)

Millin throughout *God's Stepchildren* takes pains to quantify 'race' in measurable gradations, and her passing character, Elmira, is thus described first and foremost in corporeal terms: according to Lindsell, "whiter than our own children were" (131), as "[y]oung, tall, erect, delicate featured, golden-brown eyes and golden-brown hair" (166), and as "much darker than he had always imagined, coarser featured, decidedly coloured" (204); by the narrator as, "a strong and beautiful child, with an olive skin, delicate little features, large golden-brown eyes, shadowed beneath as her mother's were, and straight golden-brown hair." (134), and, "Elmira Kleinhans was [according to her classmates] darkish" (141), "a tall, pale, thin girl" (150), "golden and pretty" (151), "thin and yellow and careless of her appearance" (164), as being a "tall, dark, beautiful child of a wife" (193), and after the birth of her child as, "not quite so pretty as she had been before she married Mr. Lindsell. She had grown stout, her skin had become darker and coarser, and even her hair had lost its suggestion of gold. She was no longer

white as the baby Deborah remembered her to have been. Yet she was still, undoubtedly handsome, and, however she looked, Mr. Lindsell would have been satisfied with her, since she was his son's mother." (217); by the father of her suitor as a, "[p]retty girl, Elmira, with that all-over golden colouring" and as having a, "dark, interesting face" (154); and Edith describes Elmira's "clear, rounded face, her fine young body luxuriant with the promise of further growth" (175). Elmira is thus essentialised as being no more than an inert body, in the public domain for others to inscribe racially. The black female body is represented here, as Lewis terms, "the locus for others' inscriptions". (Lewis, 2001: 148) Elmira's value is measured in her skin colour and proximity to a white ideal. The descriptor cited last by the narrator is interesting in that it demonstrates how the coloured woman's value, linked throughout with her physical body and phenotypical features, is superceded at once by her ability to reproduce.

Elmira is not presented in a way that suggests that she is able to recognise marriage as a way of engaging her own agency to improve her potential in society – as an "agent of change". (Bhabha, 1994: 93) Millin instead portrays the character in passive terms, as a person for whom marriage with the old white man, Lindsell, is the only means of escaping her 'fate', which, as a coloured woman, largely implies toiling as an appendage to white society within a larger patriarchal matrix. The author accepts that females, and more especially coloured females, are at the behest of a hierarchically structured patriarchal order. Lindsell acknowledges the veritable 'transfer of ownership' of the woman from father to husband through marriage when he says: "Nobody will ever come asking questions any more about whose daughter you are. You will be Adam Lindsell's wife." (176) Ownership of the female is thus absolute, and the author seems unable to challenge the notion. She is

also fully aware that economic power transcends racial status and gender, as Lindsell's assertion that money "can make even black blood golden" infers. (176) This is in keeping with what Posel (2001) propounds as the "commonsense" attitude toward race prior to 1948: "While understood and represented as a biological phenomenon, "race" was crucially also a judgment about social standing. Constructions of a person's race were based as much on "mode of living" as on physical appearance." (Posel 2001: 94) By using the word "golden", Lindsell alludes to material wealth, and the stereotype of coloured women as opportunistic 'gold-diggers' who use their sexuality to ensnare unsuspecting white men is subconsciously inferred. The old white man thus exploits what is perceived to be her greed, her desire for self-reliance and independence from the constraints of a restrictive patriarchal social order, and unrivaled elevated status as a wealthy 'white' woman to take ownership of the coloured woman's body.



The encounter between Wicomb's Helen and the Councillor, Carter described in the chapter focusing on *Playing in the Light*, is reminiscent of the colonial encounter between Cuvier and Sarah Baartman, as the authority and the subordinate, whose sexualised body provides 'evidence' of her inferiority. It is also redolent of the more familiar representations of the passing woman who trades her sexuality for whiteness in relation to white men - as represented by the passing character Elmira in Millin's work, and the ingénue Lorrain in *Kroes*. Carter identifies Helen's 'race' in purely sexual terms: "Blushing brown nipples set in dark aureoles, for in spite of the reddish-auburn hair she was dark..." (139) His assumptions about Helen are rooted in enduring colonial discourses about 'the black female', which subsume sexual promiscuity and deviance. Gabeba Baderoon (2011) notes the colonial

basis for the commodification of the black female body succinctly: “Slave-owning colonists exercised sexual license over the bodies of enslaved and indigenous women through enforced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence, and European discourses about race and sexuality normalised the sexual violation of such women.” (Baderoon, 2011: 213) Even post-colonially, these stereotypes persist and as a result of these perceptions, Carter feels himself justified to assume not only entitlement to the coloured female body, but also preempts Helen’s sexual predisposition to his advances, being a white male, and by inference in terms of the social hierarchy, desirable. In this exchange, Wicomb demonstrates how, through his reading of her body, the white male assumes superiority and coloured deference, and how the coloured woman, who is deemed worthless in the racial and gendered status quo, accepts her inferior role as ‘other’. Pumla Gqola (2001) provides insight into the skewed power play at work between the white male and coloured woman when she says: “Social hierarchies are stamped on the bodies of the Other to identify and define them and their position in the ordained social order.” (Gqola, 2001: 49) Under Carter’s warped presuppositions, Helen’s body language is misconstrued as being indicative of her sexual intent.

In *Kroes*, the character, Lorrain, is similar to Elmira in many ways. However, one of the most significant differences is that the setting here is the 1960s, firmly within the apartheid era. Unlike Millin’s description of the play-white Elmira, the author here provides a more rounded picture of the character. The character is still, first and foremost, defined in terms of physical traits, but Stamatèlos also includes positive personality traits that suggest complexity and that the character personifies more than just the body: “Sy is beeldskoon. Lang, reguit hare, mooi oë en pragtige, perfekte tande. Sy is slim, vriendelik en

gewild. En sy lyk wit.”¹³⁵ (19); and “Lorrain is so selfversekerd soos altyd.”¹³⁶ (21) After a vehicle accident in which her racial identity is exposed to her white boyfriend, she is described by the narrator as: “Lorrain met die kaalvoete, die ou rokkie, die hare wat in ‘n poniestert langs haar kop vasgemaak is met ou broek-elastic en die oë vol trane.”¹³⁷ (26) After being found out to have stolen money from the home of her friend, Lorrain is described by a coloured female adult as follows: “Kyk nou so ‘n meid! Ek het altyd gesê daai kind is te mooi.”¹³⁸ (31) This fatalistic approach to coloured female passers’ advancement is hinted at in *Kroes*, but the teenager, Lorrain, refuses to admit ‘defeat’ and uses her sexuality to find a white suitor who is less racially circumspect than her previous white prospect.

In representations of her post-apartheid characters, Zoë Wicomb seems to suggest a shift in the male gaze, following a reunion of the sum parts of coloured women. While Boetie stares at Brenda’s behind, presented in deliberately sexual terms – “over which the cloth of her trousers strains as she bends” (35) – his gaze is decidedly non-sexual, and he is not compelled to act on a desire to take ownership of Brenda’s body. He registers the act of looking, but seems indifferent to translating the gaze into a sexual act or violation.

From the examples of the gender dynamics shown in all the novels under discussion, it is clear that representations of coloured females bound to the body-as-commodity are common to all the works – albeit in varying degrees – regardless of the author’s subjectivity, or the

¹³⁵ She is beautiful. Long, straight hair, lovely eyes and pretty, perfect teeth. She is clever, friendly and popular. And she looks white. (19)

¹³⁶ Lorrain is as self-assured as always. (21)

¹³⁷ Lorrain, barefoot, with the old dress, the hair in a ponytail tied up with old panty-elastic next to her head and the eyes full of tears. (26)

¹³⁸ Just look at such a girl! I’ve always said that girl is too pretty. (31)

historical setting. However, there is a definite progression towards female autonomy in the narrative, especially as the more relaxed political and social climate in South Africa post-democracy offers writers increased opportunities for alternative means of representing female realities.

The passer's home as site of unhomeliness

In discussing the passing character in fiction, the home becomes an important symbol in delineating the theme of the passing character's profound social alienation. For passers, the home should represent a neutral site in which they can remove their masks and play down their racial performances, out of sight of the agents who police society – provided that the home is not shared with these agents. In most cases, however, homes are represented as 'unhomely', potentially subversive sites, unstable, temporary localities, or prisons. These private, domestic spaces are often ironically made public through the context of being fictionalised – domains into which the state and social laws intrude. 'Unhomeliness', a term used by Homi Bhabha (1994) to describe the hybrid condition of unbelonging in society, therefore aptly captures the passer's marginality as being neither at home in coloured or white society, as a result of ill-defined skin.

Millin presents the passing character in three locations that signify homes at various stages of the passer's life – parental home, boarding school, and marital home. The coloured female passer, Elmira, vacillates between parental home and school. Home and school represent for her two different identities, and as time passes, she finds it more and more difficult and less inclined to separate them when moving between the two spaces. The entitlements of being white make her loath to claim her coloured identity, even despite the anxiety she

feels about being exposed as a passer. In the end, after her marriage to the old white man, Elmira's days are spent traversing between Lindsell's homestead and her parents' house. The marital home, because of its geographical and social isolation, provides the passer with no audience for gauging her performance of whiteness, or for affirmation of her status by white society as a result of that performance.

In *Kroes*, the protagonist is unhomed early in life following the death of her mother. Her father promises Pattie that her stay with her aunts will be brief, but ultimately abandons her in their care. She articulates her unbelonging in her new school as being akin to being an intruder¹³⁹ and follows this up with a wish that she could be back at her mother's house. The home, then, represents safety and familiarity, and she feels uprooted from this place of safety into what is described as a "pondok" (16) or literally an 'outhouse'. As time passes, the occasional visits at her parental home become strained as she becomes estranged from her siblings and surroundings. Her lack of contact makes her feel like a stranger in her own home and eventually she does not look forward to the visits there. Pattie shares this unhomedness with the young passer, Lorrain whose own dislocation from home is as a result of the indifference her transitory home represents. The aunts describe the reasons why Lorrain seeks refuge in their home as being due to her mother's frequent relationships with men and because they move house often.

Similarly, Nella Larsen's Clare Kendry, from the American novel which bears such striking similarities to *Kroes*, is uprooted from her home

¹³⁹ "Ek voel so skaam tussen die vreemde kinders. Amper soon 'n indringer, iemand wat anderplek hoort." (15) *I feel so shy around the strange children. Almost like an intruder, someone who belongs somewhere else.*

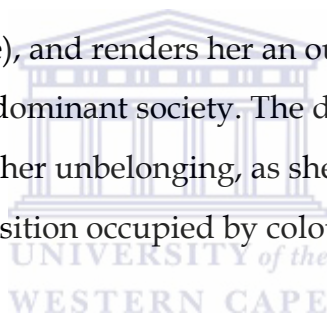
when her father dies, and is taken in by her religious zealot aunts. The displaced and transient experiences of the pre-passing figures in both novels are similar, and these temporary homes become metaphors for the unstable identities of the coloured passer. The passer makes forays into dominant society, and retreats to occupy the in-between space reserved for coloureds, but with each transgression, the insurgent is able to patch the holes in her ambiguous identity with an acknowledged one, until the inevitable juncture when she must decide whether or not to retreat to the periphery or to stay in the centre permanently. Or perhaps at the juncture, her experiences in the centre close the door to the periphery and the passer loses her ability to retreat into the safety of the coloured home. The protagonist moves into a lodging house situated in a 'white area' but occupied by coloureds (who are therefore also passers). Pattie is forced to flee this house after the police come looking for her there under suspicion of association with a white man, considered illegal under apartheid law. She is arrested under the Immorality Act while she is visiting her white immigrant lover in his home. Her next house is a flat in a white area, which she knows she cannot afford while earning comparatively less as a coloured person, and is illegal for her to occupy in terms of the Group Areas laws. The home as political site is shrouded in threat, and takes on a prison-like guise. With the advent of apartheid, the change in law makes occupying white space 'illegitimate' and being exposed poses a physical threat to the passer.

The home is prominently featured in Wicomb's work, as it pertains to her two passing females. Not much is said about Helen's childhood home, but the brief accounts hint at abject poverty. The house Helen and John move into after their marriage, is in a 'white area', and is described as one of which Helen is proud, but only until she starts to

suspect her neighbours to be coloured, play-whites like them. It becomes a house that excludes all others as it harbours the illicit trespassers, and comes to be a guarded, silent place, a “pristine house, without clutter, without objects that clamour to tell of a past” (10), where secrets are not allowed to be spoken. For Helen, the epitome of whiteness, (and what she ultimately aspires to), is described by the narrator as “respectable whiteness” (131). Her aspirations are borne of the fact that her experiences in white society had, “alerted her to the many shades of whiteness, and that there was no need to settle for anything other than the brightest.” (128) Helen is all too aware that negotiating whiteness demands vigilance, as the nuances of what that whiteness entailed, that threatened to reveal her as an imposter and thereby expel her from that privileged world, are vague and bewildering. Even something as simple as ordering bouquets of plastic flowers for her home is perceived as a threat when a sophisticated white customer alerts her to their signification as gaudy, tasteless and low-class. The irony is that the flowers offer no real threat to her, as her home constitutes a space to which no outsiders are admitted. By not allowing others entry into her private sphere, she is not in a position to fully gauge her performance and redeem the benefits that are the privileges of white society – unrestricted admission, acceptance, belonging and social resources.

Marion describes her parents as being, “meticulous, neurotic really” (10) about keeping curtains drawn. She recalls a memory of her parents once inadvertently having an argument in front of an open window, describing their reaction to the discovery of their oversight as “panic of being on display”. (10) That panic is transferred to Marion in adulthood, and she feels anxious at the prospect of having guests, unable to comprehend why someone would feel the desire to visit her

home. Marion's warped sense of domestic normality is contained in the fact that "[h]er parents never had any friends over, and not having any family – aunts, uncles, grandparents or cousins – she cannot recall anyone ever eating at their house." (71) This dysfunctional childhood home becomes the site of Marion's social ineptitude, and mirrors the home she occupies in adulthood. Her obsession with privacy, security and with getting her interior décor to look like the pages of a magazine mask a childhood desire to live in a noisy, unfettered home like her friend Annie's, which allowed for its occupants to swap the seclusion and privacy of inside for the freedom of enjoying the outside space. Helen's unhomeliness has been passed down to her unconsciously passing daughter, who cannot make sense of her role in society (public) or in the home (private), and renders her an outsider regardless of her privileged position in dominant society. The discovery of her racial heritage does not alter her unbelonging, as she is transposed into the similarly interstitial position occupied by coloured persons.



In all the narratives concerned, it is the threat of being unmasked that creates in the passer a sense of temporariness that threatens identity and belonging and that in turn makes the home an unhomely, transitional place.

The tragic mulatta and tragedy as the fate of the passing figure

The tragic mulatto, described in the preceding chapter, is a figure who originated in American slavery fiction and whose fate followed an inevitable path to failure, self-destruction or death. In the South African context, the figure is also often employed in fiction by authors who wish to illustrate the consequences of transgressing hegemonic society's norms. The tragic mulatto trope has its origin in the biologically determinist idea of the warring blood of the two opposing sides of the

half-caste's identity that allows him to identify with neither – the wholly degenerate black blood and the contaminated, but essentially 'good' white blood that can never mix and that can thus never produce a stable identity. J. M. Coetzee (1988) explains the turmoil of 'flawed blood' depicted in fiction as being, "an instinct for death and chaos" that "drives the half-caste himself to a withdrawal from life." (Coetzee, 1988: 152) In the South African novels under review, the lack of agency of the hybrid to choose her own fate is generally either ascribed to external forces like apartheid laws, or the psychological distress caused by her ambivalence to the two opposing racial identities that constitute the subject.

In *Kroes*, the protagonist goes through the indecisions of hybridity – shame, guilt, self-loathing, frustration and anger at identifying as coloured, but these are balanced out by her race-pride, empathy for the hardships endured by coloured people, and love for her friends and family. Uncharacteristically, the tragic mulatta character is spared her life, but those around her suffer the fate she may otherwise have been subjected to under this trope. Instead, the tragedy of death befalls her mother, her sister's husband, aunt, unborn child, and finally her fiancé. The death of the white immigrant, who represents the impetus for her being reclassified as white, brings an end to the possibility of consummating her aspirations in marriage. The novel ends at this tragic juncture, and the reader is thus not privy to whether the protagonist will remain 'white' or whether she will revert back to being 'coloured'. A similar inconclusiveness is portrayed when the young passer, Lorrain, is removed from the narrative prematurely. This is disappointing, as, of the novels under discussion, the manner in which Stamatélos depicts passing and her female passers is by far the most progressive in terms of the agency afforded them.

The passing for white protagonist, Elmira, in *God's Stepchildren* is not subjected to a tragic ending in order to cease her racial transgression as a passer. However, her life is by no means rewarded, and she most closely follows the path of the tragic mulatta stereotype. Millin presents the passer's life as a quest to drown out the black blood in her veins. It becomes an attempt to drown her 'coloured self' as per her schoolmate's suggestion that she would drown herself if she found out that she was coloured. The means by which she goes about this is by trying to ensnare unsuspecting white men while passing for white. It is only at the end of the narrative, when she is reunited with her coloured family and on her deathbed, that the tragedy of her cursed life is revealed to the reader through the relating of her life story to her son, Barry. She abandons Lindsell and her son for a young white sales representative with whom she lives 'in sin' as an adulteress. They squander the shares conferred on Elmira at her marriage to Lindsell, and he leaves her after the child she has by him dies. Thereafter, she takes up with and has a child by another white man who also leaves her, and she raises their illegitimate child on her own. The child, resentful of his mother's, by now unmistakably coloured 'race', forsakes her as well as soon as he is able to leave her. The passing coloured female is kept alive long enough in order to bear witness to and atone for the 'grand tragedy' she has effected through deceptively passing for white and 'miscegenation', as a warning to Barry and anyone else who may be tempted to follow in her self-destructive footsteps.

Zoë Wicomb's depictions of Helen portray her as a classic modern day 'tragic mulatta figure in the novel – a racial passer whose unfulfilled life constitutes her tragic end. Helen is offset by her daughter, Marion, who, as an accepted member of white society, is the fruit of Helen's labour.

The narrator reinforces this when he says, "...Helen's achievement was her legacy to Marion, a new generation unburdened by the past." (150) Marion has, until the chance discovery of her mother's racial subterfuge, been an unconscious passer. She is unsure of how to deal with the knowledge of her newfound 'race' and accompanying identity. Marion's contemplation of what will be required of her to assume her new identity alludes to the fluidity of coloured identity over time and space, and the interchangeability of subject positions in a new era less marked by arbitrary, repressive 'race' laws and racial discourse:

I was white, now I will have to cross over; but if those places are no longer the same, have lost their meaning, there can be no question of returning to a place where my parents once were. Perhaps I can now keep crossing to and fro, to different places, perhaps that is what the new is all about – an era of unremitting crossings. (107)

Through this acknowledgement, Wicomb breaks the fatalistic approach to passing and the 'tragic mulatta' trope, and reintroduces the possibility of coloured female agency in the subjects' self-determination. Marion is the figure of reconciliation, the mediator between the past and the present. Experiencing a cycle of anger, shame, pity and acceptance of her parents' decision to pass, she tries to conceptualise Helen's motives. Marion first conceives of her parents' decision in what is a typically held view of passing, that they "betrayed their families", "obliterated their histories", and "thought only of their own advancement." (122) But as she learns more about the act of passing within the oppressive framework of apartheid society and tries to make sense of John and Helen's lives, she appreciates the complexities involved in their decision to pass for white. She admits to the futility of berating her father when she says: "She has become kinder, less judgmental, but he blinks with the effort [to concentrate] and has nothing more to offer..." (164) In her confrontations with John, Marion finds herself at an impasse with race, and realises that

regardless of the past, her father is simply a man with limited education who is rapidly slipping into old age.

'Respectability' and 'shame' in the quest for female agency

Zimitri Erasmus (2001) lays bare the choices for decent, educated, middle-class coloured females as being either "respectability or shame". (Erasmus, 2001: 13) Coloured respectability is often presented as the antidote to those stereotypes that equate colouredness with degeneracy. And as the bearers of the shame associated with that degeneracy due to their roles in sexual reproduction and the reproduction of culture, coloured women carry the burden of performing respectability squarely. But, being diligent in the pursuit of respectability also often means denying sexual desire and restricting female agency. The successful performance of respectability is of paramount importance to the passer, since dominant society is accessed through being perceived as being adequately 'civilised'.

Millin's work of fiction has no shortage of moral caregivers. Deborah's 'foster family', the Burtwell's, impart advice on morality and respectability that precludes her sexuality in no uncertain terms. More than being moral guides, because Deborah is described as being an "unprincipled savage" who must be protected from her self-destructive sexual impulses, "it is [their] work to drive that wildness out of [her]." (88) Millin demonstrates the futility of their endeavours at introducing respectability to the hybrid's biologically predetermined 'uncivilised nature' when she succumbs to her sexual desires first with a Khoi student, and then with a white man. The missionaries admit to the failure of their 'civilising mission' when Deborah falls pregnant with the white man's child.

What these fictional passing-for-white women – Elmira, Lorrain, and Helen – have in common is what Nella Larsen terms a “having way” in reference to her passing character Clare’s personality. The narrator describes this temperament as having been present in her formative years: “There had been, even in those days, nothing sacrificial in Clare Kendry’s idea of life, no allegiance beyond her own immediate desire.” (6) In many ways, this determination should be regarded as a positive character trait, but in the case of these passing figures, it is most often depicted as opportunism, a morally corrupt attribute. Their choices are mediated within restrictive societies, but less so when the pursuit of ‘respectability’ is not the passing female’s chief concern. While Helen’s ‘having way’ is tempered by trying to be as inconspicuous as possible so as not to be exposed in the bewildering white world, Lorrain, Elmira and Clare exploit the newfound agency afforded them in their roles as ‘white’ women, and take their privileges as their due. No one pursues respectability with as much fervour as Wicomb’s play-white, Helen. In the process of that pursuit, she attempts to break all ties to a ‘shameful’ coloured history, camouflaging herself with “pinkish pancake make-up applied even on Sundays” (125) and surrounding herself with things that she thinks best embody white respectability. However, her uncertainty about the nuances of whiteness limits her agency and restricts her to a diminished, sterile and silent world within their ‘white’ home.

The pursuit of respectability is not practised in isolation, and social agents have a role to play in ensuring that coloured females do not stray from their responsibilities. In *Kroes*, as in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, the protagonists’ spinster aunts fulfill this role in the absence of their dead mothers. Her two white aunts, described by Clare as being

“respectable”, take it upon themselves as their Christian duty to provide a home for the daughter of their brother’s sexual and social ‘indiscretion’. However, the aunts admonish her to disavow her black race and to pass for white, and to accept a servile role in their ‘white’ home in exchange for their patronage. In a bid to re-socialise her in white society, the aunts impart to their niece, “talks on morals and thrift and industry and the loving-kindness of the good Lord.” (19) Self-reliant and not content with being a passive receiver of the hand-outs the aunts see fit to dole out to her, Clare is determined to take full advantage of the privileges her pale skin embodies in order to acquire what whites were entitled to by virtue of their perceived ‘race’. By passing for white, she disregards her aunts’ moral advice and instead uses her physical appearance and female sexuality to pursue her own desires. Her rich white husband removes her from the dependency on her aunts’ charity and the poverty to which she is otherwise doomed by her race, class and sex, but in exchange, she is obligated to deny her black past and endure and be complicit in his racism. These exchanges point at the social and sexual transactions required by the coloured woman who chooses to pass.

In *Kroes*, Pattie’s aunts admonish her with the same kinds of sexual messaging that Erasmus (2001) relates as demarcating, “the bounds of sexual behaviour for young coloured women.” (Erasmus, 2001: 13) In this instance, the mixed sexual messaging of calling her a “grootmeisie”¹⁴⁰ when she first starts to menstruate, is followed by a stern warning to her to be careful around boys. While on the one hand they offer her recognition as a sexually mature young woman, on the other, they still maintain control over her sexuality. This ambiguity in their approach to raising her is extended to their role in her education.

¹⁴⁰ *Big girl*

By providing her with the means to finish high school and to go to university, they seem to promote her independence. However, when she decides to leave the family unit in search of work in another city, they are less than pleased with her decision. Bound to the moral aspect in letting the young woman leave the home unsupervised is an economic consideration in having to forgo her potential for contributing toward the household financially. Pattie's body comes to represent both a liability *to them* (if sexually degraded) and an asset (as the potential means of production). Even as a consenting adult, the aunts are unwilling to relent, and before she departs for Johannesburg, they remind her that she is 'respectable'. "Djy moet djou gedra, djy's 'n ordentlike kind."¹⁴¹ (73) It is significant that they call her a "child'. This unwillingness to acknowledge her as a mature young woman stems from their unwillingness to relinquish her sexual agency to her. It seems that it is because of this that Pattie feels ashamed to tell them of the white boyfriend she has in Johannesburg, or that she wants to marry him, or eventually that she is pregnant – and thus indeed *not* respectable. Her agency is tempered as she ambiguously resists the urge to pursue her desires, and at the same time clings to the respectability grafted onto her coloured identity by her aunts and society.

While the binary social choices of respectability or shame for the coloured female are prevalent in all the works of fiction portrayed here, the texts also demonstrate the complexity of female roles and subjectivities that influence the 'choices' in their lives. The effects of greater social freedoms are starting to emerge, and are being felt by the most marginalised members of society, namely coloured women. Within this reality, the opportunity arises for internalised racial

¹⁴¹ *You must behave yourself, you're a respectable child.*

stereotypes to be discarded, and for viable alternative means of living in a post-democratic world to be reimagined.

Conclusion

Studying passing in fiction allows us to rethink outdated notions of identity as being stable and monolithic, and universal within race groups – which is essentially what makes it such a problematic and destabilising force within society. Passing, more than being an act of defiance or transgression, is an act of agency directed at a socially constructed myth – ‘pure race’. Although most often depicted as such in passing fiction, racial passing is often not amoral, or a deceptive act. The passer is able to re-imagine her identity in ways in which she is not able to while bound by her role as the subjectified but respectable ‘other’.

As noted before, women, as the social regulators and transmitters through reproduction, are held responsible for reproducing and shaping identities within patriarchal frameworks. Women are oppressed through a code of morality that represses female desire, sexuality and agency. In fact, sexual desire is probably the antithesis to virtue, the characteristic that represents *the* feminine ideal, an ideal available exclusively to white women in racialised societies. By connoting negative associations with passers and passing, patriarchal society is able to maintain the predetermined sex, class and race roles that enable it to regulate society along those lines, in a normative, hierarchical manner that assumes white male authority. Black female passers, in particular, are thus perceived as a threat to the hegemony of a patriarchal order that naturalises white male control. Because they do not subscribe to the social norms to which white women do within

white society, they are doubly unstable as radical agents, not under social control.

I would like to suggest that coloured women (and here I refer especially to middle-class, educated and light-skinned women) pass because they do not fit into the neatly constructed categories hegemonic, patriarchal society creates for coloured women within the discourses of a homogenised, stagnant, immutable coloured society. As such, these coloured women seek alternatives to these prescribed, outdated, historically constituted identities. They reinvent their identities and reconstitute places of belonging, and find homes for their unhomeliness, in which they can self-actualise on their own terms. I also suggest that by critically re-reading passing texts bearing this in mind, that a more empathetic, positive view of performances of passing and passing characters will be possible. This may in turn encourage passers to break the silence and tell the real stories of passing that are still almost exclusively represented in the domain of fiction.

APPENDIX: CHAPTER 4

Email correspondence with Pat Stamatélos

From: Pat Stamatélos
Sent: 21 July 2011
To: Marcia Marais

Haai daar -

Dit is nogal (vir my) skrikwekkend om te dink iemand maak 'n "studie" van 'n storiëtjie wat ek 100 jaar gelede geskryf het (toe ek nog jonk en onnosel was).

Ek sou jou graag wou help, maar wat ek wou sê (met die storie) het ek tog gesê. Meer inligting oor die Apartheidsjare en sy doenighede, as dit is waar jou belangstelling lê, kan mens van die Internet kry. Ek het destyds nie Internet gehad nie en het geskryf soos ek dinge van die verlede onthou het. Kroes was nooit bedoel om polities te wees nie en my bedoeling was ook nie om kant te kies nie.

As jou studie oor die hondjie en nie die halsbandjie gaan nie, kan jy die inligting ook van die Internet kry. Die magdom sogenaamde feite wat daar opgedis word verstom my. Lees gerus deur alles en as iets onduidelik is, of jy wil iets bevestig hê, laat my weet.

As ek my misgis en jy eintlik Engels sprekend is, laat my weet. Marcia baie groete, ek voel gelei dat jy soveel belang stel in Kroes (of in my) - pms.

From: Pat Stamatélos
Date: 21 July 2011
To: Marcia Marais

Hi -

Your Afrikaans is perfect.

The ONLY reason I started writing Kroes was to try and come to terms with the death of my mother - twenty five years after she died. I did NOT try to write a book, I never thought anyone would ever read what I had written. My intention was to write only a few pages - however, the more I wrote, the more I remembered and the more I remembered

the more I wanted to write.

To help you in deciding whether to throw me off your list or not: Kroes is NOT biographical, but also more than fiction. I sometimes took real characters and put them in a different time frame, or else changed them for better or worse. Oompie Spykers for instance, really was gay but he was a real gentleman, always well dressed, not like his character in the book at all. Ninety per cent of the characters in Kroes really existed, but I obviously embroidered for the sake of a story. Getting any closer to the bone would have cut me in half. It is sad, but I have always chosen denial over absolute truth.

The facts are that I was indeed born in Goodwood, grew up at the Strand, was legally adopted by the two aunties, came to Johannesburg and that I married a Greek.

There is a lot of symbolism in Kroes, which you may (or may not) understand unless you read "Val van die dice" as well - and even then both the books are so personal and deep (for me) you probably won't ever have an inkling of what it meant (to me) to write the two stories. To me they will remain "stories" and not books for I never meant either to be published - they were written as a form of healing and of drying of tears and a means of moving on. And if that is true, why then am I sitting here and now, hurting and crying, reliving the past? Probably because I have NEVER had an in-depth discussion about Kroes or Die val van die dice, or the death of my baby - some things are untouchables.

Op 'n stadium in my lewe het ek baie kwade gevoelens teenoor my pa gehad - ek was immers afgelaai en weggegee as't ware. Mettertyd het ek begryp waarom ek wêrklik so kwaad was vir hom en ook waarom hy my weggegee het. Kroes is 'n boek van vergifnis - vir baie dinge.

In my mind getting married meant living happily ever after, which was not the case for me in real life. So when I wrote Kroes I decided to kill off the unhappy part of me (in real life) while I was still happy (in the book). Later on with Val van die dice I realised killing off someone in your mind and heart does not make him go away in real life and the only way to get rid of him is by ridding him of YOU. What that entailed is more than I can bear or care to discuss - and for me, as a small child, it all started with a single death.

Needless to say, by the grace of God, I have come a long way, thank goodness.

In retrospect, neither stories should have been told as some things are better left unsaid. Peace and happiness does not come through words put on paper but through the act of forgiveness. You are welcome to forward your questions, however if you do not hear from me you will know they were too close to the bone. But I wish you well and much success with your study, with me or without me.

Liefdegroete - pms.



From: Pat Stamatélos

Date: 26 September 2011

To: Marcia Marais

'Passing for white' is the primary focus of my research. I am deeply moved by the experiences you relate through your coloured female characters in *Kroes*. I am fascinated by the subject of passing for white, and by those who sought this route as an alternative to being subjected to racial oppression under apartheid. The ultimate aim of my research for this Masters dissertation is to raise awareness of passing post-apartheid, and to explore the reasons why coloured people chose to pass for white **BECAUSE THEY WERE NEVER GIVEN THE CHOICE TO PASS FOR COLOURED...** through examining works of fiction that explore passing.

My own experiences of passing are restricted to that which is already written on the subject, which is unfortunately not very much. My knowledge of passers is also gained from what my own family's experiences were, from stories about the light-skinned relatives on my mother's side who crossed the colour line in the 1940s and 1950s and made new lives for themselves without their coloured families, withholding those histories from their children. Your story is interesting also because my parents spent the early part of their married life in the Strand in the late 1960s, and so the characters in the novel have a certain familiarity to them based on the stories my parents told of life in that part of the Cape.

Finally, I fully respect the privacy with which you have managed to conduct your life. **THANK YOU** However, if you would like to share some biographical details, it would help me to contextualise your personal story. Would you care to share any details of your background that you would feel comfortable for me to include in my thesis?

I have posed five questions below that I hope will give me some insight into you as a person, and into what your personal views are on this important subject.

One

The insight with which you write, especially on the theme of passing, and the language you use to portray your characters' lives, show a deep sensitivity to the experiences of certain communities affected by racial passing. In my view, the fictional experiences related in *Kroes* ring true for the experiences that were shared by many coloureds living in apartheid South Africa. Historically, the way that the colour bar was applied geographically in the Strand seems to be less restrictive than in

other parts of apartheid South Africa, and there seems to have been more movement between the races who lived in the area. Were you able to do your research into these communities through lived observation within the coloured community there?

Absolutely -

Two

Much is known about the lives of the other two South African authors I include in my study – both Sarah Gertrude Millin and Zoë Wicomb’s lives are well researched and documented. I have been able to make this biographical background information, i.e. the authors’ life histories, race, class, political affiliations, etc. part of my study when looking at the characters the two authors represent in their novels. However, I have not been able to do so in my analysis of your novel since I was able to find very little biographical information on your life. In your experience, does the author’s life experiences influence the characters represented in the work of fiction?

Ek wens ek kon (soos baie ander skrywers) myself heeltemal afskei daarvan, maar vir my is die nawerking en invloed van my ondervindings (in my kinderdae en jongmens lewe) soos ‘n skadu wat my gedurig agtervolg en selfs by my spook deur middel van my stories.

Three

In your novel, you show coloured women passing for white in a very sympathetic and humane way, as opposed to the opportunistic, degenerate, selfish or cowardly manner in which (especially women characters) are most often represented. In fact, the line between fiction and reality often seems blurred. **Truth is stranger than fiction, no wonder reality is often blurry.** Was your aim with doing so an intentional means of showing the strength of [coloured] women **YES** who were faced with this decision? **Equality has never been a decision but a right.**

Four

The real-life passer in post-apartheid South Africa appears to be in a predicament of not being able or willing to reveal his or her race. The unwillingness of people to reveal their pasts is indicative of the continued importance placed on ‘race’ in our society, and of the negative stereotypes still attached to being ‘coloured’ post-democratically. What do you see as being the fate of the passer in the post-apartheid setting?

There is no fate, only life.

Five

In your personal view, have the stories of passers (both in real life and in fiction) been sidelined post-apartheid? From your research into the subject, can you offer any suggestions as to why this is the case?

Daar is 'n magdom stories wat nog geboek moet word – maar om te vertel beteken om van vooraf seer te kry en niemand wil meer seerkry nie. Bruin mense is die vertellers, wit mense die kopers en wie wil nou betaál om van hulle sondes te lees? Laat ons dus die hoof buig en bid om liever te vergeet – Amen.



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