

THE COLLAPSE OF CERTAINTY: CONTEXTUALIZING LIMINALITY IN
BOTSWANA FICTION AND REPORTAGE

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DECLARATION

I declare that *The Collapse of Certainty: Contextualizing Liminality in Botswana Fiction and Reportage* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature
(MR FA KALUA)

Date

Abstract

The Collapse of Certainty: Contextualizing Liminality in Botswana's Fiction and Reportage.

This thesis deploys Homi Bhabha's perspective of postcolonial literary theory as a critical procedure to examine particular instances of fiction, as well as reportage on Botswana. Its unifying interest is to pinpoint the shifting nature or reality of Botswana and, by extension, of African identities. To that end, I use Bhabha's concept of liminality to inform the work of writers such as Unity Dow, Alexander McCall Smith, and instances of reportage (by Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies), from the 1990s to date. The aims of the thesis are, among other things, to establish the extent to which Homi Bhabha's appropriation of the term liminality (which derives from Victor Turner's notion of *limen* for *inbetweenness*), and its application in the postcolonial context inflects the reading of the above works whose main motifs include the following: a contestation of any views which privilege one culture above another, challenging a jingoistic rootedness in one culture, and promoting an awareness of the existence of several, interlocking or even clashing realities which finally produce multiple meanings, values and identities. In short, it is proposed that identity is not a given but rather a product of a lived reality and therefore a social construct, something always in process.

The thesis begins by theorizing liminality in Chapter 1 within the context of Homi Bhabha's understanding and interrogation of the

colonial discourse. This is followed by the contextualization of liminality through the reading of, firstly, the fiction of Unity Dow in Chapters 2 and 3, and then the “detective” fiction of Alexander McCall Smith in Chapters 4 and 5. In the discussion of these works, I also touch on instances of reportage which relate to the lives of the authors. In the case of Smith’s “detective” fiction, for example, reportage refers to his incorporation of actual historical events and personages whose impact, I argue, suggests the liminality of culture. In Chapter 6, the idea of reportage varies slightly to denote works of fiction in which there is a great deal of historical fact. Thus Rupert Isaacson’s *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey* and Caitlin Davies’ *Place of Reeds* are treated as works of reportage in line with Truman Capote’s application of that term. What comes out most evidently in this study is the shifting idea of (Botswana/African) identity. It should be noted that rather than present an all-embracing account of the fiction on Botswana, the study only looks at the selected examples of writing and reportage.

Key terms: liminality, in-betweenness, intersubjectivity, postcolonial theory, colonial discourse, modernity, African identity, shifting identity, Botswana, and reportage.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and to the memory of my father -- two unlettered individuals who made a lasting impact on my life by affording me an opportunity to attend school.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1 -- 31
Chapter 1	32 -- 92
Chapter 2	93 -- 139
Chapter 3	140 -- 175
Chapter 4	.....	176 -- 222
Chapter 5	.....	223 -- 253
Chapter 6	.....	254 -- 288
Conclusion	.....	289 -- 299
Works Cited	.....	300 -- 318

Abbreviations and short forms used for primary texts

Far and Beyon' -- F&B

In the Company of Cheerful Ladies – Cheerful Ladies

Juggling Truths – JT

Morality for Beautiful Girls – Morality

Place of Reeds – (POR)

Tears of the Giraffe – Tears

The Full Cupboard of Life – Cupboard

The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey – The Kalahari Journey

The Heavens May Fall – Heavens

The Kalahari Typing School for Men – Kalahari

The No1 Ladies' Detective Agency – The No 1 Ladies

The Screaming of the Innocent – Screaming

Introduction

“...life is, among other things, a circus, where liminal folly may make deep sense”. (Turner 1992: 161)

“It is in this space of liminality, in the ‘unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty’ that we encounter ... the narcissistic neuroses of ... discourse”. (Bhabha 2004: 214)

“There can be no absolutes: no absolute good or evil; no absolute way of living. No absolute truth. All truths are mediated and tempered by the fact of living. Being alive qualifies all things” (Okri 1997: 54).

The above quotations encapsulate the central concerns of this thesis in their authors’ utter conviction and unqualified acknowledgement of the fluid and indeterminate and therefore provisional nature of truth or reality. Invoking Turnerian as well as poststructuralist¹ assumptions about the shifting rather than constitutive nature of meaning, Homi Bhabha contends that identity, especially in culture, cannot be pinned down, but is always subject to and constructed through a negotiation of difference in what he calls liminal spaces, or the spaces in-between, so that only a semblance of verisimilitude can be achieved at any point in time. Similarly, writing a tribute to Salman Rushdie in an essay, “The Human Race is not Yet Free”,² Ben Okri, sharing in Rushdie’s celebration of hybrid identities in the modern world, echoes

¹ In *The Turbulence of Migration* (2000: 168), Nikos Papastergiadis draws on thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault to argue that “one of the ‘achievements’ of post-structuralist theory was to liberate the subject from notions of fixity and purity in of origin”.

Homi Bhabha's argument and sounds his conviction that our universe is divested of all absolutes. For Okri, lived reality or the act of living in itself is of the essence; moral certainties or categorical imperatives do not exist. Thus both Homi Bhabha and Ben Okri laud the accomplishments of the poststructuralist theoretical project for liberating the subject from the stultifying narcissism that defines identity in terms of fixity and purity of origins. According to Bhabha, a "third space" emerges when two cultures encounter and translate each other, setting in motion the process of transformation in the subject, a kind of consciousness which is an interface between the cultures. Also known as hybridity³, this interface allows us to view culture not as a transparent and static category but rather a dynamic and open-ended package that is always evolving and subject to change. At the core of Bhabha's argument is the fact that identity is a product of enunciation, that it is formed contingently and indeterminately at the border line between cultures.

Such views are directly relevant to African literature written in English, a discourse whose emergence in the 1960s and its nature in the last forty years have been fraught with controversy, with the crux of the debate being the "whatness" of African cultural identity vis-à-vis its

² This essay appears in Ben Okri's collection of essays entitled *A way of Being Free* (1997: 49-6). In the essay quoted above, Okri calls for the need to throw out humanity's repressive orthodoxies (brought about by old realities such as religion) and create a new world of a morality founded on dreaming alternative dreams and inhabiting ever-changing identities. As will become evident in this thesis, Okri's views here reflect the postcolonial hybridity theories of Homi Bhabha, Stewart Hall, Paul Gilroy, to mention a few examples, according to which cultural identities are constructed rather than natural.

³ In his essay entitled 'How Newness enters the World', Homi Bhabha appropriates Walter Benjamin's idea of translation to describe hybridity as cultural translation, "*continua* of transformation" (2004: 301). In this thesis, I use the concept of hybridity in Bhabha's sense, a sense which interlinks with hybridity theories of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, to cite some examples.

Western counterpart(s). The rise of African literature, which also saw a conflation of colonialism and modernity, ushered in a way of thinking by African writers, artists and political commentators which was always meant to act as a counterpoint to modernity. In other words, Western modernity in the form of colonialism had to be challenged and rejected at all costs. One result of this link between the West and modernity led to another distinction between the “the West” and the “Rest” – a Manichaeian⁴ mode of cognition which, according to Fanon, splits knowledge into binary oppositions and exclusiveness. This thinking, exclusively restricted to formerly colonized countries, in turn led to a proliferation of what has come to be known as the alterity⁵ industry in literary studies in these (colonized) countries, with artists and writers spending a better part of the last fifty years “analyzing, subverting and rejecting constructions of ‘otherness’” (Shulze-Engler 1999: 8). In this debate, the non-Western “other”, for example, the black African, the Asian, or any person of colour, was to be perceived as a metaphysical notion of “pure” difference which differentiates Western modernity from the rest of the world. As I argue in this thesis, this is rather surprising, not necessarily because of any problem to do with talking about “otherness”, but because this debate about “otherness” and difference implies that the entire colonized world has nothing to do

⁴ Frantz Fanon (1967: 31) says “the Colonial world is a Manichean world, meaning the colonizer and colonized are portrayed in terms of “self” and “other”. Apart from Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* also parades a representation of the the colonial condition as a fissured space where epistemologies exist in oppositional categories or binarisms.

⁵ Meaning ‘otherness’, alterity is a poststructuralist term used to explain the operation of difference. See Derrida’s essay entitled ‘Differance’ (1968: 278) in which the concept denotes “otherness”. Derrida says that “all ideas and all objects of thought and perception bear the trace of other things, other moments, other “presences””.

except prove its “otherness” by “speaking or writing back” to the West. In this connection, works such as Frantz Fanon’s *The wretched of the Earth* and Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, which deal with the idea of difference and “otherness”, spring to mind.

On the African continent, a fierce cultural war was already raging in the 1980s, with the publication of *The Decolonization of African Literature*⁶ by Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike. This volume virtually plunged literary studies into a “cognitive and conceptual hysteresis” (2001: 2) as Rabinowitz has observed, upon which Africa became a battleground of this war between the so-called Afrocentrics and Eurocentrics. On the one hand, Afrocentric critics such as Chinweizu used factors such as indigenous cultures, the African personality and image (whatever that means exactly), or indeed any other supposedly genuine identity marker as the bedrock for defining African identity, the notion of the black race always foregrounding the debate. The decolonization of African Literature and its related forms of cognition, these critics went further, were a prerequisite for the establishment of a (purportedly pure, particularist) African identity which would be free of any Western nuances and influences. The debate here had reached the apogee of realist writing, with Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* being seen as the epitome of the African novel. On the other hand, Eurocentric critics saw this logic as deeply flawed in allowing Africa to be read as race. These critics pointed out

⁶ This debate is primarily associated with the publication of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. This prototype novel would later be used as a springboard for the discourse of decolonization of African literature from colonial frames of reference. For the complete debate, see Ashcroft et al. *el* (2002: 29 & 127).

that African implicatedness in colonialism inevitably implied that the continent was already hybrid in outlook and thus the novel needed to delegitimize realism. As the debate raged on, some Afrocentric critics who were comfortably ensconced within the English Departments of some universities dedicated a great deal of their time and resources to developing African literature in English, especially the oral genre, seeing it as the defining heritage of African identity. In short, the debate had by now degenerated into something of a stand-off. But the last twenty years have seen this debate on the wane thanks to the changing realities of the times, among them genocide and related conflicts in Africa and around the world, the onset and threat of AIDS, and, more importantly, the pervasive influence of capital modernity and advanced technology, as well as the role played by these twin imperatives in compressing and most certainly redefining the world consciousness through time and space. The net result of this has been that homespun ontologies and related forms of what one may term as ideological posturing have been superseded by the new realities according to which African literature can no longer be defined through anti-colonial nationalism and historiographies or by valorizing cultural traditions and the nation state. To quote Chennells and Velt-Wild, the new perspective on African literature and identity is one in which it would be folly to

nurture myths of an African culture whose provenance lies in the pristine and exotic Africa uncontaminated by the larger world (1999: xii).

This transnationality in African literature has also been sounded by Shulze-Engler who argues that (the postcolonial literary) emphasis

has shifted to the “other voices from the new literatures engaged in negotiating new boundaries beyond the spaces prescribed to them by the ‘writing back’ paradigm – voices engaged in talking about violence and democracy, fundamentalism, and civil society, ethnic strife and human rights, freedom of speech and social change, individual responsibility and the transformation of collective identities” (1999: 9). Discussed in this thesis, for example, are the works of Unity Dow and Alexander McCall Smith which, I argue, fit Shulze-Engler’s notion of “voices engaged in negotiating new boundaries”, what Anthony Appiah has characterized as postrealist, postnativist and postnationalist writing. As opposed to the fundamentally “realist” and nostalgic (for roots) works of a bygone era, such as Chinua Achebe’s celebratory *Things Fall Apart*, Dow’s and Smith’s fiction, as Appiah would say, fits the appellation: “novels of delegitimation: rejecting the Western imperium ... but also rejecting the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie. And ... the basis for that project of delegitimation is very much ... grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal” (1992: 152). As I try to show, the works being examined present cultural identity as a temporality, something unstable and discontinuous, therefore subject to negotiation and translation. In short, I try to point up an intriguing trend in African literature and identity characterized by a shift from one defined in terms of anti-colonial struggle to a transnational one which allows for a collective imagining. Unity Dow’s vision, for example, very much revolves around issues of human suffering -- the subjugation of women as well as the abuse of children by the powerful in her country Botswana, as a microcosm of the widespread suffering evident and

prevalent elsewhere across African societies. Thus it is that human suffering has prompted her to inscribe in her fiction a politics of identity that is very much international, and ethically universal to a fault.

On account of the preponderance of deeply flawed men in her fiction, men who control, penetrate, and appropriate female sexuality, Unity Dow's works could well have been read as representations of the (female) body in her texts: claimed bodies, mutilated bodies, bodies generally inscribed with and marked by the signs of culture and tradition. Certainly, Dow's treatment and challenging of an essentialized female embodiment remains her most significant engagement in her fiction. Similarly, the works of Alexander McCall Smith and Caitlin Davies, for example, also offer specific representations of patriarchy, hegemony and embodied subjectivity which could make for intriguing study. Such engagements are beyond the scope of this thesis and could form the basis for further research. In this thesis, I concentrate on the anti-foundationalism of an author such as Dow or the eclecticism of Smith, as acts of liminality of identity attendant on modern individuals in a postcolonial state of Botswana, especially in the light of encroaching capital modernity. To that end, my reading deliberately elides any debates that may be seen to play up the feminist cause which is writ large in the works of Dow and Smith and Davies.

The fiction of Unity Dow, in its use of female protagonists, can be described as overtly feminist, a charge she gladly accepts. This

thesis does not engage in an explicitly feminist reading of her fiction, but rather presents her works as effects of liminality, hybridity, or exilic consciousness. Granted, her fiction does not deal with land left behind “to achieve solitude and distance in order to write” (1996: 202), as Kanagayakam would say, but it is her estrangement with her own country that makes her an outsider, a hybrid, impelling and enabling her to assume a “metaphorical condition” (Said 1994: 54) which is relevant to the public role of an intellectual exile, someone who speaks out against injustices in her society.

Similarly, the fiction of McCall Smith is not read as mainstream detective fiction⁷ or as a third wave of African literature⁸, as some commentators have observed. The reading strategy employed in this thesis does not attempt to explicate detective fiction per se but reads Alexander McCall Smith’s detective genre as a simplistic formula for crime and mystery, which I therefore label expatriate and exile writing. As will be shown in Chapter 4, the rationale used for unravelling mysteries in McCall Smith’s works is radically different from and much more simplistic than usually obtains in detective fiction as a genre, a fact which gives credence to describing his works as expatriate writing or very much in “the terrain of world literature” (Bhabha 2004: 17) in which the major theme is the exploration of “transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions” (ibid.: 17). In *Exiles*

⁷ While set out as detective fiction and clearly tapping into the mainstream detective genre that emerged in Britain and America in the twentieth century (or earlier), Smith’s fiction on Botswana is treated and examined as falling outside this genre.

⁸ See Muff Anderssen and Elsie Cloete (2006) who have described Smith’s detective style as a third wave of African literature that deals with close human relationships.

and Expatriates, Chelva Kanaganayakam explains the nature of expatriate writing as the literature of marginalization as follows:

The notion of occupying the cusp is central in expatriate writing which, curiously enough, establishes its own centrality while locating itself on the margins of two cultures (1996: 205).

In this kind of fiction, writers write about the land that has been left behind and therefore deal with a consciousness that problematizes notions such as “home”, “exile” and “belonging”. As will become clear in my analysis of the texts in chapter four, Alexander McCall Smith appears to be writing a kind of detective fiction, but I have chosen to read his texts as examples of expatriate or exile writing because of what I perceive to be his major concern in his detective works: the notion of identity as located on the borderlands of culture, the borderlands which he himself, as well as the characters he has created, does inhabit. Consequently, through the medium of the detective novel, Alexander McCall Smith is able to voice poignant and deeply-felt ideas concerning culture and identity.

Since feminist issues make for important themes in the texts but are beyond the scope of this thesis, the texts are examined, to use Homi Bhabha’s words, as “narratives where double lives are led in the postcolonial world, with its journeys of migration and its dwellings of the diasporic” (Bhabha 2004: 306). I have chosen, in other words, the kind of fiction on Botswana whose unifying interest lies neither with the “writing back” nor the “anti-colonial” model, but rather uncovers, points to, and reveals the shifting reality of African identity

in the changing world, a world now defined and differentiated by global flows and pathways. Stated differently, the works I have chosen portray identity not as something based on geography and race but rather as a function of transnational circulation, mobility and migration. To that end, I appropriate Bhabha's use of liminality (or "spaces in-between") in *The Location of Culture* as a useful perspective to inform the work of Unity Dow and Alexander McCall Smith, adding reportage by Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies. I read all the fiction and reportage examined in this thesis as shaped by multicultural views and therefore as expressive of liminality, or what Bhabha terms "the borderline condition of cultural translation" (2004: 11).

Granted, Alexander McCall Smith's seeming appeals to the quixotic in his fiction on Botswana may constitute some of the damning limitations of his works. This is evident in his conscious decision to write his fiction in a typically generic detective genre, a decision which inevitably plays into the hands of his detractors with the prevailing perception that his fiction is formulaic and therefore of limited literary value. This view has prompted some readers to read racism into his texts, completely oblivious of the works' redeeming qualities such as Smith's challenging of deterministic claims of culture, his attempts to dissolve those binaries that were set up by the colonial enterprise. To look at Smith's novels merely as works of popular culture is to miss his vision of culture as evidenced by the slippage that marks not just his position (as an expatriate in Botswana for many years) but also

his writing of this particular fiction about the country, and therefore the hybrid spaces that emerge in the very act of his description.

A worthy point of departure for Smith's fiction, I argue in this thesis, must lie not in the way his fiction has been received globally as works of popular fiction and therefore lightweight but rather in the very suggestiveness of his use and treatment of the concept of 'Africa', for example, in relation to the history of colonialism. I advocate a position that Smith's use of this concept raises an openness about cultural identity that is redemptive and powerful, resisting any kneejerk foregrounding of indigeneity and homogeneity. Smith's writing, I insist, incarnates a kind of liminal hybridity that Homi Bhabha explicates with compelling tenacity in *The Location of Culture*. The culture that Smith writes into his books, and which Botswana exemplifies, is one in which the author renders fluid such categories as colonizer/colonised, white/black, man/woman, to cite a few examples, and the Manichean binarism circumvented. Thus drawing the reader's attention to the constructedness of meaning and, Smith's fiction demonstrates that the concept 'Africa' (and identity) has always been an evolving construct, given the fluid semantic boundaries of the idea evokes. In short, the ideological power of Smith's narratives lies in the refusal to emphasize singularity and exclusivism of African identity.

Reportage as used in this thesis has unique connotations and sense. I use the term to refer to both journalism as reporting and to (largely) nonfiction novels. As a genre, this usage owes its origins in the 1960s

America and has come to be associated with names such as Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Tom Wolfe. As will become clear, these writers were able to develop this genre by writing their own lives into the fiction. In this thesis, it will be noted that writers such as Alexander McCall Smith and Rupert Isaacson juxtapose fiction with real (historical) events whereas Caitlin Davies conflates examples of real journalism with with fact and history.

Of crucial significance to the development of this genre in America was the publication of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, a novel in which Capote was able to ingeniously manipulate facts in narrative to make the work "read like a novel than like a historical account" (Hollowell 1977: 63). Lending "a new seriousness to the talk about "higher journalism"" (Ibid: 63), the non-fiction genre was born. Hollowell explicates this new genre:

The varieties of these works of fictionalized social history have been called by a number of terms – "higher journalism," "new journalism," "the literature of fact." By whatever name we call them, however, these forms of narrative reportage have capitalized upon the growing popularity of nonfiction. They reflect an increasing tendency toward documentary forms, toward personal confession, toward the exploration of public issues. Perhaps most important, the best of such works have been written not only by journalists but by novelists who have temporarily abandoned fiction to explore the social issues and moral dilemmas that confront us. (1977: 1)

For Hollowell, a great deal of emphasis must be placed on the authors' personal experiences that inform their journalistic content and on how those experiences are reworked and interpreted in order

to transform the content into a living text. For the writers of the nonfiction novel mentioned above, what happens in the novel matters far less compared to the artistic method by which the work is conveyed. On inaugurating the new literary genre or art form, Truman Capote wrote:

The decision [to write *In Cold Blood*] was based on a theory I've harbored since I first began writing professionally, which is well over twenty years ago. It seemed to me that journalism, reportage, could be forced to yield a serious art form: the "nonfiction novel," as I thought of it. (p. 64)

Thus, just as "[t]he nonfiction novels of Capote, Mailer, and Wolfe are deeply colored with the mood of perpetual crisis that pervaded the sixties" (Hollwell 1977: 147), for example, Capote's terrifying account of two killers and the slain Kansas family, as well as the texts by Smith, Isaacson and Davies, capture the mood and probe the enduring crises and complexities surrounding notions of not only personal and minoritarian group identities in Southern Africa but also the fraught nature of the authors' identities as white people in Africa. In short, by giving the reader such vivid portraits of life in the region, McCall Smith, Isaacson and Davies critically explore in their texts the diffusion of various forms of identities in Southern Africa, a diffusion which emphasizes the liminality of not just the writers but also the works they have produced.

The choice of authors – one black African and three white – might sound surprising, evoking as it does debates about representational

practices, including the pertinent question of “who is an African writer?” This question is crucial for, apart from Unity Dow, the rest are white. For example, while the roots of both Alexander McCall Smith and Rupert Isaacson are to be located in and straddle both Britain and Zimbabwe, the latter being the country of their birth, Caitlin Davies became “African” through her marriage (in Botswana) to a local Motswana man. Thus the question of “who is an African writer?” brings to mind Chinua Achebe’s famous description of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as a racist novel, a charge which, it can be argued, exposed Achebe’s misreading of Conrad’s novella, especially in its staging of the contradictions that are at the core of the civilizing mission. Indeed, one might ask whether or not the chosen white authors in this thesis, who represent the western eyes, so to speak, by virtue of the colour of their skin, have the right to represent Africa or “Africanness”. Or need one be overly keen on “Africanness” and who can best represent it?

In his reflections on the appellation “African writer”, but also taking issue with those writers who seemed immensely enamoured of a monolithic and Pan-Africanist view about writing, the Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera once said: “either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then f*** you [T]he direct international experience of every single entity is, for me, the inspiration to write” (quoted by Chennells & Velt-Wild 1999: 121).

Marechera's perspective seems to settle the argument about my choice of the authors whose various genres may be aptly compared to what Paul Cantor regards as the enduring characteristics of the novels of Achebe and Salman Rushdie: "neither kneejerk condemnation of Western culture nor uncritical celebration of non-Western culture. Rather these authors offer a thoughtful examination of the problematic interaction of Western and non-Western cultures, with a deep appreciation of the positive and negative aspects of both sides" (1998/9: 3). It is these dispassionate views about culture and identity – views inimical to linearity, reification, romanticism and resolution – that prompted me to choose these particular writers. In short, rather than being bogged down by the authors' race, I would argue that it is their capacity to theorize the "'middle passage' of contemporary culture" (Bhabha 2004: 8), the liminal or intercultural aspects of the human experience, which gains them entry into and a purchase in the present thesis. Through their representation of Africa (and its identity) as a shifting and mutating category, especially in the light of globalization, these writers confirm Marechera's comments.

Dambudzo Marechera's comments are also instructive in the light of Homi Bhabha's ruminations (inspired by materialist thinker Walter Benjamin and Mikhail Bakhtin) on the liminality of colonial discourse in relation to culture and identity. In an essay entitled "How Newness Enters the World," Bhabha, echoing Walter Benjamin, suggests that the (post)colonial world is going through what he terms "the trials of cultural translation" (2004: 303). For Bhabha, cultural translation reflects the mingling of the once separate spaces of postcolonialism

and postmodernism, especially with capital modernity becoming pervasive. This leads him to ask a rhetorical but profoundly penetrating question about colonial discourse: “Why else do you think the long shadow of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* falls on so many texts of the postcolonial pedagogy?”(ibid.: 303). His answer is that “Marlow has much in him of the anti-foundationalist, the metropolitan ironist who believes the neo-pragmatist universe is best preserved by keeping the conversation of humankind going” (ibid.: 303-4), and he succeeds in this venture because he “gives history the lie” (ibid.: 304). These reflections are significant not least because the texts being considered in this thesis fall within the realm of transcultural narratives which, as Bhabha has observed, “bear the anxiety of reference of perception and representation”, with the result that “there emerges the need for a global analysis of culture. Jameson perceives a new international culture in the perplexed passing of modernity into postmodernity, emphasizing the transnational attenuation of ‘local’ space” (2004: 308-9).

Apart from Walter Benjamin, Bhabha’s thinking on liminality also draws on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian thought to have rewritten the history of modernity, and also believed to be the precursor of colonialism in proffering the chronotope of dialogism (as against monologism) and its related concepts of heteroglossia, multi-acculturality and the carnivalesque, all of which gesture toward a celebration of dynamism, flux and mutability – the fact that absolute values do not exist, that rigid oppositions can be dismantled, and that everything is just too slippery to be pinned down. In *The Location of*

Culture, Bhabha characterizes dialogism as “a reading that is catechrestic: reading between the lines, taking neither him at his word nor me fully at mine” (2004: 269). According to this reading, “agency (is) an after-effect of the intersubjective” (Ibid.: 269). As “a moment of indeterminacy” (ibid.: 270), Bakhtin’s founding concept of dialogism exhibits an affinity with the poststructuralist concept of textuality through a simple dictum: that every word or utterance is refracted through a host of other perhaps contradictory idioms, through which alone its meaning can fully be grasped. In contrast to the Saussurean linguistics which presented language as predictable and self-evident, and signs as self-identical, for Bakhtin, language is a fickle affair, words are constituted by their relations to otherness and signs always mean more than what they say, including what they do not say. Stated differently, language is porous, hybrid and open-ended, its signification arbitrary. As Bhabha has put it, “[t]he *who* of agency bears no mimetic immediacy or adequacy of representation. It can only be signified outside the sentence” (2004: 271).

To the extent that it attests to the shifting and and slippery nature of language, liminality is the converse of textual analysis or practical criticism⁹, a reading method which views language as thoroughly referential. Liminality entails that words are liberated from their traditional or normal meanings and placed in resonant positions which imply new meanings. It is this approach to language and

⁹ The skill of close reading, says John Barrell, is based on assumptions of language as absolutely referential, that words have meanings which stand still because they refer to something in the world and our experience. For more on practical criticism, see pp. 131-7. While paying due homage to practical criticism as a viable reading strategy, my textual analysis in this thesis primarily relies on Homi Bhabha’s idea of reading ‘against the grain’, of looking for meaning in the margins or interstices of culture.

meaning that allows Bakhtin to prefer the novel which represents a “polyphonic” contestation of discourses whereby any form of signification is relative, and one kind of idiom subverts and dismantles those around it. As is shown in this thesis, the fiction and reportage examined is anti-genre and non-canonical in that it shows up discourse as partial and provisional.

Bhabha’s thinking echoes Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Paul Gilroy, whose hybridity theories present identities (such as that of blackness) from a complex standpoint, furnishing useful options to essentialist views. Stuart Hall, for example, deconstructs the label “black” in view of various subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities which constitute this label, largely as a result of the effect of modernities. Similarly, in his ruminations about the “black Atlantic”, Paul Gilroy does not view black ethnic identity in absolute terms, but as something that is fluid and shifting. As for Edward Said, “a rethinking of global culture” (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 1999: 16) is an imperative of our times. Thus, like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, Said presents identity as a paradox, and in terms of a slightly eclectic figuration which includes notions of exilic consciousness, amateurism and intellectualism, to mention a few examples. So, as I argue, by inhabiting different forms of consciousnesses of marginalization – the notion conceived as a complex condition of exile -- the authors discussed in this thesis also embody a hybridity of identity. McCall Smith, Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies, on the other hand, experience exile differently as “an actual condition” (ibid.: 54) through the ideas of expatriation and migrancy, the former often voluntary, the

latter both voluntary and involuntary. Thus “one identifies as the space of exile”, says Kanaganayakam, “that cusp created by the intersection of two cultures” (1996: 205). It is considerations such as obtain in this fiction – marginalisation, estrangement, exile, to mention some examples -- which make this study located in the context of Bhabha’s framework of liminality, a framework to which I am indebted as underpinning my reading of the texts. As such, any points of departure and difference from Bhabha do not suggest a distraction from his paradigm *per se* but rather highlight his eclectic sleight of hand with which he expounds his version of postcolonial theory, allowing it to draw extensively from discourses of psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and postmodernism.

As a literary critic, I can only live up to the basic precept which Homi Bhabha advises all critics to abide by and embrace. “For the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (2004:18). The “unrepresented pasts”, in this case, suggest the imbrication of colonizer and colonized in one another, and thus refer to the burning issues of our time in Africa, including gender, race, class, citizenship, HIV/Aids, to mention but a few, about which the authors write and on which I discourse. These pressing issues of our time are brought to the fore through a textual reading from the liminal perspective.

First, I contend that Unity Dow’s texts, covered in Chapters 2 and 3, represent a kind of autobiographical manifesto in which she offers “an

account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which ... expose(s) the falseness of the view from the top and ... transform(s) the margins as well as the center” (Smith 1993: 159, quoting Hartscot). As this thesis demonstrates, Unity Dow’s rather transgressive standpoint (in her life and fiction) borders on the heretical and blasphemous, at least to the cultural chauvinists of her time and society, but it is her engagement with power that provides ample gestures towards “[h]ybridity” which, as Homi Bhabha reminds us, “is heresy” (2004: 322). By trying to make manifest her perspective on identity as a member of the marginalized, and bringing the culturally liminal or borderline experiences of women out from under the penumbra of alterity, Dow participates in the hybridization of culture. Unity Dow’s courting of hybridity is that “postcolonial desire for deracination” (Bhabha 2004: 322) manifested in the totality of her life as an activist, a mother, a judge, to give a few examples, while at the same time allowing her fictional characters to participate in “cultural heresy” (ibid.: 322). This is to say that Dow’s fictional narratives (in this thesis) abound with heretical moments in the lives of her protagonists who destabilize and reject various shades of tradition before rewriting new scripts of their lives. Again, as Bhabha argues perceptively, “[b]laspemy goes beyond the severance of tradition and replaces its claim to a purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and reinscription” (ibid.: 323).

Secondly, in the fiction of Alexander McCall Smith, hybridity refers to “a theatrical form of the staging of cross-genre, cross-cultural identities” (Bhabha 2004: 323). Smith’s “detective” fiction on

Botswana is an insightfully revisionary narrative of “doubling” which draws on various traditions – fiction, fact, history, memoir, detective work – to shed light on “the doubling of identity” (ibid.: 72). This doubling entails a disavowal of identification based on the related axes of gender, sexuality, race and nationality. Therefore, in the protagonists he has created in his fiction, Smith articulates culture as a moment “of signifiatory or representational undecidability” (ibid.: 51) characterized by productive performance of identity.

Finally, in their reportage on Botswana, Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies are allowed space, as voices from the margins, to grapple with their own hybrid and transcultural identities, first in their own lived realities as straddling more than two cultures, and secondly, through their reflecting on and problematizing how the so-called *lumpen* minorities¹⁰ in Botswana are beginning to find their voices against the background of a society that has always advocated cultural purity.

As will be seen in Chapter 1 where *The Location of Culture* is discussed, Homi Bhabha advances the idea of liminality in relation to Victor Turner’s understanding of the polysemous nature of ritual in both tribal and industrial societies. Although Bhabha hardly ever mentions the name of Victor Turner in *The Location of Culture*, the latter’s influence on him cannot be gainsaid, for Turner’s expansive liminal perspective flames virtually every aspect of Bhabha’s

¹⁰ The salutary lesson to be learnt from Botswana’s minority populations is the extent to which our world is tending towards a kind of global citizenship.

discourse. Thus, instead of replicating Turner's use of the ambiguous but transformational significance of ritual, Bhabha introduces the disabling and disavowing notion of the prefix "post", not to suggest teleological closures but to explain the vexed concept and open nature of the "difference" that punctuates identity in the postcolonial context. For Bhabha, the "post" in postcolonialism carries a burden that is inimical to notions of, say, class analysis implied in Marxist discourse, but broadly addresses discourses of modernity, disavows all forms of particularist ethnocentricisms and nationalisms and privileges the concept of hybridity located in migrancy, cosmopolitanism, minoritarian identifications and related forms of identity associated with global flows. Through the ideas of hybridity, metonymy, contingency, ambivalence, splitting, incommensurability, undecidability, to mention a few, Bhabha sees culture "as complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions"¹¹.

As I argue in this thesis, by deploying the concept of liminality, which in its shifting nature rejects any impositions of classification systems on the world and which, in Bhabha's formulation, implies notions such as the Third Space, hybridity, cultural difference, borderlands and exile, I will show how the texts I have selected present the "writing back paradigm" as having run its course and therefore irrelevant, especially in the twenty-first century. Hence the texts under study present the idea of culture as always in a state of flux, identity as an

¹¹ See Bhabha in conversation with W.J.T Mitchell (1996: 1). Vigorously trying to articulate the *third* space of culture, Bhabha here is opposed to liberal and romantic notions of cultural diversity and issues of unquestioned pluralism.

open question. In other words, the Third Space disrupts binary logic or any form of monologism and related closures (of self/other, black/white, man/woman) which arrogate to culture primordial unities and fixities, and the space itself becomes the precondition for the articulation of what Homi Bhabha (1988) insightfully calls cultural difference – the idea of culture as a fluid and mobile category. In an attempt to explain the notion of splitting, for example, which is a manifestation of the ambivalence of culture in postcolonial societies, Homi Bhabha argues that “there is a theoretical space and a political place for ... an articulation – in the sense that the word itself denies an “original” identity or a “singularity” to objects of difference – sexual or racial” (2004: 96). By saying this, Bhabha suggests that liminality, here represented by the postcolonial perspective, is a theory, a politics, as well as an ethics which reveals itself in the reading process. Consequently, for Bhabha, textual liminality may entail “a contradictory process of reading between the lines” (Ibid: 35): exactly what “a postcolonial interpretation demands” (Ibid: 250). Also known as catechrestic, this kind of reading means that

[t]he pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that the two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space (Ibid: 53).

A postcolonial text which, according to Bhabha, also shows signs of dead “centres” (Lyotard), contains a “Third Space” or simply brims with spaces which are waiting to be seized on, analysed and filled with new meanings, new identities. These spaces manifest

themselves through “metonyms” such as author’s dedications, allusions or glosses; authorial intrusions or interventions as exemplified by ironic references, especially in dialogue, to mention some instances. The implication is that writers, as well as the characters they create, often become figurations of liminality by not only destabilizing the self/other, centre/margin, thereby leading to the dissolution of boundaries, but also metonymically filling in those spaces, especially in their refusal to remain “fixed” or “centred” by the text.

Though presented as a highly problematic claim for the agency of individual subjects, Homi Bhabha’s espousal of liminality is one of a master trope that is invested with a surplus of meanings and works in contiguity and alignment with other correlatives or related signifying notions and tropes. These include the spaces in-between of transition (Turner, Bhabha); cultural translation (Bhabha); deterritorialization, rhizomes and nomadology (Deleuze and Guattari), marginality and hybridity (Turner and Bhabha); counter-hegemony (Gramsci); counterhegemony and the language metaphor (Hall); heteroglossia (Bakhtin), the black Atlantic (Gilroy); the analogon and pastiche (Jameson), the seam (de Kock); migration, diaspora, exile, contrapuntality and intellectualism (Said); *nepantla* or the consciousness of borderlands (Anzaldúa); the Matrixial (Ettinger). Together, and as aspects and effects of liminality within the postcolonial as well as the poststructuralist/postmodern condition, I show how the appeal of each of these tropes to multivalency, multivocality and multireferentiality is a liminal form of identification,

which points to Bhabha's idea of enunciation: that there are always conflictual positions constituting a subject in the postcolonial condition, a condition which now finds a confluence with the contentious concept of globalization. Bhabha undertakes such an analysis of the colonial condition to demonstrate the presence of a slippage which calls into question the claim for a unitary identity by the colonizer and the colonized. In short, ambivalence is, for Bhabha, constitutive of the colonial condition.

I also demonstrate that liminality inaugurates an interface between postcolonial studies and globalization theory, since built into the tropes listed above is a view of identity as something that eschews and transcends binaries, as a product of cultural difference and therefore a performance that occurs in the contingent moment.

Further, I argue that postcolonial theory exposes the liminality of the Western world, especially Foucault's wounded epistemes, by an interrogation and critique of discourses of modernity. To this end, the thesis takes issue with modernity as "a monolithic and univocal 'civilizing mission' central to the ideology of imperialism, the idea that 'progress' is a gift from the West to the world" (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 1999: 19). In Chapter 3, for example, I use Unity Dow's *Juggling Truths* as an exemplar of a postcolonial text where Western modernity is critically examined and all but rejected. The same chapter proceeds to highlight the ironies of Dow's position in the discussion of *The Heavens May Fall*, her fourth novel, which dramatizes the inexorability of modernity in the form of modernization

and urbanization (or globalization) which the Third World finds attractive and of which formerly colonized nation states are agents.

Finally, the thesis demonstrates the extent to which all the authors and their works can be said to be constitutive of ambivalence and therefore of the effects of various forms of liminality. Thus the present reader looks for evidence, in the texts, of that ambivalence, the resistance to colonialism or an instability of power. I wish to show how, through the process of writing and their committed engagement, the writers fulfill the minimum conditions of disavowal as a constant reference – “that state of in-betweenness” (Said 1994: 58) which Edward Said associates with all marginals, exiles and intellectuals characterized by a movement of agency from fixity or stereotyping into a process of circulation: while the colonizer performs particular strategies in order to maintain power, there is an ambivalence that ineluctably accompanies the attempt to fix the colonized as the object of knowledge, with the result that the relations of power become ambiguous. For Edward Said, exile may have its trauma, especially as “life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal” (2000: 186), but at the same time, exile gives intellectuals certain advantages and a unique autonomy which allow them to perceive the world differently. “Seeing ‘the entire world as a foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision” (ibid: 186). This state is possible because, armed with an original vision, one begins to reject paradigms of “objectivity” in which one was always trapped, and one manifests this vision by speaking the truth to power. This study will indicate the extent to which the authors discussed

experience a kind of displacement which allows them to begin “seeing the entire world as a foreign land” – a state which empowers them to adopt new visions of perceiving themselves and society.

Chapter 1 theorizes the concept of liminality from the vantage points provided by anthropologist Victor Turner and postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha as signposts for the debates raised in the thesis. I argue that liminality, as Turner perceives it and Bhabha theorizes it, comes to be associated with poststructuralist and postmodernist debates. Hence the chapter theorizes the idea of liminality in its aggregated meaning within colonial discourse that Bhabha expounds in *The Location of Culture*. As the idea of liminality wanders and accumulates meaning within the discourse, concepts such as hybridity, metonymy of presence, *differance* and other related notions in the field of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis – all correlatives of liminality – are also discussed as a way to extrapolate these ideas in the contexts of the works that are examined in the thesis and also to emphasize the fluid and shifting nature of Botswana and African identities.

Chapter 2 concerns the first two works of fiction by Unity Dow – the only true writer of fiction to have emerged from Botswana since the death of Bessie Head in 1990. As well as considering the life of the author whose activism in the 1990s changed the lives of women and children in her country, and therefore her activism constituting the ambivalence of the author, I also use the liminal concepts of Victor Turner, Jacques Lacan, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and apply

them to *Far and Beyon'* and *The Screaming of the Innocent*, her first and second novels respectively. Specifically, I make use of Turner's idea of the pilgrimage, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialization, reterritorialization and the rhizome to show how Dow's women, by rising above the confines of domestic space which define their lives, embody Bhabha's notion of liminality as hybridity, heresy, resistance and ambivalence. It is through their ambivalence or undermining of authority that Dow's women attain agency. Drawing attention to Unity Dow's preoccupation with the idea of culture and selfhood, the discussion considers how, according to this author, the subjectivity of the notion of woman in Botswana and African culture aligns itself with a selfhood or identity completely different from that of a man in that it is based on biological essentialism. In other words, for Unity Dow, women occupy their bodies as essential material bodies and therefore female identity is perceived as being located in woman's embodied selfhood, a selfhood that is destined to procreate and nurture, and will always be marginal, vis-à-vis that of its male counterpart. *The Screaming of the Innocent*, in particular, deals with how a woman's anatomy can be put to atavistic use as well as exploited for gratification in acts of sexual congress. The body of a young woman who is killed for *muti*, for example, is an essentially corporeal body which, one would say, is rendered the "other", repressed, violated and used according to a patriarchal normative understanding of woman's embodiment. This presentation of female subjectivity based on biological determinism is, however, challenged in both novels. To that end, I make references to the ideas of Antonio Gramsci to demonstrate how Unity Dow's first two novels are

exercises in counter-hegemony and therefore enunciations of liminal identity. Or, put another way, Dow's texts are hybridized in the contexts of other cultures. The subversion of hegemony and expressions of liminality are embodied in Unity Dow's two memorable heroines: Mosa in *Far and Beyond* and Amantle in *The Screaming of the Innocent*, who evade the tyranny of biological essentialism, challenge and reject patriarchal prescriptions and inscriptions of culture before regaining their agency. The chapter concludes by showing how, as subjects of ambivalence, Unity Dow's subalterns learn to speak.

Chapter 3 concerns Unity Dow's third and fourth novels, namely *Juggling Truths* and *The Heavens May Fall*. The discussion in these texts veers toward the utopian dialectic of Western modernity or forms of rationality as well as the discourse about the efficacy of so-called African culture which Unity Dow places side by side, interrogating the two notions in some detail. I argue that through Monei and Naledi (the main characters in *Juggling Truths* and *The Heavens May Fall* respectively), Unity Dow establishes the essential gesture of Western modernity (as embodied in the discourses of liberal humanism and grand narratives) to be an unreliable bestower of identity. In her interrogation of this dialectic, Dow finds Western modernity based on the notion of reason highly problematic and therefore in need of a more rigorous interrogation. These two works are descriptions of the slippage and ambivalence of those forms of rationality with their ideological and semantic dislocation in the spatio-temporal displacements of colonialism. Forms of Western knowledge

confuse all attempts to assert authority or achieve closure. At the same time, Unity Dow perceives the discourse of Africanism¹², while not an altogether gestural or worthless rhetorical experience, as just as problematic because, in its overheated obsession with exclusivity and purity, it confines culture within a quarantine (of nativism) at a time when it is so evident that the free play of the global market performs a tellingly vital role in bestowing identity. Thus through Monei and Naledi, young women with nimble intellects who understand hegemony, Dow examines the questions and presuppositions that concern her because they are corrosive of her identity. The chapter concludes that through the characters of Monei and Naledi, Unity Dow challenges the totalitarian simplicities that are implied in the notions of Western modernities and African culture. Deconstructing all claims to ahistoricity in the above notions, Dow tries to forge new and liberating spaces of meaning and identity.

Chapter 4 introduces the works of Alexander McCall Smith, in particular his detective novels on Botswana, numbering six in the series. These novels are as follows: *The No 1 Ladies' Detective series*, *Tears of the Giraffe*, *The Kalahari Typing School for Men*, *Morality for Beautiful Girls*, *The Full Cupboard of Life*, and *In the Company of Cheerful Ladies*. While Alexander McCall Smith has written other fiction, the above novels exemplify the author's most profound reflections on African identity. The chapter examines the

¹² I am using *Africanism* in the sense that Afrocentric critics have deployed the term, mediated through notions of nativism, to denote the existence of a pure, unalloyed African identity, an identity exclusively associated with the black race.

themes of hybridity, transitionality and transnationality not just in the image of the protagonist Precious Ramotswe but also in the lives of other minor characters as well as within the events in the texts, which make nonsense of all notions that privilege falling back on a primordial and imagined African identity. Rather than view Smith's works as representing a third wave in African Literature, which Muff Andersson and Elsie Cloete suggest, I contend that such a generic classification is perhaps unnecessary in the light of the fact that postcolonial theory and that of globalization are now intertwined, if not inextricable. This link puts paid to theories which place African Literature in seamless categories such as implied above and means that Smith's works belong to postcolonial or world literature. In *The No.1 Ladies Detective* series, McCall Smith has created intriguing characters who glide easily or sometimes uneasily between experiences of the local and the global, at times subscribing to or inhabiting a number of cultural arenas and juggling multiple cultural affiliations and identities. Discussed in detail in this chapter are Precious Ramotswe, Mr Patel and various global flows and spaces – all as representative of Smith's literary creations whose current cosmopolitan identities are in inverse proportion to the amount of traditional purchase evident in Botswana.

Chapter 5 also develops the themes of transitionality and transnationality. As opposed to chapter 4 which deals with fictional characters and events, Chapter 5 focuses on Smith's narrative of Africa, as viewed through the eyes of historical personages such as Seretse Khama and Nelson Mandela whose lives are a testimony to

identity as something located in transnational spaces of cultural exchange, and not nativism and Pan-Africanism. To the extent that Smith allows memory to speak through Ramotswa's act of remembering, this Chapter concerns the reportage gleaned from his fiction and bears witness to what Homi Bhabha calls "the 'unhomely' condition of the modern world" (2004: 16). This representation of unhomeliness finds its eloquent expression in the names and characters of Khama and Mandela who do not subscribe to the immensely prized but exceedingly evasive essence that is African (black) identity. Through memorialization, authorial intrusions, wry humour and engaging irony, to mention a few examples, Smith presents and writes about African historiography not in terms of "homogeneous empty time", but as haunted by "the ghostly ... the terrifying ... and the unaccountable" (ibid.: 205). Or to put it slightly differently, Africa is seen as having a troubled and distressed past, a past which needs re-examining before any clamours for a pure and unalloyed African identity can begin to make sense. But Smith is not despondent; he suggests that in this same Africa lies hope for the future of the world. Personages such as Khama and Mandela – quintessential examples of what it means to negotiate the 'middle passage' of contemporary culture – are viewed as enacting the process of cultural difference (Bhabha) and thus performing "the healing of history" (2004: 25), to use Bhabha's words.

Chapter 6 examines the motif of reportage, the term used in a particular way in this thesis to denote, at once, fiction presented as journalism, fact presented as fiction and fiction presented as fact. The

two texts examined in this chapter are by eminent journalists whose works also centre on the identity of Botswana and by extension, Africa. Both Rupert Isaacson's *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey* and Caitlin Davies' *Place of Reeds* explore issues of land, place and identity. Of interest is the way that the two authors bring into relief the identities of minority groups in Africa, in this case the Khoisan and white peoples or Europeans who either have lived on the continent for centuries or choose to adopt Africa as their home.

Chapter One

Theorizing Liminality

All forms of criticism are founded upon a theory, or an admix of theories, whether they consciously acknowledge that or not. Theoretical writings have recognized that what are often taken to be “natural” and “commonsensical” ways of studying literature actually rest upon a set of theoretical injunctions which have been naturalized to the point at which they no longer have to justify their own practices. (Rice & Waugh 1989:1)

I think a theory should go beyond illuminating the deep structure of an event, object, or text, should do more than establish or embellish the framing discourse within which this object of analysis is placed. (Homi Bhabha, in conversation with Mitchell, 1995)¹

The views expressed here by Philip Rice, Patricia Waugh and Homi Bhabha are instructive and act as the cue for this chapter which examines Homi Bhabha’s notion of liminality, the idea of in-betweenness or boundary straddling (as Victor Turner conceived it), which in turn forms the basic theoretical framework of this thesis. In

¹ It is Bhabha’s conviction that theory is not just mere speculation but a response to a problem. In *The Location of Culture* (2004: 28-9), Bhabha explains rather rhetorically but cogently, the significance of theory and its impact on identity as follows: There is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of the imperialist or neo-colonial West. The Olympian realms of what is mistakenly labeled ‘pure theory’ are assumed to be eternally insulated from the historical exigencies and tragedies of the wretched of the earth. Must we always polarize in order to polemicise? Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representation of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory vs politics? Can the aim of freedom of knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, centre and periphery, negative image and positive image? Is our way out of the dualism the espousal of an implacable oppositionality or the invention of a counter-myth of radical purity? Must the project of our liberationist aesthetics be forever part of a totalizing Utopian vision of being and history that seeks to transcend the contradictions and ambivalences that constitute the very structure of human subjectivity and systems of cultural representation?

The Location of Culture, Homi Bhabha develops Victor Turner's key idea of liminality, together with its related symbolic registers (such as rite of passage, *limen*, *communitas*, and antistructure) that are located in ritual, to explain the vexed, non-dualistic and shifting nature of identity in the modern (largely postcolonial) world. According to Homi Bhabha, the postcolonial perspective, which in his formulation is fronted by a Turnerian symbolic model of liminal social drama, is not just idle speculation, nor mere reflection, nor just a form of criticism, but a process of celebrating dynamic spaces of cultural change characterized by shifting identities. For Bhabha, theory, in this case liminality, is a response to and a real moment of intervention in people's daily lives as they try to grapple with the cosmic eddies of change around them. Because of such change, the notion of culture is not defined holistically but as enunciation.

In this chapter I apply the concept of liminality to suggest a way of looking at postcolonial (Botswana/African) identity as fluid, relational and always in flux. I explain this fluidity of identity by making a connection between Victor Turner's concept of liminality and Homi Bhabha's innovative formulation and application of the same idea in his text, *The Location of Culture*. The connection is important because, in espousing the vocabulary of liminality which gestures toward fluidity and allows particular spaces of meaning to emerge, both Turner and Bhabha are involved in what Stuart Hall calls "thinking at or beyond the limit" (1996: 259), a thinking on the margins.

It must be mentioned at the outset that the thesis does not purport to offer a thorough-going, poststructuralist, psychoanalytic or postmodern reading of the texts under study; nor does it offer a reading of the African continent as a text. Where they are employed, poststructuralist concepts resonate with Homi Bhabha's idea of liminality, and are only adduced in order to fully contextualize the postcolonial condition as Bhabha sees it. This is mainly because liminality or hybridity, as Bhabha has expounded it in *The Location of culture*, is a complex idea that requires extrapolation by means of other poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and postmodern concepts. I will thus be attempting to explicate the full range of the complexity of the idea by making references to other theorists such as Jaques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. Similarly, debates about African identity are also invoked and summarized in this thesis, but are not central to my argument. These debates have been referred to in order to demonstrate the extent to which statements about culture are often stricken by the kind of ambivalence suggested by liminality and, as such, are used only to shed light on my concerns with hybridity. In short, the chapter examines the notion of liminality (with its various domains of meaning and across a wide range of debates) as a tool or theoretical scaffolding for reading the fiction of Unity Dow and Alexander McCall Smith as well as some reportage in the fiction by Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies on Botswana. This reading illustrates the postcolonial nation of Botswana as caught between the ambivalence (Victor Turner's in-betweenness) of contesting registers of identity.

Initially used by Van Gennep in his tripartite taxonomy of “separation; margin (or *limen*); and reaggregation” (1992: 48) which he saw as characteristic of all rites of passage, liminality, or *limen*, simply means the middle “state”, a stage of transition, or a border² zone. Intrigued by Gennep’s formulation, Victor Turner adopted the middle notion of transition, what Gloria Anzaldua also calls *nepantla*, meaning a consciousness of borderlands³, seeing it as central in explaining the nature and importance of various forms of space that can be identified in human cultural experience. What prompted Turner to arrogate a cultural significance to liminality, these culturally invisible zones, is the contrapuntal⁴ character and transformative nature of ritual, which necessitates the emergence of those border spaces. Turner writes:

Here I would like to repeat the “Orphic” level of ritual, which transcends both structure and antistructure, the

² In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (1989: 208), R. Rosaldo writes: “More often than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets, and irruptions of all kinds. Social borders frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste. Along with ‘our supposedly transparent’ cultural selves, such borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production”.

³ G. Anzaldua, (1987: 77-98) introduces the concept of *mestiza* or a consciousness of borderlands as a dual or multiple personality whereby a subject develops a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity (p.79) because its personality is plagued by psychic restlessness (p.78). In *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002: xv) Anzaldua and Keating use the metaphor of bridges to explicate the notion of *nepantla* as borderlands thus: “Whenever I glimpse the arch of this bridge my breath catches. Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantlaTransformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla ... and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement Most of us dwell in nepantla so much of the time it’s become sort of ‘home.’”

⁴ While Victor Turner (1992: 75-6) uses the term to explain the transformational nature of ritual, Edward Said’s use has its origins in music to denote connectedness. Thus Turner’s use emphasizes the notion of *limen* in ritual whereas for the latter’s appropriating of the term gestures toward the promotion of a textured universalism in which there is an interaction between the local the global.

oppositions ... become irrelevant, a new arbitrariness appears in the relation between signifier and signified – things cease to signify other things, for everything *is*, the Saussurean significative dualism yields to a basal non-dualism where signifier and signified dissolve into indiscriminable existence. (1992: 157)

Of interest in Turner's description of ritual in the above quotation is the special emphasis he places on the "Orphic" stage, a boundary qualified by the verb *is*, which carries the polysemous magic that does away with the idea of structure, giving ritual liminality an ontological, ethical and symbolic potency that exults in arbitrariness, defies all reification and produces multiple, connotative "signifieds"⁵. As Turner puts it, "[a]ction and intersubjectivity dominate ritual" (1992: 66). Intersubjectivity here refers to a dynamic process whose symbolic significance can be inferred from the observable behaviour of the initiates as they respond and adapt to internal as well as external changes in their environment.

To be sure, Turner's notion of liminality or the threshold is often graspable at a most rarefied level of cognition as a dialectical process that lacks a constitutive materiality, "the dialectic without transcendence" (Bhabha 1996: 9). Homi Bhabha inclines toward the

⁵ See V.W. Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* (1992: 3-29). In the first chapter, entitled 'Encounter with Freud: The Making of a Comparative Symbologist', Victor Turner saw the signification of socialcultural symbols identified in African ritual (in particular amongst the Ndembu people where he worked for more than two years) as comparable to Freud's terms of multivocality, multireferentiality, polysemy, cultural sublimation and projection – terms which are explained in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and signal the idea of multiplicity. For Turner, to observe Ndembu ritual and culture was to encounter the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious at work. This is important in that the idea of liminality takes on poststructuralist characteristics and dimensions.

non-constitutive space of liminality, in particular Turner's deployment and introduction of a dialogic antagonism, paradoxes and contradictions, as implied in the following words and clauses: "is", "arbitrariness", "dissolve into indiscriminable existence" – all of which designate the status of "in-betweenness", and contextualize it in the light of colonial discourse.

Victor Turner arrived at the concept of liminality in his extensive and far-reaching study of the rituals or rites of passage practised by the Ndembu people of Central Africa. In the course of examining these rites which "indicate and constitute transitions between states" (1967: 93), Turner observed that the entire ritual process revolves around, crystallizes into and is reducible to just one term: *limen* or liminality – the preeminence and dominance of the median or in-between stage during which time ritual initiates go through a period of disorientation and inhabit new forms of identity at any point in time, slipping in and out of determinate identity at will and generally displaying protean, ambiguous and sometimes diametrically opposed attributes such as alienation, confusion, amorphousness, ambiguity and/or individuality, among other things. More importantly, Turner was fascinated by the multivocal character of socio-cultural symbols within the Ndembu ritual, a phenomenon which led him to proclaim that he had rediscovered Sigmund Freud⁶. By this, Turner meant that the

⁶ It is important to note here that, trained in the School of Structural Functionalism, Victor Turner was a student of scholars such as Comte, Feuerbach, Radcliffe Brown, and Malinowski who believed that ritual symbols and processes merely confirmed the rigidity and efficacy of social structure. But Turner was pleasantly amazed by the genius of the Ndembu culture, especially in its multivocal capacity to transcend the Western-Cartesian dualism implied in Western social structure. For somebody such as Turner whose social and educational upbringing had offered him nothing better than functional anthropology, liminality

conscious and unconscious behaviours of those initiates involved in Ndembu ritual showed the kinds of signification comparable to Freud's symbolic interpretation of dreams. Like Freud's dreams and their multivocal nature, Turner perceived Ndembu ritual (with symbols that lend themselves to multireferentiality, polysemy, cultural sublimation and projection) as nothing but the operations of Freud's psychoanalytic idea of the unconscious. For Turner, therefore, liminality transcends structure and becomes post-Cartesian.

Differently put, as a culturally busy middle stage and the pivot of action, the *limen* becomes a kind of displacement resulting in "the slippage of signification that is celebrated in the articulation of difference" (Bhabha 2004: 235). It is this slippage that makes it virtually impossible for cultural meaning to move freely and completely between any two or more systems of cultural differentiation, and consequently, the truth of culture must always be called into question. For Turner, "the attributes of liminality or of liminal or liminoid personae⁷ (threshold people) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner 1969: 95). Thus liminality is that

was like a breath of fresh air. Even more important was Turner's understanding of Ndembu ritual as mirroring Freud's multireferential mode of interpreting dreams. In liminality, Turner discards the structuralist-functionalist social formation in favour of the space in-between.

⁷ Victor Turner makes it clear that the liminal and the liminoid are different and coexist in all societies but that, despite their obvious differences, the two categories can be used interchangeably. Similarly, in this thesis, the two terms denote one and the same thing. See Turner's *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, pp. 57-8.

moment “when the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape” (Turner 1992: 133). While it may be a moment of restlessness, unleashed by an unknowable future, it certainly is also “an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment” (Bhabha 2004: 6) revealed in the possibilities for dissonance and dissidence in the life of the initiate. In other words, liminality represents a phase in the life of a subject – an individual, a community, or a nation – which belies any attempts at settled assumptions about its identity because of inherent contradictions and instabilities that often come to haunt the subject. It is the transformative nature of ritual which left Turner enamoured of the idea of liminality.

Further, despite some notable differences between ritual and literature, Turner argues for a link between African (Ndembu) ritual and (Western) literature. This is because both ritual and literature make use of symbols. “Dominant symbols”, writes Turner, “provide the fixed points in the total systems, ritual or literary” (1992: 89). As a result, Turner contends, it is the multivocal nature of symbols that allows both ritual and literature to become a means by which society achieves reflexivity as it takes stock of itself.

Elsewhere, the realm of liminality has been likened to the idea of the *seam*. Leon de Kock, for example, has shown how South Africa -- a “country of thoroughly interstitial identities” (2004: 8), should be understood within the trope of the *seam* – a graphic symbol that reflects the heterogeneity of the country’s civil society. A concept he

borrowed from historian and scholar Noel Mostert, De Kock's deployment of the *seam*, as "the site of both convergence and difference" (1994: 12), is poststructuralist in its semantic deployment and contains resonances of the notion of *limen* as Victor Turner theorized it. According to De Kock, multicultural notions of "the rainbow nation" should be eclipsed within the fold of the *seam* where South African identities will be produced in a performative, if tentative, manner.⁸

In his seminal text, *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha draws on, adheres to and appropriates Victor Turner's idea of liminality, articulating it as a disembodied and protean form of signification or meaning-making which derives from and is a consequence of the postcolonial condition or colonial discourse and related, interlocking poststructuralist/postmodernist discourses.

The border space which Turner describes as the place when "things cease to signify other things, for everything *is* becomes the boundary which Homi Bhabha calls "the realm of the beyond" (2004: 1); the beyond as a contested space, "the borderlines of the 'present' (Ibid: 7); "the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond'" (Ibid: 2).

⁸ It is important to note, though, that in his 2005 article entitled "Does South African Literature Still Exist? Or, South African Literature is Dead, Long Live Literature in South Africa", Leon de Kock has rethought his position regarding the idea of the seam, but only in relation to South African literature. I would argue that the idea of the seam still is very important for African literature.

Like an irruption, Homi Bhabha's idea of liminality as "the beyond" is not an overdetermined space but one loaded with ambiguity; it represents an act of unleashing that post-dialectical moment when people reject structures and hegemonies and occupy any one of the heterogeneous spaces where they negotiate narratives of their existences as well as of particular spaces of meanings and different identities within the postcolonial condition. Often understood at the level of abstraction, this is a precarious condition to experience, characterized as it is by "indescribable existence" (Turner), a "sense of disorientation" and "a disturbance of direction" (Bhabha): as well as entailing confusion and paradox, this disjunction points up the immense freedoms which come about when contradictions are synthesized and overrun in the Third Space.

Homi Bhabha theorizes the Third Space of confusion and paradox, or liminality, within the context of (post)colonialism. As will be shown later in this chapter, Bhabha achieves this feat by developing a postcolonial theory that draws on and exceeds the far-sighted and far-reaching views of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said⁹, while being at variance with the perspectives put forward by partisan thinkers, in particular the writers of *The Decolonization of African Literature*. By grounding his version of postcolonialism in liminality or the Third space, Bhabha is able to contextualize the vexed nature of the postcolonial condition and provide a counterpoint to identity issues.

⁹ Both Fanon and Said present the postcolonial condition as a deeply troubling one in which knowledge is structured in terms of oppositional categories. Bhabha's theory aims to transcend this worldview.

In the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha begins theorizing the notion of liminality by considering its related registers such as boundaries and borders. He quotes Martin Heidegger from his famous text, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, in which the latter asserts that “[a] boundary is not that at which something stops, but ... that from which *something begins its presencing*” (Bhabha 2004: 1). Bhabha goes on to entitle the chapter “Border lives: The art of the present” to suggest the space of liminality that people inhabit in modern times. Thus he announces the theme of the book by asserting that “[o]ur existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix ‘post’...” (ibid.: 1). This announcement inaugurates Bhabha’s version of colonialism and identity politics shaded by liminality or, as he echoes Johnny Mercer, “Mr In-between”, and it is the “shiftiness” of identity that is the business of this thesis.

For Bhabha, postcolonialism is understood not in terms of the binary logic exemplified in Eurocentric/Other or Eurocentric/Afrocentric debate, nor necessarily as an offshoot of poststructuralist/postmodernist discourses (as some scholars believe) but rather as a broad and overarching dynamic which announces or even predates the onset of colonialism (as we know it) and subsumes other postmodernist discourses. According to these discourses, “[c]ulture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity ... as its resplendent being is a moment of

pleasure, enlightenment or liberation” (Bhabha 2004: 251). Bhabha adds:

It is from such narrative positions that the postcolonial prerogative seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension, both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples. My use of poststructuralist theory emerges from this postcolonial contramodernity. I attempt to represent a certain defeat, or even an impossibility, of the “West” in its authorization of the “idea” of colonization. Driven by the subaltern history of the margins of modernity ... I have tried to ... revise the known, to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial. (2004: 252)

Hence, according to Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, postmodernism, like other “isms”, gives way to and is subsumed by postcolonialism, a not unproblematic notion which he develops into a grand narrative or theoretical edifice that straddles everything else in literary and political theory and is used to explain all forms of social reality or phenomena. Crucially, as this thesis demonstrates, the binary oppositions by which people are accustomed to thinking are collapsed and transcended in a typical poststructuralist, Derridean mode.

Setting the debate in the context of culture, Bhabha elevates the notion of postcolonialism to something of a grand narrative, investing the prefix “post” with the kind of generative power that gives the concept a ubiquitous characteristic which evades any distinctive

specificity or periodisation.¹⁰ As I will reiterate in this thesis, postcolonial theory becomes not just a theory but also a philosophy and an ethics characterized by that space where *something begins its presencing*.¹¹

Homi Bhabha adapts liminality from the domain of ritual ceremonies and links it to the postcolonial condition which, understood in its multifaceted constitution, becomes the locus of and paradigmatic matrix for understanding identity formations. In order to identify this post-dialectical moment of the “beyond”, Bhabha makes use of Said, Freud, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida¹² to transfer Victor Turner’s concept of liminality from its anthropological usage to a more nuanced matrix of meanings in the postcolonial context. That is,

¹⁰ Also known as periodicity, the term has been used by most postcolonial thinkers in the so-called Third world to develop the concept of “them” and “us”, “their theory” and “ours”, and so forth. Bhabha’s theory of the Third Space challenges all notions of periodicity in favour of revisionism in postcolonial theory.

¹¹ Throughout *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha articulates this evanescent and shifting space which he also terms the hybrid moment.

¹² Homi Bhabha, in conversation with Mitchell, (pp.12-13) writes: “Edward Said’s work was of course crucial in suggesting a whole interdisciplinary terrain ... Said’s perspective caused the flash of recognition in which I first apprehended my own project.... Foucault was attractive to me because I was contesting polarized and binary notions of constructing subjects within the play of power. I was persuaded by my reading of Foucault to rethink the very nature of power outside the polar or binary model.... As far as Lacan goes, I was struck by his ability to provide a linguistic register for affective desire and identification. From my reading of Lacan, I discovered that the tropic tryst of metaphor and metonym was charged with intersubjective and unconscious meanings – meanings that could be recuperated for a reading of the symbol realm of the social text. I suppose what I was trying to do with Lacan was to take his circuit of the petit object ‘a’ and to thread it through a number of social circulations and cultural locutions. The ‘objectives’“objectives of desire became my theme. I was trying to see how that trajectory of desire would be able to invest social value in particular objects. I was also interested in taking the notions of repetition and iteration in Lacan’s work and using them for questions of cultural translation. I think there is a link in my thinking around Lacan and Derrida, despite their famous differences. I was very impressed with Derrida’s ability to demonstrate the textual, inscriptive, and institutional practices of deferral and displacement. I think the pressure that I put on Derrida was to say that if we accept the process of deferral, both spatially and temporally, yet accept that at certain points there are contingent closures, then how do we rethink that contingency, not as some kind of teleological causality, but as an iterative causality beyond the erasure of structural or functional determination? I was interested in fleshing out and developing Derrida’s statement, ‘For some of us the principle of indeterminism is what makes the conscious freedom of man fathomable.’”

Bhabha mediates the meaning of liminality in terms of theoretical parameters which Freud, Lacan and Foucault as well as Derrida employ in order to articulate their respective deconstructive positions and also to convey their impact on identities. Thus liminality comes to be associated with the mobile and indeterminate clusters or genealogies of meanings reflected in the works of the above psychoanalytic and poststructuralist thinkers. For example, besides mobilizing concepts such as hybridity, cultural translation and marginality, Bhabha also employs Derrida's notions of dissemination, deferral, displacement and indeterminism, Foucault's indeterminism which makes him locate meaning in the power/knowledge nexus, and Freud's concept of the unconscious, amplified and renamed by Jacques Lacan through its main tropes of metaphor and metonymy, making liminality a loose but potent signifier which is implied in every one of the above terms.

In order to place Homi Bhabha's concept of liminality in perspective, a link between liminality and colonial/postcolonial discourse¹³ needs to be established because, according Bhabha, liminality epitomizes the very spirit of the entire postcolonial condition in its variegated

¹³ See Bill Ashcroft and Paul Ahluwalia, 1999. *Edward Said: the paradox of identity* (London & New York: Routledge): p.22. The above writers state that "Edward Said has been regarded almost universally as the progenitor of colonial discourse theory in his work on Orientalism. Colonial discourse theory is that theory which analyses the discourse of colonialism and colonisation; which demonstrates the way that discourse obscures the underlying political and material aims of colonisation; and which points out the deep ambivalences of of that discourse as well as the way in which it constructs both colonising and colonised subjects. Said's use of Michel Foucault's notion of discourse in *Orientalism* can be said to have initiated this field of study However, colonial discourse theory has been associated most popularly with Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak whose post-structuralist influences, and at times complex theoretical elaborations, have made their attention to the discursive constructions and discursive power of colonialism very different from that of Edward Said (Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1988)."

constitution. In other words, postcolonialism, as discourse that problematizes culture, and liminality, as an intersubjective realm of that culture, inform each other. Like observing the amorphous behaviour of a liminal persona, for example, “a postcolonial interpretation demands”, so argues Bhabha, “a kind of reading against the grain” (2004: 250). Thus reading concerns examining “the specific ‘interruption’, the interstices, through which the colonial text utters its interrogation, its contrapuntal critique” (ibid.: 150).

The origin of the term postcolonialism or postcolonial theory has been a matter of contentious and protracted debate during the second half of the twentieth century. The vexed nature of this debate begins with some scholars attributing the notion of postcolonialism to Edward Said in his founding work entitled *Orientalism* (1978)¹⁴ which critiqued the uneasy colonial relations between the Orient and Occident. Drawing on “Foucault’s notion of discourse as a system of regulation” (Easthope & McGowan 1992: 241), Edward Said presents the identity of the Orient as having been created by colonialism. Thus his text compares, at least thematically, with Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), an earlier work in which Fanon explores the distressed and lopsided nature of the postcolonial condition in terms of representing reality. With the publication of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), postcolonialism had become a contested discourse, accruing

¹⁴ See Frantz Fanon, 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin): pp. 31-2. In this text, Fanon argues that the postcolonial condition should be understood according to Manichean aesthetics. He writes: “The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically ... the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil.”

a plethora of meanings which render the discourse highly problematic. At the core of all the above texts is an understanding of colonialism as an oppositional politics, which presents knowledge in terms of binaries.

While both Edward Said and Frantz Fanon attempt to interrogate colonialism and its failings because of its warped representational premises (thus setting in motion postcolonial theory), Ashcroft *et al.* attribute the emergence of postcolonial theory to “the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of European theory” (Ashcroft *et al.* 2002: 11). These writers have argued that

[i]t has often been accepted as fact that Edward Said initiated the discourse of postcolonialism. Yet *The Empire Writes Back* emerged not from that intervention but from the work of those African, Caribbean and Indian writers, artists and social theorists who were actually the power of imperial discourse. (Ashcroft *et al.* 2002: 198)

Irrespective of the real origins of postcolonial theory, and as noted above, “most critics agree that literatures designated ‘postcolonial’ share a foregrounding of the tension with the imperial power” (Hutcheon 1995: 12, echoing Ashcroft). Thus Ashcroft *et al.* provide a version of postcolonialism that emerged “mainly from within English Literature Departments” (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 199) of former British colonies and settler nations, and was “principally concerned with literatures in English” (*Ibid.*: 199). For these writers, then, postcoloniality is applicable to exclusively non-Western countries that were once colonized. From its inception, postcolonial theory has been

appropriated by other disciplines such as History (Dirlik & Mbembe), Politics, Biblical Studies and International Relations. But as I try to show in this thesis, the ground for postcolonial theory has shifted from one of interrogating strained relations involving Empire and colony (in)to a discursive and contested discourse in which thinkers such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak theorize postcolonialism in ways that make it disseminate, to use Derrida's term, and interlock with other related discourses such as postmodernism, poststructuralism and theories of globalization.

Stuart Hall has also expressed the above view, aware that the "post-colonial" or postcoloniality is informed by its operation in the contested space of world politics, a space in which structure and totality are jettisoned and rejected. In an article entitled "When was the post-colonial? Thinking at the Limit", Hall explains why there are multiple modalities and positions on the meaning of postcolonial theory, interrogates its trends towards ahistoricity and universalism, explains its link with politics, and reflects on whether or not the "post" refers to direct colonial rule. In conclusion, Stuart Hall rejects any notion of the "postcolonial" that privileges sequentiality and periodization in favour of Homi Bhabha's discursive version which valorizes contingency and ambiguity and, further, which locates conjectures between colonialism and capital modernity. This is thanks to both Hall and Bhabha's deep awareness that any calls for a return to pure and uncontaminated cultural origins merely obfuscate the reality of the deep-rooted and largely irrevocable cultural effects of the process of transculturation which has taken place and which

defines the protracted experience of colonisation. In other words, the colonizer and colonized are so very deeply implicated in one another that any discourse about origins smacks of paradoxes. In anticipation of Homi Bhabha's detractors, for example, some of whom believe that "return" is possible, Hall writes:

In the re-staged narrative of the post-colonial, colonisation assumes the place and significance of a major extended and ruptural world-historical event. By "colonisation", the "postcolonial" references something more than direct rule over certain areas of the world by the imperial powers. ...[I]t is signifying the whole process of expansion, exploration, conquest, colonisation and imperial hegemonisation which constituted the "outer face", the constitutive outside, of European and then Western capitalist modernity after 1492. (1996: 249)

Therefore Stuart Hall entreats his readers to read postcolonial discourse theory "in its dislocated and differentiated character" (1996: 250), which makes it "part of an essentially transnational and transcultural 'global' process" (1996: 247) that "produces a decentred, diasporic or global rewriting of earlier, national-centred imperial grand narratives" (ibid.: 247). "'Global' here does not mean universal", argues Hall, "but is not nation- or society-specific either. It is about how the lateral and tranverse cross-relations of what Gilroy calls the 'diasporic' ... supplement and simultaneously dis-place the centre/periphery, and the global/ local reciprocally reorganize and reshape one another" (ibid.: 247). Such a displacement makes this version of postcoloniality poststructuralist in orientation and gestures

towards a “proliferation of histories and temporalities” (Ibid.: 248) which call attention to the interrogation of modernities.¹⁵

Such a (poststructuralist) stance becomes interesting when one considers that imperialism’s creation of the notion of class suggests that is impossible to return to an *a priori* politics of identity. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, for example, Frantz Fanon foregrounds similar slippages and ironies attendant on identity that is grounded in racial binaries or the idea of “difference”. The slippage becomes ever more visible after decolonization when the idea of “class” merely replicates the very idea of difference which was meant to be expunged from society. Fanon, in other words, demonstrates how the struggle against colonialism turns into a farce with the resurgence of the Manichean boundaries among the new middle class of decolonized nations, and indicates in which ways colonial modes of life are appropriated by the emerging middle class and become deeply embedded and inscribed in the cultures of the formerly colonized.

The above perspective provided by Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon leads to an interesting “cultural” nexus between postcolonial studies and globalization theory, one which makes it important to examine postcolonial ideas of globalization. Ashcroft *et al.* argue that “[t]heories of globalization have moved, over the last half century, from expressions of the process as ‘cultural imperialism’ or neo-imperialism to analyses of the ‘hybridization’, ‘diffusion’, ‘relativization,’ and interrelationship of global societies, the

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of the notion of modernity (or modernities), see Chapter 3.

'compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as whole" (Ashcroft *et al.* 2002: 216, echoing Robertson 1992: 8). Making a link between the concepts of globalization and the post-colonial, these writers argue for an encompassing definition of the postcolonial as referring to "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 2). For these writers globalization and postcoloniality crisscross in the field of culture. This period being covered here is significant in that it sheds light on issues of "gaps" or "spaces-in-between" that have become evident across societies since the onset of colonization. In other words, the postcolonial process (which is the flip side of globalization in both Hall's and Bhabha's understanding) has always carried with it a liminal dimension. Thus postcolonial theory gains a purchase on globalization because the notions of identity related to borders, migration, marginality, liminality, and "spaces-in-between" – a large component of the postcolonial theoretical project – are given prominence in the debate about globalization.

In *The Consequences of Modernity*, for example, Anthony Giddens provides an apt definition of globalization: "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (1990: 64). For his part, Mike Featherstone conceives of globalization mainly in the realm of culture and thus defines it as consisting of both "cultural integration and cultural disintegration processes which take place not only on an interstate

level but processes which transcend the state society unit and can therefore be held to occur on a trans-national or trans-society level” (1990: 1). For Robertson, “the concept of globalization has involved the simultaneity and interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or ... the universal and the particular” (1995: 30). All the above theorists share in common an understanding of the process of globalization that entails a compression of space/time by an amalgam of forces ranging from economics through politics to culture. Culture here is seen as the worst affected when “it succumbs to the steam-roller force of globalization” (Schulze 1999: 4). The net results of this are issues of transnationality, migration, marginality, to mention a few, which act as countervailing forces to notions of purity of cultures. In *The Location of Culture*, for example, Homi Bhabha’s oblique but insightful references to globalization are encapsulated by what he insightfully calls the “liminality of the migrant experience”, a peripatetic experience which the author himself can most definitely identify with, having

lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and in other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of “foreign” cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourse, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering in the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of

incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statues, immigration status(2004: 199-200)

Homi Bhabha's reflection on globalization is here deeply punctuated by what Featherston calls a "living between cultures, or on the borderlines" (1995:10) and confirms that liminality has inflected notions of identity in modern life and experience.

It is important to note that the postcolonial theory of Homi Bhabha has not gone down well with those postcolonial theorists who believe that his project is nothing more than an indulgence in high and difficult theory that offers little or no relevance to people's daily existences. Among Bhabha's vehement detractors are Benita Parry, Ella Shohat, Anne McClintock and Arif Dirlik.

A strong proponent of nativism¹⁶, Benita Parry has argued that postcolonial theory of Bhabha's persuasion is fraught precisely because it leads to foreclosures which preempt the "native" from fully

¹⁶ See Anthony Appiah's influential text entitled *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (1992:56- 72). According to Appiah, nativism is "the claim that true African independence requires a literature of one's own.... [T]he debate in Africa presents itself as an opposition between 'universalism' and 'particularism,' the latter defining itself, above all else, by its opposition to the former. But there only two players in this game: us, inside; them, outside. That is all there is to it. As African particularism, implying and often meaning decolonization, the concept of nativism was first broached by Chinua Achebe in the 1970s with the call to ban the term 'universal' in African Literature, recover the social context and the importance of oral art as the indigenous equivalent and equal in the European literary craft. This debate was taken up by intellectual radicals soubriqueted the 'bolekaja' critics, notably Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike. In their famous text called *Toward the decolonization of African Literature*, these Nigerian authors argued that they could no longer rely on the West as the source of knowledge and all its frames of reference. Thus they went on to take a swipe at critics such as Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark for stylish crimes such as pretentious and inaccessible diction, imported idiom, and a general dearth of oral tradition in their work, but instead admired and advocated Achebe's work, extolling its simplicity and closeness to oral tradition.

theorizing the kind of resistance that would bring about change and emancipation. Writes Parry:

[a] postcolonial rewriting of past contestation, dependent as it is on a notion of a multiply [dis]located native whose positions are provisional, and therefore capable of annulment and transgression, does not restore the foundational, fixed and autonomous individual. (1994:85)

As for Ella Shohat, the “post” in postcoloniality “is imbued ... with an ambiguous spatio-temporality” (1992:322). This ambivalence, she argues, introduces a multiplicity of positionalities, presents postcoloniality as ahistorical and universal, and does away with history, making it a problematic temporality.

Arif Dirlik, one of the most vehement of Bhabha’s detractors, is cognizant of and appreciates the goal of postcoloniality: “to abolish all distinctions between center and periphery as well as all other ‘binarisms’ that are allegedly a legacy of colonial(ist) ways of thinking and to reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency” (1994: 294). However, Dirlik notes that in aligning itself with capitalist hegemony, postcoloniality has become a new global hegemony (in criticism). Dirlik delineates the label postcolonial and its change thus:

[a] description of a diffuse group of intellectuals and their concerns and orientation was to turn by the end of the decade into a description of a global condition, in which sense it has acquired a new orthodoxy both in cultural criticism and in academic programs. (1994: 295)

For Dirlik, it is the intellectuals who have moved from Third World countries to metropolitan cities who are behind this change and postcoloniality's complicity with this hegemony. Rueing the change, Dirlik says that

[t]he complicity of postcolonial in hegemony lies in postcolonialism's diversion of attention from contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination, and its obfuscation of its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence, that is, to a global capitalism that, however fragmented in appearance, serves as the structuring principle of global relations. (1994: 296)

Aijaz Ahmad, who is drawn to the idea of organic consistency located in space and time, finds Homi Bhabha's perspective questionable, especially in being too eclectic and thus allowing "a dispersal of meaning" (1994: 283), as well as in ignoring the "structural endurance of histories" (Ibid: 288). Ahmad now recognizes that because of its transhistorical nature, postcoloniality fails to take into account the facts that migration is never permanent, that what Bhabha is interested in is not postcoloniality, but the question of class. Thus Ahmad concurs with Arif Dirlik, for example, regarding the "globalized condition of postcoloniality" (1995: 282) which makes the postcolonial condition a deconstructive discourse, among other things, with its spatial-temporal designation stripped away.

Anthony Appiah, in describing postcoloniality as "the condition of ... a comprador intelligentsia" (1992: 149), also highlights a shift in the theory, and ascribes a deconstructive constitution to postcoloniality

as “postmodernization, post-Third World, and postnationalist” (echoed by Arif Dirlik 1994: 301). For Appiah, postcoloniality refers to the condition of those intellectuals (from formerly colonized countries) plying their “postcolonial” literary trade in metropolitan cities.

In spite of all this criticism, and the various positions I have described, it would be gratuitous to dismiss Homi Bhabha’s theory out of hand, as its merits are evident..¹⁷ Ashraf Jamal testifies to these as follows:

Bhabha ... fuses the ontological and ethical, aesthetic and theoretical. By fusing these dimensions ... Bhabha ... reaffirms the immanent agency of thought in the world. The redemptive ethical solutions each offers are by no means transcendent or otherworldly. Rather, ... [his thought]... makes possible a “preparation for action in the world, however minimal”. (2005: 45)

Jamal’s point concerning the ethics of Bhabha’s version of postcolonial theory is instructive here. For Bhabha believes that pure theory should not be elitist or far removed from the imperatives of people’s lives. Theory should not entail antagonism and polarization either. Indeed, for Bhabha the language of theory is an endeavour which concerns itself with action or “progressive political change” (ibid: 32). To that end, theory, as a political engagement, is indeed an ethics which should not serve hegemony but must be “counter-hegemonic” (Bhabha 2004: 41, echoing Stuart Hall). Thus, theory must attempt to reach for a non-teleological synthesis by means of unsettling the essentialisms and logocentrisms of received political traditions, and also by surmounting “given grounds of opposition and

¹⁷ Bhabha’s strongest argument that the practicality of his theory is borne out by what happens in our daily lives, ie the movement of peoples leaves them in a liminal state all the time.

open[ing] up a space of translation: a place of hybridity ...where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations and changes ... the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics” (ibid: 37). To the extent that it is a political counter-hegemonic strategy, Bhabha’s theory fully addresses the problem of gender, race and class¹⁸ and thus initiates a process of translation or transformation in the subject.

Thus, in speaking of “hybridity without discriminating between the colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial” (Ghosh-Schellhorn 1999: 33), Bhabha’s postcolonial perspective is ahistorical, or reduces history to space and time. This reduction means that his theoretical model emphasizes the ethical vision, the quotidian, the present, where, among other things, taken-for-granted attitudes and positions are problematized. For Bhabha, culture is an expansive and fluid notion and, as such, is realizable in its dissemination in people’s daily lives. As has been pointed out above, Bhabha’s vision emerges clearly when he considers the hard reality of globalization and its effect on modern mobile identities which require very serious ethical decisions when it comes to the status of the migrant or the asylum seeker, to mention a few examples. For Bhabha, this kind of ethics defines what and who we are in the modern world.

A similar vision has also been alluded to by Achille Mbembe in his text *On the Postcolony* in which he wonders what the identity of Africa

¹⁸ See Bhabha (2004: 42-45).

will be like since “the younger generation of Africans have no direct or immediate experience’ of colonization, what role it may have played as a foundational event in African history” (quoted by Dirlik, 1994: 301). Mbembe here suggests that the young generation will not immerse itself in “Africanness” because technology has wrought changes which leave, in one’s psyche, feelings of amnesia regarding colonialism, if the subject crops up. As this amnesia begins to spread across the colonial world, the new generation will live their lives not according to notions of decolonization, which, as Ashcroft *et al.* argue, “sometimes becomes a search for an essential cultural purity” (2002: 40), but rather will embrace a double and an incommensurable consciousness in line with the fruits of globalism, especially the trappings of global youth culture as located in unrestricted satellite television and the internet, for instance.

In the same vein, Bhabha harbours no illusions of embracing the straightjacketed notions of the purity of cultures often reflected in nationalist rhetoric, but rather always envisages and explores possibilities for creating new cultural combinations through the promotion of hybridity, syncreticity and cosmopolitanism. It is vitally important to note that what Bhabha refers to as the “in-between” or Third Space of cultural meaning --- a marginal space where culture is formed and produced performatively --- is not a nebulous space of a complacent hybridity *per se*. Rather it is a marginal space of “occult instability” (Bhabha: 2004: 52) where one begins to perceive “culture-as-political-struggle” (ibid.: 52). As cultures interact and translate each other in this space of anguish and fierce political struggle, cultural

identity is often achieved at a cost, always in process. Thus the promotion of hybridity as comprehensively explicated by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* points to the centrality of the “in-between” as the only practical way of perceiving identities, especially at a time when perpetual dislocation in the name of globalization is the trope of the twenty-first century.

Crucially, Bhabha’s idea of liminality shares a nexus with hybridity – a notion that has nothing to do with “a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (1994: 113). In other words, it is not the kind of in-betweenness which manifests itself in the progeny of mixed-race marriages, one reminiscent of miscegenation¹⁹, creolization, or *metissage*²⁰. Bhabha’s articulation of hybridity certainly includes but far transcends this basic understanding and negative use of the term. Specifically, he sees hybridity as a psychic “in-between” space which emerges from a fusion and coalescence of two disparate cultures and traditions, such as when certain aspects of Christianity merge with those of another religion or vice versa to yield a double consciousness. It is a zone of contact and cultural interaction typified by forms of innovation and cultural exchange which show the interconnectedness of identity existing, particularly, between the colonizer and colonized as a result of the clash of cultures that colonialism inevitably brings about. Thus, even in the light of the presence and pervasiveness of the colonial dynamic, the

¹⁹ See Papastergiadis, p. 169.

²⁰ Also known as *mestiza* (Anzaldúa) or *metizaje*, this term is used in this thesis to denote the condition of liminality. Thus a *mestiza* could refer to either a physical condition (meaning a coloured person) or a shifting consciousness of borderlands about culture(s).

hybrid space discounts the usual binarism which presents “the colonized as victim and colonizer as victor, overlooks that both were caught up as players and counter-players in the dominant model of universalism” (Papastergiadis 2000: 179), and destabilizes any selfish imposition of colonial authority, making nonsense of any claims to purity of cultures and therefore identities. For example, while one meaning of liminality, as hybridity, may allude to “the migrant’s dream of survival: an initiatory interstice; an empowering condition of hybridity” (1994: 227), other meanings of hybridity tend towards the metaphysical, allowing for either a subversion of or assimilation into a culture, including one’s own. As Hoogvelt puts it, “hybridity is celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence through the advantage of the *in-between*, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference” (2001: 170). Hybridity here is the kind of experience which allows one a simultaneous involvement and participation in two cultures to the point where, at a deeply psychic and subliminal level, one is able to appreciate, negotiate and transcend the differences. This articulation entails a way of life that involves identifying, acknowledging, and celebrating differences in a manner that is both uncritical and perceptive. As stated above, sometimes in trying to overcome essential and transcendental differences, it becomes imperative to interrogate and perhaps jettison certain aspects of one’s culture in order to make sense of one’s current identification, leaving identity an open and iterative question. Bhabha aligns hybridity with liminality as follows:

Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements as the basis of cultural identifications. What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender, or race. Such assignations of difference – where difference is neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between – find their agency in a form of a 'future' where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is an ...interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and needs of the present. (Bhabha 1994: 219)

Emerging as crucially significant here is Bhabha's notion of iteration and incommensurability – weird moments of ambivalence that intervene at the point of enunciation of identity to inaugurate a performativity which comes to haunt any specificity of identity, all this to confirm that "all forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because their enunciation resists totalization" (Bhabha 1990: 314). In other words, Bhabha's idea of hybridity draws heavily on a Bakhtinian semiotics of culture which privileges notions of heteroglossia and the carnivalesque. According to these notions, "(t)he language of hybridity becomes a means for critique and resistance to the monological language of authority. The hybrid text always undoes the priorities and disrupts the singular order by which the dominant code categorizes the other" (Papastergiadis 2000: 182). Homi Bhabha alludes to this realm of hybridity variously as "heresy" (2004: 322), "blasphemy" (ibid.: 322, echoing Rushdie), achieving "[a]gency, as the return of the subject" (ibid.: 271), and "splitting" (ibid.: 188), a

position or site of resistance from which to propose or stage counter-hegemonic discourse, to mention some examples.

Again, the idea of liminality also functions like Lacan's notion of the unconscious, a concept which in Bhabha's insightful formulation is called the metonymy of presence. In its ability to open up a gap between Fanonian oppositional categories, metonymy is "a device of non-logical deletion" (Lodge in Rice and Waugh 1989: 37) and "a figure of contiguity that substitutes a part for a whole ..." (Bhabha 1994: 54-55). Metonymy of presence is an agency whose expression of the image of presence in identity becomes disrupted by absence or lack – a situation which eventually generates the idea of polysemy or a multiplicity of identity. Deriving the analysis from Freudian psychoanalysis and its capacity to unravel texts, Madan Sarup states that "condensation and displacement may be rhetorically translated as metaphor and metonymy" (1988: 4). In other words two terms are linked by contiguity or metonymy when one is used instead of another or one is displaced for another in a process called displacement. Metonymy is therefore a mode of signification which employs the concept of contiguity or association to express the image of presence in identity that may at the same time be disrupted by absence, as in "sails" for ship. Bhabha argues that the "partializing process of hybridity is best described as metonymy of presence" (1994: 115), the "inside/out/outside/in space a moment of *extimite*" (Ibid: 296), and adds that this process operates in terms of stereotypes and difference, "at once a substitute for the phallus and a mark for its absence" (ibid: 115), but always leading to ambivalent and

paradoxical identities. Therefore, in Bhabha's formulation, metonymy is liminality or hybridity. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin state that "it is preferable to read the tropes of the text as metonymy, which symptomizes the text, reading through its features the social, cultural and political forces which traverse it" (1989: 51). In this thesis, I use the metonymic reading strategy to demonstrate how postcolonial texts reveal the partial subjectivities of those on the margins – women, exiles, minority groups, and so forth.

As has been demonstrated, Homi Bhabha's attempts to link liminality with various kinds of marginality are made on a deeply subliminal level because, for him, it is those margins and border spaces that constitute the locus of the shifting and indeterminate nature of modern identity, from personal to group and from political to geographic kinds of marginality. Thus physically and psychologically displaced peoples such as exiles, émigrés, refugees, tourists, travelers, expatriates, intellectuals, women and minority groups are caught in the matrix of living a marginal existence. While perhaps exulting in their new identity of living the locality of culture, these people never quite cease to experience feelings of being exiled, excluded from the mainstream lifestyle and orphaned by the entire process of displacement, physical or metaphorical. Therefore, the existence of the marginalized groups consists in living a temporality of culture. Bhabha has put this succinctly, saying that their

locality of culture is more around temporality than about historicity: a form of living that is more complex ... more symbolic ... more connotative ... less patriotic ... more rhetorical ... more mythological ... less homogeneous ...

less centred ... more collective ... more psychic ... more hybrid in the articulation of hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism. (2004: 200)

For Bhabha, occupying this space on the margins, that of liminality as a negative experience, has its own traumas but the experience need not be a passive one. The margins can still represent an affirmative position, what Bhabha calls “the uncanny moments in the process of social transformation” (1996: 200). As a “time lag”, the margins inaugurate in the life of the marginalized a moment of cultural translation – the ethos permeating the mobile nature of modern, liminal identity. This “represents only an extreme instance of the figurative fate of writing that repeatedly generates a movement of equivalence between representation and reference, but never gets beyond the equivocation of the sign” (Bhabha 1990: 314). In other words, since the language of cultural translation is frequently a “slippage of signification” (ibid: 314), it is all but impossible for meaning to move freely and completely between any two or more different systems of cultural meanings.

This chapter ends, fittingly I hope, with Botswana’s geopolitical as well as global inclination to the idea of liminality, the concern of this thesis. Writing in the *Mmegi Reporter* in 1991, Jeff Ramsay, a renowned historian of Botswana, advances a rather belaboured speculation on the meaning of the country’s name after the change

from the colonial Bechuanaland, the speculation shedding light on the fact that it is a colonial construct.²¹

Bessie Head once described the country in terms of a one-dimensional, if celebratory, mould of cultural purity as “a bewitched crossroads where each day the sun rose on a hallowed land” (1984: 176). This is an instructive observation, pointing out that the country had nothing exciting within its borders, largely owing to the legacy of a benign colonial rule. Thus, “Botswana remained independent in a way”, continues Bessie Head: “its customs and traditions were left intact and people’s traditional rulers had a large say in governing their people” (1990: 55).

A similar picture emerges in the travel writings of Nadine Gordimer whose portrait of Botswana is one of a society mired in what Homi Bhabha has described as “the philosophical tradition of identity as the process of self-reflection in the mirror of (human) nature” (2004: 66). Botswana represents the case of a society living an holistic culture because colonialism never took root there. Gordimer describes this situation with unparalleled perspicacity:

In the middle of Southern Africa there is a country whose coat-of-arms bears, instead of some Latin tag boasting power and glory, the single word: rain.... And sometimes, in Botswana, looking at the figures of men, the bole of thorn-tree or palm, a single donkey, breaking the white light, it seems a vast sand-tray in which these are lead toys stuck upright. But they are rooted there. This

²¹ Jeff Ramsay has explored this concept by examining the etymology of the word “Botswana” and comes to the conclusion that, like most nations, it is a construct, first of colonialism and secondly, of the people themselves.

Kalahari sand nourishes them – grasses, thorn bush, mopane forest, birds, beasts, and 600 000 people. They live on it, in it, and off it. In places it hardens into a crust of salt; it swallows, in the north-west, the waters of a great delta. But even in the final dessication of the south-west provides harsh sustenance for those – beasts and men – who know where to find it, and for those who know how to space their thirst, there is water if you dig for it. (1988: 167)

In terms of geographical locality, as I have intimated the Botswana nation is a colonial construct that was conceived in 1884, the year in which European powers (led by Britain, France, Germany, and Italy) assembled to dissect most of the African continent into supposedly convenient and governable entities from which Europeans would source raw materials for their domestic industries. Grippled by the threat of Bechuanaland becoming an appendage of the Union of South Africa, three Batswana chiefs²² travelled to Britain to beseech Queen Victoria for protection against the Boers. Hence, Botswana became the British Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885.

From the days of the Protectorate to the period leading to independence in 1966, Botswana remained largely untouched and untainted by modernity. With its capital being situated in Mafeking (in the Union of South Africa), the British presence in Bechuanaland was regarded as largely nominal, and Botswana's status in the colonial scheme of things practically an anomaly. Again, Bessie Head has

²² Michael Dutfield, 1990. *A Marriage of Inconvenience: The Persecution of Ruth and Seretse Khama* (London: Unwin Hyman): pp. 17-18. The three Batswana Chiefs who travelled to Britain were Khama of the Bamangwato, Sebele of the Bakwena, and Bathoen of the Bangwaketse. The Queen also assured the chiefs that their country would be protected from the influence of John Cecil Rhodes who was at the time seeking mining rights in Bechuanaland.

observed that the Batswana “people were ruled for 80 years by an indifferent and almost absent colonial power” (Head 1990: 78). She observes that “all through the colonial era, the Bechuanaland Protectorate held for the British, in strategic terms, the glamour of the ‘road to the north’. Yet they looked at the terrain with anguish – it was a semi-desert; it was drought-stricken more often than not; it had a chronically bankrupt cattle-based economy; foot-and-mouth disease was endemic. They noted in their dispatches: ‘what a god-awful country it is to live in!’” (Head 1984: 195). Little wonder then, given the above sentiments from the colonial masters, that “the threat to transfer to South Africa hung over Bechuanaland ... like a dark cloud during the first half of the twentieth century” (Faucus 1988: 32) because the country could not stand on its own.

Bordering South Africa to the South, German South West Africa (now Namibia) to the west, and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to the north – all bastions of white power and dominance, and with only Rhodes’ railway going through the vast landmass of the Kalahari, Botswana’s dependency and near-pariah status had become a hard reality. Ironically, however, it was precisely this particular, peculiar status that helped Botswana to develop a subliminally collective sense of community steeped in tradition, a society prepared, one can surmise, to allow the modern world to pass it by. Despite occasional festering tribal conflicts and the vagaries of the climate, the country remained largely peaceful, especially under Tshekedi Khama, virtually closed off to the world. As a community, Botswana became steeped in the conviction of its unique identity, based largely on solid

institutions such as Chieftainship, the common Setswana language, and a homespun democracy built around the notion of the “Kgotla” or traditional court where issues of human nature were debated on a daily basis, often with Olympian poise.

But with the advent of capitalist modernity²³ these traditional institutions were to betray a deeply entrenched patriarchal system that was later perceived as the motif for the work of, not just Bessie Head, but also others such as Unity Dow and Alexander McCall Smith.

That Botswana has been and is changing is a matter of immense interest. This is a country which, on the threshold of independence, for instance, seemed intent on mobilizing some of its pre-colonial institutions, notably Chieftainship, with a view to grafting them onto its postcolonial state, thereby making its politics neo-traditional in outlook. For example, the country sought to “base its stability and integration on a publicly proclaimed Tswana identity” (Van Binsbergen 2000: 2). It is evident that in the spirit of achieving national unity, the ruling elite from the dominant Tswana-speaking majority did, from the outset, exert a stifling stranglehold over the rest of the ethnic minorities through, among other things, the imposition of Setswana as the national language.²⁴ Further, the country was territorialized into governable districts without due regard for the

²³ It is axiomatic to say that the discovery of diamonds in Botswana in 1967, just a year after independence, proved crucial in propelling the country into capitalist modernity.

²⁴ See Chapter 6.

existence of non-Tswana tribes, with the result that only the eight so-called major tribes, all of them Tswana-speaking, “found their way into the Botswana constitution” (Ibid.: 1). Even though there was a sense in which one could intuit that storms were brewing, none ever developed into full-blown political issues, thanks to the wise legacy of Botswana’s first president, Sir Seretse Khama, who steered the course of restraint and consultation, fully aware of the socially constructed nature of the modern nation. In a speech he gave to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, 22nd September 1969, Khama had this to say about the identity of Botswana:

We are ... faced with the task of welding together a nation from different tribal and racial groups whose separate identity was emphasized under colonial rule. Our aim is to create a situation where every citizen of Botswana, whatever his race or tribe thinks of himself as a Motswana. My Permanent Secretary for Development Planning, who is with us here today, is a White South African by birth, but he has chosen to live among us and identify with our aspirations. He is a Motswana. He is not only a Motswana because he carries a Botswana passport, but because he accepts our values and is fully engaged in the struggle to realize our ideals. In Botswana men and women of all races and tribes are working together to achieve a society where individuals can realize their own potential. (Carter & Morgan 1980: 57-8)

Sir Khama made the above comments in the light of Botswana’s international ethnic dimensions within its borders. For example, the Kalanga, “Botswana’s largest and most vocal ethnic minority” (Van Binsbergen 2000: 1), are also found in Zimbabwe. There are other minority tribes such as the Herero, also found in Namibia; the San, also resident in Namibia and South Africa; the Subiya, Ndebele,

Hambukushu; Indians; Afrikaners located all over Southern Africa, but especially in South Africa; and the English, likewise found all over Southern Africa. This state of affairs explodes the myths paraded on behalf of Botswana as a country of ethnic and cultural purity. It can be argued therefore that in the light of such trends, “the monolith Tswana illusion” (Ibid.: 5) must be consigned to the dustbin of history.

Since attaining her independence from Britain in 1966, Botswana has made gigantic strides in economic development as well as in the social-cultural sphere and has inevitably been caught in the “turbulence of postcolonial identity” (Spivak 1991: 144). Its mineral wealth has put the country on the world map, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the Third World.²⁵ Not only has Botswana been lauded for its prudent fiscal management, but it has also been portrayed as Africa’s beacon of democracy on a continent notorious for cycles of conflict which unleash suffering and misery on its population with clockwork regularity. The Long Term Vision for Botswana – a government policy document drafted in the late 1990s and launched in 2003 (and projecting the country’s goals and aspirations by the year 2016) – makes interesting reading with regard to Botswana’s liminal identity:

Botswana finds itself in a period in history when social attitudes and values around the world are changing at an unprecedented rate. Within the country itself, this has been accelerated by the pace of urbanization, and increasing contact with diverse foreign cultures. In future, the people of Botswana will need to adapt to the challenges of global society while retaining the positive

²⁵ From <http://search.yahoo.com> (The Head Heeb: Botswana Archives 2004: 6).

aspects of their cultural values that distinguish them from other nations. (Vision 2016, 1997: 1)

What is envisaged here is the imperative of a society being catapulted into a global hybrid culture that inevitably spawns new and fluid identities – mostly cross-cultural in outlook. Amongst other ways, these identities are most evidently manifested through the emergence of stereotypes, that is, individuals who are at home imitating, appropriating or dabbling in foreign cultures. Black American culture, for example, always finds a young person in Southern Africa ready to imitate it, often through the iconography of media such as Channel “O”, which ironically claims in its logo that it is “uncolonized”. Spivak calls this phenomenon “the boomerang effect of the cultural shuttle in fully telemanic (computerized and videographic) circuits of popular culture” (Spivak 1991: 142), with rap performers in Southern Africa aping their counterparts in America as if the Southern African rappers were involved in a cultural re-appropriation of what is originally and essentially African. Modern Botswana finds itself at the centre of such cultural exchanges.

In examining the fiction of Unity Dow and Alexander McCall Smith, as well as two journalistic texts by Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies, all of which span the period between the early 1990s to the end of 2006, the thesis adopts a thematic approach to the texts and seeks to establish the writers’ innovative, hybrid vision of identity as presented in Homi Bhabha’s schema of the third space. This vision represents a seismic shift from the earlier one that had informed the

realist African novel, and which, in many ways had adopted a predominantly anti-colonial stance, effusive in its fetish of an identity based on nativism: the African novel used as a vehicle for Pan-Africanism and anti-colonial protest writing.

The extraordinary quality of the works discussed in this thesis is not the eclectic nature of the genres but rather the works' representation of a particularly intriguing, hybrid view of a postcolonial nation for which the notion of African literature must be seen as partial and provisional. Granted, Alexander McCall Smith may be perceived as a populist writer, no matter how simplistic and patronising a view of Africa some readers might find him to be championing, his so-called detective novels given labels such as lightweight novels not worthy of mention in African literary studies. But this thesis examines these works through Homi Bhabha's lens and understanding of the hybrid moment in a postcolonial context. This understanding of identity is not new. Bessie Head²⁶, certainly one of the progenitors of the theme of hybridity, conceived such a vision in her fiction. In her writings, she draws on her experience of living in South Africa to explore the idea of power in its multi-faceted forms, in particular its violence and brutality. Her works are a reflection on power's excesses, its limitless ability to control thought, imprison one's freedom, and even impair one's speech. This emerges clearly in her most famous and certainly most studied text *A Question of Power*

²⁶ Bessie Head still is Botswana's foremost writer who accrued considerable recognition with the publication of her first three novels: *When the Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power*. In this trilogy Head engages her readers in her exploration of the changing nature of identity, in particular that of women who saw as always "feminized" and "otherized". In this thesis, these issues are taken up by Unity Dow.

where Elizabeth, the protagonist, hopelessly powerless to speak, can hardly react or respond to those forms of power that decrease her strength and cause her to teeter on the brink of insanity. Using Botswana, her adopted home, as a microcosm of the nature and dangers of power, Head's three most famous texts represent a powerful act of deconstruction of all forms of power and their related knowledges, which she sees as mere constructs. She then tries to posit for herself identities that are ever shifting and immensely liberating. In *A Woman Alone*, Bessie Head succinctly summarizes the notion of liminality in the light of not just Botswana, or Africa, but globally, as follows:

I clearly foresee a new race of people – not nations or national identity as such but rather people who are a blending of all the nations of the earth. Its beginnings are already there so I do not see any of this as being forced on people, but that it is the natural outcome of mankind's slow spiritual unfoldment over the centuries. These are the themes which have preoccupied me as a writer. (1990: 100)

It is this resistance to the idea of fixed identities that is explored and comes alive in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Two

Identities in Transition

We are a people in transition, a people in cultures that are weak in terms of our relationship to global power. There is no doubt that we always feel under assault, culturally that is, especially in terms of music, food, clothing.... At the same time, there is no doubt that no culture can remain isolated. So for me it's about striking a balance between remaining true to ourselves in the light of cultural interaction and also about changing as a result of that interaction. (Dow 2005)¹

The import of the above sentiments lies in Unity Dow's vision and understanding of Botswana/African cultural identity as caught between the imaginaries of the local and the global; or, in the words of Bhabha, cultural identities are a matter of negotiation in "a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference" (Bhabha 2004: 55). In these imaginaries, Bhabha's Third Space or a moment of "transition" must be seen as a watchword that keeps either dualities (of Africa and its others) in abeyance. Calling it a hyphenated moment between the "post", Homi Bhabha conceives of this space as a thinking against and outside absolute contestations of "self" and "other". It is this elusive and ever-shifting moment, I argue in this chapter, that distinguishes the *raison d'être* of Dow's life and the characters she has created in her fiction. In other words, Unity

¹ Given how often she has reiterated the point about interaction between cultures in the 21st century, Unity Dow's deployment of the term 'transition' should be understood as being in the service of cultural globalisation and its impact on identity.

Dow's vision and its agency are located in the non-positional and hybrid moment of *transition* that defines her life and fiction. This kind of agency confirms what Bhabha believes to be the abiding characteristic of any postcolonial critique:

propos(ing) forms of contestatory subjectivities that are empowered in the act of erasing the politics of binary opposition.... The contingent and the liminal become the times and the spaces for the historical representation of the subjects of cultural difference in a postcolonial criticism. (2004: 256)

The undercutting of the politics of binary oppositions is not unique to liminality. As will become clear, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the rhizome (and its related registers) works like liminality and is thus invoked in this chapter to explain an ambivalence located in social experience similar to liminal phenomena. In other words, the metaphor of the rhizome is used as a correlative of liminality, in this context what Bhabha would call mimicry – “moments of disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance” (1985: 162). In this rhizomic operation, I argue, the myth central to patriarchal hierarchies and binaries is completely challenged and undermined by Unity Dow's main characters in the first two novels being examined in the chapter. It is this engagement with the binaries that allows (liminal) spaces of ambivalence, moments of disobedience and signs of resistance to emerge in their lives. In a move which Ashcroft terms “the interpolation of the dominant discourse” (2001: 53) – a tactical contravention of the rules and hierarchies which structure quotidian existence -- the rhizomic metaphor enables the characters to address their agency by

reflecting on and interrogating notions of the 'centre' and 'margin' from the conditions of their marginality and, in the process, to negotiate a dialogic, hybridized space of transition within which they can operate.

In an article entitled "Getting under the Skin of Power", literary critic Anne Gagiano obliquely alludes to that moment of transition in Dow's writing, describing her as "an important new voice from Botswana" (2004: 36) who "joins the company of African authors like Soyinka, Head, Marechera, Dangarembga and Vera" (ibid.: 36).² In this article, Gagiano presents the fiction of Unity Dow as symbolizing the author's capacity to get under the skin of those who not only wield power in her society, but also unfortunately abuse it. As a writer, Unity Dow, like Bessie Head, is concerned about the deleterious effects of power in Botswana. Gagiano summarizes Dow's social engagement as follows:

Dow as an author holds up a mirror to her own society: simultaneously exposing its wastage of female potential and the harm both traditional culture and modern state structures allow to be inflicted on women, whilst also showing the contributions women can and do make in drawing on the benign potentialities of their culture and the structures of the state accessible to them. Her texts convey the impression of profound loyalty to her country and its people – but it is a love with eyes open to the evils and injustices that tarnish social health and cultural wellbeing. (2004: 48)

² In various ways, all of the above writers are well known for being advocates of cultural hybridization. Crucially, these writers do not essentialise any one race in their fiction but emphasize nomadic identity. It is interesting that Gagiano stresses the fact that Unity Dow follows in their footsteps.

Indeed, it is not just Unity Dow's fiction that offers a testament to her concern about the injustices that taint her society's social health and wellbeing. Her entire life embodies that concern, one rooted in her profound belief that culture and tradition are oppressive categories. This conviction has prompted her to adopt a self-consciously liminal view of identity, as demonstrated in her interview, in the court case of 1994 and, finally, in her fiction.

In a related but different context, Margaret Lenta, another perceptive critic of Dow, presents her as a writer who tries to interpret the history of her largely traditional society "from within". Lenta writes:

In interpreting the society in which she lives, Dow joins a tradition of African writing, in which the most famous practitioner is Nadine Gordimer, whose 'history from the inside' has offered an understanding of South Africa's recent past and present to many readers. (2004: 34)

For Dow, this interpretation of the history of her small society has taken two forms, the first by her being "deeply involved in public life" (Lenta 2004: 34), and secondly through her fiction. In both endeavours, Dow presents a society whose tradition and modernity conspire to victimize women, reducing them to subalterns. This victimization is played out most spectacularly in her first two novels, *Far and Beyond* and *The Screaming of the Innocent*. In conversation with her brother Stan, the main character of *Far and Beyond* rues her gender status as follows:

It might not be fair for me to vent my anger on you but is it fair for the whole society around me to objectify me all the time? Is it fair that I am described as a water gourd with

cracks? Is it fair that cows are paid to my father in exchange for my labour, both productive and reproductive? Someone else gets paid so that my children will not be mine! Is it fair that I am reduced to a sexual part? Represented as a hoof cut from a cow? Is it fair that I get instructed to obey my husband? To serve him without complaint? To tolerate his beatings, his unfaithfulness? I am sorry that you have to suffer my my telling you about it. (pp.153-4)

However, in a rather unusual play of cultural memory and patriarchal desire, Stan's response is couched in absolute terms, that bespeak a realist and concrete narrative of cultural authority, as follows:

I cannot change the society around us. You cannot do that either. People have been doing things this way for centuries. (p. 153)

Stan's statement demonstrates that his knowledge of (this) culture is that it is a preconstituted, holistic one, containing within itself codes by which it can authentically be interpreted. The statement reflects and echoes what happens in *The Screaming of the Innocent* in which women are not allowed any space and individuality to function. Indeed, propositions such as those proffered by Stan are neither axiomatic nor false but nonsensical, or meaningless, because their value and truth cannot be validated in any determinate way. It is this language of cultural description that Unity Dow is up against and needs to deconstruct.

Therefore, by being alert to and challenging culture's oppressive tendencies, Dow represents Victor Turner's concept of "antistructure" and tries to locate agency in the liminal space of culture. In Homi

Bhabha's words, this kind of "agency ... seeks revision and reinscription: the attempt to negotiate the third locus, the intersubjective realm" (2004: 274). This sort of agency is also known as "the iterative ... activity of the time-lag" (ibid.: 274) according to which identity is a matter of negotiation and is produced contingently.

This chapter examines specific reportage based on Unity Dow, the reportage read as a social text, and her first two works of fiction, in order to indicate the extent to which these texts privilege what Turner terms "the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with factors of existence" (1992: 106). The first part of the chapter examines the reportage based on Unity Dow's life of political activism³, fighting for women's rights, before she launched herself into a second career which involves writing fiction. As I show in the chapter, this reportage concerns straddling two cultures, or, to borrow Bhabha's expression, Dow's "compulsion to move beyond; to turn the present into the 'post'; ... to touch the future on its hither side" (2004: 26). By embarking on a legal battle with her Government in the mid-1990s over discriminatory citizenship laws, Unity Dow was able to "affirm the borders of culture's insurgent and interstitial existence" (ibid.: 26). As I argue in this chapter, her successful challenging of Botswana's patriarchal bulwark (with its fraught laws) inaugurates a significant moment in her subjectivity, characterized by locating culture in the margins and thereby pointing up the country's interstitial cultural temporality which is marked by what Homi Bhabha

³ See Guobin Yang (2000: 379) who argues that social moments such as political activism "are liminal phenomena characterized by varying degrees of freedom, egalitarianism, communion, and creativity".

calls “the process of transformation” (2004: 321). Not only does this process of transformation or cultural translation, as Bhabha would say, affect Unity Dow *per se* in her personal struggles with the powers that be but the entire postcolonial nation of Botswana also emerges out of the court case as a translated and transformed community where nothing seems black and white any longer. The second part of the chapter, which concerns Unity Dow’s first two novels, examines how the texts articulate Homi Bhabha’s intersubjective realm of culture.

To that end, I use Giles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s use of the concept of a rhizome (to denote a liminal zone), and its related notions of assemblage, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, to inform the activities of Mosa, the protagonist in *Far and Beyond* who takes issue with and challenges the idea of culture and identity as self-evident truths or transcendental reality. This is not to suggest a postmodern reading of the texts but rather to demonstrate the transgressive and de-territorializing nature of the Turnerian liminal space or Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity. The ideas of deterritorialization (and reterritorialization), assemblage and the rhizome are representative of, in other words, the process of culture as a fluid and open-ended arena, a fluidity that attests to the liminality of culture. The second part of the chapter deploys Victor Turner’s ideas of antistructure and Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony to argue for liminal identity in Dow’s second novel. Margaret Lenta argues that “[c]onservatism and a respect for structures perceived as traditional is part of Botswana’s ethos” (2004: 37). In the course of

this chapter, I will be underlining Unity Dow's challenging of such structures; I shall adduce Victor Turner's liminal symbols of *communitas* and antistructure as represented by rites of passage such as birth, naming, subversion, spiritual journeys and related iconographies.

Unity Dow was born in 1959 at the height of African nationalism, manifested particularly in quests for and moves toward political decolonization. Between the 1970s and 1980s, she read law at the University of Botswana, later continuing in Swaziland as well as in Scotland. For Dow, this was a time characterized by her coming into contact with, and making, foreign friends. It was at this time that Unity Dow's cultural identity (as a Motswana and an African) was to face a major test, a kind of thinking informed by an eschewal of what Bhabha calls "the pronominal I of the proposition" (2004: 53). Her courting of foreign company and friendship, which ended in her marrying one Mr Dow, an American, was meant to sustain this revisionary ethic.

Over the years, Unity Dow has built a reputation as Botswana's foremost novelist, holding uncompromising ideals and convictions, her foremost agenda being the establishment of a just society premised on the rule of law beyond the outmoded dualities of "self" and "other". Unity Dow has travelled the world undertaking her book tours. Early this century, Dow became the first, and remains the only, female High Court Judge in Botswana. Indeed, her life and fiction are an exercise in interstitial agency, which is Homi Bhabha's vision of

the Third Space of enunciation, marked by what Victor Turner terms the subjunctive mood of culture. Like Bhabha who sees transgression and transformation as being at the core of culture, Dow's understanding of the idea of culture revolves around notions of struggle and contestation.

In all her endeavours as a woman who finds herself on the margins of her community and also as an intellectual with legal expertise and always concerned with matters of equality and justice, Unity Dow fits the bill of Edward Said's wish for an intellectual: "to push the boundaries, to reconcile ... her own identity with the reality of other identities, other peoples, rather than dominating other cultures" (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 1999: 142), or indeed being dominated by them. This type of initiative on the part of the intellectual entails, among other things, "taking a stand against one's government" (Ibid.: 142), an effective "questioning, not to say undermining, of authority" (Said 1994: 91), "[s]peaking the truth to power" (Ibid.: 102). Since taking such a stand often leaves one on the margins, this is extended to her protagonists or heroines who symbolize the *zeitgeist* of liminality in the modern postcolonial country of Botswana. Liminality and marginality are here used interchangeably to refer to a condition of anguish and deprivation for women in Botswana which Unity Dow, in her pursuit of freedom, turns into a space of resistance against patriarchal colonisation. Dow realizes that this is possible only by taking that position of marginality which often allows one an empowering position from which to produce the counterhegemonic discourses necessary to fight for a space in the centre.

“The native intellectual who identifies the people with the true national culture will be disappointed” (2004: 55), writes Homi Bhabha. Unity Dow is no such intellectual or respecter of nativism, her dynamism coming to light in 1990 when, as a specular intellectual occupying the intersubjective realm of culture, she was ready to speak the truth to power. She did this by taking her government to court, challenging the Citizenship Act of 1984 “on the grounds that it discriminated against women” (Dow 2001: 1). She would not identify with or be party to the legislative amendments to the Act which effectively did away with the statute that had allowed for citizenship by birth. This was surprising, given that the overtly anti-racial first president⁴ had married an English woman with whom he had offspring who were Botswana citizens. In the main, this enthusiasm to strengthen the patriarchal fabric of society through legislation heralded not so much the advent of race as of sexism. The introduction of this Act and its amendment was meant to target the country’s womenfolk who dared to have children sired by foreign men. And so patriarchal whims of male superiority were bolstered as Botswana men could pass their citizenship to their children, irrespective of the nationality of the women with whom they had engendered those children, while their female counterparts were not allowed the same leeway. Effectively, under the new statute, to use Bhabha’s words, Botswana defined its “culture as epistemology” (2004: 254) instead of “culture as enunciation” (ibid.: 254). While culture as epistemology tends to

⁴ See Chapter 1 where I point out how very concerned Seretse Khama was on realizing, at the dawn of independence, that there were some people in his country who were ‘anti-white’.

totalize experience and invoke anteriority, culture as enunciation adopts a dialogic approach that aims at reinscriptions and relocations of any imputations to cultural origins and purity. As somebody articulating her position from the margins, Unity Dow had become a spokesperson for culture as an enunciative object.

Homi Bhabha argues that “it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking” (2004: 246). The Botswana government’s act should be seen as a typical case of the displacement, domination and subjugation imposed on the women of Botswana who were subjected and reduced to the margins by national laws which defined culture from the patriarchal standpoint. It was this act of impudence on the part of the government that galvanized Unity Dow into thinking of “empowering strategies of emancipation” (ibid.: 246), and of engaging “with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value” (ibid.: 247), and not as something based on holism.

What Unity Dow had managed to do was fully engage the question of cultural difference which, as Bhabha argues,

requires a radical revision of the social temporality in which emergent histories may be written, the rearticulation of the ‘sign’ in which cultural identities may be inscribed. And contingency as the signifying time of counter-hegemonic strategies is not a celebration of ‘lack’ or ‘excess’ or a self-perpetuating series of negative ontologies. Such ‘indeterminism’ is the mark of conflictual yet productive space in which arbitrariness of the sign of

cultural signification emerges within the regulated boundaries of social discourse. (2004: 246)

Unity Dow introduced the notion of cultural difference in her society by resisting a “totalization” (2004: 232) of cultural authority which was buttressed by patriarchy. She went on to revise and rewrite the cultural landscape by ensuring that those whom history had objectified (women and children) now possessed agency – they had become subjects and were therefore in charge of their history and destiny. As Bhabha reminds us, cultural difference initiates “the borderline moment of cultural translation” (ibid.: 234). For Dow and her children, culture became “both transnational and translational”, – “a strategy of survival” (ibid.:247). Culture was transnational because her children were offspring of both American and Botswana parents, whereas culture as translation implies the displacement or migrancy that led to the union of the two people.

The idea of cultural difference can be summarized in a précis of Unity Dow’s final presentation in which she puts forward her definitive position regarding the identity of culture, or the idea of it as a matter of translation. Her logic is

First,...that women in Africa have not been involved in the formulation and/or interpretation and/or implementation of what are now accepted norms and concepts that inform current notions of human rights, democracy, and good governance. Second, women’s contact with systems that are traditionally viewed as the bedrock of democracy and good governance have been from a position of weakness, in roles of servants, objects, and exceptions to the general rule. Third, women have not been participants, on an equal basis with men, in the negotiation, formulation,

development, and implementation of national constitutions. Fourth, many national constitutions fail to guarantee women rights with men under the law. Fifth, I suggest, that only when women are equal actors in the process can there be a legitimate claim that Africa is on the road to democracy. Finally, the local cannot remain isolated and exclusively self-informing, and, consequently, the global must inform and influence the local. (2001: 319)

In the above quotation, Unity Dow bemoans the lack of female representation and participation in various spheres of African life, largely owing to strictures of patriarchal dominance. These strictures make a mockery of post-colonial Africa's avowed commitment to democratic values. Discrimination against women and other forms of exclusion become even more poignant in a country such as Botswana where the embrace of western democracy is in inverse proportion to adherence to tradition.

In a court judgment that was delivered in 1994, seen as a real contestation of hegemony, Unity Dow became victorious in the case, the judgment basing its evidence not on spurious notions of African culture but rather on international conventions⁵ to which the postcolonial country of Botswana is a signatory. I contend that Dow's agency in the court case is seen in its ambivalence and catechresis, the fact that the case became an intertext, to use Spivak's term. The

⁵ Dow (2001: 330) writes: "One of the things that happened very early on in this case was that a foreign journalist found the story and syndicated it around the world. This was valuable for obvious reasons. It pushed the story out of the confines of the national and gave it it some importance. Another thing that happened earlier on was that the Union Morgan Institute of Human Rights got involved and filed an Amicus Brief. The students at that institute did research and provided much needed cases and materials, which were not available in local libraries. Yet another international agency which was involved in providing cases and materials was the International Women's Rights Action (IWRAW)...."

ambivalence and catechrestic gesture is a liminal or hybrid moment which prompts her to invoke many international conventions in an attempt to arrive at the meaning of culture. Effectively, she represents “a Lacanian voice that speaks outside the sentence” (quoted in Bhabha 2004: 264) and thus achieves her individuation, which entails occupying the intersubjective realm of culture. Homi Bhabha writes:

How does the deconstruction of the ‘sign’, the emphasis on indeterminism in cultural and political judgement, transform our sense of the ‘subject’ of culture and the historical agency of change? If we contest the ‘grand narratives’, then what alternative temporalities do we create to articulate the differential (Jameson), contrapuntal (Said), interruptive (Spivak) historicities of race, gender, class, nation within a growing transnational culture? Do we need to rethink the terms in which we conceive of community, citizenship, nationality, and the ethics of social affiliation? (2004: 240-250)

By deconstructing the ‘sign’ or debunking Botswana’s myth of culture’s particularity and holism, Dow had introduced into Botswana Derrida’s concept of indeterminism, an alternative temporality around the ‘sign’ of culture as a fluid and shifting signifying category. Her marriage to her American husband and the events of the court case surrounding their children’s citizenship constitute a time-lag or third space of the enunciation and negotiation of identity, an act of deconstruction, a rethinking, reshaping and revision of the whole idea of culture in Botswana. Thus culture becomes an aporetic condition of supplementarity and survival and therefore a liminal experience. In particular her victory meant that her children’s identity was no longer grounded on (the Botswana/African) referents of earth and blood

which privilege ethnicity, but became hybrid in the sense of *metissage*. In other words, the case symbolized the myth of culture as teleology or as a continuum. In this case, for example, identities are contextualized; black and white become coeval, and Dow's children's identities locatable across memories and cultures of Botswana, Africa and America.

On a personal level, Unity Dow's timely and meaningful intervention in the workings of her society is significant here in terms of her identity and function. She is elevated to a position of "the intellectual, whose role is at very least to apply the same standards and norms of behavior now already collectively accepted on paper by the entire international community" (Said 1994: 98). Thus, by calling into question the dogma and orthodoxy located in the citizenship statute which is very much skewed in favour of men, and bringing it into line with global ethical standards, Unity Dow displays a rare sense of detachment and therefore assumes the "public role of the intellectual as outsider, 'amateur', and disturber of the status quo" (ibid.: x). Dow infuses her culture with a global reach in order to present Botswana and Africa as part of "a new international space of discontinuous historical realities" (Bhabha 2004: 310), one where "the new historical subject emerges at the limits of representation itself" (ibid.: 310).

After the landmark case which resulted in the empowerment of Botswana (and African) women by according them rights, Dow juggled professions and started writing works of fiction, to which I now turn, becoming Botswana significant writer alive today. In her fiction,

Dow's voice is unique, clearly breaking out of tribal affiliations, and her tone is laced with authoritative overlays of colonial Britain or America on which Botswana institutions draw. *Far and Beyond* was her first novel (2000). This was followed by *The Screaming of the Innocent* (2002), *Juggling Truths* (2003) and *The Heavens May Fall* (2006).

Unity Dow has made it abundantly clear, in an interview with Fred De Vries (2007), why she started writing fiction. "Writing was a calling, an attempt to transcend the Botswana limitations" (*The Weekender* March 3-4 2007: 9).⁶ This view had also emerged earlier in an interview with M.J. Daymond and Margaret Lenta to whom she had said: "I like delving into our culture: I just like thinking about it" (2004: 50). It is unsurprising therefore that, as I will be arguing in this thesis, Unity Dow's fiction, like her reportage, represents a postcolonial critique of an African identity premised on male chauvinism.

At this point, it is possible to venture an extrapolation about Dow's works as representing her reflections on a society which is deeply enamoured of certain oppressive and outmoded traditions. In her works, Dow paints Botswana as a society with something of a rustic charm and identity, and yet this very idyllic façade masks some of the worst-festered cultural upheavals, and Dow's works therefore

⁶ See also Dow (2001: 327) in which she had this to say before she won the famous court case: "It is noteworthy that the House of Chiefs is charged with advising the legislature on matters of culture. The members are also judicial officers, heading customary courts in their respective villages. Of course women cannot be members of the House of Chiefs, as women cannot be chiefs. This is not by operation of any written law, but by operation of Customary Law."

constitute a stripping away of that mask of tradition which masquerades as the country's cultural purity.

Intriguingly, *Far and Beyon'* carries the word "beyond" in its title, as if to bear witness to Homi Bhabha's prognosis and description of the postcolonial *zeitgeist* located in the "metaphoricity" of "the beyond", which Unity Dow almost recreates in her first novel. Crucial here is the fact that the notion of the *beyon'* in Dow's first work carries with it the postcolonial burden of intersubjectivity – an enduring thread running within Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. Published in the year 2000, six years after the publication of Bhabha's celebrated text, Unity Dow's use of the word "beyond" in the book's title evokes a similar aura of connotative meanings to that contained in Bhabha's notion of the "beyond" in *The Location of Culture*. But like Homi Bhabha who sees culture as stricken with an ambivalence, Unity Dow's text presents the so-called African culture as an unstable site, burdened with an ambivalence which is the same as Bhabha's, always in transition. The ambivalence in Dow's "beyon'" also introduces and gestures towards a similar moment of anxiety and crisis to that which Bhabha alludes to and portrays in *The Location of Culture*. This "disturbance of direction", or what Bhabha calls the "Third Space", becomes the foundation for not just Unity Dow's *Far and Beyon'* but also the rest of her fiction which, comprising texts of hybridity, portrays the notion of culture as, to use Bhabha's citation of Fanon, "a zone of occult instability where the people dwell" (2004: 52). For instance, Unity Dow's protagonists find themselves having to nurture or negotiate that moment of "disorientation", "disturbance",

“restlessness”, “confusion”, by inhabiting Homi Bhabha’s disembodied interstitial or intervening spaces of hybridity which her fiction reflects.

The “beyond” is as much a moment of utter disorientation (as described above) as one of invention, intervention and liberation. Bhabha writes:

Being in the ‘beyond’, then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell ‘in the beyond’ is also ... to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then the intervening space ‘beyond’ becomes a space of intervention in the here and now. (2004: 10)

Thus Unity Dow starts her first novel with an epigrammatic intervention, in this case also as a liberation song dedicated to her children. She entreats them as follows:

Trudge not, through life, leaving ugly gashes.
Tip-toe not, through life, leaving half-formed impressions.
Trudge gently, lovingly, and purposely,
leave graceful heart imprints
Love the earth, for she loves you so.
More mogolo go betlwa w taola, wa motho o a ipetla.
The essence of self is carved by oneself, only that of a
diviner’s bones is carved by a human hand.

The above passage, read against the background of what Victor Turner calls antistructure, really expresses a moment of epiphany

achieved by Unity Dow following her legal battle with her government.

Turner argues that

[a]nalysis of rites of passage in Central and East African socialcultural systems, followed years later by study of theatre and narrative in literate cultures of large-scale societies, has given me cause to think that human life, both singular and plural, requires moments of antistructure as well as its days of structure if it is to remain healthy and achieve self-mastery. I say "*moments of antistructure*" because quantitatively these passages between structured times ... are brief though rich in implications for the future. Clock time and experienced time are quite different, as we all know. When we are deeply implicated in an activity, we cease to count minutes. The moments of antistructure are felt to belong to one's "authentic self," beyond playacting: action and awareness then merge and one ceases to keep one's eye on the clock. (1992: 135-6)

Deeply aware of how society often abounds with traditional myths, Dow admonishes her children not to be taken in by their matter-of-fact view of the world. Instead the children are advised to try and distance themselves from such myths and instead reflect on them with a view to knowing themselves better. Attained through reflection and asking questions, such self-knowledge tends toward the counterhegemonic since "the self is carved by oneself", without indulging in "half-formed impressions".

Mosa's early life and upbringing is dominated by the presence of Uncle Rich. Early on in Mosa's life (when she is about ten) Uncle Rich, who happens to be a man of great wisdom and wide-ranging experience, makes timely prognostications about her future: that she

will go 'far and beyon' (*Far and Beyon'* p. 66). Initially, this prophecy seems empty of any meaning given that the power relations structuring this society, a society where a woman counts for nothing, are defined through patriarchal values. Thus even though Mosa's uncle continually talks of her going "far and beyon'", the beyond being a seemingly faraway place, she has little or no idea of what this notion entails (p. 66), her only inkling being the radio which allows her an awareness of beyond the confines of her village and country.

In the course of the novel, the "far and beyon'" is no longer a physical place but rather takes on a symbolical significance, something like a pilgrimage, which suggests a spiritual journey that also gestures towards personal transformation. When the full reality of Uncle Rich's prophecy sinks in, it induces an intense awareness about the brave new world ahead of Mosa, a world in which the full nature of her subjectivity must be put to a test, and which comes to fruition in her deconstruction of not just her name but also the entire paraphernalia of the tradition that defines her life. It is the sheer brutality of oppression of women in her society that spurs her into thinking of the "far and beyon'", a liberating space beyond the realms of what her culture and tradition can offer. Thus *Far and Beyon'* is Dow's representation of a stepping out of reified and fetishized notions of culture as Mosa tries to understand culture's finer aspects.

As the story opens, many years have passed and a great deal has happened to Mosa's family. First, her unfortunate upbringing takes place in a single-parent family because her father abandons her

mother for another woman whilst Mosa and her brother Stan are still very young. Secondly, Mosa has lost her two half brothers to the scourge of HIV/AIDS within a year of each other, though her mother puts the causes of these deaths down to witchcraft. In the meantime, precocious and intelligent Mosa is now a teenager who, unfortunately, has dropped out of primary school owing to a pregnancy, before carrying out an illegal abortion. And even though she decides to move in with the man who has made her pregnant, the relationship is doomed to failure, given that this is the kind of society where women are given in marriage and treated like chattels, a gender-blind society which subscribes to hidebound views about culture and is notorious for the abuse of and violence against women.

As indicated earlier, my use of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's postmodernist concepts (of deterritorialization, assemblage and the rhizome) – which represent transitive time and thus introduce the subjunctive mood of culture – does not suggest a postmodern reading of *Far and Beyon'* but rather aims to develop and further contextualize liminality through those postmodern concepts because they gesture towards uncertainty and are therefore useful tools to inform the activities of Mosa and Amantle.

Initially used by Deleuze and Guattari, the notion of deterritorialization aims “to locate a moment of alienation in language” (Papastergiadis 2000: 117). This kind of alienation allows identities and meanings to be dissociated from their conventional everyday use, resulting in a creation of the element of Freud's *unheimlich* in language. Hence the

notion of deterritorialization in Unity Dow's *Far and Beyond* characterizes the fluid and nonconformist attitude of the main character in this gender-blind society, signifying her developing consciousness – a critical consciousness that “resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour” (Papastergiadis 2000: 117, echoing Braidotti). First, through the deconstruction of her name, followed by her interrogation and challenging of various cultural practices which she finds problematic, as well as her involvement with specific activities which overtly disrupt essentialist notions associated with identity, Mosa sees the collapse of “truth” (pertaining to culture in this case) as it had been constructed by her society over many generations ago. By describing the presence of rhizomic processes (or networks of resistance in the novel itself and its narrative), it will be shown that acts of becoming are those moments of metamorphosis in the life of the main character whereby she achieves “a zone of proximity” to an other identity.

In a co-authored text entitled *Anti-Oedipus*, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari theorize the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, notions based in psychiatry, to characterize a dual and mutually dependent process whereby a psychotic experience, at once, portrays madness as a horrible affliction while at the same time a mere illness. “A true politics of psychiatry”, Deleuze and Guattari argue, “would consist in the following praxis: (1) undoing all the reterritorializations that transform madness into mental illness; (2) liberating the schizoid movement of deterritorialization in all the flows, in such a way that this characteristic can no longer qualify a particular

residue as a flow of madness ...” (1984: 321). Put another way, the loss of territorial space in the patient, here seen through deterritorialization, and manifested in madness, is compensated for by the process of reterritorialization according to which the patient’s madness simply manifests itself as a mental illness. Thus the process of “coming undone” (ibid: 322) is followed by that of reterritorialization which entails an emergence of a new identity as the patient gains back their fragile space and mental balance or equilibrium.

In a different context, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization through a contrastive analysis of two things: a tree and a rhizome. Based on the principles of affinity and difference, the above theorists bring the main characteristics of a tree and a rhizome to bear on human identity whereby, on the one hand, identity is seen as an essence while, on the other, it is recognized as a social construct, and therefore a matter of becoming. An assemblage, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is what both the tree and the rhizome have in common, and can be exemplified through an image comprising many parts such as roots and branches, but where fixity, order and autonomy are the underlying principles. But whereas the tree is genealogical, and seems always to establish an order or a structure in the world characterized by a fixed point, the bulb-like rhizome possesses more connected and conjoined points which, structured like an ensemble, look radically different to any points on a tree. Further, the unity that obtains in a tree stands in sharp contrast to the lack of it in the rhizome where the dimension of multiplicity obtains, especially during

the process of deterritorialization, a moment when the rhizome changes its nature and reconstitutes itself.

Deleuze's and Guattari's understanding of the notion of the rhizome is an intriguing one in its disarticulation of structures. As will be shown in this chapter, the activities of the rhizome, for example, displace and estrange the idea of stability, replacing it with that which Homi Bhabha terms "the third locus, the intersubjective" (2004: 274), "iterative activity of the time-lag" (ibid.: 274) – a liminal moment that occludes closure and allows agency to adopt a non-foundationalist position and keep reinscribing itself.

With the concept of the rhizome in mind, this chapter argues that Mosa is a figuration of liminality through deterritorialization. In other words, through Mosa the heroine, Unity Dow deterritorializes and deconstructs the idea of culture and identity, presenting it not as a stable category, but rather as a fluid concept. Experiences of both deterritorialized and reterritorialized flows of desire or flows of "becomings" are at the heart of Mosa's transformation and exemplify her rhizomic identity.

In *Far and Beyon'*, Unity Dow's first novel, women are constantly trying to free themselves from the hackneyed and narcissistic notions of identity linked with the "territorialized" assemblage which is their traditional past controlled by patriarchy. Such an "*a priori* of the masculine" (Grosz 1990: 123) means that women are eternally relegated to roles of domesticity, drudgery and servitude. With the so-

called African culture underlying prevailing and essentialist assumptions of gender and identity, Dow's women exist, and are portrayed, only in terms of stereotypes, the "Other" of men who are "territorialized" by their culture. It is this negative and invidious portrayal of women in subjection that Unity Dow explores in *Far and Beyond*. In the course of the novel, Mosa, the protagonist, pulls out of the assemblage of her culture, disrupting the binarism implicit in the representation of gender based on biology and tradition, by unlearning and subverting an unthinking submission to tradition and sloughing off the African stereotype of woman as an overdetermined category.

The unfolding of her personal crisis begins early in her life, just before her entry into adolescence, when she reflects on her name:

She was twelve years old when she felt this ball of unhappiness in her. She could not point to a particular source of her melancholy. As long as she could remember she did not like her name. Why could her mother not come up with a nicer more optimistic name, she wondered? Mary, Gwendolyn, Sylvia, Elizabeth. Something English and sophisticated(p. 73)

The protagonist's dislike of her name underlines the confining and circumscribing nature of women's lives, desperate lives fully submitted to the phallic cult's panoptic vision where even names are a reflection of patriarchal hegemony. Mosa's quest to look into the nature of identity and meanings constitutes an infiltration into the interstitial spaces of culture's structure, and a levelling process. In effect, because of "the arbitrariness of the sign of cultural

signification” (Bhabha 2004: 246), Mosa engages in “a liminal interrogation outside the sentence” (ibid.: 260) of her name by examining it further as follows:

Instead she was called Mosa, short for *Mosadi*, woman. Her mother, when being affectionate, called her *Mosadinyana* – little woman. She could not possibly go by the English meaning of her name woman. It would be ridiculous to be called woman. She had a friend who was called Magdalene. She was such a lucky girl. Her Grandmother shouted with pride, for all to hear, “Magdalene!” And it all sounded so special. (p.73-4)

At this point, Mosa experiences feelings of displacement emanating from her *unheimlich* relationship with her name and, like a rhizome, she develops “a line of flight” or, as Bhabha would say, becomes “[t]he Lacanian ‘voice’ that speaks outside the sentence” (2004: 264). This is “the voice of an interrogative, calculative agency” (ibid.: 264) aiming “to renegotiate the third locus, the intersubjective realm” (2004: 274), by literally wrenching and unhinging her name from its conventional, traditional usage in culture. This happens when she realizes how much the English equivalent merely confirms the certitude of her tradition: “little woman”. In this attempt to expunge the “unhomely” effect attached to and suggested by the meaning of her name the protagonist deterritorializes and defamiliarizes the everyday of culture and tradition, distancing herself from it. To echo Deleuze and Guattari, Mosa’s sentiments are that

We are tired of the tree. We must no longer put our faith in trees, roots, or radicles; we have suffered enough from them. The whole aborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. (1983: 33)

From this point onwards, Mosa develops an awkward relationship with “the tree of culture” and becomes a symbol of the rhizome – an “acentered multiplicity” (Ibid: 38). This new rhizomic model of life that she adopts is a world of receding borders and shifting frontiers which bring about an immanence of sexual liberation through her deconstruction of all aborescent structures and hierarchies in her society. Put differently, Mosa achieves a deterritorialized state of cultural translation, characterized by what Bhabha terms “language *in actu* (enunciation, positionality) rather than language *in situ* (enonce or positionality)” (2004: 326).

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain the nature of a rhizome, especially as it relates to what they term “lines of flight” or deterritorialization, processes which they see as crucial to the undoing of orders and hierarchies that pretend to fixity and stratification. Deleuze and Guattari argue that

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of a rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. (1980: 382)

Deleuze and Guattari describe a rhizome as very much a world whose structure is anything but permanent. While the process of territorialization guarantees a semblance of order in the rhizome, that of deterritorialization introduces the dynamic of “fluidity and

multiplicity” (Ibid: 382) through the “rupture” located in “lines of flight”. This becomes clear in the to-and-fro movements during which “lines of flight” always eliminate orders and hierarchies that seem to portray the rhizome as a fixed signifier. The idea of flight – literally meaning running away from something which is either frightening or seen as abhorrent – is significant given that Deleuze and Guattari’s nuanced portrayal of freedom and containment is reflected in Unity Dow’s construction of the character of Mosa, whose vision is a relevant metaphor for transcending the confining strictures of culture. This becomes apparent, once more, when Mosa returns to school and where the general conduct of some of the male teachers towards the girls convinces her that her society is founded on a masculine ascendancy and male supremacy. Once it becomes obvious in a staff meeting, for example, that a good number of girls are dropping out of school owing to pregnancy, those teachers who sexually abuse and even impregnate the girls explain away their ignominious behaviour through a vocabulary of stereotyping, masking it in the logocentric of essentialism which betrays itself in phallogentric language. For example, one of them smugly describes the girls’ behaviour as follows:

Girls will always fall pregnant, that is just the way things are. That is nature. (pp. 140-1)

In another gesture of teachers playing down their scandalous and oppressive behaviour, one of them offers a superior description of the girls in the following phallogentric language: “If these girls are loose, there is nothing we can do about it” (p. 141). This use of phallogentric

language is not restricted to teachers only, for even Stan, Mosa's surviving brother, and only confidante, betrays his deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs by typecasting women in the denigrating role of sexual objects. In an overt reference to sexual misconduct by men as a given, Stan claims that "people have been doing these things this way for centuries" (p. 153). Stan is here trying to provide a justification for the subjection of women as virtually natural, since it has been continuing for a long time.

Mosa's rhizomic identity, evident in her refusal to share in her mother's sentiments regarding her position and the destiny of women in her society, can be summarized by Homi Bhabha's use of Lacan's psychoanalytic concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, a term Bhabha uses to characterize identity as a liminal and performative experience, a mobile form of existence. Echoing J. Forrester, Bhabha's idea of identity based on *Nachträglichkeit* is one characterized by "a transreferential function, [where] the past dissolves in the present, so that the future becomes (once again) an *open question*, instead of being specified by the fixity of the past" (2004: 314).

This analogy is important when applied to Mosa who, on her return to school, becomes an embodiment of Bhabha's idea of identity as an open question especially when she begins to challenge and turn the school tradition on its head. For example, in a gesture of introducing openness and equality to the school, she successfully brings to a stop a traditional practice according to which sweeping and classroom cleaning is a "girls only activity" (p. 133). In her pursuit of

egalitarianism, Mosa and all the Form Four (H) pupils participate in cleaning the classroom. Like “a rhizome (which) is not answerable to any structural or generative model, being by nature foreign to the very idea of a genetic axis” (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 24), Mosa brings in a different model, a different arrangement of sweeping which does away with and disarticulates established hierarchies. Mosa here reaches a point at which identity has nothing to do with gender, as an *a posteriori* construct, and is open to several choices, the choices which Deleuze and Guattari further emphasize when they state that

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*... the rhizome is alliance, unique alliance... the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and ... and ...and...”. This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb “to be”. Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? ... Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation – all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic) ...(1980: 386).

For Mosa here, remaining outside “the verb to be” entails reaching a resolve to stay outside of the confines and dictates of her culture, a resolve which allows her to attain a place of immanence where divisions are effaced and multiplicity introduced. At the same time, Mesa reterritorializes herself by ensuring her full involvement in the process of sweeping yet still remaining part of the very social fabric she set out to deterritorialize.

When Mosa becomes a teenager, many factors conspire against her wellbeing within their family, beginning with the death of her two brothers from HIV/AIDS. Her family, as well as the wider society, believe that the boys have been bewitched, with the result that diviners are invited to divine the cause of their deaths. In the end, a neighbour is named as the cause of the deaths, apparently through witchcraft, but Mosa remains unconvinced of this verdict which is based largely on an unthinking and uncritical belief in superstition. This conflict between tradition and modernity drives her into despair and confusion, impelling her to say:

My God, life is confusing! At school I am taught science and how the world works from that point of view! I get home and have to deal with witch doctors and somehow we are supposed to remain sane! (p.106)

However, by going to school, Mosa opts for modernity rather than sticking with tradition, and this is reflected in her decision to take an HIV test from which she emerges with a clean bill of health. Hence the “scatological” embodiment or the feeling of “abjection” that she symbolized is expunged.

Another factor has to do with the way in which the patriarchal system is maintained through, as Man Sarup puts it, the Lacanian “phallus, the name of the Father, the Law” (1988: 33). Marriage ceremonies in her society, the protagonist learns to her horror, are instances for showcasing women’s inferior position compared to those of men. In point are the following admonitions given to women at a wedding ceremony:

“A wife holds on to the house pillar for support and comfort before shouting about problems.”

“A wife does not ask her husband where he has been.”

“A husband may go chopping in a neighbouring field. Only a wife with long ears will hear things she does not need to hear.”

“A wife must cook, clean, and wash for her husband.”

(p. 151)

These maxims demonstrate the extent to which women remain territorialized in the assemblage of their culture, their lives mapped out the moment they are born. This is why they are treated as servants in marriage. Seemingly complaisant to with male power and privilege, the best these women can aspire is the kitchen, while also catering to the carnal whims and needs of the men who, to all intents and purposes, are sexual predators always prepared to look elsewhere other than their wives for gratification. It dawns upon Mesa that women's acquiescence in male hegemony makes them fall into the category of what Gayatri Spivak calls “subaltern” women who “cannot speak”. In *Far and Beyond*, until Mosa comes into the picture, the women literally “cannot speak”. However, these double standards which have been embedded in the fabric of her patriarchal society will not daunt but galvanize her into action, most of which involves activities carried out to ward off sexism, even if this means putting her on a collision course with the authorities – the male fraternity, regarded as the custodians of culture.

In an act that could be portrayed as subversion of the first order, but which is carried out in the terms of the idea of the ludic, which for

Victor Turner simply means “play”, Mosa tries to expose the practice of abuse in her school through what Bhabha would call “mimicry [which] marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance” (2004: 172). The exposure and resistance takes the form of a series of plays which are performed in front of the whole school in the presence of the Minister of Education, whom the girls have invited clandestinely as an inspirational speaker to their school’s prize-giving ceremony. Although the school’s headmaster learns about the Minister’s visit, he is unaware of the girls’ secret plan. In a gesture Homi Bhabha calls sly civility, the Minister’s visit to the school’s prize-giving ceremony is hijacked by the girls who turn entertainment into a carnivalesque, a spectacle of real emancipation in the form of a series of presentations in which the girls – now Turnerian liminars or his *communitas* – agitate for a social configuration that resists the status quo. The short plays and displays –a metalanguage or non-verbal communication which takes the form of sexual simulations –highlight the level of abuse in the school by focusing on the male teachers’ sexual liaisons with their female students, and therefore offer a reflexive moral critique of Mosa’s society in which men display repressive and predatory behaviour towards their largely pliant womenfolk. The liminars bring about a freedom and indeterminacy of culture. Victor Turner writes:

Play, then, is part of liminality, including many types of ritual liminality. And since it involves metacommunication and metalanguages – verbal and non-verbal languages about the languages of the every day, about its “natural” languages and messages communicated in such

languages – play relates as much to the individual as to the person, and to relations among individuals. (1992: 151)

As Deleuze and Guattari argue, “A rhizome never ceases to connect semiotic chains, organizations of power, and events in the arts ... and social struggles” (1983: 12). Yet again, as in a rhizome, the performances -- an act of the protagonist’s masterful creativity – are meant to decentre the language of culture into other registers. This decentring constitutes the attainment of a threshold or flows of deterritorialization from which emerge various states of becoming.

As the story ends, Mosa has undergone a ritually transformative experience and a dramatic change in the grammar of her life, the ritual extending from the day she became pregnant through her interrogation of her society’s cultural values to deconstructing them. Thus *Far and Beyon’* represents the metonymic symbol of that change which author Unity Dow initiates in the prologue.⁷ Unlike her mother Mara and her brother Stan, whose inane apologia for tradition she finds problematic and considers as shot through with tension and contradictions, although it is naïve, Mosa has successfully erased, escaped and transcended the biological and cultural signs and markings which various patriarchal systems had inscribed on her body throughout the story, during which notions of woman were inextricably linked with a dainty femininity. For Mosa, femininity and Africanness become categories that need to be interrogated and negotiated. In a real sense, Mosa recovers her agency or subjectivity.

⁷ Refer to Dow’s dedication in the novel.

With an attitude which Anne Gagiano has tellingly described as “candidly feminist” (2003: 1), *The Screaming of the Innocent*, Unity Dow’s second novel, resonates with a similar theme to that in *Far and Beyon’*: deconstructing power structures or delegitimizing hegemony, except that the events conveyed in this novel provoke much anger and opprobrium.

In the discussion of *Far and Beyon’* earlier in the chapter, it has been shown how Mosa and her friends successfully expose hegemonic power and abuse by teachers, the exposure happening during the prize-giving ceremony where the Minister of Education is in attendance. This is a typical scenario of patriarchal hegemony. Through Mosa, a gradual eclipse of this patriarchal power and old order becomes evident. Similarly, *The Screaming of the Innocent* is set against a patriarchal hegemony that women find stultifying at best, but, as in *Far and Beyon’*, that power is also challenged and seen to be slowly eroded. In contradistinction to *Far and Beyon’*, however, where the presence of hegemony seems erratic, *The Screaming of the Innocent* depicts a society divided between emergent and traditional classes, with the former having exerted a systemic stranglehold over the former. In many ways, therefore, the text concerns a contestation of hegemony or “balancing power binaries” (Gagiano 2003: 1) in a society where not only women but also weak men are exploited by the powerful. As I attempt to demonstrate, the traditional part of Unity Dow’s world in *The Screaming of the Innocent* exists to serve the political class, which is

hegemonic, while the emergent class (in the name of Amantle, the main character, and her friends) occupies the civil society and the subaltern class. I argue that the subaltern consciousness manifest in the emergent class disrupts the power binary in the text and ushers in an agency that rejects sublation and instead tries to redefine and reinscribe itself, an identity based on reinscription as explained by Bhabha:

there is a contestation of the given symbols of authority that shift the terrains of antagonism. The synchronicity in the social ordering of symbols is challenged within its own terms.... This is the historical movement of hybridity ... as a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time-lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in-between the rules of engagement. (2004: 277)

In his revisionist reading of Marxist theory, historicist philosopher and political commentator Antonio Gramsci sets out to explain the meaning of the concept of hegemony, showing the concept's evolution over time, beginning with a Marxian theorization, with its emphasis on the opposition between the economic base and the superstructure. Almost breaking with the economic aspect, but making a link between the two, Gramsci embarks on a quest to understand how the ruling classes are able to effectively apply ideology in order to achieve a popular consensus. The consciousness among the populace that it is submitting to bourgeois ideological control, Gramsci realizes, is not a natural phenomenon but rather a result of a "collective will", a "consensus", a certain preparedness to accept the ideology of the ruling class. Thus, whereas the Marxists perceive ideology as a function of the class position of the subjects,

Gramsci's understanding of ideology is that it is a force which produces subjects and is responsible for the development of subjectivity. In other words, the Marxian presentation of ideology as a mere system of ideas is viewed by Gramsci as reductionist; he instead perceives ideology as something with a material existence and not just a conglomerate of evanescent realities.

Similarly, Unity Dow perceives her society as being divided between two interlinking classes of the powerful and the less powerful, between the rulers and ruled. It is important to note that Gramsci had distinguished these classes as political and civil society respectively, making the intellectual the focal point of analysis in politics and culture, and that hegemony (or the domination of the powerful) is maintained largely through a process he calls consent by those in the civil society. Like Gramsci, Dow views culture as a hegemonic system, a vast intellectual enterprise involving struggle, often linked with social class, economic class and also connected with transmitting ideas and values. As a hegemonic system, Dow believes culture should be kept in check.

Read in terms of the Gramscian idea of hegemony, Unity Dow's *The Screaming of the Innocent* develops a cultural terrain which becomes a site where the concept of hegemony is contested by Gramsci's organic intellectuals, the emergent class who are prepared to "speak the truth to power". *The Screaming of the Innocent* is a work which reads like a detective thriller in the way that Unity Dow allows events to build up: the gory motif of ritual murder, followed by a frantic

search for the perpetrators, strangely three years later. In this story, Amantle, Unity Dow's main character, and her friends, are prototypes of Turner's *communitas* and Gramsci's organic intellectuals, who are prepared to challenge society's structure and hegemony respectively. As opposed to the silent majority who may be viewed as being complicit with and providing consent to hegemony, Amantle and company represent the emergent class of the ruled who challenge rulers.

According to Margaret Lenta, in *The Screaming of the Innocent* Dow deals with "the lingering beliefs of the pre-Christian past, and at the same time present-day class and gender inequalities" (2004: 40). Margaret Lenta's comments seem lukewarm and carry connotations of stereotyping and social Darwinism according to which those races which had not received Enlightenment would continue exterminating one another. In other words, an ambivalence was firmly lodged within the cultures of backward societies, and would be exorcised through Christian enlightenment.

This ambivalence, embedded in the concept of the culture of "backward" communities, concerns author Unity Dow herself in her second novel. In an interview carried out in September 2005, I asked Unity to shed some light on the novel; she rhetorically answered:

This work is about culture. What is culture? Why is it that when bad things happen in Africa they are labelled cultural? Is Africa the only place in the world which has got culture? Should we take ritual murder happening across the African continent as a cultural practice? Does

the act of killing make it cultural because it's uniquely African? How can anyone want to gain power by invoking silly belief systems to do evil?[sic] (Unpublished: 4)

Unity Dow is challenging the presumption of the patriarchal chauvinism of (mostly black) men in Botswana (but also from across the African continent) who have “invok[ed] silly belief systems to do evil”. The truth is that there is no such thing as the African culture and yet the diffusion of belief is evident in male cultural authority, a form of hegemony against women and children. The men believe that they are entitled to this truth, and yet, as Anthony Appiah argues, “the truth is the property of no culture, that we should take truths we need wherever we find them” (1992: 5).

Unity Dow's *The Screaming of the Innocent* resonates with Appiah's apt observation about culture and shows how its author looks elsewhere other than Africa for the definition of culture. The above work unsparingly anatomizes the emptiness of particular aspects of power, an insidious form of patriarchal hegemony which manifests itself in the guise of tradition.

The plot is thick and fast. At the centre of the conflict one encounters in *The Screaming of the Innocent* is the disappearance of a young girl, Neo Kakang of Gaphala village, who, while tending goats, is abducted by powerful men in society for *diphoko* or ritual murder. A wealthy and highly-regarded businessman, Disanka, with the connivance of the police who provide a cover-up for the culprits, teams up with other influential men in society such as the village

school head-teacher, the village headman, and the Minister for Safety and Security, all of whom want the girl's parts to be used for good luck and material wealth, both of which would further their ambition and power, thereby enhancing their leverage in the society.

The "unheimlich of culture", as Bhabha points out above, consists of the infernal images of atavism, primitivism, death, fear, anxiety, uncertainty, to mention but a few, with which any perceptive reader is bombarded during Neo's gruesome murder. The "unheimlich of culture" points to the means by which Unity Dow presents the body of women in Africa as being claimed by patriarchal hegemony.

For a time, the girl's disappearance seems like water under the bridge in this laid-back community, except for her family who live with the pain of her loss and are convinced she was killed for ritual murder. For example, Motsatsi, the victim's mother, opines that "[e]verybody knows it's big people who commit ritual murders, not small men with little influence" (p. 68). But it is a different story at the police station where Sergeant Senai tells the victim's mother that "[t]he case is therefore closed" (p. 66) following the "police conclusion that the child had been killed by wild animals" (p. 66). In the meantime, a veil is drawn over the case but the community will not be hoodwinked.

Three years later, the perpetrators are eventually exposed through the efforts of Amantle, a well connected and young female idealist, together with three other youthful persons, namely Boitumelo, Naledi,

Nancy and Daniel. Unity Dow succeeds in presenting a penetrating and unsparing picture of African society in which men, the avatars of power, enjoy *carte blanche* to oppress the weak in society. Hence, as the story ends, the named offenders have most unfortunately got off scot-free as we see no revenge exacted on them, but, as Lenta puts it, there is no doubt the young Amantle has developed “into a larger role than tradition would have allowed her” (2004: 45). In other words, this oppression is gradually reaching its finale.

The Screaming of the Innocent is an exemplar of the operation of hegemony as Antonio Gramsci conceptualized it. For Gramsci, culture is a political struggle. The fact that the activities of people such as Desanka (who are involved in murdering Neo) go unpunished but instead become part of society’s secrets confirms the existence of hegemony in this universe that Unity Dow has created. In this territory, where an influential superstructure and class of people (such as Disanka, the school village headman, the Minister of Safety and Security) have exerted their power and dominance over the subaltern classes – women and vulnerable men – culture becomes an actual political struggle. In this novel, Shosho remains a quintessential example of the powerless men in society whose vulnerability is exploited by the powerful, such as Disanka to kill Neo. This becomes clear at the end of the novel when soul-troubled Shosho decides to take his life by hanging himself from a tree “in order to silence ... the screaming of the innocent child that was exploding in his head” (215).

The notion of hegemony as mere dominance which can be challenged takes on intriguing dimensions with the arrival of Amantle on the scene. She seeks to plumb the mystery of the lost girl and expose the powerful class by teaming up with her friends – Boitumelo, Naledi the lawyer, Nancy the camera expert, and Daniel (another National Service intern). The four embark on subverting and destroying the hegemony, preempting the villagers' demand that the murder be solved through divination. While the villagers are preparing for a date with government officials to explain how the girl disappeared, the five youths retreat to a rural hinterland where they set up camp, discuss the appropriate language, and finally produce a script for the proceedings, armed with a copy of the file of the deceased obtained from the police and the box in which were hidden her clothes. On the day of the meeting, Amantle and her friends ably capture the meeting on video, name the names of the culprits in the abduction case, and promise to follow it up. Thus it is proven that, after all, the powers-that-be are not too strong to be broken, as Turner would put it, by forces of “antistructure” within the society.

This characteristic feature of liminality embodies itself in Amantle's spontaneous bonding with her friends, as well as their separation from the rest of the community to a retreat where they gain “gnosis ... the crux of liminality as it relates to the cultural engendering of personhood, and revitalization of the social structure” (1992: 152). When she and her friends set up camp, they plan how to destroy the hegemony. To that end, she briefs the rest as to what happened before scripting the language to use at the meeting.

This story confirms that hegemony is not so much conclusively about dominance as about its contestation. The formation of a young group, led by Amantle, who may be described as the emergent class, demonstrates that the “subaltern” group in any society will not always accept subjugation. In this case, they exemplify a different hegemony and certainly a new balance of power. In the words of Victor Turner, the young people who participate in the carnivalesque by challenging hegemony and exposing wrongdoing are like initiates who undergo transformation. “When initiands – those undergoing change of state, status, or being – move into liminality, they experience change” 1992: 137). As a *communitas* “[s]tripped of ascribed structural being, they are wholly in becoming” (ibid.: 137).

Amantle and her friends reject structure in favour of antistructure and participate in a liminal activity which confers on them the insignia of *communitas*. Nowhere does this spirit of antistructure manifest itself more than on the day of the meeting. When, for example, the Minister wants to duck a question regarding the child who has disappeared, he is shouted down in a brazen manner by Boitumelo as follows: “you are wrong, mister minister”. This is followed by the crowd uttering a hubbub of disapproval for the minister but expressing support for the young people who ably challenge the “predominantly male government officials” (p.200), who represent hegemony in the society. As Turner emphasizes, this is in line with the thinking of “human life as moving back and forth between experiences of social

structure and experiences of antistructure, the latter often in liminal situations, thresholds between structured domains” (ibid: 142).

As the novel ends, the five youths have not managed to bring the culprits to book, but at least they have managed to challenge their society’s structure and its flawed moral order, overcome contradictions immanent in the “indicative” mood of culture (where the powerful oppress the weak) and attained the subjunctive mood which gives them a sense of release from encumbrances of structure. Attempts to muffle the screams of the weak and the innocent come to nought through the old man’s confession as he lays bare the story of Neo’s murder at the end of the novel.

It is my argument in this chapter that the conflict in both novels hinges on the need for cultural change. In their interrogation of the language of culture, especially African culture, Unity Dow’s first two texts are liberatory narratives which depict African society at the cross-roads of change, a time when the dark night of phallic supremacy must be re-examined. In other words, Unity Dow’s avowed opposition to a phallogocentric view of the world is never in question. In *Far and Beyond*, for example, Unity Dow expresses thinking in transition through the various actions of the main character who rises above everything that would constrain and overdetermine her identity. In particular, through the notion of “the far and beyond”, more of a spiritual journey than a physical one, or an attempt to “touch the future on its hither side” (Bhabha 2004: 26), which she reminds her brother Stan to witness to, she says:

I insist that you be there to cheer me when I go far and beyond'. (p.196)

The idea of the "far and beyond" here exceeds mere flight. A vision, a new beginning is largely the essential metaphor of rejecting the phallogocentric view of the world, of transcending tradition and embracing cultural change. Another metaphor revolves around the notion of death from HIV/AIDS. Indeed the idea of death represents the main foreboding in *Far and Beyond*, hanging over the text like an incubus. Thus going "far and beyond" entails the idea of surviving death, of being afforded another opportunity in life, a space to dream, a real, empowering space of identity as a matter of becoming, which in fact becomes Unity Dow's script of her life, in her fiction.

Similarly, Amantle, the main character in *The Screaming of the Innocent*, reflects on the "unhomely" nature of the so-called African culture in her reflection on the ritual murder of the girl. She wonders:

Is there a monster lurking in all of us? And if we're so paralysed by fear, if we dare face this evil, who will heed the the screams of the innocent? (p. 214)

From the prism of culture, both Mosa and Amantle perceive the world as an unhomely place to be, a place characterized by "the view of culture-as-a-political struggle" (Bhabha 2004: 52), but fortunately a struggle that is not without hope.

This hope, by way of conclusion, is sounded by Ben Okri who has this to say:

The only hope is in the creation of alternative values, alternative realities. The only hope is in daring to redream one's place in the world – a beautiful act of imagination, and a sustained act of self-becoming. Which is to say that in some way or another we breach and confound the accepted frontiers of things. (1997: 55)

“Flawed men” is one way to summarize Unity Dow’s first two novels, but, as I have argued, the texts are quintessential examples of redreaming one’s place in the world, and about confounding the accepted frontiers of things. To use Bhabha, Dow’s two novels are a critical analysis of “patriarchal fundamentalism and its regulation of gender and sexual desire” (2004: 328). Gradually, this critique turns into an act of dreaming, a process of self-becoming, a discursive and transgressive line of liminality, a liminal or rhizomic refrain or tone embodied in Mosa and Amantle, the main characters in *Far and Beyon’* and *The Screaming of the Innocent* respectively, who confront the language of hegemony and turn it on its head, allowing themselves to live on the margins of the mainstream delineations of culture and identity. Because of their subalternity or marginalized status in society, both these feisty characters engage in insubordination to various levels, deconstruction and inversion of roles and rules – what in Homi Bhabha become “the rhetorical strategies of hybridity” (2004: 207). Thus Mosa and Amantle are no longer merely historical events within the larger but now outmoded scheme of the patriarchal body politic. Instead, their resistance to and disavowal of binaries of cultural categories places them in Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas* and reveals the space and margin of hybridity which they occupy. When Walter Benjamin makes the point

that “[i]n every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition from a conformism that is about to overpower it” (1977: 217), Unity Dow embodies that point through her heroines who wrestle with angels and avatars of tradition. As Homi Bhabha puts it, this is “[t]he process of reinscription and renegotiation – the insertion or intervention of something that takes on new meaning – [which] happens in the temporal break in-between the sign, deprived of subjectivity, in the realm of the intersubjective” (2004: 274).

Chapter Three

Interrogating Modernities

The power of the postcolonial translation of modernity rests in its *performative, deformative* structure that does not simply reevaluate the contents of a cultural tradition, or transpose values 'cross-culturally'. The cultural inheritance of slavery or colonialism is brought *before* modernity *not* to resolve its historic differences into a new totality, nor to forego its traditions. It is to introduce another locus of inscription and intervention, another hybrid, 'inappropriate' enunciative site through that temporal split or time-lag Differences in culture and power are constituted through the social conditions of enunciation: the temporal caesura, *which is also the historically transformative moment*, when a lagged space opens up between the intersubjective 'reality of signs ... deprived of subjectivity' and the historical development of the subject in the order of social symbols. (Bhabha 2004: 346-7)

In *Juggling Truths* Monei, the protagonist, is opposed to the ontology of the white world and thus calls into question the metaphysical notions of progress or rationality as embodied in the presence of missionaries and the idea of nationalism. Similarly, Naledi Chaba, the heroine of *The Heavens May Fall*, finds it difficult to accept Western institutions of modernity unquestioningly, showing up their inherent contradictions. In both cases, the sign of culture is mocked and ridiculed. With its sovereignty and teleological thread lost, the genealogy of modernity is no longer an *a priori* edifice but an ambivalent discourse of generalizability. In other words, modernity is

opened to the concept of postcolonial translation in that its value has been attenuated.

This chapter explores the theme of liminality as a postcolonial translation of modernity (in the context of Unity Dow's third and fourth novels) in which the protagonists express a slippage or splitting contained in the statements and propositions about cultural modernity. As I attempted to show in chapter one, Unity Dow and her works are products of liminality in their challenging of assumptions about culture and its paradoxes as well as in finding different and liberating axioms which come to define new identities – in this case the new cultural identities being produced in the context of the shifting or endless slippage of modernity. In other words, Dow's texts discussed in this chapter "speak" "from the signifying time-lag of cultural difference" and therefore do exemplify "a structure for the representation of subaltern and postcolonial agency" (Bhabha 2004: 340). For Dow, the "sign" of modernity must be examined and reinscribed from the perspective of the subaltern, a woman, who finds the authority of culture nonsensical. Hence, in investigating the terms of reference, Dow allows her protagonists, who are on the margins of society, to engage in "the deconstruction of the 'sign', the emphasis on the indeterminism in cultural and political judgement" (2004: 249) in order to "transform our sense of the subject of culture" (ibid.: 249). The deconstruction of the sign by the protagonists entails bearing witness to the collapse of the teleology of modernity (as progress) and attesting to the significance of Bhabha's idea of cultural difference in the rearticulation of signification, and identity.

Commenting on *Juggling Truths*, Annie Gagiano observes:

The importance of *Juggling Truths* (2004) in the context of Dow's aesthetic and social project ... is not primarily its use of the theme of the African subject caught or torn between western and local traditionalism to which its title seems to point. It is proposed that the third text functions strategically in 'expanding' the portrayal of wholesome, generous family and social practices that feature much more peripherally in the two earlier novels. Its generally whole atmosphere serves as a further validation of Dow's implicit castigation of those unwholesome practices embedded in local culture (2004: 38-9)

Anne Gagiano's critical approach seems to point to the notion of reading that privileges the immanence what Homi Bhabha calls "the philosophical tradition of identity as the process of self-reflection in the mirror of (human) nature" (2004: 66). Although Dow tries to depict a traditional life led in relative harmony in laid-back postcolonial Botswana, I argue that by placing undue emphasis on those wholesome traditional practices, Gagiano falls for the outmoded realist vision which fails to home in on Dow's vision that is embodied specifically in the motivation of her main character in the text. It is not possible to appreciate the encyclopaedic view of cultural identity that Dow's texts dramatize through the close reading approach that Gagiano employs. The idea of culture that Dow adumbrates here is much more subtle and profound and should be viewed in terms of Homi Bhabha's idea of cultural difference, "a form of supplementary subversion" (Bhabha 2004: 232) located in the activities of the

protagonists and according to which culture is seen as a contested and produced commodity.

“In the postcolonial text”, Bhabha writes, “the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image ... is confronted with its difference, its Other” (2004: 66). Consequently the protagonists in both *Juggling Truths* and *The Heavens May Fall* engage with issues of identity not in terms of essence, nor by unquestioningly embracing the kind of identity that is an ideological interpellation imposed on them, but instead choose Bhabha’s Third Space – such as through splitting – as a way to attain their agency.

This kind of agency is evident in an interview with Dow carried out in September 2005 where she emerges as displaced by the discourse of modernity which features prominently in her novel. Giving her perceptive opinion on this text, she responded:

Any religion, say Christianity, is highly patriarchal. In fact religion confirms, affirms and concretizes patriarchy. Christianity ... is patriarchy personified because it is about men using power and the women facilitating that power. (Unpublished interview: 4)¹

The above view was reiterated in yet another interview in which Dow, Botswana’s “most famous judge, ...a staunch feminist and an acclaimed novelist” (De Vries 2007), encapsulated the theme of

¹ My argument in this chapter is indebted to Unity Dow for the above comment in which she articulates the inherent ironies and ambivalences located in all forms of religion, including Christianity. According to the interview, *Juggling Truths* concerns an interrogation of the interrogating discourses of modernity

Juggling Truths as being nothing other than “cultural identity” (Beukes 2006: 17).

The present chapter expounds this theme and shows that, as postcolonial texts, both *Juggling Truths* and *The Heavens May Fall* explore discourses of modernity. That is, they bear witness to the delegitimation of not just the master narratives of modernity but also those of patriarchy. Unity Dow is aware and immensely critical of the existence of certain African traditions that are patently irrelevant and oppressive, while also realizing just how shaky is the ground on which rests the foundation of logocentrism (of the great Western philosophical tradition). One can also state that Dow’s two texts echo Homi Bhabha’s characterization of modernity as “iterative; a continual questioning of the conditions of existence; making problematic its own discourse not simply as ideas but as the position and status of social utterance” (2004: 348). The texts deal with issues of the trashing of particular objectionable African traditions while at the same time throwing up fundamental questions about enlightenment modernity in the form of Christianity and the modern nation that constitute the core of Unity Dow’s third and fourth novels, *Juggling Truths* and *The Heavens May Fall*.

I consequently argue that patriarchy and modernity implode in the face of the postcolonial voice of Unity Dow. This implosion takes the form of antistructural liminality which, as Victor Turner observes, “may look like chaos to the representatives of traditional order, but may in fact be a creative response to conditions that require societal

reordering” (1992: 148). This becomes evident in the above works in which she foregrounds and considers the vexed issues of power, women, nationalism, and globalism – all of which are implied in the discourses of modernity. There is no doubt that the logocentric which Unity Dow examines is fraught. The protagonists begin to pinpoint the flaws and contradictions in the *logos* –various structural orders and systems around which society has built its moral fibre and stability. Specifically, the protagonists arrive at the awareness that man is the subject, woman is the object; the colonizer, often white, is the subject, the colonized, often black, is the object, and the “other”.

If the Enlightenment period was crucial to the project of modernity at all, it was an excessive faith that the Enlightenment philosophers placed in the efficacy of the liberal arts and the sciences (as a way to encourage an understanding of the natural forces but also to promote the idea of “goodness”, for example, self awareness, morality, justice and happiness) translated into the notion of the “civilizing mission”. It is this single belief in the idea of the “civilizing mission” – the purported view that somehow the world owes it to the West for bringing about “progress” – that Unity Dow views with suspicion.

Anthony Giddens has characterized modernity as the “modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in influence” (1990: 1). For this reason, argues Giddens, “[r]ather than entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one into which the consequences of modernity are

becoming more radicalized than before” (Ibid.: 3). Frank Schulze-Engler concurs with Giddens, saying “it may be much more useful to look at modernity not so much in terms of an ‘Enlightenment Project’ at all, but rather as a continually radicalizing process” (1999: 9). It would seem, therefore, that modernity should be seen as not having run its course but as still going through all forms of rationalization, and sometimes of radicalization. Also sharing in this view is Arif Dirlik, for whom “the ideologies of modernization and instrumental science are so deeply sedimented in the national body politic” (1994: 300) that modernity of this type tends to be attractive to most third world countries. For Dirlik, most modern states are prepared to engage the process of modernizing their nations, thereby bringing modernity to the doorstep of their societies. It is the case therefore that modernity is located in Europe and then spreads from there to the rest of the world through colonialism. This fact cannot be gainsaid in the discussion of Unity Dow’s works.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha has also shown that the philosophical presumptions expressed in the name of “modernity”² either turned out to be nothing more than a failed optimism or point up the anxieties lurking in the project itself – an optimism not fully satisfied and anxieties abounding. And postcolonial writing exposes an extravagant reliance on the significance of modernity, even as modernization is desirable. The diffusion and pervasiveness of these discourses of modernity is well known in postcolonial writing and has

² In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha has argued convincingly that the discourse of modernity is not accepted as an *a priori* in the postcolonial space. Instead, modernity is subjected to stringent interrogation, the kind of questioning which leads to the idea of culture as a matter of translation.

been clearly underscored by Simon Gikandi, for example, who avers that “postcolonial theory functions under the anxiety of modernity and its universal theories of reason, history and the human subject” (2000: 87). According to Gikandi, and here in a spirit of sheer solidarity with the above sentiments expressed by Bhabha, “the best postcolonial work has come to acknowledge that the central problems it confronts emerge from the problematic of modernity because colonialism – the primary subject of postcolonial theory – was, in the end, the highest stage of European modernity and its dominant ideologies of secularization and rationalization” (2000: 87-8). Concurring with both Bhabha and Gikandi’s contestation of modernity, Stuart Hall also pinpoints the concept of the Enlightenment as crucially important to postcolonial writing. Hall says that

[t]he Enlightenment returns, in the discourse of the ‘postcolonial’, in its decentred position, because it represents a critical epistemic shift within the colonising process, understood in its wider sense, whose discursive, power knowledge effects are still in play....Until the Enlightenment, difference had often been conceptualized in terms of different orders of being....Whereas under the universalising panoptic eye of Enlightenment, all forms of human life were brought within the scope of a single order of being, so that difference had to be re-cast into the constant marking and re-marking of positions within a single discursive system (*differance*). This process was organized by those shifting mechanisms of ‘otherness’, alterity and exclusion and the tropes of fetishism and pathologisation, which were required if ‘difference’ was ever to be fixed and consolidated within a unified discourse of *civilization*. (1996: 250)

Thus from the Enlightenment onwards, the totalizing and overweening assumptions implied in the concept of modernity begin to assume a universalism that is grounded in a Cartesian dualism. But thanks to colonialism, the Enlightenment's faith in enlightened reason (with its auxiliary rationality) as a force of human deliverance from all forms of bigotry and power is exposed as a sham and thus comes to haunt modernity all through the colonial period.

Juggling Truths reads like an autobiographical work which is in this thesis interpreted in the light of Edward Said's contrapuntal reading approach. Like liminality where "[t]he who of agency bears no mimetic immediacy or adequacy of representation" (Bhabha 2004: 271) but is rather "signified outside the sentence" (ibid.: 271), Said's approach places emphasis on the "materiality of the text, the 'worldliness' of its production and reception, its being in the world" (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 1983: 32). As with Bhabha's notions of contingency and iteration, Said's concept of contrapuntality entails that a certain kind of indeterminism is always privileged during the reading process and allows for a range of affiliations that inform the notion of "worldliness", of the origin of the text's open-endedness. Said's idea and ideal of this critical reading is to be found in Homi Bhabha's rhetorical summation of his trademark approach to criticism, an approach whose eclectic energies are to be found in his idea of liminality. Bhabha asks, rhetorically:

If we contest the 'grandnarratives', then what alternative temporalities do we create to articulate the differential

(Jameson), contrapuntal (Said), interruptive (Spivak) histories of race, gender, class, nation, within a growing transnational culture? Do we need to rethink the terms in which we conceive of community, citizenship, nationality, and the ethics of social affiliation?(2004: 250)

To be achieved in this reading approach is the emergence of new temporalities and different, other ways of reconceptualising identities. Rather than follow the formalist and functionalist approach to reading, which “essentializes” the text, turning it into a verbal object of truth, contrapuntal reading concentrates on the text’s materiality, durability and futurity in the world (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 1999: 45; Turner 1992: 154). By giving primacy to indeterminism, a contrapuntal reading allows the text to yield different temporalities and different subjectivities. Through Monei, the novel’s main character in *Juggling Truths*, the “sign of Enlightenment modernities prefigured in the “master narratives” such as Christianity and nationalism is deconstructed and demythologized.

Set in the 1960s during the heyday of political decolonization and colonial emancipation in Africa, *Juggling Truths* dramatizes the upbringing of a young Motswana woman called Monei (or Nei for short) “in the then British Bechuanaland Protectorate” (p. 1). In this rural setting of Botswana’s village life, about which she tells her story, Monei’s life is defined in terms of this society’s tripartite world of the village, the lands (or farm land) and the cattle post –a world which, to some extent, survives to this day. In this type of traditional world, roles are clearly defined and spelt out: men either ploughing at the

lands or looking after cattle at cattle posts while women gladly yield to the vortex of the home and child-bearing. Says Dow:

Beyond the hills were the lands, where we ploughed maize, millet, sorghum, watermelons, beans, sweet reed and many other foods. Beyond the lands were the cattle posts, the land of men and boys, where the cattle were kept and boys learnt to be men and men lived quietly missing their women and daughters. We lived a semi-nomadic life. From June to October we lived in the village proper, commemorating deaths and celebrating births and marriages and the women decorated *lapa* and house walls. Men would sit under trees in the mornings, enjoying their wives' brews eyeing their toddlers and privately planning their next children. (pp.1-2)

Of immense interest about this society is that sense of harmony located in the traditional way of life, as Anne Gagiano has rightly observed. But, as I argue, this harmony cannot last, given that colonial modernity slowly penetrates and suffuses the society. In other words, Unity Dow is here writing against the background of a colonial state whose engrossment in its own cultural traditions must inexorably be broken by the grip of European modernity, as Dow observes:

Occasionally men assembled at the village *Kgotla* to discuss weighty village matters, such as whether this or that cousin of the Chief should be given a ward to head. Or the District Commissioner (the Queen's representative, local magistrate and general main man for all things colonial) might address them about a visit of some anthropologist who would be coming to study their ways. Still, the Dutch Reformed missionaries might berate them for not encouraging their children to go church. All these things they would tell to their wives around the evening fires as porridge bubbled and bean leaves boiled in front of everyone. (p. 2)

It is within the above context that Unity Dow's *Juggling Truths* foregrounds both the pervasiveness of tradition and of modernity, almost in equal measure. Whereas the *Kgotla* points to a society grounded in orality, the figure of the District Commissioner and the presence of missionaries are symbols of the immanence of the colonial enterprise and its pretences to modernity as moral progress. Initially located in Europe, modernity is presented by Dow as having spread its tentacles to Botswana through colonial governance, the Bible or Christian humanism and later the idea of the nation-state – all three symptoms of modernity “suggest[ing] the triumph of the writ of colonialist power” (Bhabha 2004: 152). In this colonial scheme of things, such a diffusion of modernity is fed through anthropology, which in turn impacts on traditional beliefs and customs in the colonized world. Unity Dow attempts to show that modernity (as reflected in the above concepts) is associated with bigotry and intolerance and is therefore in need of serious investigation.

In *Juggling Truths*, orality has a symbolic significance and is embodied in and manifested through Monei's grandmother – a typically embodied subject with a gendered identity and an arch figure of tradition who believes that a woman's body can be understood only within the matrix of reproduction and nurturing. Monei's grandmother's ideological basis for her subjectivity rests on womanhood as determined by biology. Another form of determinism is evident through the embracing of orality at *Kgotla* meetings where the patriarchal order is given credence and full endorsement.

On a different level, the presence of the District Commissioner, anthropologists, priests and ministers in Unity Dow's world introduces an ambivalence that redounds to imperialism's civilizing mission. To this extent, *Juggling Truths* is as much about the representations of traditional life (as perceived by Monei) in rural Bechuanaland, as it is about the pervasiveness of colonial modernity, especially in its righteous appeal to the civilizing mission – colonial governance, Christian humanism and the nation state being clear manifestations of this modernity. Thus Unity Dow's third novel shows, at once, Monei's attempts to free herself from the clutches of tradition as well as laying bare and eventually jettisoning, almost with disdain, some of the grand signifiers and foundations of knowledge located in Enlightenment modernity.

Homi Bhabha states that “[t]o recognize the *differance* of the colonial presence is to realize that the colonial text occupies that space of double inscription, hallowed – no, hollowed – by Jacques Derrida...” (2004: 154). As Monei grows up, for example, colonialism is still hallowed in the colonial frontier, an attitude which changes as she begins to develop an awkward relationship with what she comes to associate it with – “those ideological correlatives of the Western sign – empiricism, idealism, mimeticism, monoculturalism ...that sustain a tradition of English ‘cultural’ authority” (Ibid.: 150). Imperialism's righteous appeal to the civilizing mission: the Berlin Conference (p. 74), the Protectorate whose capital was in Mafeking (p. 73), Father James' commitment and messianic zeal, which Monei sees as

hollow, his conniving with the oppressive, patriarchal ideology of her culture, while at the same rejecting local traditions, and finally, the vacuousness of Botswana independence – all come to at once define and rupture the colonial space. As believers in modernity, both the District Commissioner and Father James see Africa's traditions as a form of anachronism that would fade in the face of the civilization, rationality and progress brought about by Christianity.

For Unity Dow, the District Commissioner, the epitome of the mission, Father James (representing the flipside of the civilizing mission) and the functional anthropologist all conjure up split discourses of a self/other dichotomy and white cultural superiority. In this case, Unity Dow points up the workings of Manicheanism: how the colonizer has achieved a total and comprehensive understanding of “otherness”, or the colonized, through the ideology of culture as embodied in religion and anthropology. Therefore, Dow's *Juggling Truths* is an example of colonialist literature which has to be read “against the grain”.

JanMohamed writes:

Colonialist literature is an exploration and a representation of a world at the boundaries of 'civilization', a world that has not yet been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology. That world is perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil. Motivated by his desire to conquer and dominate, the imperialist configures the colonial realm as a confrontation based on differences in race, language, social customs, cultural values and modes of production. (1985: 19)

In a passage entitled “Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817” which appears in Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha discusses how the presence of the Christian Bible in the colonized world of the nineteenth century India, Africa and the Caribbean came to represent, simultaneously, colonial authority and its nemesis – displacement. Thus “the English Book”, says Bhabha, is “an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline” (2004: 146), a text of the “civilizing mission” (Ibid: 149) suggesting “the triumph of the colonialist moment in early English Evangelism” (Ibid: 149). Paradoxically, however, the “institution of the Word in the wilds is also an *Entstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition” (2004: 149). As I argue in this chapter, the realisation about the ascendancy of the English Bible becomes Monei’s point of epiphany, a moment when the discourse of colonialism must be disavowed and displaced.

During her childhood, Monei is weaned on colonial liberal notions such as the ascendancy and supremacy of the English Bible, representing the core of universal human values. For example, she offers her prayers to Jesus Christ on one Christmas day (p. 17) in order that Mrs Monyatsi, her class teacher and a stern disciplinarian, does not take her class the following year. But over time, she becomes quick to spot a dissonance in these discourses. This explains why she is prepared to read the Bible “against the grain”, deconstructing and displacing the major discourses inscribed in the so-called “holy book”, including the creation story, or the godliness of

Jesus, to mention some examples. Locating an ambivalence in the biblical story about Adam and Eve, for example, Monei opts for a parallel, local version in Tswana/African culture. She says that

The word of God was not always easy to understand.... There was that confusing story about Adam and Eve, especially since there was already another story about the first inhabitants of the Earth that my grandmother told us. According to this version, the first people were Matsieng and his family, who had emerged in the belly of the earth and then proceeded to multiply, filling the world with human beings. (p. 53)

In a gesture that would be perceived as blasphemous by a Christian readership, she takes issue with Christianity for its partial representation of truth. Not only does she call into question ideas about the Immaculate Conception and Mariolatry (which many Christians, in particular the Catholic majority, are encumbered with); she questions the authority of (God) Jesus when her prayer is not answered. Thus she reflects:

Either Jesus Christ did not hear my main prayer, what with all the wishes from so many people about so many things, or he could not help.... If Jesus failed to save me from Mrs Monyatsi, I just hoped that he could at least grant me my other prayer. It occurred to me though, that the doubts I had about Jesus, and what he could and could not do, may have had something to do with his not granting my prayer.... My grandmother had once whispered to me that if Mary had been pressed, she would have told a better story about Jesus' totem. She hadn't elaborated and at that time I hadn't been too clear about where babies came from, but it raised, in my mind, questions about Jesus' identity. Clearly, it seemed, if Mary had lied about Jesus' totem, no one really knew who

he was and that could mean that he was not the Son of God. (pp. 17-18)

The above passages about the creation story and the nature of Jesus Christ demonstrate, at least on a subliminal level, Unity Dow's embrace of hybridity, a common form of representation in the postcolonial text, as a moment of transformation in her subjectivity. By allowing Monei, her protagonist, to interpret the Bible "against the grain", for example, and hold up the mirror to other interstices of dialectical contestation, Dow ensures that the authority and force of the Bible is consigned to a relativism that is influenced by particular historical world views. In other words, by revealing other, possible positions of reading and making sense of what the Bible means, Monei participates in the transgression of its authority through Bhabha's idea of cultural translation. Homi Bhabha has this to say:

Blasphemy is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of the cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation. In the asserted authenticity or continuity of tradition, 'secular blasphemy' releases a temporality that reveals the contingencies of, even incommensurabilities, involved in the process of social transformation. (2004: 323)

Further, in *Juggling Truths*, Father James of the Roman Catholic Church stands out as an immensely controversial figure who, in both his missionary zeal and Manichaean vision, embodies the discourse of modernity in the form of British imperialism which is played out in the colonial outpost of Botswana. For example, not only is Father James opposed to ancestor-worship (p. 47) and traditional dancing

(p. 47), both of which he subsequently bans; he also abhors the other so-called primitive traditional practices such as circumcision. But in a gesture which evokes Bhabha's idea of 'sly civility', Monei sees a provincialism embedded in Father James' act of "renaming members of his flock" (p. 55), replacing them with English ones. From this point onwards, Nei becomes intensely suspicious of the Christian Church, and grows out of and smashes to splinters several humanist ideals which are seen as foundational to the Christian faith.

In the end, Monei rejects both baptism and circumcision and attends school where she becomes one of the "star pupils" (p. 44), and dreams about becoming "a queen (p. 44) so she could speak "in the freedom square" (p. 73). For Monei, all these decisions make her a "borderline figure" (Bhabha) and pave the way for the discursive ground she adopts in her quest for a perceptive idea in which culture is perceived as "not only a 'transitional' reality but also a 'translational' phenomenon" (Bhabha 2004: 320).

Differently stated, the above examples illustrate how Monei succeeds in subverting the western, humanistic, enlightenment ideal of "man" (and its racial typology), seeing a tension in these ideals. This discursive tension that Monei identifies with the Bible at once challenges the origin and authority of the English Book and, as Bhabha rightly observes, inaugurates a moment of *Enstellung*, a process of disavowal, dislocation, "displacement, fantasy, psychic defence, and an 'open' textuality" (Bhabha 2004: 153) whereby logocentrism or the Word is stripped of its theocratic authority, and

becomes the “oubuom – kernel of nonsense” *ibid.*: 178). Thus by challenging and putting in the melting pot the ideas of the biblical creation myth, the totem of Jesus, the efficacy of the Bible itself, as well as the reality of hell, Monei engages in hybridity.

It is important to note that Monei sees in western modernity (as exemplified by Father James) a disabling ambivalence. In the famous Derridean term of the supplement, she deconstructs and displaces this language of authority located in modernity’s notion of “progress” and gives history the lie. This lie is evident when Monei is able to locate, yet again, more dissonance in the idea of “woman” as “construction” in both African and western societies. This issue of femininity and its construction is embodied in the character of Monei’s grandmother who, having uncritically internalized the patriarchal system, enjoins Monei to embrace it unquestioningly as well. In a mater-of-fact gesture of kow-towing to age-old traditional values with overt overlays of patriarchal bias, Monei’s grandmother reminds her of the role of women in society: “to bring forth children” (p. 53). Further, Monei becomes aware that modernity (as stated earlier, defined as a cluster of ideas, knowledge and assumptions derived from the Enlightenment) conspires with the so-called tradition to form a social canker which relegates women to the status of subservience. Religion, Monei notes, becomes the axiomatic signifier of meaning in the Lacanian Law of the Father, and, through Father James, Roman Catholicism adds adversely to this signification. The Catholic priest’s injunction to Monei merely mirrors the traditional and submissive role she has to play because “men had the God-Given power to rule over

women” (p. 53) according to the Bible. An instance of displacement occurs when Father James tells Monei that “bearing children was a punishment from God for Eve’s wickedness” (p. 53) while, for her grandmother, “child bearing was a blessing from God and the ancestors” (p. 53). Monei is made to juggle with these apparent moral certainties and relics of modernity, all of which are inscribed in the colonial discourse which defines the contours of her society. But just short of internalizing these certainties, Monei’s father disabuses her of them, assuring her that her future lies in the modern education with which he will provide her. He says:

“But for you, Nei, your future will be different. Independence means new things. New challenges my child, which means new skills. That is why we sent you to school. So that you can have the tools to meet this new wind that is blowing.” (p. 131)

The new challenges catapult Monei into the borderlands of culture, as demonstrated by the way she is able to shift out of her traditional formation and focus into a mode of thinking that is more rational, more analytical. Steeped in tradition themselves, both Monei’s father and mother desire Monei’s future to be different to their way of life by embracing certain liberating forms of modernity through education. For instance, believing in the efficacy of modern education, Monei’s mother advises her against dropping out of school – the only place which holds out hope for the future. Thus for Monei, a different future beckons, and it is one which does away with paradigms that uphold tradition or valorize the self/other dualities which are the site of oppression in her traditional society. On being asked by her teacher,

for example, what she would like to become in future, Monei decides to become “the Queen” (*JT* p. 44), “a doctor” (p. 44), “a nurse” (p. 44) – all at once. Later, when she and Martha become top of the class, they decide on becoming barristers, all this because Monei cannot figure out why only men became doctors, presidents or principals (p. 45). By being open-minded about career choices, Monei manages to adopt multiple and liberating speaking positions, and thus embraces a new *mestiza* consciousness of borderlands, one which allows her to intuit the dangers of reifying tradition, making women ahistorical and transcendent symbols of culture (as presented by both Father James and her grandmother). Instead of aligning herself with this perception that engenders oppression, Monei now enters a state of nepantlism³ which are “thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives” (Anzaldua 2002: 1). Commenting on *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Sidone Smith writes:

For Anzaldua the topography of the borderland is simultaneously the suturing space of multiple oppressions and the potential liberatory space through which to migrate toward a new subject position. The geographical trope is at once psychological, physical, and spiritual, since it functions as a space where cultures conflict, contest and reconstitute one another. (1993: 169)

Monei’s new subject position involves, as Homi Bhabha would put it, taking “[t]he view from the cultural seam that solders two great

³ See Anzaldua (1987: 78; 2002: 1) where she uses the above concept to mean *mestiza* the consciousness, or borderlands.

wounded worlds” (2002: 196), the movements of peoples across boundaries or any forms of cultural divides, even if this simultaneously entails a rejection of both oppressive traditions (p. 144) as well as a rethinking, re-evaluation and rearticulation of particular, localized modernities.

This is significant for Monei because she has experienced the disjunctive space of modernity, a clashing of meanings. This explains the process of cultural difference, a form of intervention which is inimical to totalization and other forms of cultural generalizations. In a way, Monei refuses to belong to modernity unquestioningly. Hence, from this point right through to the end of the novel, Monei begins to take on a hybrid identity. Homi Bhabha argues that “[t]he jarring of meanings and values generated in the process of cultural interpretation is an effect of the perplexity of living in the liminal spaces” (2004: 232) which constitute sites for cultural contestation, and therefore that a transcultural negotiation is a manifestation of the process of cultural translation.

A further case of delegitimation in *Juggling Truths* is explored in terms of the socially constructed nature of nationhood. Unity Dow presents notions of history and of nationalism, gained through independence, as artifacts with immensely farcical characteristics. Only through an altercation between the school headteacher and Mrs Tobane about the Berlin Conference which led to the partition of Africa, is Monei able to appreciate the ironies of colonialism. For example, Mrs. Tobane is convinced that the Conference was as

much a party as it was a waste of time given that the Bechuanaland Protectorate was administered from the Union of South Africa for almost a century.⁴ That Britain, the absent power, is, in 1966, conferring a new status on Botswana through independence remains another contentious issue between the two interlocutors. One of the sticking points, for instance, is the question of who possesses the right to represent what in the new nation of Botswana, especially given that a good number of places in the new city of Gaborone are named after some British man or woman connected to the colonial enterprise. Monei wants

to know why my school, the local hospital and now the big hospital in Gaborone were all named after white women. (p. 74)

Even more importantly, *Unity* reflects on the idea of independence. With little fuss and no real colonial cobwebs to brush away, *Unity Dow* describes the Botswana of 1966 as the Bechuanaland Protectorate slipping quietly out of the British imperial grip and becoming the modern Botswana nation. Reminiscing about independence, this is what Monei, the protagonist, has to say:

That was the year 1966, when my country got its name, Botswana, back. No longer would it have to use the long and sounding name, British Bechuanaland Protectorate. On a windy and disagreeable day, we marched from our respective schools waving blue, black, and white paper flags celebrating independence and the right to claim our

⁴ See *Juggling Truths*, p. 74. "... And who wrote the history books anyway? And were you there to say, No, don't put the ruler there. Move it to the left. You are going through a whole village." Were you? No. They filed into a room and drew straight lines this way and that way with no regard for people living where their rulers went.

country's name. I have to say that my first thought, when I saw the new flags, was that they could have done better, in terms of colours and design. I thought, 'such boring colors and such simple lines!' (p. 72)

On this auspicious occasion, when nationhood-affirming feelings ought to take centre stage, Monei is anything but happy, her celebratory mood having been sullied by the humdrum colours of the flag, as well as the wind which had made the day "disagreeable". The independence inaugural has left a sour taste, its meaning having dissipated on the very first day.

I would have liked for the Principal and Mrs Tobane to continue their arguments. One learned a lot from such exchanges, I had long ago decided. I would have wanted to know why my school, the local hospital and now the big hospital in Gaborone were all named after white women. Who were these women? But I wondered silently and dared not open my mouth. Instead I sang with the rest of the school, waving my little paper flag and marched to the centre of the village to celebrate my nation's independence. I didn't feel particularly independent, though. (p. 74)

Monei's feelings call attention to Benedict Anderson and his reflections on nationalism. Traceable to the eighteenth century Europe, the idea of a modern nation, he reminds us, is a social construct, as demonstrated in Monei's incipient intelligence. In his theorizing which adopts a purely anthropological approach, Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community" (1983: 15) whose members are practically strangers to one another but nonetheless endeavour to forge an image of oneness and harmony arising from what Homi Bhabha calls "patriotic fervour", that merely

assumes a projection of a society at peace with itself. The nation is “[t]he space of arbitrary sign” (Bhabha 2004: 227). Hence as a result of the discussions between the Principal and Mrs Tobane regarding independence, Monei is convinced that the nation of Botswana is nothing but an arbitrary sign, and nationalism in general is “the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as “neurosis” in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attached to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies) and largely incurable” (Anderson 1983: 5, echoing Tom Nair). The school principal evinces a certain instance of the neurotic symptom described above when she threatens to dismiss Mrs Tobane for her unpatriotic behaviour. And Monei shares in this lack of patriotism.

As Ben Okri states, “[w]hen we live with overwhelming orthodoxies, the eruptions are greater. Then our dreams burst the banks of the acceptable” (1997: 57). These orthodoxies are embodied in the myths of rationality and progress. Unity Dow decides to throw the project of modernity overboard, in addition to rejecting her tradition, seeing it as forming part of what Iain Chambers terms “the repertoire of ‘epistemic violence’ (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) that formed the emerging constellation of modernity in which the West ... objectified the rest of the world and constituted itself as the Subject of History” (1996: 47). Through her challenging and displacement of the colossus that is modernity and its putative authority, particularly as contained in ideologies such as Christianity, nationality, and tradition, to cite but a

few examples, Monei gives the history of nationalism the lie. Consequently *Juggling Truths* concerns the displacement of the discourses of modernity and the dissolution of those boundaries (of truths) that these discourses have erected. Indeed, it is the case that the truth about modernity is being told in its disgusting ugliness.

This act of displacing modernity is given further resonance in Unity Dow's fourth novel, *The Heavens May Fall*, which was published at the close of 2006. In an interview with Unity Dow, she described the theme of the text as being

about power; ... about justice or the lack of it. In the final analysis, it's about striking a balance between the two forces.

What is interesting about the above remark is, firstly, the emphasis placed on the certainty of power and, secondly, Dow's own ambivalence toward the notion of justice, the ambivalence shown in the expression "or the lack of it". Justice, in Dow's view, assumes a simulacral characteristic: either being fully done or not at all. In the end, it is the ineffable and illusive non-position of "striking a balance" that Dow advocates. Striking a balance comes to denote the "in-between" space, or what Bhabha terms as "the overlap and displacement of difference" (2004: 2).

In a scintillating book review posted on the Litnet website, dated 23 March 2007, Mathilda Slabbert summarizes the themes embedded in Unity Dow's fourth novel as follows:

The themes of the novel are firmly embedded in the familiar ground of her profession, her stances on women and children's rights and the intense and sometimes contradictory sentiments surrounding traditional conventions and Western laws in dealing with cases of rape and abuse. (2007: 1)

It is important to note the term "contradictory" which introduces the notion of ambivalence, similar to Dow's attitude described above. *The Heavens May Fall*, argues Slabbert, deals with raising awareness of important social issues affecting women and children in Botswana, as well as of other related issues associated with modern laws that draw their efficacy from the colonial legacy. In short, the text is also about investigating and reinscribing both tradition and modernity. On a certain level, the engagements in Unity Dow's fourth novel can be seen as a poignant reminder of the events of the 1990s court case already mentioned, except that here all she is interested in doing is to expose the wrongs through fiction.

As in *Juggling Truths* where Father James indulges the rhetorics of "natives" and court debates related to essentialist mystifications involving colonizers and the colonized, *The Heavens May Fall* also tackles these issues. There are other themes, in other words, with which *The Heavens May Fall* deals, including the colonizer/colonized hierarchy. Of crucial importance for our purposes is that *The Heavens May Fall* acts as a testament to the emergence and inexorable pervasiveness of a new era defined by global capital, an era attested to by modernization. In other words, modernity may be in its infancy

in *Juggling Truths* but has certainly reached a different level of fruition in *The Heavens May Fall* and consequently inflects identities.

Set at the threshold of the twenty-first century, almost forty years later on the time scale after the events of *Juggling Truths*, *The Heavens May Fall* gains its inspiration from a Latin saying, “[!]et justice be done or the heavens fall”. Unity Dow here uses this title as a metaphor for what she perceives to be the enduring flaws located in patriarchy, in particular, and modernity, in general, which often stand in the way in society. The nation of Botswana, like a whole range of postcolonial countries, has embraced certain forms of modernity, such as the legal system, which do not function properly because such societies are highly patriarchal. In the case of *The Heavens May Fall*, Dow suggests that any failure of the forms of logocentrism that help society to transform would entail her using her incisive intellect and indomitable will to bear on the situation until it alters. Her fourth work is as much about female and child abuse in a postcolonial African country grappling with modernization as it is a continuous and an unsententious interrogation of modernity, again modernity defined in terms both the grand narratives of the enlightenment era and of modernisation.

As in *Far and Beyond* and *Juggling Truths*, Unity Dow dedicates her work to her three children, whom she describes as “Africans”. She writes:

To my three children, Chileshe, Tumisang and Natasha,
three Africans to whom I say: Africa, why are you stoic,

hugging your hurts to yourself? Are you afraid they will dislike you? Africa, why are you so secretive, burying your ills deep within yourself? Are you afraid they will judge you? Let them dislike you; let them judge you; but Africa, do like yourself; and above all, Africa, do judge yourself.
(dedication page)

Rather than share some nuggets of wisdom as in the previous novels, she instead decides to give a scathing address to a somewhat symbolic audience which she calls “Africa” – apparently a colonial label which is used and continues to be invoked by “Africans” to perpetrate injustices that are cloaked in the name of “culture”. This is what is odious about this “Africa”, Dow contends: the fact that the continent harbours a great number of ills in her bosom. Dow rhetorically recommends an introspection and a willingness to accept constructive criticism as the antidote, particularly given that the continent’s embracing of modernization is fast and furious. At this point, the reader gains a poignant sense that perhaps Unity Dow’s autobiography has come full circle in her fourth novel where, in a rather surreal way, the entire continent is called forth to account for its excesses.

The children being addressed have an American father and therefore a double identity. It is a matter of intriguing irony that in their split identity which Paul Gilroy calls “double consciousness” (1993: 50), or Homi Bhabha a “doubling of identity” (2004: 72), the three “Africans” are not Africans as we know them, but rather inhabit an intersubjective moment of hybridity best exemplified by Paul Gilroy’s notion of the “Black Atlantic” and the diasporic pathways it produces.

As a “transnational space of traversal, cultural exchange, production, and belonging”, the Black Atlantic “disrupt[s] contemporary forms of cultural nationalism” (ibid.: 49) or what Gilroy calls “ethnic absolutism” (ibid.: 49). Thus Unity Dow adumbrates the vexed debate of the “counterculture of modernity” in Botswana, the notion of modernity and its incomplete identities.

In The Heavens May Fall, Naledi Chaba is a lawyer, working at Bana-Bantle Children’s Agency. Unity Dow has this to say about her protagonist’s workplace:

Bana Bantle Children’s Agency in Mochudi is an organization whose name, meaning beautiful children, does not even begin to tell half the story of what it does. When it was first founded and for two years thereafter, the agency was a counselling centre for abused children. This was when the Swedes were funding it. Then the funding ran out and, when the Dutch indicated they were willing to fund a counselling centre for victims of domestic violence, the agency re-invented itself. After that, a legal wing to the centre was established, or rather evolved. In the end we did anything from placing children in foster homes, to nagging and or suing deadbeat fathers to support their children, handling divorce matters and defending women charged with all kinds of crimes. (p. 40)

This, in short, is what has become of the postcolonial state of Botswana as Dow portrays it. With the protagonist being thrown in at the deep end, child abuse, domestic violence, foster care and divorce matters are some of the issues with which this society has to contend. Dow’s Botswana here is by no means the African village depicted in *Juggling Truths* where a measure of harmony is achieved

through communal living: *The Heavens May Fall* deals with a modern state caught in global configurations of power and trying to contend with modernity in its current post colonial form. In this state, one sees “the proliferation of extranational organizations that intrude increasingly in the space of the national – national sovereignty is no longer to be taken for granted” (Dirlik 2002: 612).

Again, *The Heavens May Fall* constructs the idea of culture not based on tradition but translated through modernization – the legal system, technology, language, dress, to mention some examples. Thus on one level, Botswana’s shifting cultural identity is manifested in Naledi’s serious and challenging job “as the in-house attorney” (p.39). This involves either representing children who are victims of abuse or women in need of legal aid, or acting as a liaison (for the same women and children) with (rather hateful) non-governmental organizations that are prepared to offer various forms of assistance to them through maintenance or education. Against this background Naledi takes up a case involving the fifteen-year old Nancy Badisa who is a victim of rape by a tenant. But then the rapist is given a “not guilty” verdict in a civil court. This prompts Naledi to seek an order allowing her to take the case to the High Court, and “compelling the respondent to undergo an HIV test for the reason that the respondent has exposed the applicant to unprotected sex” (p. 104). However, because of the “ever shifting goal posts in the legal system” (p. 66), the High Court Judge, who has a murky past, throws out the case even before he hears it. It emerges again that the defendant is HIV negative. In the end, the case is not resolved. Given the issues with

which Naledi is involved, the reader comes to understand that the nature of Botswana's cultural identity as depicted in *The Heavens May Fall* has become "an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity" (Bhabha 2004: 251). This is consonant with the reality of the postcolonial world, as Bhabha confirms:

The postcolonial perspective forces us to rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive 'liberal' sense of cultural community. It insists that cultural and political identity are constructed through a process of alterity. (2004: 251)

On another level, *The Heavens May Fall* is a work in which Unity Dow reflects on and reassesses modernity (understood as urbanization and modernization), in particular considering how time has wrought changes that leave Naledi, and perhaps everyone else in her time, mildly surprised, and even mildly foolish. It seems the passing years have dulled the nation's faith in the efficacy of tradition, the tradition about which Monei's grandmother waxes so lyrical in *Juggling Truths*. In an act of ambivalence brought about by cultural difference, *The Heavens May Fall* explores the slippage of signification, especially in those instances where it dawns on Naledi that her country's "[w]ritten law enjoyed primacy over customary law" (p. 60); the country has a successful Olympic team (p. 15); most institutions are run on the ethics of a "SWOT analysis" (p. 40), and there are "expensive private schools in Gaborone ... with children from practically all over the world" (p. 57). Again, Bhabha comments:

Cultural difference introduces into the process of cultural judgement and interpretation that sudden shock of the successive, non-synchronic time of signification, or the

interruption of the supplementary question The very possibility of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the ground of knowledges, or to engage in a 'war of position', marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification. Designations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always 'incomplete' or open to cultural translation. (2004: 233)

Further, Dow, in this case perhaps represented as Naledi, is able to recollect that she was "born and raised in the Botswana of no tar-roads, no running water and no electricity, limited places in school" (pp.166-7). But things have changed fast, with her communities assuming a virtual diasporic identity, reflected in modernization as follows:

...the huts were replaced by bigger, multiple roomed houses with electricity, indoor plumbing and in some cases telephones. The national diamond wealth had translated, at the individual level, into access to state-subsidised utilities, free education and free health care. (p. 96)

In yet another context in *The Heavens May Fall*, Unity Dow reflects on the concept of African beauty and embodiment in the twenty-first century, especially as modernity stares down on this postcolonial nation with all manner of minutiae. She eventually reaches the conclusion that the idea of the so-called African beauty is a metaphysical construct and can hardly be defended at all in this day and age. As Naledi says:

But finally, it is by the standards of the glossy magazines that we measure ourselves and it is by those standards that our peers judge us. Our peers are college-educated

and many have studied abroad. They watch blockbuster movies and play American music at their weddings. They watch a pop star and complain, 'She has gained weight!' This is about a frail-looking woman who is selling her music but also to offer her looks as part of the package. (p. 14-15)

Naledi's reflection on embodiment calls attention to Gloria Anzaldua's fluid concept of the borderlands or *mestiza* consciousness. This concept emerges from her desire to debunk not only colonial history and its cultural systems but also the history of the oppressed or colonized. Aware of the monolithic nature of most official cultural histories and the need to present and project history as inherently multiple, Anzaldua's state of the borderlands is a new consciousness which is arrived at through the politics of language and in which the new, revolutionary subject evades a dualistic ontology of identification by continually traversing cultures. The result of this revolution in the subject is that the matrices of identification are multiplied to a point where she attains the enabling and empowering status of embracing more than one culture.

By foregrounding the constructed nature of identity, Unity Dow presents the idea of history as something that is not stable and fixed. Monei, Dow's protagonist in *Juggling Truths*, becomes a representative figure of the revolutionary subject of the borderlands by exploding myths about any firm and settled notions about history and tradition. Some of these myths are propagated by Father James as well as Monei's revered grandmother.

To conclude, this chapter has argued just how the grand signifiers and foundations of knowledge located in enlightenment modernity are laid bare by Monei and Naledi, the protagonists of Unity Dow's *Juggling Truths* and *The Heavens May Fall* respectively. On the one hand, Monei grows out of traditional beliefs and humanist ideals and their tendency to overgeneralize and sometimes universalize meaning and identity. Thus a constricting orthodoxy found in both African patriarchy has been challenged just as Western logocentricity and historicism have also been interrogated and destabilized. This has been illustrated by the way in which, through the main character, Dow raises important questions about belonging to modernity, for example, by perceiving the authority of the Bible in terms of cultural relativism. To use Homi Bhabha's words, through mimicry, Monei's analysis of her society constitutes a cultural translation in which she alienates the "enlightenment idea of 'Man'" and challenges the transparency of social reality as a pregiven image of human knowledge" (2004: 59). On the other hand, Dow's *The Heavens May Fall* stages the idea of cultural translation as containing terms of reference that are radically different from the earlier text. Here culture is no longer defined in terms of modernity as an ontology with its notions of progress, rationality, cultural supremacy – all of which are a product of imperialism. Rather, modernity is the prism (of modernization) which influences people's identity in all the particulars of their lives. Thus cultural translation entails Bhabha's notion of the time-lag which reinscribes or reinterpretes modernity from a new angle and turns it into a catachrestic gesture for the purposes of the

transformation and performance of identity. In *The Heavens May Fall* Dow's Botswana represents a new template of change (brought about by modernization) exemplified by the borderlands of culture and identity that are experienced in people's lives.

Chapter Four

Borderlands of Cultures

The liminal or central phase of elaborate ritual is clearly dominated by the subjunctive mood of culture. So too are the productions of artists of all types For they are masters of the “paralimina or liminoid,” if not of the liminal. Their works may not be overtly concerned with invisible or ultrahuman beings and powers ... but they are surely concerned with ... with the assignment of meaning to the moral complexities and paradoxes of human social and individual life, with glosses, commentaries, and evaluations of the stream of the intersubjective events that compose the lives of communities – systems of connective persons and individuals. Furthermore, they are concerned with possibilities, not merely with what seems to be the case at the given moment in terms of the authoritative assumptions of the given culture. They are concerned with variants, with alternatives, with that which is nobler or baser, more beautiful or uglier, purer or more corrupt, than the current dominant social construction of reality accepted as fact, as culture’s indicative mood. They are inherently sceptical of the received wisdom, the worldly wisdom. (Turner 1992: 135)

The above passage conveys and underlines something of the fluid and shifting nature of identity which Homi Bhabha sees as pervasive in the postcolonial condition. Characterized by what Turner calls “the stream of intersubjective events that compose the lives of communities – systems of connective persons and individuals” (ibid.: 135), the subjunctive mood is the hypothetical mode that points up a culture’s certain “playfulness”, non-positionality or hybrid moments

which are also instances of antistructure and can be exemplified by culture's capacity to be tentative rather than normative, connotative rather than denotative, subjunctive rather than indicative, fluid rather than fixed. Thus the subjunctive mood crucially implies the articulation of temporalities of transition and movements of meaning across various realms of possibilities.¹

This chapter examines the subjunctive mood of culture or temporalities of transition in Alexander McCall Smith's so-called detective fiction on Botswana. In analysing these temporalities, I concentrate on Smith as a writer of vision whose voice is projected into the characters he has created, in particular his alter ego Precious Ramotswe (endearingly called by the honorific Mma), a seemingly constituted figure of African identity, but who also undoubtedly represents a rupture in the subjectivity of the African woman, now at a cross-roads of identity. Smith uses reflective interludes and moments of ambivalence which punctuate the narratives of *The No 1 Ladies Detective Agency* series, in order to interrogate the notion of identity as being inscribed on the body (of this "African" woman). I demonstrate throughout this chapter that McCall Smith's texts are liminal novels, with no roots in one place, which display links across Africa and beyond, depicting a society caught between two imaginaries of the local and the global. These links bring forth what Edward Said calls a text's "worldliness", a term he uses to refer to a web of affiliations and connections a text often has with the world;

¹ See Turner (1992), pp. 57, 150 and 153. He discusses liminal phenomena as being fundamentally paradoxical, a characteristic which points to the subjunctive mood of culture.

these connections convey the notion of non-positionality and introduce what Said calls the paradox of identity. Smith's texts evidence overlays of literary tropes such as deft humour, gentle irony, subtle wit and comic understatement – all employed to accentuate the concept of worldliness, and hence the paradox of identity – a paradox of immense proportion though often obscured if the stories are taken at face value or subjected to practical criticism. I argue in this chapter that Smith's use of the tropes mentioned above emphasizes his commitment to and profound engagement with the subjunctive mood of culture, the *limen* or paradox of identity in modern Africa.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha captures Turner's rendering of the subjunctive mood of culture (or the liminality of the postcolonial condition) through the use of metaphors or temporalities of transition and various expressions of identity that resist closure and are therefore fundamentally intersubjective. For Bhabha, fluid registers such as contingency, indeterminism, undecidability, and incommensurability are employed as building blocks for his commitment to the liminality of identity, describing as they do the intersubjective moment of signification prevalent in the postcolonial condition. Consider Bhabha's argument below:

My contention elaborated in my writings on postcolonial discourse in terms of mimicry, hybridity, sly civility, is that this liminal moment of identification – eluding resemblance – produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative 'unpicking' and incommensurable, insurgent relinking. It singularizes the 'totality' by

suggesting that agency requires a grounding, but it does not require a totalization of those grounds; it requires movement and manoeuvre, but it does not require a temporality of continuity or accumulation; it requires direction and contingent closure but no teleology and holism. (2004: 265)

Here, Bhabha means that agency or individuation takes place in a disjunctive space of temporality which is hardly a transcendence or an expressive totality of the sign but rather “a form of retroactivity, *Nachtraglichkeit*” (ibid.: 265) according to which signification is left indeterminate, open to negotiation, and occurs contingently or iteratively. As I have reiterated throughout the thesis, my choice of Turner and Bhabha is deliberate: both emphasize the significance of the temporality of the intersubjective, what Bhabha terms as “the hybrid moment outside the sentence – not quite experience, not yet concept; part dream, part analysis, neither signifier nor signified” (2004: 260). It is this “in-between” which the novels of McCall Smith invoke, and which concerns me in this chapter.

In an attempt to explicate the intersubjective space of enunciation at the core of culture, Bhabha extensively deploys poststructuralist/postmodernist metaphors such as Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive notion of dissemination, Walter Benjamin’s description of fractured and floundering modernities, Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities”, and Fredric Jameson’s understanding of postmodernism as “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, to point up Turner’s notion of the subjunctive mood or the intersubjective realm, often expressed in terms of antistructure but

always emphasizing the liminal or hybrid moment located in the postcolonial condition. Bhabha's use of these shifting metaphors is intended to point to the agency of the hybrid moment.

Alexander McCall Smith was born in Bulawayo, in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1949. He was educated in both Zimbabwe and Edinburgh, Scotland, before returning to Africa, specifically Botswana, in the early 1980s to assist in setting up the Department of Law at the then new University of Botswana. More recently, Smith has become well-known as a prolific writer of popular fiction, especially *The No1 Ladies Detective Agency* series, with over fifty books² to his name. This series – set in Botswana – is clearly inspired by his African experience, both as a young man growing up in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and, later, as a teacher and traveller within sub-Saharan Africa. Smith may not be solely a practitioner of the detective genre, given that he has also penned various books in his legal field, but the series he has produced is a multilayered story which has had a considerable popular appeal not because of the nature of the adopted genre, but largely, it may be surmised, owing to his generous portrayal of his female protagonist Precious Ramotswe³ – a fairly substantial woman who fondly describes herself as “traditionally built”, and whose mien stands for every solid, estimable

² Smith's *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* is the first in a sequence of eight Precious Ramotswe novels. This thesis deals with only the first six. The two not examined in this thesis are *Blue Shoes of Happiness* and *The Good Husband of Zebra Drive*. Other works by Smith include the following: *Two and Half Pillars of Wisdom*, *The Sunday Philosophy Club* (a series), *44 Scotland Street* (a series), *Friends, Lovers, Chocolate*, *The Right Attitude to Rain*, *Espresso Tales*, *Love Over Scotland*, *The Girl Who Married a Lion*, and *Dream Angus*.

³ *The No 1 Ladies Detective Agency* received two Booker Judge Special Recommendations and Smith received recognition for his work in 2004 when he was presented with the award of 'Author of the Year' by both the British Book Awards and the Booksellers Associations.

value such as good morality and prudence, in fact as solid as her well-formed “African figure”. While seemingly assigning Precious Ramotswe (and Africa, in this case) the role of preserving vestigial aspects of tradition (or Africanness), Smith’s fictional universe is one where tradition and modernity are always in contestation. Precious Ramotswe may be made to speak on behalf of both Botswana and Africa’s memory, tradition and culture, but, I argue in this chapter, Smith’s fictional world abounds with ironies and equivocations which shatter notions of fixity of culture and instead usher in the hybrid moment.⁴

Each of the six of Smith’s texts discussed in this chapter bears the stamp or evidences the skein of intuitive Precious Ramotswe investigating some mystery – a disappearance, a possible murder, an indiscretion, and so forth. For example, unfaithful husbands, a wayward Indian girl, a bogus Nigerian doctor, and a boy found in the hinterland of the Kalahari for a possible ritual murder, preoccupy Ramotswe’s detective endeavours in *The No 1 Ladies Detective Agency*. *Tears of the Giraffe* revolves around Jack, son of an American expatriate family, who disappears without trace. *Morality for Beautiful Girls* tells of a wife trying to poison a husband whereas in *The Kalahari Typing School for Men*, Ramotswe investigates the

⁴ At the time of concluding this thesis, *The No 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* was being made into a film in Botswana’s capital of Gaborone, with Hollywood fully involved in the shooting. Directed by Oscar-winning Anthony Minghella and produced by Amy Moore, the film’s protagonist heroine Precious Ramotswe, is American blues singer and diva Jill Scott. At the time this writer visited Botswana to meet Mr Smith (in August 2007), the production team and the government of Botswana were working jointly and closely on this venture which the latter hopes will offer a tourism boost through special Precious Ramotswe Tours. It is important to note also that more than one thousand locals have been employed during the shooting, with the local directors and producers learning from the best in the world.

activities of a rival male detective as well as finding the owner of a radio stolen a long time previously, in order to cause the thief to apologize and make peace with the owner. *The Full Cupboard of Life* is dominated by the case of Miss Holonga, a supremely successful business woman with a traditionally-built face, who asks Ramotswhe to investigate on her behalf whether her many suitors who propose to her do so for her money or are genuinely in love. Finally, Ramotswhe's marriage to JLB Matekoni is consummated in Smith's sixth instalment, *In the Company of Cheerful Ladies*. In this text, Ramotswhe's assignment is reduced to a visit to a local market where she notices and stops a woman stealing a bangle from an inattentive trader.

When the first in the series of *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* came out in 1998, it took the world by storm, becoming "one of the most consistent selling titles of 2003" (*Bookseller*: 14). By the time Smith published *The Full Cupboard of Life*, his fifth instalment, the series had been treated to rave or at least favourable reviews, selling millions of copies. The range and force of the reviews is of compelling interest, as will be shown below, largely owing to the consummate skill with which Smith has dealt with his subject. Using the so-called detective genre and in a lighthearted style, Smith has brought into relief some of the most perplexing issues and debates in African literature. Thus while on the one hand, some reviewers categorically pointed out that Smith's novels were mysteries of the conventional detective genre, others took a more measured view, on the other,

pointing to the genre's complexity and futurity⁵. The latter argued that Smith's portrayal of an Africa that is of such interest to Western readers points to and parades the transnational themes of his work.

At the back of Smith's first in the series, *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, a catchy blurb but loaded with meaning pithily seems to summarize Smith's quest or engagement, as follows:

Wayward daughters. Missing husbands. Philandering partners. Curious conmen. If you've got a problem, and no one else can help you, then pay a visit to Precious Ramotswe, Botswana's only – and finest – female private detective.

The above is what a first read through Smith texts is likely to deliver: a quick (but, as I argue, glaringly limited) moral summation, a summation that puts Smith's fiction tidily within the detective genre but which belies his texts' open-endedness and dialogic nature. As the following reviews show, Smith's novels display that openendedness, leading to dissonant, if intriguing, views.

"Lovers of mysteries are in for a treat" (2004: 11) was an unequivocal comment by Ann Burns and Joseph Carlson who hailed Smith's award-winning series as pure moral mysteries, thereby suggesting that the texts belong to pop culture. Putting Smith's texts in the same

⁵ See Victor Turner (1992): p. 154: "Perhaps that is why our greatest artists – Homer, Murasaki, Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Beethoven, Bach, Dostoevsky – produce works full of futurity, of secrets which in some cases millenia of interpretations have hardly begun to bring to light. For such works are not just products of the creative process; they are creativity itself, flashes of the "fire that can," which can never be consummated or terminated because it is the sign of our species' most distinctive feature, its as-yet-unrealized evolutionary potential, its "meonic" freedom – to use Nicholas Berdyaev's term – its perennial hope, its unused cerebral potential.

category as Burns and Carlson had done, Jeff Chu described the novels as “detail[ing] the quiet and quirky adventures of Botswanan sleuth Mma ... Ramotswe” whose “quotidian challenges [are] common to every country” (2004: 143).

More effusive in his comments, and also echoing Burns and Carlson, was Jeff Zaleski for whom Smith’s fiction is a “Literature of optimism”, its protagonist Ramotswe the “Miss Marple of Mochudi” (2003: 38), and “an unapologetic propagandist for progress and morality”; and Smith himself “[a] newcomer ... in the pantheon of detective storytellers” (2003: 20). What is intriguing about Zaleski’s comments is a slippage or dissonance introduced at the point at which Ramotswe is not just a sleuth, but also an advocate for modernity (or progress). This slippage is also noted by Simon Jenkins:

Mma Ramotswe shouts out of Africa that honesty and a respect for traditional values can redeem all the horrors of the headlines. They can marry happiness to progress. They can save Africa. They can save the world. (2003: 22)

At the core of the above reviews is a kind of representation that is revealing of a slippage of signification. This slippage, which has been hinted at by Smith himself, signals a disjunctive social imaginary, a certain interruptive insurgency in his fiction which lends it to a multiplicity of readings.

In various interviews, for instance, Smith’s stock response concerning the nature of his “detective” fiction has been as follows:

I do think that these books might be difficult to put into any specific tradition. They are obviously about Africa, but you see, there is no crime in these books. Mma Ramotswe is a private detective whose job is to help people with problems which have little to do with crime. Some people have told me that they remind them of a great Indian writer called R.K. Narayan.⁶

In another context, Smith had this to say:

I think the picture that we get of Africa on a daily basis is a continent which is really sorely troubled in various respects. And, of course, all that is true, but there is (sic) so many good people in sub-Saharan African countries who are leading decent lives with good humour and generosity, spirit. And that is the side of Africa I want to portray. I don't want to write heart of darkness novels. (Simons 2004: 3)

Smith's noncommittal responses are deeply significant in that they suggest his eschewal of ideological posturing and instead confirm his transnational portrayal of identity, particularly as foregrounded in the various and varied reviews which, according to my reading approach, point to the borderlines of culture. It is for this reason that I read the texts as providing an incisive diagnosis of what Bhabha calls the power of cultural difference, or the fact that culture is a matter of interpretation. Botswana is undergoing such unprecedented change that Precious Ramotswe's detective work involves hunting down not murder s (as in the case of famous Agatha Christie's Miss Marple) but rather devious spouses (usually perfidious men), embezzlers and

⁶ In a recorded telephone interview which was held on 10 June 2005, Smith gave the above response in answer to the question of whether his detective fiction on Botswana falls into the category of African novels or should be read as mystery/detective fiction with its roots in Britain and America. Smith has been consistent in giving the same answer in many other interviews in Europe, America and Australia.

fraudsters, all of whom have been lured into the maelstrom that is modern Botswana by the advent of capitalism.

This depiction of identity as a function of capital modernity is evident in the very opening line of the first book in the series, as follows: “Mma Ramotswe had a detective agency in Africa, at the foot of Kgale Hill” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 1). Although the reader is given an awareness of Botswana’s vegetation, notably “the [acacia] thorn tree which dots the wide edges of the Kalahari” (ibid.: 1), Smith does not go into detail about portraying Botswana or the African landscape as the Edenic idyll that is implied in the above opening line. Instead, with gentle humour, he takes the reader straight into the activities of Precious Ramotswe, the protagonist, a genteel, middle-class woman with enough “human intuition and intelligence” (p. 1) to set up a private detective agency. With further wry humour, Smith goes on to describe Ramotswe’s basic assets as being

a tiny white van, two desks, a telephone and an old typewriter. Then there was teapot, in which Mma Ramotswe – the only lady private detective in Botswana – brewed redbush tea. And three mugs – one for herself, one for her secretary and one for the client. (p. 1)

It is important to note that apart from the known potency of brewed redbush tea in fitness regimes, none of the above assets would be of much help in solving a crime. In a description of the painted sign that advertises the agency, the terms used are so ambiguous as to be a disclaimer or to suggest that the agency is a mere consultancy:

THE NO 1 LADIES’ DETECTIVE AGENCY. FOR ALL
CONFIDENTIAL MATTERS AND ENQUIRIES.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED FOR ALL PARTIES...
(p. 1)

In another instance, the lawyer who was charged with administering her trust fund chats to Ramotswe, who presently compares herself to Agatha Christie, much to the surprise of the lawyer.

“Women are the ones who know what’s going on,” she said quietly. “They are the ones with eyes. Have you not heard of Agatha Christie?”

The lawyer looked taken aback. “Agatha Christie? Of course I know her. Yes, that’s true. A woman sees more than a man sees. That is well known.”

“So,” said Mma Ramotswe, “when people see a sign saying NO 1 LADIES’ DETECTIVE AGENCY, what will they think? They’ll think those ladies will know what’s going on. They’re the ones.” (pp. 59-60)

The lawyer is surprised to learn this, suggesting his incredulity about Ramotswe’s intentions and credentials regarding the venture.

The subtext of the above examples seems clear: Smith’s fiction is not hardboiled detective mystery but consists of loosely detective novels which allow him to write about ordinary lives, yet in a manner that refrains from inscribing Africa in the language of alterity or “otherness”, as Smith indicates in his interviews. Smith’s fiction is about the softer side of the African continent portrayed through detective work, not a necessarily one-sided view of Africa in itself – the prelapsarian continent or one dogged by ills and difficulties; his writing suggests the eschewal of a Manichaeian ideology in favour of an ethic that involves, invokes and embraces thinking in transition. Through Ramotswe, Smith uses the detective genre in order to write

about the Africa that is astride tradition and modernity, a view corroborated by Muff Anderssen and Elsie Cloete who argue that:

Ramotswe, as a female entrepreneur, straddles two worlds. In the one, Ramotswe socialises outside the traditional homestead and village and sits comfortably in the offices of lawyers, doctors and other officials and is not averse to taking a drink in a bar or tea on the veranda of an hotel. She has, above all, mobility in the shape of her little white van. In the other world, she maintains the traditional courtesies of greeting and respect and elicits, sometimes with the aid of a *pula* note or a gift of a dress, material information from women. (2006: 132)

The two worlds identified by Andersson and Cloete emphasize the point I make in this chapter, that Smith's most significant contribution in his fiction is his depiction of Botswana and Africa at the threshold or cutting edge of cultural identity, a threshold which makes the revisiting and revision of certain aspects of culture and tradition essential. As I hope to show, throughout all six of Smith's texts which are discussed in this thesis, an agency of examining and interrogating tradition is manifest, particularly in the character of Precious Ramotswe – a formidable and intuitive heroine with unimpeachable and inestimable values. Consequently it is the case that in Smith's texts the issue of colonialism is inflected recurrently and delicately, and Africa is a repetitive theme in order to emphasize the paradox of identity in the modern, globalized world.

Ramotswe's involvement in sleuthing activities may seem like the major ideological burden of Smith's fiction, or it might appear that the fiction represents his lament for a fading era in Africa characterized

by the life-affirming ideals embodied in his protagonist. But as will become clear in this chapter, Smith's vision is one of hybridity, in which new identities keep resurfacing and re-emerging in his works. Speaking across cultural divides of nativism and modernity, Smith's Precious Ramotswe must be one of many unsung, hybrid heroines of twenty-first century Africa who, well aware of the inanities of modernity and their impact on African identity, see modern Africa not as lodged in a purity of culture, but as inexorably and inextricably bound to modernity, in particular globalisation. Throughout his fiction on Botswana, Smith brings forth this vision of a changing identity, of Ramotswe balanced astride two cultures, with a deftness of touch, humour and irony.

In an attempt to explore and negotiate gaps in identity between cultures, McCall Smith radically rethinks the history of colonization, seeing it as a history that is perpetually disintegrating and re-integrating in the fluid and shifting interstices of modern life. Smith proceeds by carving the topos of the identity of Africa within the trope of hybridity. According to this trope, Africa is viewed not in terms of an unchanging past moving inexorably toward a fixed future, but rather as representing "the emergence of a form of social temporality that is iterative and indeterminate" (Bhabha 2004: 286). Within this iterative articulation of contingency and intersubjective history Botswana finds itself as "a community in discontinuity" (ibid.: 285).

Stated differently, the Africa defined through fixity of location as well as by means of a cultural norm tied to an immemorial past becomes disabled from time to time, being replaced by a more indeterminate and shifting reflex of a continent whose locus of identity is delicately balanced on a spatial-temporal continuum which is reminiscent of materialist thinker Walter Benjamin's analysis of time and space in ambiguous allegories. In other words, history is captured in its openness and intensity by the disorder that defines it but cannot bring it to a final resolution. This kind of openness or slippage turns Africa into a floating signifier whose present becomes so indeterminate as never to be fully grasped. This Africa is seen first through Precious Ramotswe's own liminal, day-to-day life, the relationship with other characters such as her former boyfriend, Note Mokoti, JLB Matekoni whom she goes on to marry, and her assistant Mmakutsi.

In an interview with WJT Mitchell⁷ in 1996, Homi Bhabha admits to being formatively influenced by Walter Benjamin with regard to his allegories, which conceptualize and transcend contradiction. Bhabha's definition of the Third Space of enunciation, a dialectic that is voided of all closure, is as a moment of transition. This moment of transition is also one of displacement and is at the core of Ramotswe's African world, especially as seen in the way in which Smith stages contradictions in his detective fiction. These contradictions appear in the moment of instantiation characterized by

⁷ In this interview, Bhabha fully and satisfactorily articulates his position of the *Third Space* through his use of Walter Benjamin's imagery which presents identity in shifting, problematic terms. Bhabha consolidates his position by mobilising poststructuralist notions of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan and Freud, all of them specialists in the field of identity.

Ramotswé's repetition of words such as "Botswana" or "Africa" as bespeaking cultural essentialism, fixity and purity.

This liminal zone (about Africa, Botswana, Ramotswé and the rest of Smith's characters) emerges from within Walter Benjamin's musings on notions of antagonisms and the dissonant temporalities that characterize, nay haunt, historical phenomena, one of these temporalities finding its most eloquent expression in the following description of a Klee painting called "Angelus Novus" or the angel of history:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him to the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 1973: 218)⁸

Walter Benjamin's paradoxical portrayal of the angel of history and Anne McClintock's description of the exhibit provide a useful entry point to and viable explanation concerning identity formation in the

⁸ The paradox that surrounds the angel of history has been compellingly described by Anne McClintock in an article entitled 'The Angel of Progress: The Pitfalls of Postcolonialism'. She effectively represents the cultural hybridization of the postcolonial condition, as follows: "To enter the Hybrid State exhibit on Broadway, you enter the Passage. Instead of a gallery, you find a dark antechamber, where one white word invites you forward: COLONIALISM. To enter colonial space, you stoop through a low door, only to be closeted in another black space – a curatorial reminder, however fleeting, of Fanon: 'The native is being hemmed in'. But the way out of colonialism, it seems, is forward. A second white word, POSTCOLONIALISM, invites you through a slightly larger door into the next stage of history, after which you emerge, fully erect, into the brightly lit and noisy HYBRID STATE."

said detective works of Alexander McCall Smith. For Benjamin, there is something about the quality of his thoughts in the above description that resonates forcefully with Smith's depiction of identity in postcolonial Botswana: a *zeitgeist* of ambivalence, indeterminism, and contingency, to name a few features, is captured to haunt the idea of history as a continuous forward momentum. Similarly, McClintock's description of the exhibit, especially its multiple time, points to her commitment to examining the hybrid history of colonialism. Throughout this chapter, I try to show how Smith's fiction can be seen as contradicting a linear logic and understanding of identity, instead being projected as a celebration of the hybrid or transcultural trope of colonialism.

Most commentators have argued that the self-evidently disorientated figure of Walter Benjamin's portrait of the Angel whose face is "turned to the past" and his back "turned to the future" symbolizes the staggering nonlinearity of history, owing to the puzzling instability that surrounds this overarching figure, so much so that its meaning can hardly be pinpointed. There is a contradiction, indeed paradox, suggested by the Angel's posture: "his face turned to the past and his back to the future". The Angel's gesture in order to awaken the dead and put broken things together, for example, contains resonances of the forlorn hope of trying to recover and redeem the past, which appears all but lost. As is evident in the portrait, the past cannot be salvaged, at least not in its entirety. Thus Ramotswe's attempts to salvage Africa's past tradition, even in the wake of a hurtling

postmodernity in the form of global capital, constitute an apt representation of hybridity.

It is the case, therefore, that Walter Benjamin, deeply sceptical of perceiving “history as a neutral and seamless web, progressing inexorably through “empty time”, yielding a continuous narrative whole” (Kearney and Rainwater 1996: 213), uses obscure representations and mental images to “attest to the need for an interpretive strategy that ‘brushes history against the grain’” (Ibid: 213). That is, Benjamin decentres any rationalizing totalities that have pretences to a centre. Similarly, in all six of *The No 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* series discussed in this chapter, Alexander McCall Smith clearly examines the logocentric of African historiography in the light of both tradition and modernity and, as I argue, the theme that runs through his fiction is the slippage of metaphors that he employs, the fact that Smith – the amanuensis of Ramotswe – abhors certainty in favour of another space that presents identity in terms of cross-cultural consciousness. The portrayal of Botswana or Africa (the landscape) and its inhabitants (all possible motifs for the angel) in such an inimitable way evidently tends towards brushing history against the grain. This way of viewing history runs counter to contemporary Afrocentric and realist logic, according to which African culture is part of a history that has progressed inexorably through “empty time”. In McCall Smith’s detective works, Precious Ramotswe’s intricate persona, illustrated through her multiple personality, revealingly indicates that Africa is not yoked to such a history; that there are no self-contained cultures; that instead it is the

blurred zone of the in-between, or a zone liminality, of “hybrid invisibility” (Rosaldo 1989:208) that remains a fertile space of cultural production.

In *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, for example, this kind of historiography emerges in the context of Ramotswa's early life whose significance casts into relief the translated and hybrid nature of Botswana during the colonial era. First, Africa is portrayed as “a world that seemed to have no end” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p.14), with the Bechuanaland Protectorate very much part of Rhodes' railway which traversed as well as linked the Protectorate to Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa. Through Ramotswa's act of remembering, the reader becomes aware of the transnational life of her father Obed Ramotswa who, “born ... in 1930” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 13) during the Protectorate, possesses two identities, given that he spends virtually all his working life in South African mines, often in the company of “people ... from Lesotho ... Mozambique and Malawi” (p. 18). Smith here not only de-nationalizes the Protectorate but also presents the whole of Southern Africa as a community “imagined” (Anderson: 1983: 5-7) by colonialism, as evident in the intermingling of the region's peoples. In other words, the entire Southern African sub-region is implicated in “double-writing or dissemi-nation” (2004: 212) to reflect the performative, “liminal figure of the nation-space” (ibid.: 212). So, nations should not be viewed as totalities but rather temporalities with no claims to any holism of culture.

A similar temporality of disavowal is evident in the way that Smith has portrayed Ramotswe's curvy and full-figured "African" body, often seen as a representative, if stereotyped, image of the continent's female body, treasured, especially in Botswana, for its unique and unitary embodiment. Patently feeding the stereotype, Smith describes Ramotswe's physique as follows:

Her weight was hardly a confidential matter, and anyway, she was proud of being a traditionally built African lady, unlike these terrible stick-like creatures she saw in the advertisements. (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 193)

Aligning Botswana to the entire continent of Africa, Smith's metaphor suggests a realism and sequentiality about his protagonist whose overdetermined embodiment portrays her as lodged in fixity – that Africa women are unperturbed by their huge body sizes. This "master narrative" seems the only explanation as to why, at least to the reader, larger-than-life Precious Ramotswe glows with pride as the bearer of Africa's most generous embodiment, while at the same not hiding her denigration of

those far-too-thin ladies ...(who) were useless, for everything. They were useless, good-time girls, who only made men all hot and bothered (*Tears* pp. 7 & 53).

Hence, according to McCall Smith, Precious Ramotswe, "an African patriot" (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 2) wants this Africa of rustic identity, one that is set against its unbroken and uninterrupted past, one of a seamless history, to remain intact. He writes:

Mma Ramotswe did not want Africa to change. She did not want her people to become like everybody else, soulless, forgetful of what it means to be African, or worse

still ashamed of Africa. She would not be anything but African(p. 214)

It is at this point, however, that Smith's wit and irony come through, especially in his juxtaposition of wishes for or claims of purity and those of a total disjuncture. As Dr Maketsi, one of Ramotswe's clients who is enamoured of a fixed African identity, reflects, so much has changed that some African men "were obliged by their wives to change the nappies of their babies" (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 195). Though quite committed to a fixed African identity himself, Dr Maketsi's thoughts reiterate the prose introduced by Ramotswe above, a signature of an African past whose condition is probably unsatisfactory which is why it is changing. The kind of social agency upon which Dr Maketsi reflects regarding Africa is one of intermediacy, as Bhabha has observed, which has lost mastery.

Further, all these attempts to nourish Ramotswe's nostalgia come to nought since by setting herself up in a detective agency, for example, Precious can no longer subscribe to tradition but must become a purveyor of late capitalism's concepts of commodification and consumerism, which have come to efface and eclipse the idea of Botswana's cattle as a symbol of wealth. Thus her business may be funded by her father's cattle wealth but she herself takes out a bond on the house she purchases in Zebra Drive (*The No 1 Ladies* p. 60); she is a modern woman (p. 102) who is health-conscious and therefore she drinks bush tea (*Morality* p. 9), reads magazines (*Cheerful Ladies* p. 90) and prays before going to bed (ibid.: p. 90). In

addition, Ramotswe prays for the spirit of her father who was “now safe in the arms of Jesus” (ibid 91). She is also a proponent of gender equality (p. 194). Little wonder then that gracing her sitting room are, among other things, “the commemorative plate of Seretse Khama and the Queen Elizabeth II tea cup, with the Queen smiling out in a reassuring way; and the framed picture of Nelson Mandela with the late King Moshoeshoe II of Lesotho” (*Cheerful Ladies* 12-3). All these speak to her acculturation or what Bhabha calls “the babelian performance in the act of translation” (2004: 193), a liminal point between the local and global.

One also finds an echo of Bhabha’s interstitial agency in Smith’s second instalment, *Tears of the Giraffe*. Herein, Smith does not avoid engagement with serious issues of identity by causing us to read Ramotswe’s psyche. Smith employs his humorous, colloquial style to resolve certain liminal tensions through gentle irony and also to share Ramotswe’s positive attachment to her almost uniquely stable country of Botswana. On the one hand, she is convinced it is “wrong for a man to be too close to a place where a woman is giving birth” because “the old Botswana morality said that it was wrong, and the old Botswana morality, as everybody knew, was so plainly right. It just *felt* right” (ibid.: 17). On the other hand, “as a modern lady” (ibid.: 18), “she had asked herself why a father should not see his child being born, so he could welcome it into the world and share the joy of the occasion” (ibid.: 17). And even though Botswana morality is “simply right”, she opts for the biblical one “at Sunday school” (*Morality*, p. 75). Clearly, Smith is not being absolute here; his ironic poking of fun,

the pushing of the threshold of “otherness”, points to Ramotswe’s inhabiting the intersubjective realm of traditional morality and modern feminism. One might be presumptuous and argue that Ramotswe’s leanings are towards modernity.

In yet another context, she is clearly not happy about the prospect of living near a graveyard if she takes up married life, traditionally, in her husband’s yard. “Not that Mma Ramotswe was superstitious” (*Tears*, p. 5), Smith writes, where “not that” conveys the opposite of an African fear of “unquiet spirits and the like” (ibid.: 5) which is not part of her “conventional theology” (ibid.: 5). In this case her modern Christian belief seems to have prevailed against traditional African animism, and yet, the sentence trails off “and yet and yet ... ”

At this point, Ramotswe enters an extended reflection on good and evil:

God, *Modimo*, who lived in the sky, more or less directly above Africa. God was extremely understanding, particularly of people like herself When they died, good people, such as Mma Ramotswe’s father, Obed Ramotswe, were undoubtedly welcomed by God. (ibid.: 5)

The colloquial tone in the above passage gently mocks the very Afrocentricism for which Ramotswe speaks in these novels. Again, if God lives above Africa, one wonders why “the soul of her father ...” is “safe in the arms of Jesus” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 93). Whether or not that abode is above Africa remains ambiguous and merely reinforces the limen of the African identity issues with which Smith is attempting

to grapple. Further, Ramotswe's reflection makes even more impact when, after puzzling over God's purpose in relation to her sufferings (the death of her mother when she was a baby and the death of her own baby after a few days), the positive side of life resurfaces following her stoic acceptance: "God has sent her a husband" (ibid.: 6).

Throughout the detective novels, Smith juxtaposes interesting concepts in order to highlight the intersubjective realm of culture that he believes has come to characterize the postcolonial condition. Thus in *Morality for Beautiful Girls*, Ramotswe adopts the avowedly feminist stance, of mocking traditional marriages "in which the man made all the decisions" (*Morality*.: 1). Her mockery comes into fruition in her own relationship with Matekoni where the marriage is founded on equality and balance. Again, in this very text, Smith's subtle handling of the question of identity is reflected in the description of the beauty pageant. Of interest are not just the questions posed to, but the answers given by, the queens. Questions such as "What are the main values Africa can show to the world?", "What do you want to do with your life?", and "Is it better to be beautiful than to be full of integrity?" strike at the core of intersubjective identity, drawing attention to a common humanity, and the need for selflessness and integrity. In other words, the self/other dualism is trumped in favour of a liminal universalism – identity formed contingently in "the time-lag – the temporal break in representation" (Bhabha 2004: 274).

Similarly, Smith's men in *The Kalahari Typing School for Men* abandon the beaten track of culture and tradition and learn how to type for themselves but under the tutelage of Grace Makutsi, Ramotswe's able secretary. In *The Full Cupboard of Life*, the famous maxim "it takes an entire village to raise a child" is overhauled through the activities of the orphan farm where the children whose families have succumbed to AIDS are kept and looked after. Silva Potokwani, the bossy matron of the farm, has an "unusually traditional shape" (p. 12) and does not believe in "being a thin and unhappy person" (ibid.: 13), and yet is "a firm believer in the power of the book" (ibid. 13). "It would be on books that the future would be based" (ibid.: 13), she reflects. In other words, the future of Botswana and Africa depends on its people's acceptance of modernity, especially in the form of modern education.

In The Company of Cheerful Ladies, the sixth instalment, names such personages as Mandela, Khama, Moshoeshoe, Garfield Todd, to mention some, who emerge as exemplars of what identity may mean in twenty-first century Africa, this in the light of the several excesses Africa has seen – civil wars, disease, genocide, and so forth. Smith illustrates the unsettling realities of the modern global culture by describing what Botswana is like today. For example, Princess Marina Hospital in Gaborone is full of doctors and nurses from all over the world who are there to "bring relief to those are very sick from this cruel illness that stalks Africa" (p. 29). Smith's verdict is summed up in a most paradoxical manner by Ramotswe in the following reflections:

There was no doubt in her mind that Botswana had to get back to the values which had always sustained the country It was all very well being a modern society but the advent of prosperity and the growth of the towns was a poisoned cup from which one should drink with greatest caution.... Mma Ramotswe was horrified when she read of people being described in the newspapers as consumers. That was a horrible, horrible word, which sounded rather like a cucumber.... People were not just greedy consumers, grabbing everything that came their way, nor were they cucumbers for that matter; they were *Batswana*, they were people. (p. 161)

Prosperity, nihilism, consumerism – all this is not surprising. For example, Ramotswe discovers in her routine detective engagements, Botswana is already in the grip of what Arjun Appadurai calls “disjunctures” (1990: 296) or the “five dimensions of global cultural flow” (ibid.: 296).⁹ According to this flow, a kind of greedy materialism (in the form of sleek and fast cars, modern, gated houses (*The No 1 Ladies* p. 92-3) and the privilege of modern telecommunications technology in the form of Sky Television (*Cheerful Ladies*, p. 161)), has enveloped the modern postcolonial nation of Botswana. And as a result of this, Ramotswe’s longing for the past, the longing seen in her aversion to the “thin” women of Gaborone, may express a simplistic nostalgia. For the women of anorexic embodiment may constitute a rupture in the identity of black African women such as Ramotswe’s for whom their “solidly built” embodiment is now seen with a certain

⁹ Also known as landscapes, Appadurai’s figuration of his life-worlds that delineate global interaction include the following: ethnoscape (the migration of people); technoscape (technology); finanscape (the movement of global capital); mediascape (information flows), and ideoscapes (a combination of ideas and ideologies that define an epoch). These landscapes lead to the deterritorialization of culture in many societies around the world and, as I argue, Smith presents Botswana as being caught up in these disjunctures.

disdain, but such embodiments cannot be wished away in modern Botswana. As exemplified in *Morality For Beautiful Girls* (pp. 176-9) where certain forms of beauty pageantry such as beauty contests are *de rigueur*, such embodiments are formed contingently in Bhabha's term, the time-lag. As Bhabha argues, "[i]t is the contingency that constitutes individuation – in the return of the subject as agent – that protects the interest of the intersubjective realm" (2004: 272). These "thin" women of Gaborone city attain their subjectivities "outside the sentence" (ibid.: 272) of their (African) culture, for the link or contiguity between *who* and *what* they are cannot be exceeded or trumped but "must be accepted as a form of indeterminism and doubling" (ibid.: 271).

Again, the Africa defined through fixity of location as well as a cultural norm tied to an immemorial past becomes disabled from time to time, being replaced by the more indeterminate and shifting reflex of a continent whose locus of identity is delicately balanced on a spatial-temporal continuum reminiscent of Walter Benjamin. This kind of slippage turns Africa into a floating signifier whose present becomes so open and indeterminate that it can never fully be grasped.

Precious Ramotswe's part in this changing Africa is that of a steely matriarch who is there to lay bare her society's pathologies, brought about by modernization. McCall Smith captures this Africa vividly in Ramotswe's conversation with Makutsi, her assistant, in which it emerges that, according to the research findings of Dr Leakey, all human beings are "Africans" (33), that East Africa is in fact the cradle

of humanity (*Morality* p. 10). It is important to note here that Africa is presented as the point of origin as well as of dispersal of humankind - - “the mother of ...different civilisations” (1990: 112), as Stuart Hall has put it. This point is further accentuated by the fact that all human beings share the “same DNA” (*Morality*, p. 10), a common humanity through the common genome (*Morality* p. 10). Such representations of Africa draw attention to Leon de Kock’s trope of the seam – the “site of both convergence and difference” (2004: 12), “where the divided culture must return time and time again, where the impossibility of origin and unity is staged repeatedly” (Ibid.: 12) and, finally, “where difference and sameness are hitched together – where they are brought to self-awareness, denied, or displaced into third terms” (de Kock 2004: 12, echoing Dipesh Chakrabarty).

For the above reasons Smith does not yield to or deliver a sermon; there are many aspects of African culture that Smith criticizes because of their outmoded or degenerate nature. He describes Africa in uncompromising terms as the “evil incarnate, the heart of darkness, the root of shame” (*The No 1 Ladies* p. 221), and indeed “the merciless Africa” (ibid.: 221) where many terrible things are allowed to happen with impunity. As in Unity Dow’s *The Screaming of the Innocent* in which ritual murder is at the core of the narrative, *The No 1 Ladies Detective* also details the disappearance of a child for the purposes of a ritual murder in the hinterland of the desert. Fortunately the child is rescued, thanks to Ramotswe’s efficient detective skills. In *Tears of the Giraffe*, Smith’s second detective novel, an American boy whose parents have arrived to work in

Botswana as expatriates disappears without trace. In *Morality for Beautiful Girls*, Smith's description draws attention to Ben Okri's words: "The greater the visible order, the greater the hidden disorder" (1997: 54). Okri's maxim is instructive in terms of the way Smith mocks the morality of Africa's (possibly) most democratic state, before deriding the continent's abhorrent treatment of its underclass. This is done through Ramotswa's musings as follows:

This was Botswana's dark secret – this exploitation – which nobody liked to talk about. Certainly nobody liked to talk about how the Basarwa had been treated in the past, as slaves effectively, and if one mentioned it, people looked shifty and changed the subject. But it had happened, and it was still happening here and there for everybody knew. Of course this sort of thing happened throughout Africa. Slavery had been a great wrong perpetrated against Africa, but there had always been willing African slavers, who sold their own people, and there were still vast legions of Africans working for a pittance in conditions of near-slavery. These people were quiet people, weak people, and the domestic servants were among them. (*Morality*, pp. 72-3)

Other examples of African ills, aside from the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and the general oppression of women on the continent, include instances of suffering caused by the political machinations of tinpot rulers such as Idi Amin and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, or South Africa's apartheid architects such as Hendrik Verwoerd.

In addition, in her trying to remember, Ramotswa reflects on the "worldliness" of the Botswana nation, its false claims to holism, what Homi Bhabha calls "the ambivalence of the 'nation' as a narrative strategy" (2004: 201) or "the liminality of cultural modernity" (ibid.:

201). She notes, for example, that Seretse Khama “invented Botswana” (33) – a country with a constructed history going back to the Union of South Africa; that the country, shown to embody African values through Ramotswa, happens to be “the best-run state in Africa, by far” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 150. By reflecting on certain arbitrary signs and symbols which signify Botswana’s affective cultural life, such as its invention by Khama, as well as its thriving statehood, Ramotswa is able to come to terms with “the disjunctive time of the nation’s modernity” (Bhabha 2004: 204). Hence the nation-space of Botswana is stricken with an ambivalent signifying system in which the performative interposes in its sovereignty and casts a large shadow on the nation’s pedagogical, narrative authority.

She further mulls over independent Africa, especially the chaos that independence wrought in many nations. By bringing to the fore Botswana’s success story manifested in all the good things associated with modernity (modernization, prosperity, urbanization), Smith’s Botswana becomes embodied in a Benjaminian instance in which the past and the present are fused in the constellation of the now. The coordinates of transparent identity highlighted by the physical and moral embodiment of Ramotswa are thrown into dispersal and disavowal by the protagonist’s very intersubjective identity. As a figure of ambivalence and contingency, her sense of identity is never quite resolved throughout the fiction.

Other motifs of transitionality and transnationality in Alexander McCall Smith’s “detective” works on Botswana are shown by means of

migrant characters in the fiction as well as spaces in-between created by modern capital. Filling these spaces are people of various races and creeds, whom one could describe as “postcolonials” – blacks, Westerners and Asians – who serve the interests of capital in Botswana. In this case, Homi Bhabha’s idea of a cosmopolitanism of the global or concentric type, the “vivid imagining of difference” (Bhabha 1996), comes in handy for showing the extent to which McCall Smith’s Botswana has become a part of the new international space which Bhabha aptly describes as “the global dialectic of the unrepresentable” (2004: 311). In this dialectic, an imaginary of the global modernity, as well as that of transitional and transnational global cosmopolitans of all kinds and persuasion, becomes McCall Smith’s preoccupation in his works on Botswana. For example, people of various diasporic identities come to occupy or inhabit a space which Bhabha variously calls a “time lag”, the “projective past”, the temporality of transition, that moment of social transformation which Benedict Anderson has so memorably described as “imagined communities”. Cosmopolitanism here also entails “imagined worlds” (Appadurai 1990) of “hyperspaces” as well as “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983) characterized by migrancy, or globalization (a central trope within postcolonial studies) and taking on a special connotation as a spatial imaginary that is premised on notions of commonality and humanity, both of which make us all world citizens. In chapter 5, I demonstrate how Smith’s fiction conveys a translational sense of hybridity in his portrayal of characters such as Nelson Mandela and Seretse Khama who refuse

to totalize experience but instead inhabit intervening and interstitial horizons and spaces of intersubjective identities.

The discourse of colonialism inaugurates that moment in the history of colonization called global modernity, characterized by transcultural and transnational movements or diasporic flows which come to destabilize notions of culture and place as stable and locatable. As Hall puts it, such movements “reposition and displace ‘difference’ without, in the Hegelian sense, ‘overcoming’ it” (251). The diasporan imaginary that Smith describes in his works disrupts all notions of an original and fetishized past based on tradition and community, allowing identities which are open to change.

In *The No 1 Ladies Detective Agency* series, the Botswana nation emerges on liminal edges, with all its pretences to historical and cultural specificity under elision and erasure through Smith’s description of global spaces in what Homi Bhabha calls global cosmopolitanism, a term he uses to describe Jameson’s rendition of postmodernism as the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Thus Ramotswa calls to mind the fact that a country which possessed almost nothing at independence in 1966 is now “a modern country” (p. 90), with “democracy” (p. 18; *Cheerful Ladies* pp. 3-4) and successful media (*Kalahari* p. 32), in which all women had a vote and some had become highly educated “ladies with BAs and BScs” (*Cupboard*, p 34). Besides, with “[t]he Bank of Botswana ... full of money, from ... diamonds” (p. 18), Botswana has gone on to adopt

Performance Management Systems in a drive to entrench a culture of efficiency in civil society.

Indeed, Botswana has become a liminal nation with a global configuration which Homi Bhabha has described as follows:

There is a kind of global cosmopolitanism, widely influential now, that configures the planet as a concentric world of national societies extending to global villages. It is a cosmopolitanism of relative prosperity and privilege founded on ideas of progress that are complicit with neo-liberal forms of governance, and free-market forces of competition. Such a concept of global 'development' has faith in the virtually boundless powers of technological innovation and global communications. It has certainly made useful interventions into stagnant, state-controlled economies and polities and has kick-started many societies which were mired in bureaucratic corruption, inefficiency and nepotism. Global cosmopolitans of this ilk frequently inhabit 'imagined communities' A global cosmopolitanism of this sort readily celebrates a world of plural cultures and peoples located at the periphery (2004: xiv)

As a result the demographic contours of the Botswana nation bespeak intense multinationalism through, for example, there being an international school called "Maru-a-Pula, where there were ... foreign children" (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 101) or the presence of global migrants such as the Nigerian doctors in Gaborone (*The No 1 Ladies*, pp. 201-219), entrepreneur Patel and his family, or the American World Bank economist based in Botswana to look after the Bank's "activities in this part of Africa" (*Tears*, p. 25-6). All this points to Botswana as participating in a global cosmopolitanism created by the

teleology of global capital, causing the people within this national space to assume Anderson's label of an "imagined community".

McCall Smith further vividly underlines the existence of modern transnational temporalities or global spaces which define what Bhabha terms "the unrepresentability of the new international space" (2004: 314) and are redolent of "the multiple axes of transnational globality" (ibid.: 314), partly described here through postcolonial simulacra as follows:

There were three quite exceptional houses in the country, and Mma Ramotswe felt some satisfaction that she had been invited to two of them. Mokolodi, a rambling chateau-like building placed in the middle of the bush to the south of Gaborone. This house, which had a gatehouse with gates on which hornbills had been worked in iron, was probably the grandest establishment in the country, and was certainly rather more impressive than Phakadi House, to the north....The third house could only be suspected of being a house of distinction.... "Like Buckingham Palace," said one woman who had been called to arrange flowers for some family occasion. "Only rather better. I think the Queen lives a bit more simply than those people in there." (pp. 92-3)

Smith's text is instantly a global one, attempting to enact a dissolving of coordinates between the so-called "African" culture and its "others", while at the same time accentuating what Bhabha terms "the incommensurable realities of international space" (2004: 314). Shown here to be part of "virtual reality", this space mutates in the wake of global capital, so much so that "Buckingham Palace" seems to have lost its locale and fixity. A Jamesonian postmodern hyperspace of

super infrastructure, of hyperreality – the result of late capitalism, and suggested here by terms such as “rambling”, “grandest establishment”, “impressive”, and “house of distinction” – is taking over Botswana’s traditional space of acacia trees and rounded huts. In the end, Smith believes, the whole of Africa is affected in a deleterious way, as indicated in Ramotswe’s conversation with her secretary about the importance of progress as measured in the levels of literacy instead of material wealth:

“Many young people these days have not been taught that. They want big jobs right away. They want to start at the top, with lots of money and a big Mercedes-Benz.”

“That’s not wise,” said Makutsi. “Do the little things when you are you and then work up to doing the big things later.”

“Mmm,” mused Mma Ramotswe. “These Mercedes-Benz cars have not been a good thing for Africa. They are very fine cars, I believe, but all the ambitious people in Africa want one before they have earned it. That has made for big problems.” (*Tears*, p. 124)

This is the point at which globalization (the process by which capitalism penetrates the world) interlinks with postcolonial/postmodern theories and, in turn impacts on culture. In this case, Botswana is no exception. Ramotswe and Makutsi attest to a shift experienced by many people in Africa today whose consumerist predispositions belie their claims to cultural identity. Global modernity, Arif Dirlik’s preferred term for globalization, is viewed here as shifting the emphasis and focus of postcolonial theory from a literary practice (of valorizing the “other”) to a more multivalent, more inclusive, if contested territory, with much broader

prospects and purposes, in this case those of showing the trajectory of global modernity. To use Bhabha's reading of Jameson, Ramotswe and Makutsi see Africa "in the scenario of the unconscious," where its "present" is neither the mimetic sign of historical contemporaneity (the immediacy of experience), nor is it the visible terminus of the historical past (the teleology of tradition)" (2004: 307). Botswana in particular boasts that realm of architectural modernity which Fredric Jameson calls aesthetic populism. To use the example already cited, expressions such as "a rambling chateau-like", "grandest establishment", "Like Buckingham Palace" are portrayals of the new hyperspace and emphasize the craze for development and progress that has consumed Botswana as a globalizing nation participating in a "cosmopolitanism" of a concentric type, a craze whose eloquent comparison is to be found in Jameson's description of *The Bonaventura Hotel*¹⁰. The desire to create a homogeneous environment in most parts in the world, carries a subtext of completely modernizing space, in turn effectively threatening traditional society and reifying the "new consumer culture of the image or the simulacrum" (Jameson 1984: 288). In its architecture, aesthetic populism of hyperspaces and through other manifestations of a multinational capital, the city of Gaborone, Precious learns, now stands for a simulacral and cultural expression which resists cognitive mapping.

¹⁰ In his famous essay, 'Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', Fredric Jameson uses the description of the above 'hyperspace' of a hotel in Los Angeles (with all its complicated features) to convey a disjunction between body and environment, expressed here by the difficulty with which a person tries to locate oneself, organize their immediate surroundings, and fully and cognitively understand their position a representable external world.

In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Marxist critic Fredric Jameson rethinks and reworks the rather utopian materialistic dialectic of Marxism (with its concentration of power in the state), and sways it in the direction of “uncharted spaces of the city space, allegorized in its media and vernacular visions” (Bhabha 2004: 306). The “uncharted spaces” are temporalities or “third spaces” of signification assumed by the new historical subjects, the owners of the buildings, who are themselves products of a new international culture made possible with the aesthetic of modernity morphing into postmodernity. In this new international culture and landscape, minorities and migrants come to disrupt, globally, notions of pure and holistic culture.

It is the case that the new space becomes a space of “discontinuous historical realities” (Ibid: 310) with inscriptions of the “in-between” moment which allows the identities of the new historical subjects to be subjects of cultural difference, emerging as they do “at the limits of representation itself” (Ibid: 310). In other words, whether affected by mass migrations or not, the new global society is characterized by the emergence of hybrid, transitional and transnational identities across the city space.

Aside from the carnivalesque spaces that Alexander McCall Smith so well depicts in his detective fiction, he also reflects Homi Bhabha’s notion of dissemination to describe “the liminality of the migrant experience” (2004: 321) or “the gathering of the people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant ...” (ibid.: 199- 200). In this experience,

Smith presents “a Botswana where Western Europeans, Asians and black Africans share in the cosmopolitanism ushered in by the dynamic of capital modernity” (Kalua 2007: 72), a modernity in which the colonial space is ruptured. This imaginary is prefigured in the lives of exiles and migrants as exemplified, prototypically, by Smith’s portrayal of Mr Paliwalar Patel and his family who epitomize what Bhabha terms “the borders of culture’s insurgent and interstitial existence” (2004: 26). Mr Patel and his family, I argue, stand for the “return of the postcolonial migrant to alienate the holism of history” (Bhabha 2004: 241) and accentuate “the liminality of the nation, the margins of modernity” (ibid.: 211). In other words, Smith’s portrayal of Mr Patel as an arch figure of Indian migration, dispersal and disjunction points to “the emergence of the new historical subjects of the transnational phase of capitalism” (ibid.: 311) whose identities are produced “at the limits of representation itself” (ibid.: 310). Mr Patel himself may be enamoured of the essentialist ideologies of patriarchy and nationalism (in referring to his old country which has already receded into a bygone era, and is now twice removed) but his translocated identity in the diasporan city of Gaborone seems irrevocable. Through this character Smith attempts to foreground the complexities, fears and anxieties faced by those people who have left home, voluntarily or otherwise, in search of alternative lives. In Smith’s reckoning, this imaginary of “rootedness”, “home” or “home country” always constantly becomes nothing but mere nostalgia, even as it continually draws attention to the illusory notions of “roots” and “home”. Thus Patel’s implacable attachment and pretensions to an original India, McCall Smith would argue, are impractical because

India is very much open to many interpretations and is therefore an invention, a social construct. This knowledge is reflected in some of Mr Patel's children who, despite being brought up as completely Indian, exhibit none of their father's phobias about losing an authentic Indian identity but rather are prepared to make use of relocation as a deliverance from the strictures and encumbrances of their culture and tradition. The children try to achieve this freedom of acculturation by renegotiating new identities in their adopted country.

Born in Zululand in 1967 and a scion of probably his family's second or third generation in Africa, Mr Patel is an example of "the borderline figure of a massive historical displacement – postcolonial migration" (Bhabha 2004: 320). With little money but abundant business acumen, he emigrates to Botswana where, following years of hard work, he rises to fame, becoming "one of the wealthiest men in the country" (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 93). Thus as well as being "the owner of eight stores" (Ibid.: 93) across Botswana, Mr Patel has also built a famous palatial residence, a "house of distinction" (Ibid.: p.93) which bears a resemblance to "Buckingham Palace" (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 93). But for all the privileges he enjoys as a Botswana citizen, as an Indian immigrant, his success in business and the education of his children, Mr Patel's mythic ideas about India – his *natal patria* to which he can relate only vicariously and in which he has never lived – are so enduring as to represent a life that "dramatizes the activity of culture's untranslatability" (Bhabha 2004: 321). Largely uncritical and nostalgic, Mr Patel's rhetoric of cultural authenticity about India

often degenerates into essentialism, especially in his use of generalities, such as the following:

We Indians like to live in compounds ... to see what is going on in the family. (ibid.: p. 95)

This nurturing and glorification of Indianness in the diaspora as something homogeneous, immutable and “simply horizontal” (Bhabha 2004: 200) prompts him to participate in and endorse discourses that promote notions of self and other, of stereotyping all black Africans whenever it suits the Indian community. Nevertheless, Mr Patel, a man who “had no time for modern ideas” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 103), feels comfortable representing reality in this manner. At a wedding in Durban, for example, his cousin warns him about Africa in these words:

Look, we Indians have got to be careful. You shouldn't go flashing your money around the place. The Africans don't like that, you know, and when they get the chance they'll take it away from us. Look at what happened in Uganda. Listen to what some hotheads are saying in Zimbabwe. Imagine what the Zulus would do if they had half a chance. We've got to be discreet. ((Ibid.: 96)

The *angst* expressed in the above passage is painfully real for those who have left home. As a product of “the later phase of the modern nation” (2004: 200), Mr Patel harbours fears of victimization. This is largely because of his condition of dislocation, for Mr Patel is doubly removed, first through his parents' movement as nineteenth century indentured immigrants to Durban, South Africa, and second, through his own conscious decision to relocate to Botswana. In spite of all this

displacement, Mr Patel still thinks of the Indian nation and “Indianness” in terms of “holism of culture” (Bhabha 2004: 204), as a fundamentally irreducible form of identity that transcends all forms of diasporas, displacements and dislocations. Thus Mr Patel may be a resident alien in Africa, his history there going back generations, but he is given to continually invoking and appealing to India in order to explain problems to do with culture in Africa. This tendency of Mr Patel to continually hypostatize the existence of India, seeing it as an organic whole, a teleology, fails to take into account what Bhabha calls the “ambivalent temporalities of the modern nation-space” (2004: 205), often brought about by mass migrations. This brings to mind Benedict Anderson’s reflections on nationalism, in particular the ambiguities that embed the concept as well as the intrinsically limited way in which this concept of the modern nation has come to be understood. “[T]he nation”, Anderson argues forcefully, is “an imagined political community” (1983: 15), with most of the members within this body politic being happily unaware of many others who live in it, while at the same time each member conjures up in their mind images of oneness and community, “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (ibid.: 16). For Anderson, “[n]ationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” (ibid.: 15, Anderson echoing Gellner). In the light of Anderson’s insights, it is unsurprising that, even as Mr Patel enjoys the privilege of being a naturalized Botswana citizen, he still entertains, voluptuously, mythic ideas about India – his “old country” to which he only relates vicariously. In this case, he typifies the “incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks” (2004: 313)

which are a telling feature of the transnational world with its transitional or hybrid identities.

In contrast to Mr Patel, his children openly display their hybridized selves. To the extent that Botswana is part of the ruptured and fissured colonial space, a space very much diasporic in its social imaginary, as children of an immigrant to Botswana Mr Patel's offspring become representative figures of the transnational identities which have emerged in the modern postcolonial space and have come to not destabilize the idea of nation as holism, but rather confirm it as, to invoke Anderson again, an "imagined community". This is exemplified by the behaviour of his two children, Wallace and Nandira, who, having been raised with an overwhelming sense of being completely Indian, have little to worry about ethnic origins and their father's insistence on the appeal to Indian roots. For them, "at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race" (Bhabha 2004: 313). After graduating as a dentist, for example, Wallace displays this "in-between" space, the space of hyphenation, when he decides that the letter "l" in their family name Patel falls away and thus he becomes Dr Wallace Pate BDS (Natal), even if it means a strained filial relationship with his father. Mr Patel's mortification at Wallace's shortening of the family name meets with his son's curt reply:

“Short names are easier, father. Pate, Patel – it’s the same thing. So why have an extra letter at the end? The modern idea is to be brief. We must be modern these days. Everything is modern, even names.”(*The No 1 Ladies* p. 94).

Thus an iterative temporality of identity reinscribes the figure of Wallace. In the words of Homi Bhabha, Wallace embodies “the history that happened elsewhere, overseas; his postcolonial, migrant presence does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but articulates the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at itself narcissistically in the eye” (2004: 241). The national history that his father invokes is consequently displaced and destabilized by Wallace.

The case of Nandira and her identity is more intriguing. Her strained filial relationship with her father highlights the sheer force of cultural difference which “resists totalization” (2004: 232). This consequently reveals the emptiness of thinking of one’s old country or home as a pre-given absolute. Here, Mr Patel’s romantic nostalgia, which induces phobias in him about losing an authentic Indian identity, finds a counterpoint in the persona of his daughter Nandira for whom travel and relocation entail that her identity is inevitably open to change, and perhaps freedom as well. In an effort to show how much she eschews the Indian tradition of policing female children, as well as of arranged marriages, Nandira invents a social life for herself in which she appears to have a boyfriend “just to bring a bit of ... freedom into her life” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 119), an act which leaves her father on

edge, believing that the organicity of her family is at stake. In desperation, Mr Patel engages the services of Precious Ramotswe in order to establish who Nandira's boyfriend is. But, as Ramotswe finds out, all that Nandira pines for is freedom from the confines of her culture and tradition. She tells Ramotswe:

“I want them – my family – to think I've got a boyfriend”, she said. “I want them to think there is somebody I chose, not somebody they thought right for me.” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 117).

Nandira's freedom contrasts sharply with her father's feelings of nostalgia, caused by the realities of exile, perturbations of memory and musings about home, notions with which dislocated people all over the world grapple.

Hence, Nandira's notions of freedom entail her capacity to negotiate her own identity in a foreign land, seeing her father's perceptions of India or home as idealistic and imaginary spaces in his memory, a memory fed by a desire to return. Nandira, like her bother Wallace, participates in a process of translating or transforming aspects of her culture which are found to be out of place in the diaspora.

Elsewhere, Salman Rushdie has observed that many Indians affected by certain forms of dislocation and diaspora are

haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely

the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of the mind. (1991: 428)

For Rushdie, the idea of home is an immensely scattered concept – not a place where one grew up but rather an imagined and reinvented place etched on one's memory and springing up from time to time to sound like truth. For exiles and immigrants of all types, this ideational feeling (of there being a home elsewhere) is liminal, which explains why it evokes nostalgia. Edward Said has portrayed the liminality of exilic consciousness and migrancy fittingly as follows:

Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew. (2003: 186)

What emerges forcefully from the above discussion about displacement and diaspora is an old proverb which says that one cannot go home again, home in this case referring variously to the fixed locale where one was born, a memory of one's past tradition, a sentimental idea of an imaginary space, a dark abyss of desire, all of which point to an abstraction while accentuating the concept of multiple dislocations evident in the modern postcolonial world.

To sum up, I have argued in this chapter that in all six texts of *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series, Smith's portrayal of the postcolonial nation of Botswana is that of a displaced historicism, of a national space rendered ambivalent by an endless slippage of those categories (such as gender and class) which seem to give nations

their hoariness and homogeneity. As Homi Bhabha would say, Botswana exemplifies “an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the locality of culture. This locality is more around temporality than about historicity” (2004: 200). In other words, rather than read it as a holistic cultural unity, this chapter has presented the nation of Botswana as narration.

Precious Ramotswe, the protagonist in the series, emerges as the arch-figure who bears witness to the ambivalence of culture brought about by the invasion of the projective past, the time-lag which has caused the sign of “African identity” to dissolve, a hybrid space where identities are formed and produced contingently.

Consequently, even though Alexander McCall Smith seems to pander to the idea of Ramotswe’s body as being a material, historical and social site lodged in the fixity and stability of “Africanness”, he also employs ample slippage in his metaphor to destabilize this fixity and thus Precious herself as not being centred on any national culture, with her body portrayed as a fluid, interstitial space that is transversed and formed by multiple discourses, both of (African) tradition and modernity. In the words of Homi Bhabha, Ramotswe is the “figure of the double” (2004: 71), one that “cannot be contained in the analogical sign of resemblance” (ibid: 71) but negotiates its existence in the highly productive *Third Space* of liminality in which identity or cultural signification “emerges in the time-lag, or temporal break, *in-between* its social-symbolic ordering and its iterative repetition as the sign of the undecidable” (2004: 296). In this case,

Ramotswe's body or embodiment is being formed and reformed from time to time, particularly given that she lives in a country which offers complex evidence of global tendencies typified by capital modernity and the diasporic imaginary, both of which impact on and inflect identity.

Chapter Five

Cosmopolitan Identities

Remembering Fanon is a process of intense discovery and disorientation. Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present. It is such a memory of the history of race and racism, colonialism and the question of cultural identity, that Fanon reveals with great profundity.... What he achieves ... is something far greater: for in seeing the phobic image of the Negro, the native, the colonized, deeply woven into the psychic pattern of the West, he offers the master and slave a deeper reflection of their interpositions, as well as the hope for a difficult, and dangerous freedom. (Bhabha 1986: xxiii-xxiv)

In the above passage, Homi Bhabha pays homage to the Martiniquan psychoanalyst Franz Fanon, “the purveyor of transgressive and transitional truth” (Bhabha 2004: 57), for his sterling contribution towards our understanding of the idea of the person and society and of how society can be transformed. Bhabha’s tribute to Fanon stems from the latter’s profound grasp of the colonial enterprise – the vexed nature of colonialism – and therefore, in the interest of Bhabha, as a jumping-off point for postcolonial criticism. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, his first, classic, magisterial work, Fanon portrays the colonial world in terms of the fixed, unworkable dualities of the colonizer and colonized. But in his famous saying ‘The negro is not. Any more than a white man’, Fanon does not perceive this fissured space of Manichaeian binarisms as a *fait accompli*. In other words, for both Fanon and Bhabha, society can be transformed.

In the preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre gestures toward the same change as he warns about 'the most dangerous will o' the wisps', among them, 'the withdrawal into the past African culture. For the only true culture is that of the Revolution; that is to say, it is constantly in the making'¹. At this point, Bhabha's remembering of Fanon becomes a salutary lesson in colonial history, as colonizer and colonized reflect on their identities.

For Homi Bhabha, who understands Fanon too well, it is by embracing the *beyond*, which he sees implied in Fanon's work, that one can avoid indulging illusions about pure cultures. Bhabha argues:

Fanon recognises the crucial importance, for subordinated peoples, of asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories. But he is far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures to recommend that 'roots' be struck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present. The negating activity is, indeed, in the intervention of the 'beyond' ... the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. (2004: 13)

As a result Homi Bhabha remembers Fanon for his perspicacious vision of a colonial space divested of opposed structures and Manichaeian boundaries which satisfy a Hegelian recognition. For Bhabha Fanon "speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change" (Bhabha 2004: 57). In *Black Skin, White Masks*,

¹ My argument concerning the shifting nature of African identity is indebted to Sartre's profound vision and his understanding of culture as an ever-shifting category.

so Bhabha argues, “[t]here is no master narrative or realist perspective that provides a background of social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of an individual or collective psyche” (ibid.: 61) because, for Fanon, “the colonial subject ... is historicized in the heterogeneous assemblage of the texts of history, literature, science, myth” (ibid.: 61). In short, Bhabha looks back on Fanon as being the prime mover of social change within colonial, identitarian discourses.

This chapter deals with the extent to which the vexed and troubling question of colonialism leaves both colonizer and colonized deeply implicated in one another in ways that cause the identity of each to be inflected by a disabling ambivalence. As opposed to Chapter 4 where the fictionalized activities of the protagonist are given prominence, this chapter investigates the way in which Smith’s inclusion in his texts of instances of reportage or history (which preoccupy Ramotswa) highlights his commitment to the notion of identity as holistically locatable in a common humanity or human destiny. The chapter explores, explains and uses these moments and interpositions in order to embark on a consideration of the liminality or pilgrim status of key figures in Southern African political life who are spotlit, in order to appreciate these figures’ understanding of the complexities of human identity. Consequently, in all six texts, Smith allows her female protagonist to constantly reflect on historiographic detail concerning the lives and activities of these individuals, either dead or alive, such as Seretse Khama, Nelson Mandela or Garfield Todd, as a way of putting (African/Southern African) identity issues in

perspective. The act of remembering that Ramotswe is made to carry out, so I argue, simultaneously brings to the reader's mind both the painful and embarrassing history of race and racism and the imbrication of master and slave in their respective, problematic cultural identities, especially when the lives of illustrious individuals such as Khama and Mandela are juxtaposed with those of patent misanthropes such as Verwoerd and Idi Amin, to mention two examples. Simply stated, Ramotswe's reflections on the cultural unconscious present her as being as much "in the passage" (Bhabha) as are Khama and Mandela, through whom the protagonist moves toward self-discovery, self-knowledge and self-understanding regarding her identity.

Crucially, Smith's interposition of historical fact (or what should be seen as memory archives) in his fiction enables Precious Ramotswe to memorialize and recount particular historical details in order to grasp the past and its lessons for the future. This attempt to make sense of memory and history (with all its terrors) is made through the enactment of the identities of many famous southern African personages, whose choices and articulations of identities "affirm the borders of culture's insurgent and interstitial existence" (Bhabha 2004: 26). By breaking tribal and racial polarities – Khama in marrying an Englishwoman, Mandela for forgiving the murderous apartheid government following years of incarceration, Todd, who "stood up for decency and justice in Zimbabwe" (*Cheerful Ladies*, p. 13), and Moshoeshoe, for his dignity, geniality and overall humanity – these figures experience "a process of displacement and disjunction

that does not totalize experience” (Bhabha 2004: 8); the time-lag comes to signify their individuation, an individuation that is a function of the intersubjective. Or, to put it differently, these personages, to use Turner, “become members of the transient class of initiands and pilgrims ... without form” (1992: 30). Turner suggests that such people are symbolically and mystically “dead”. He writes:

Pilgrimages in the salvation religions, like initiation in tribal religions, are full of symbols and metaphors of death, and also are directly concerned with the dead.... This is partly because both pilgrims and initiands are undergoing a separation from a relatively fixed state of life and social status, and are passing into a liminal or threshold phase and condition for which none of the rules and few of their experiences of their previous existence have prepared them. In this sense, they are “dying” from what was and passing into an equivocal domain occupied by those who are ... “dead” to quotidian existence in social systems. (1992: 29)

As I attempt to show in this chapter, both Khama and Mandela exemplify characteristics of liminality (as initiands and pilgrims) and achieve performative identities. Their anecdotal experiences are indicative of liminal narrative practices as insightfully explicated by Victor Turner. At different times of their lives and in different ways, for example, both Khama and Mandela are forgiving and relish and uphold “moments of antistructure” (Turner 1992: 135), ensuring that “order is mocked, reversed, criticized or ignored” (ibid.: 147) – all this because they are “concerned with possibilities, not merely with what seems to be the case” (ibid.: 135). Such possibilities entail a performativity of identity or a privileging of “the subjunctive mood of culture” (ibid.: 148).

A similar in-between and intercultural note has been sounded by Paul Gilroy in his studies of the black Atlantic diaspora or African cultures in the western hemisphere. “The black Atlantic”, he has argued, “is my own attempt to figure a deterritorialized, multiplex and anti-national basis for the affinity or ‘identity of passions’ between diverse black populations” (1993: 18). Gilroy’s formulation serves as a caveat against what he calls “ethnic absolutism”, such as Afrocentricism, and instead addresses the connections and interconnectedness of black cultures. His formulation remains a counterpoint to a way of thinking that is predicated on particularities or essentialisms. Gilroy adds:

As a supplement to existing formulations of the diaspora idea, the black Atlantic provides an invitation into the contested spaces between the local and the global in ways that do not privilege the modern nation state and its institutional order over the sub-national and supra-national networks and patterns of power, communication and conflict that they work to discipline, regulate and govern. The concept of space is itself transformed when it is seen less through outmoded notions of fixity and place and more in terms of ex-centric communicative circuitry that has enabled dispersed populations to converse, interact and even synchronize. What Manuel Castels has called a ‘space of flows’ was prefigured as the ‘trialectics’ of triangular trade, and gave way to modern movements that aspired towards the abolition of racial slavery, the acquisition of citizenship and the disaggregation of Euro-American modernity’s colour-coded utopias. These struggles have taken different forms on all shores of the Atlantic. (1993: 22)

Paul Gilroy uses this concept of the black Atlantic or the “spaces in-between” of modernity as an intricate unit of analysis for examining

complex modern identities, which are decidedly transnational and transcultural in nature. Gilroy's analysis is foregrounded in and resonates with the several instances and interpositions of reportage in Alexander McCall Smith's detective fiction, but particularly in *Tears of the Giraffe*. Represented through inhabiting a double consciousness, or focussing attention on "the middle passage" (1993: 53), Ramotswe's remembrance of Seretse Khama and Nelson Mandela constitutes Smith's attempt to offer a significant intervention in the totalizing myths of identity based on race and nationalism. Alexander McCall Smith, in other words, confronts and interrogates modernity, seeing it not as a synchronous tradition but rather as subject to change or diachronic forms of history. Thus reportage becomes the process of "rememoration"² which "turns the present narrative enunciation into the haunting memorial of what has been excluded, excised, evicted, and for that very reason becomes the *unheimlich* space for the negotiation of identity and history" (Bhabha 2004: 284).

Precious Ramotswe's admiration for Khama, Mandela, Todd and Moshoeshe evokes Homi Bhabha's idea of cultural difference, "[t]he jarring of meanings and values generated in the process of cultural interpretation [which] is an effect of the perplexity of living in the liminal spaces of national society" (ibid.: 232). By consciously rejecting ethnic particularisms and embracing transnational paths of

² See Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (2004 ed.): 284. He mobilises Toni Morrison's idea of 'rememoration' (her concept of the recreation of popular memory) turns the present of narrative enunciation into the haunting memorial of what has been excluded, excised, evicted, and for the that very reason becomes the *unheimlich* space for the negotiation of identity and history".

identities and cultural production, both stances being inimical to and suspicious of either modernity or related “rhetorics” such as Pan-Africanism, these revered figures participate in the “borderline moment of translation” (Bhabha 2004: 234) which Walter Benjamin has described as *continua* of transformation. They have in common their status as representative figures of liminality in the form of an exilic consciousness, Mandela through imprisonment and Khama by suffering true banishment. As I try to demonstrate in this chapter, Mandela and Khama embody forms of moral liminality³ which predispose them to advocate and inhabit spaces between “the local and the global” and not to “privilege the modern national state”. In the words of Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, therefore, they embrace “a textured universalism in which the local and the global interact in order to produce a better world for all” (1999: 143), a universalism which Anthony Appiah terms as cosmopolitan patriotism⁴. This world that both Khama and Mandela symbolize becomes a lens through which Ramotswe perceives a profound understanding of the complexities of identity in (Southern) Africa, here demonstrated by Khama’s resolve to marry an Englishwoman. Consider Ramotswe’s first, significant act of remembering Khama in *Tears of the Giraffe*:

She thought of Seretse Khama, Paramount Chief of the Bamgato [sic], First President of Botswana, Statesman. Look at the way the British had treated him, refusing to recognize his choice of bride and forcing him into exile simply he had married an Englishwoman. How could they

³ See Victor Turner (1992): p.144. In an essay entitled ‘Morality and Liminality’, Turner argues that those who adopt the subjunctive mood of culture go through a process of moral regeneration and transformation, a process which allows initiands to begin to see the world differently.

⁴See Anthony Appiah in ‘against National Culture’. He uses the expression “cosmopolitan patriotism” to denote a quasi-liberal understanding of humanity which encourages and advocates global citizenship.

have done an insensitive and cruel thing to a man like that? To send a man away from his land, from his people, was surely one of the cruellest punishments that could be devised. And it left the people leaderless; it cut at their very soul: *Where is our Khama? Where is the son of Kgosi Sekgoma II and the Mohumagadi Tebogo?* But Seretse himself never made much of this later on. He did not talk about it and he was never anything but courteous to the British Government and to the Queen herself. A lesser man would have said: Look what you did to me, and now you expect me to be your friend! (*Tears* p. 59).

Homi Bhabha has argued that “the new historical subject emerges at the limits of representation itself” (2004: 310). Ramotswa’s act of remembering the above story provides a quintessential example of that emergence of the new subject where, through marriage, Khama establishes connections and affiliations between the colonized and the colonizer.

Ramotswa’s act of remembering needs contextualization as it throws into relief the vexed nature of race relations in Botswana from the 1950s. When Seretse Khama went to Oxford in 1945 to read law he was the heir (*Tears*, p. 6) to the chieftainship of the Bamangwato, Botswana’s biggest Setswana-speaking tribal group. In 1947, Khama met an English woman by the name of Ruth Williams whom he would later marry. This development led to a tribal dispute as Tshekedi and others of Khama’s uncles wanted Seretse to drop his English wife in order to become chief.⁵ However, in the face of what Bhabha calls “incommensurable differences” (2004: 312), Seretse managed to

⁵ For detailed information on the kind of tension that the marriage generated, see Michael Duffield (1990).

convince the younger members of the tribe to accept him as chief and Ruth as his wife, even if the two would live “borderline existences” (ibid.: 312). Both Khama and Ruth became subjects of cultural difference, their identities having been hyphenated with “incommensurable elements” (ibid.: 313) as the basis for cultural identification. Eventually, and in a dramatic display of a Turnerian liminal paradox (of the initiand being once more reaggregated into society), Khama changed roles by becoming Botswana’s first president in 1966. For the tribesmen and Khama, Botswana’s “past dissolved in the present, so that the future becomes ... an open question” (ibid.: 314) instead of being stipulated by the country’s tradition.

But when in 1948 the Nationalists in South Africa took power from the United Party by gaining a landslide victory in a general election, an event leading to the birth of apartheid, the marriage was brought into a spotlight, opening up a Pandora’s box, since the thrust of the new policy was the separation of races in South Africa. George Winstanley has put this succinctly:

The very idea of a mixed marriage of an important person in a neighbouring state was repugnant to the Nationalists more particularly as they still entertained notions of taking over Bechuanaland and turning it into a black enclave of the Union of South Africa. It is almost certain that the South African government brought diplomatic pressure to bear on the Labour government through the British High Commissioner in South Africa. The shameful outcome was that in 1950 Seretse Khama accompanied by his wife and baby daughter flew out of Bechuanaland into exile in the UK. (2000: 52)

The troubled marriage between Seretse Khama and Ruth Williams, with all the acrimony it engendered on both sides of the families⁶, causes Ramotswe to wonder whether it is of any use digging up the past in order to trace and recover cultural teleologies. Despite being mistreated by the British, and almost disowned by his own people, Ramotswe reflects, Khama, as “a good man” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 33), extended forgiveness to those who had wronged him, instead of allowing the racialized conflict to consign him and his wife to their respective cultural particularisms. As the architect of the new “invented Botswana” (ibid: 33), as well as its first President in 1966, Khama followed Benedict Anderson’s exhortation to create “an ‘imagined community’ rooted in a homogeneous empty time of modernity and progress” (Bhabha 2004: 8). Khama’s marriage to Ruth beomes revealing of Anderson’s work on nationalism, particularly his view that nations are not natural entities but an effect of mimicry which Khama puts into practice by turning Botswana into a corruption-free, democratic state where “every person ... is of equal value” (*Kalahari*, p. 35). The idea of mimicry as *unisonance*, as Anderson uses it, displaces the narrative of the nation as being inscribed in the language of the “homogeneous empty time” of modernity into an “imagined community”. This displacement of narrative is evident to Precious Ramotswe in her daily detective work when she deals with diasporic groups such as Nigerians and Indians. This demonstrates that “however divided and split”, Botswana

⁶ See Dutfield, pp.1-34.

remains “[t]he people-nation” as it takes on “a form of democratic ‘anonymity’” (Bhabha 2004: 227).

On another plane, Khama’s marriage to Ruth in the face of opposition also points up Homi Bhabha’s notions of cultural translation and hybridity. Bhabha writes:

If hybridity is heresy, then to blaspheme is to dream. To dream not of the past or present, nor the continuous present; it is not the nostalgic dream of tradition, nor the Utopian dream of modern progress; it is the dream of translation as ‘survival’ ... the act of living on borderlines. (2004: 324)

In other words, by marrying an English woman against the wishes of tradition, Seretse Khama renounces ethnic particularism (and other patriotisms expressed by Bamangwato tribesmen) in favour of Bhabha’s concept of the dream of translation or transformation that often attracts the aspersion of heresy or blasphemy. This kind of heresy has been described by Ben Okri as an exilic consciousness. Talking about those people who grapple with contending realities in the modern world, Okri says that

Exile is a fleeing from one dream to another one. In the process we change, we metamorphose, and our new shapes are never settled. (1997: 54)

Through the racial politics of their marriage as a cultural exchange, Khama and Ruth Williams, his Englishwoman, as well as their offspring, participate in and experience cultural borderlands as permeable and porous, despite inherent tensions. The experience

becomes part of Paul Gilroy's counterculture of modernity that openly defies notions of purity of culture and tradition and instead reconstitutes its own moral genealogy of a Third Space of cultural hybridity whereby it takes on transnational and transcultural identities. It comes as no surprise to Ramotswa to reflect just how fortunate the postcolonial state of Botswana has been "because all three of her presidents had been good men, gentlemen, who were modest in their bearing" (*Cupboard*, p. 3). All these presidents have steered the cultural identity of Botswana into a transnational imaginary and its cosmopolitan subjectivities.

The apotheosis of cultural hybridity in Botswana today is to be found in Smith's inclusion of a moment related to the current "Vice President of Botswana himself, a generous man who prided himself on his open door policy" (*Cupboard*, p.15). This is in contradistinction to many "countries where it was inconceivable that any citizen could claim the right to see the second most important person in the country" (*ibid*, p. 15). Through the Vice-President, Seretse Khama's son, who will become the next president, Botswana has hyphenated⁷ and translated itself as a nation.

Finally, Ramotswa's reflections on Mandela bring to mind the antagonism or paradox of identity that Bhabha has characterized, with profound insight, as cultural difference – "[t]he jarring of

⁷ In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha uses the terms hyphenation and dissemination synonymously to gesture toward disavowal and the scattering of a concept. That the next president of Botswana is somebody with British blood in him means that (in terms of identity) the postcolonial nation of Botswana gets disseminated and translated, to use Bhabha's terms.

meanings and values generated in the process of cultural interpretation ... [as] an effect of the perplexity of living in the liminal spaces” (Bhabha 2004: 232). In *Tears of the Giraffe*, for example, that spirit of ambivalence and disavowal of identity is seen in McCall Smith’s description of Mandela:

Then there was Mr Mandela. Everybody knew about Mr Mandela and how he had forgiven those who had imprisoned him. They had taken away years of his life simply because he wanted justice. They had set him to work in a quarry and his eyes had been permanently damaged by the rock dust. But at last, when he had walked out of the prison on that breathless, and luminous day, he had said nothing about revenge or retribution. He had said there were more important things to do than to complain about the past, and in time he had shown that he meant this by hundreds of acts of kindness towards those who had treated him so badly. That was the real African way, the tradition that was closest to the heart of Africa. We are children of Africa, and none of us is better or more than the other. This is what Africa could show the world: it could remind us what it means to be human. (*Tears* p. 60)

In the above passage, Smith describes the formation of Mandela as a social subject under rather disjunctive conditions, involving his imprisonment and forgiving his enemies before embracing an “African” identity which is offered for the entire world to emulate. I will use Homi Bhabha’s concepts of ambivalence and splitting to show how Smith’s use of engaging irony in the above description brings to bear his portrayal of Mandela’s subjectivity as liminal, cosmopolitan, transnational. I argue that the passage demonstrates a process of

dialogic meaning employed by Smith whereby attempts to arrive at a univocal meaning are, to use Bhabha's expression, voided and avoided.

Homi Bhabha's notion of the liminal will be applied to the above passage, in order to contextualize Smith's understanding of identity of Mandela in a broader sense. According to this reading,

The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the you designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is the ambivalence in the act of interpretation. The pronominal I of the proposition cannot be made to address – in its own words – the subject of enunciation, for this is not personable, but remains a spatial relation within the schemata and strategies of discourse. The meaning of the utterance is quite literally neither the one nor the other. (2004: 53)

The notion of ambivalence in interpretation, as Bhabha puts it, highlights and pinpoints the arbitrariness of language that Jacques Derrida has expatiated on in the concept of *differance*, the fact that meaning is never quite present in the sign; that the sign is therefore never self-referential and, consequently, that meaning becomes an effect of traces. This parallaxal shift of the "I" of identity is played out at the point at which Alexander McCall Smith allows Ramotswe to

remember Mandela whose identity she sees as ambivalent, metonymically subject to Freud's notion of displacement and therefore "'incomplete' or open to cultural translation" (2004: 233).

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduces such an ambivalence through his discussion of the concept of splitting:

Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the same place, one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality. This results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief. (2004: 188)

This is instructive in terms of Smith's description of Mandela whose "acts of kindness" are typically "the real African way, the tradition that was closest to the heart of Africa". Here, Africa is viewed diachronically as a sign outside of time, a sign with real signification in terms of its geography as well as its majority black populations.

But this cannot be the case because in his detective novels, Smith's use of Africa is as a sign that fragments and hyphenates. In *Morality For Beautiful Girls*, in particular, the term Africa connotes global cosmopolitanism and identity. Ramotswe gives her secretary Grace Makutsi the following lesson in human evolution as proved by Dr Leakey:

"We all lived in East Africa then." ...
"We are all the same people. Same blood. Same DNA." ...
"We are all made up of DNA and water." ...
"If people knew this," she said, "if they knew that we were all from the same family, they would be kinder to one another...."

Thus Africa is the origin of the human species, the fossil remains of East Africa pointing to a palaeontological past which shows a commonality in the history of humankind. The reader is able to “envisage ... a certain affective and ethical identification with ‘globality’ ... premised on the need to establish a transhistorical ‘memory’” (Bhabha 1996: 201)⁸. In recent times, this identification or sense of commonality has been supported by the cracking of the genome which, among other things, deconstructs the idea of race, presenting it as a construct. This is Smith’s attempt to eschew nationalist or patriotic sovereignty and reorient Southern Africa to a global, liminal cosmopolitan ideal by means of invoking Mandela’s status.

Elsewhere, Smith’s use of the ambivalence surrounding the term Africa is just as intriguing. In *Tears of The Giraffe*, for example, it is “Ramotswe’s view that “there was God, *Modimo*, who lived in the sky, more or less directly above Africa” (*Tears*, p. 5)⁹. Smith’s Africa here is a geographical locale, certainly a place of difference from the rest of the spatial world. At the same time, however, each time Ramotswe offers her usual prayer “for the soul of her father”, she does so in the full knowledge that the soul is “safe in the arms of Jesus” (*The No 1 Ladies*, p. 91). In other words, “the real African way, the tradition that was closest to the heart of Africa”, ambivalently refers to a universal

⁸ I am thinking here of Homi Bhabha’s use of Adrienne Rich’s text, *An Atlas of the Difficult World*, and Martha Nussbaum’s text *Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism*, both of which he quotes liberally for their evocative meditation on the value of the cosmopolitan temporality, their rejection of patriotic sovereignty and the liminality of identity associated with this kind of temporality.

⁹ Note that this example is quoted in Chapter to highlight a different point altogether.

signifier of humanity that ought to be cherished for its own sake, and not just viewed as a particularistic trait traceable to any race.

The crucial point stemming from Smith's use of a political figure such as Mandela, as well as from the metaphoricity of the term Africa, highlights what Bhabha calls the process of disavowal which "negates the visibility of difference" and produces a strategy for "the negotiation of the knowledges of differentiation" (2004: 189). Or, as Bhabha has put it elsewhere, such use of ambivalence is meant to "emphasise a certain liminality in the identity or subject of a cosmopolitan process" (1996: 201). This point is clearly made in an article entitled "Unpacking my Library ... Again" in which Bhabha writes about a disjunction in identity such as that of Mandela in the following words:

Identity is an intersubjective, performative act that refuses the division of public/private, psyche/social. It is not a 'self' given to consciousness, but a 'coming to consciousness' of the self through the realm of symbolic otherness – language, the social system, the unconscious. (ibid.: 206)

In short, Mandela's formation as a social subject is one of splitting and ambivalence, of a double consciousness. This ambivalence is brought into stark relief in order to emphasize the cosmopolitan nature of modern society.

A similar kind of disavowal is attendant on the concepts of justice and forgiveness which are embodied in the same quotation by Smith to describe, not diachronically but synchronically, the disjunctive conditions with which Mandela's identity or subjectivity is formed and

imbued, a disjunction that has a telling effect on the structure of human identity.

Clearly, everybody knows Mandela, his renown having been built around his personal philosophy and ideology, largely and crucially embodied in his “I am prepared to die” speech of 1964, in which he constructs his own idea of identity which absorbs community, morality, justice, politics and national identity. In this trial Mandela was able to explain his aims and aspirations and the reasons why he was involved in the struggle.

Alexander McCall Smith’s description of Mr Mandela represents a person with shifting and abiding paradoxes in his nature or character. The fact that Mandela’s “agency of identification is never pure or holistic but always constituted in a process of substitution, displacement of projection” (Bhabha 2004: 233) causes him to symbolize Victor Turner’s liminal pilgrim, Gilroy’s black Atlantic, or Derrida’s traces, to mention a few examples.

Anthropologist Victor Turner associates a pilgrim or prophet with one who goes on a long journey in search of enlightenment and in the process becomes transformed. This model is fully described by Turner, who draws a parallel between an initiand and a pilgrim. Though the former is secular and the latter otherworldly, the two have in common factors such as “the voluntary extraction of the individual from a regularized, structured existence into a cultural – or personal, or social – hiatus that is predominantly anti-structural and free from

quotidian concerns” (Scherzinger 2004: 7). Significantly, Mandela embodies that role of a pilgrim and is therefore a “liminar” through incarceration and absence, both of which keep him away from a world of hierarchies and structures. Besides, this absence is initiated of his own volition at the Rivonia trial where he chooses death if necessary, and before he faces a protracted period of seclusion in prison (a pilgrim’s remote place), and away from his people. Mandela’s sojourn there becomes “an apt symbolic death ... and rebirth into authentic social life” (Ibid: 31), a significant spiritual journey. When he comes out of prison, Mandela is “fortified by the graces merited by the hardships and self-sacrifice of the journey” (Ibid: 37). It is this experience, however, that eventually entitles him to become a “liminar”, somebody occupying the “betwixt and between”, a “threshold” person – one of those who has gone through the rites of passage and has achieved self-discovery for reaggregation into his society.

Again, the passage quoted from *Tears of the Giraffe* takes the reader back in time to the Rivonia trial of 1964 before Mandela was imprisoned for life. In the famous speech which he presented in defence of his actions, Mandela makes it clear that he is a being with an interconnected identity, a symbol of global redemption, what Bhabha calls concentric global cosmopolitan. He illustrates this transculturation or human connectivity in the speech in various ways. For example, he has no qualms about stating that he is “an African patriot” (1964: 10) who has been “influenced by Marxist thought” (ibid.: 10) but is “an admirer” of and has “great respect for British political

institutions, and for the country's system of justice" (ibid.: 10). In addition, Mandela says he "regard[s] the British Parliament as the most democratic institution in the world" (ibid.: 10), with the American system arousing "similar sentiments" (ibid.: 10) in him. The kind of ideal which Mandela embodies, to use Bhabha's argument, is "a certain liminality in the identity or subject of cosmopolitan process" (1996: 201). Consequently, Mandela expresses his "between and betwixt" identity in his freedom "to borrow the best from the West and from the East" (ibid.: 10).

The most important aspect of Mandela's embodiment of a Turnerian intersubjective realm is expressed by his concluding remarks at the Rivonia trial:

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die. (1964: 13)

This view ties in with Jacques Derrida's own analysis of the concept of forgiveness, if Mandela's act of forgiveness were bequeathed with the mantra of identity. Derrida expresses the idea of identity (in the form of forgiveness) in such a paradoxical and aporetic way as to be reminiscent of Victor Turner, where the notion of forgiveness is divested of any meaning or identity except for traces or as Derrida would say, the metaphysics of the supplement. Derrida says that

In order to approach the very concept of forgiveness, logic and commonsense agree for once with the paradox: it is necessary, it seems to me, to begin from the fact that, yes, there is the unforgivable. Is this not, in truth, the only thing to forgive? The only thing that calls for forgiveness? If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls 'venial' sin, then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear. If there is something to forgive, it would be what in religious language is called mortal sin, the worst, the unforgivable crime or harm. From which comes the aporia, which can be described in its dry and implacable formality, without mercy: forgiveness only forgives the unforgivable. One cannot, and should not, forgive; there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable. That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as an impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible. (1997: 33)

Thus the logic of concepts such as paradox, aporia, conditionality as well as unconditionality – all of which are implied in Derrida and Turner's notions of identity – suggests that Smith's Mandela is a subject of displacement as is Derrida's concept, according to which the displaced object (or subject in this case) "is both a sign of violence and of 'progress'" (1994: 135). As Chow puts it, "[d]isplacement constitutes identity, but as such it is the identity of the ever-shifting" (ibid.: 135).

To turn to another context, in an introduction to Jacques Derrida's treatise entitled *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness: Thinking in Action*, Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney provide a revealing, textual summation of Derrida's views on forgiveness as follows:

Derrida argues that true forgiveness consists in forgiving the unforgivable: a contradiction all the more in this century of war crimes ...and reconciliation tribunals, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. If forgiveness forgave only the forgivable, then, Derrida claims, the very idea of forgiveness would disappear. It has to consist in the attempt to forgive the unforgivable: whether the murderousness of Apartheid or the Shoah. (1997: vii-viii)

Derrida's mode of thinking is not simply confined or restricted to the idea of forgiveness but embraces a whole range of crucial concepts such as friendship, law, justice, testimony, and most recently, the death penalty. An important feature of this critical thinking lies in the inherent idea of a contradiction or double imperative¹⁰, an imperative that is traceable, as Derrida puts it, to some past heritage¹¹. In the following description Nelson Mandela all but goes through a ritual, defined as a form "of ... behaviour associated with social transitions" (Turner 1967: 95) in which the "condition is one of ambiguity and paradox" (Ibid: 97). This condition obtains in many initiations or ritual personae, such as pilgrims who travel to holy places, whose actions are akin to structural "death" or dissolution.

Thus it is that Khama and Mandela represent a crystallisation of contradictions of identity and see race from the standpoint of a "hybrid cultural formation" (2004: 358), an anomaly and a retroversion (356-7). For these personages, their desire for deracination springs

¹⁰ See Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney in their preface to Derrida's primer entitled *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*.

¹¹ Derrida here invokes the Abrahamic tradition where Abraham's relationship with God abounds with paradox and equivocation.

from their view of cultural identity as not deterministic nor a form of regulation which becomes a means of domination by which one group or clan exercises hegemony over another, but rather as something always “caught anecdotally outside the sentence “ (2004: 260). This kind of identity outside the sentence has been captured by Bhabha in his interpretation as a moment of transition through modernity. For him:

The postcolonial passage through modernity produces that form of repetition – the past as projective. The time-lag of postcolonial modernity moves *forward*, erasing that compliant past tethered to the myth of progress, ordered in binarisms of its cultural logic: past/ present, inside/ outside. This *forward* is neither teleological nor is it an endless slippage. It is the function of the *lag* to slow down the linear, progressive time of modernity to reveal a ‘gesture’, its *tempi*, the ‘pauses and stresses of the whole performance’. (2004: 363-4)

Bhabha’s notion of the projective past or time-lag is that it comprises those moments or temporalities of transition or moments of transformation to which Bhabha advises modern society to give expression, especially as demonstrated by the characters of Mandela and Khama who articulate that transition by avoiding overtly nationalist or patriotic sovereignty, emphasising our common humanity and becoming the citizens of the world. As Bhabha has put it, “the ‘self’ (is) at the centre of a series of concentric circles that move through the various cycles of familial, ethnic and communal affiliation to ‘the largest one, that of humanity as a whole’” (1996: 201).

Hence their multiple vortices accord these men an intersubjective anchoring moment of paradox which seems “ex-centric” (2004: 254), while at the same time being life-affirming, and subsuming and transcending qualities such as ubuntu, socialism and the Black Consciousness ontology.¹² In particular, McCall Smith presents Mandela as somebody with an uncanny ability to look into the soul of humanity and, like those scientists who cracked the human genome early this century, to begin to map our common DNA, our common destiny and therefore identity.

In contrast to all these figures whose identity is a “space of translation-as-transformation particularly apposite to the difficult, *transnational* world” (Bhabha 1996: 203), Smith thinks of those leaders in Africa who have wreaked havoc on the lives of ordinary citizens. Smith cites further horrific examples when Ramotswa thinks of “the Shona people and how they kept going on about what the Ndebele did to them under Mzilikazi and Lobengula” (*Tears*, p. 59), or the atrocities of Hendrik Verwoerd’s murderous Apartheid regime. (*Morality*, p. 73)

Within Botswana, Smith contextualizes moments within a universal march of history (and identity), pointing up the paradoxical nature of modern identity as seen through the eyes of the postcolonial

¹² See Coetzee & Roux (1998) where the above ideas are discussed in reasonable detail. For example, the writers say that “closely related to African Humanism, Ubuntu incorporates notions of an African collective consciousness and the universal brotherhood of Africans. Its values include sharing, treating other people as humans, empathy, warmth, sensitivity, understanding, care, respect, patience, reciprocation, and communication” (p. 451) My argument is that, while the Black Consciousness movement never advocated a relationship between the black and white race, Mandela’s act of forgiving becomes a real liminal moment of ‘forgiving the unforgivable’.

Botswana intellectual. In *Tears of the Giraffe*, for example, Ramotswa finds herself tumbling into the corridors of the University of Botswana (in the city of Gaborone), a centre of excellence and the citadel of very learned local scholars who, like Khama, Mandela, or Todd, look ordinary. Ramoswe reflects:

There were unimaginably learned people here; scholars like Thomas Tlou, who had written a history of Botswana and a biography of Seretse Khama. Or there was Dr Bojosi Otlogile, who had written a book on the High Court of Botswana, which she had bought, but not yet read. One might come across such a person turning a corner in one of these buildings and they would look just like anybody else. But their heads would contain rather more than the heads of the average person, which were not particularly full of very much for a great deal of time. (*Tears* p. 176)

It is important to note that, as shown in Chapter 4, Smith's Botswana abounds with highly educated and trained people: "ladies with BAs and BScs" (*Cupboard*, p. 34) and local "doctors and nurses" (*Cheerful Ladies*, p. 29) working at the main hospital in Gaborone. Of significance regarding Thomas Tlou and Otlogile and Bojosi, however, is that they are producers of the postcolonial text, a process which qualifies them to become culturally translated individuals (Bhabha) and specular intellectuals (Said) whose liminal purchase impacts on that of their country in their attempts to bridge the gap between the colonizer and the colonized.

Ian Chambers compares writing to a journey where one constantly traverses thresholds. For him, echoing Michel de Certeau,

to write is, of course, to travel. It is to enter a space, a zone, a territory, sometimes signposted by generic indicators (travel writing, autobiography, anthropology, history ...), but everywhere characterized by movement: the passage of words, the caravan of thought, the flux of the imaginary, the slippage of the metaphor, the drift across the page. (1988: xxi)

In other words, as a kind of a journey, or a form of migration, writing opens up possibilities for a certain detachment between writer and the contexts that define the writer's identity. It is an experience of transit, an act of articulating positionalities, what Bhabha terms "language in *actu*" (2004: 326). Known as cultural translation, this process of "the performative nature of cultural communication" (ibid.: 326) reveals an opening in the writer and the world (s)he inhabits, or after Bhabha, "desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, ... demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation" (ibid.: 327). To that extent, Tlou and Bojosi are representative of the postcolonial intellectuals who live culturally translated and liminal lives.

Further, Ramotswa's reflections about these intellectuals are instructive since they tie in with Edward Said's idea of the role of an intellectual in the Gramscian sense – "everyone who works in any field connected with the production or distribution of knowledge" (Said 1994: 9). Thus, "as pivotal to the workings of modern society" (ibid.: 10), academics such as Dr Bojosi Otlogile and Professor Thomas Tlou fulfill the public role of the modern organic and secular intellectuals who experience "exilic displacement" (ibid.: 62) in the sense of remaining in the "state of in-betweenness" (Ibid: 58).

Commenting on exilic consciousness, Edward Said states that “[e]xile means that you are always going to be marginal, and that what you do as an intellectual has to be made up because you cannot follow a prescribed path” (ibid.: 62). Always “representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to as well as for, a public” (ibid.: 11), exilic intellectuals avoid dogmatism by making a conscious and reflective analysis of their society, “actively representing the truth to the best of [their] ability (ibid: 121). In order to fulfill their roles, organic intellectuals such as Thomas and Bojosi strive for the worldliness that defines their texts. As a historian and scholar, for example, Thomas’ texts about the history of Botswana, and the biography of Seretse Khama, present the history of Botswana through the lens of colonialism. Similarly, Bojosi’s text on the High Court of Botswana cannot avoid touching on the postcolonial perspective which, as Bhabha argues,

attempts to revise those nationalist or ‘nativist’ pedagogies that set up the relation of Third and First World in a binary structure of opposition. The postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres. (2004: 248)

As Bhabha further argues, “[i]t is from this hybrid location of cultural value – the transnational as the translational – that the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project” (ibid.: 248). In other words, postcolonial texts crafted by postcolonial intellectuals deal with “reinterpreting and rewriting the forms and the effects of an ‘older’ colonial consciousness from the later experience

of the cultural displacement” (ibid.: 249), thereby presenting the concept of culture as being contingent, indeterminate and often paradoxical.

For Edward Said, an intellectual holds paradoxical roles in the public arena. Said expands on her or his public role as follows:

So in the end it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters – someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers. My argument is that intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching.... And that vocation is important to the extent that it is publicly recognized and involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability. (1994: 14)

Thus Edward Said’s appropriation of a Gramscian idea of the true, organic intellectual is one who is always a product of marginality and exilic consciousness. This means that intellectuals need not leave their own country (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 1999: 17) in order to experience this condition of marginality and exilic consciousness which can affect anyone who “considers him- or herself to be part of a more general condition affecting the displaced national community” (Said 1994: 50). According to Said, this is not actual exile, but “a metaphorical condition” (ibid.: 52) which is also the “state of in-betweenness” (ibid.: 58), a truly liminal condition.

Thus Tlou’s and Bojosi’s engagement as writers can be described as constant journeys across thresholds between the events about which

they write and the act of narration itself. In some ways, the process of representation may predispose them to articulate positions or positionalities that may not be in line with official claims to knowledge in those subjects. This, for Chambers, is the liminal condition associated with writing, which, I contend, Tlou and Bojosi represent in Smith's *Tears of the Giraffe*.

Finally, in *Morality For Beautiful Girls*, Smith remarks that “[t]he ordinary people of Africa tended not to have room in their hearts for grudges” (p. 74). As has been shown, some of these illustrious Africans who stand up for decency are Seretse Khama, Nelson Mandela and others, in contrast to other Africans such as Hendrik Verwoerd, Idi Amin, Robert Mugabe, and many more whose vision of the world is clouded by the idea of an identity based on patriotic nationalism or race.

In conclusion, in this chapter the writer has contended that postcolonial identities are produced at a point of contingency, at which time and space conflate to create a disjunction in representation. That point of contingency and indeterminacy, or what Bhabha calls “the catechrestic seizure of the signifying caesura of modernity’s presence and *present*” (ibid.: 360), is the location where identities are conceived liminally. As I have attempted to show in this chapter, all the instances of reportage cited from Alexander McCall Smith’s detective texts on Botswana – the stories of King Moshoeshoe, Garfield Todd and the others -- exemplify Bhabha’s profound understanding of culture, seeing it not in terms of snug and

tidy racial compositions and mutually exclusive ethnic essences but as a fluid and unstable dynamic that defines the very reality of living, a liminal reality. As has been suggested, Mandela and Khama undergo transformative experiences in their lives which give them the right to make a cosmopolitan claim on the world, one that allows them to adopt identities which align them to an interconnectedness between race, land and language. While Khama chooses the temporality of a hybrid ontology through an interracial marriage, Mandela's identity is mediated in nature and formed, to use Bhabha words, in "an intervening space, a space of translation-as-transformation ... apposite to the difficult, transnational world" (1996: 203). Out of this transnational imaginary the figure of Mandela emerges agonistically as a global cosmopolitan, a "subject in the process" (ibid.: 204). Other instances of reportage such as the lives of Moshoeshoe and Todd also emphasize the importance of a common humanity.

Chapter six

Minorities and other Marginals

There is ...another cosmopolitanism ...that emerges from the world of migrant boarding-houses and the habitations of national and diasporic minorities. In my view, it is better described as a vernacular cosmopolitanism which measures global progress from the minoritarian perspective. Its claims to freedom and equality are marked by 'a "right to difference in equality" ... rather than a diversity founded on a 'dual economy'. Such a 'right to difference' ... does not require the restoration of an original [or essentialist] cultural or group identity; nor does it consider equality to be a neutralization of differences in the name of the 'universality' of rights where implementation is often subject to ideological and institutional definitions of what counts as 'human' in any specific cultural or political context . A right to difference-in-equality can be articulated from the perspective of both national minorities and global migrants; and in each case such a right represents a desire to revise the customary components of citizenship ... by extending them to include the realm of 'symbolic citizenship'. (Bhabha 2004: xvii) .

The above passage encapsulates the essence of the "in-between" space or marginal condition which has become the mainstay of, and a way of life for, many people in the modern postcolonial world. As Bhabha adds, "the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic colonial and postcolonial condition" (2004: 13), and, as such, needs the intervention of the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism (as a liminal moment) to safeguard those identities that are lived on the

margins of societies, communities and nations. Also sometimes known as the *postcolonial uncanny*¹, “[t]he unhomely moment,” argues Bhabha, “creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow” (ibid.: 13), and suddenly leaves you in a condition of “incredulous terror.”² This chapter examines various examples of reportage and the ways in which they dramatize and exemplify certain forms of the postcolonial uncanny in the postcolonial state of Botswana which is characterized by historical displacements and anxieties, multiple dislocations and relocations, as well as experiences of the idea of “home” as nothing but nostalgia residing in memory, as an ideal that is most certainly an imagined space, a product of desire. While the concept of unhomeliness as described in this chapter tends to denote what Bhabha would term “the quotidian contradictions and displacements that inhabit the indigenous lives of minorities” (Bhabha 2002: 194), it is also deployed to gesture toward a “world rendered restless by its transhistorical memories” (ibid.: 201), thus articulating a human “in-between” temporality that has become an abiding characteristic of the postcolonial condition.

¹ Initially used by Alan Lawson, the phrase the *postcolonial uncanny* was deployed in the context of land ownership and land claims between the Aborigines of Australia and their white settler counterparts. Drawing on Sigmund Freud’s usage of the paradoxical concept of *unheimlich*, or unhomeliness, meaning “the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (Bhabha 2004:14, echoing Freud), Lawson’s deployment of this double-edged phrase connoted the particular fears and anxieties that have emerged within the Australian body politic (amid Aboriginal land claims) and are characterized by the nation’s strange feelings about place and identity as its inhabitants, of predominantly English/British extraction, grapple with the question of whether what they have is theirs or indeed belongs to the Aborigines, and vice versa.. Thus the idea of the postcolonial uncanny evokes a sense “of being in place and ‘out of place’, simultaneously” (Lawson quoting Gelder and Jacobs: 1214). In this Chapter, I argue that the anxieties “of being consumed by indigeneity; of being lost in the space of the other; of the unheimlich of home”(Lawson 2000: 1214), are at the core of Rupert Isaacson’s text *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey*, and Caitlin Davies’ *Place of Reeds*.

² Bhabha quotes Henry James’s text, *The Portrait of a Lady*, to convey the condition of displacement and unhomeliness in Isabel Archer, the protagonist, as disorienting her, as well as being the moment of terror which introduces cross-cultural initiation..

As explicated in the introduction to this thesis, as well as in chapter 5, reportage in this chapter broadly incorporates forms of writing with pretences to fact, journalistic reporting and the nonfiction novel. The case of the dwindling status of Botswana's national (African) language, as well as the relocation of the San people from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, are simply the two forms of factual reportage used here to accentuate and highlight the central idea of unhomeliness as dramatized in the nonfiction novels, namely Rupert Isaacson's *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey* and Caitlin Davies' *Place of Reeds*. The two texts and the said examples of factual reportage are all examined against the backdrop of reportage as a genre, the notion of reportage being appropriated from journalistic activities in the America of the 1960s.³

In other words, this chapter offers contested teleologies by revisiting and reprising Freud's idea of the *unheimlich* or unhomeliness, herein encapsulated by the notion of the postcolonial uncanny. The narrators of *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey* and *Place of Reeds* foreground the temporalities of identity in Botswana by presenting the idea of "home" as an open question – a tenuous and slippery category that gravitates between a centre (associated with and characterized by notions of birth, love, nourishment and security) and the margins where insecurity and estrangement are the order of the day. Marginality in this case represents spaces of resistance

³ An extensive literature exists on the notion of reportage generally. I have found the contributions of Hellman (1995) and Hollowell (1977) to be particularly useful. For these writers, most nonfiction writing in the postcolonial context can be classified as reportage.

occupied by minority groups in Botswana which have come to alter and translate the idea of the nation. Through the concept of the “uncanny”, Bhabha reminds us, “we begin to get a sense of the complex time of the national narrative” (2004: 206) with its “doubling”, its “ghostliness”, its ambivalence.

Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies’ texts, as well as other reportage, deal with a “[m]inority discourse” which “acknowledges the status of national culture – and the people – as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of fullness of life” (Bhabha 2004: 225). In other words, rather than present the idea of the national space in “visual synchrony” (2004: 206), and “as achieved only in the fullness of time” (ibid.: 206), Isaacson and Davies represent national space as “a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference”, and therefore “a contested conceptual territory where the nation’s people must be thought in double-time” (ibid.: 208). Speaking from their own lived experiences of displacement, dislocation, geographical migration and all the forms of outsiderhood and discontinuity imposed on their lives, the narrators present Botswana as comprising “imagined communities” where “the unisonant boundaries of the nation are singing with different voices” (Bhabha 2004: 243). It is partly the narrators’ experiences of marginalized positions (as whites), which allow them to grapple with the complexity and paradox of identity in this way. To that end, the concept of the postcolonial uncanny (or unhomeliness) is served by Bhabha’s notion of “vernacular cosmopolitanism” which is best articulated through cultural difference

In bringing to the fore the vexed issues of identity on the margins, I hope to demonstrate how modern histories cannot be recounted and rewritten without due regard to the histories of the national and global minorities, the powerless and the previously subjugated and oppressed groups. Both Isaacson and Davies' works problematize what Homi Bhabha would call "the major social displacement of peasant aboriginal communities" (2004: 7) in Southern Africa, as well as the dilemmas attendant on identity resulting from relocation and dislocation, together with the way that this situation nourishes the feeling and theme of *unheimlich* or "unhomeliness" in the modern world.

Homi Bhabha has observed that discourses which question the ethics of the nation state are a recurrent feature in the postcolonial world. Favourable to the concept of the nation as a social construct of modernity, Bhabha argues that,

[t]he liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse – the agency of a people – is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contest of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative. (2004: 212)

As will be seen, this disjunction or split is evident in the postcolonial nation of Botswana where debates about "the pedagogical and performance" are played out in a most telling way.

In a well argued and researched doctoral thesis entitled *The National Language: a Resource or a Problem*, Lydia Nyati-Ramahobo, a University of Botswana academic, has observed the dwindling status of Setswana as a national language of Botswana in favour of the English language. She writes:

Setswana is the national language in Botswana. It is spoken by about 90% of the population either as mother tongue or as second language. It is, therefore, the language of national unity and cultural identity. However, a decline in morale in the teaching and learning (sic.) of Setswana at all levels has been observed in recent years. Many language teachers have opted to teach English rather than Setswana, and students' performance in Setswana has consistently deteriorated over this time. (1999: xi)

This observation points to “the emergence of a hybrid national narrative that turns the nostalgic past into the disruptive ‘anterior’ and displaces the historical present” (Bhabha 2004: 240). That the hypostatized status of Setswana has diminished in the face of English is not surprising, given that the latter is the medium of instruction in education as well as the language of business in commerce and public life. However, what Nyati-Ramahobo offers is an arresting statistic in a country where, as in many others in the region, (a local) language is expected to carry the burden of culture, bestow pride on its people and define their identity. That definition of identity must now remain an iterative temporality.

In *A Woman Alone*, for example, Bessie Head describes Botswana as perhaps the only country in Africa to have undergone a benign

form of colonial rule by becoming a British protectorate. “Because of this”, Bessie Head contends, “Botswana remained independent in a way; its customs and traditions were left intact and people’s traditional rulers had a large say in governing their people. Thus, the real Southern African dialogues took place in Botswana” (1990: 55). Bessie Head is here describing a society at the point at which culture is conceived in ways that “hypostasize the existence of Nationalism-with-a-big-N ... and then ... classify it as an ideology” (Anderson 1983: 5). Elsewhere, Mikhail Bakhtin explains the notion of a homogeneity of national culture in terms of what he calls “a unitary literary language” (such as Setswana) being seen as predetermined and inviolable, so to speak, therefore becoming a rallying point for national unity as well as a medium for propagating cultural values. Bakhtin succinctly puts his point regarding the nature of unitary languages:

Unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language. A unitary language is not something given [dan] but is always in essence posited [zadan] – and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. (1934: 198)

Intriguingly, however, Nyati-Ramahobo’s results reveal Setswana originally to have reflected Bakhtin’s understanding of the use of unitary languages, as monologues serving the often-parochial interests of nationalism. However, her findings are instructive in that as a subject and as a career, the English language has overtaken

Setswana, suggesting the emergence of a “disjunctive temporality” haunting the Botswana nation, characterized by a people’s taste for the performative as opposed to the pedagogical. This means that the preeminence of the English language (in today’s world) has ineluctably catapulted Botswana into what Bhabha calls the “space of liminality, in the ‘unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty’” (2004: 214) about the country’s identity, based on a unitary language. The certainty of the Setswana language, in other words, as the bestower of national identity is, inevitably, slipping away, particularly now that “Botswana is Africa’s most globalized nation” (Headheeb: 4) and role of Setswana will gradually become eroded and attenuated. Thus in this uncertain space, a disjunction exists, between the national imperative that makes an appeal to “the atavistic national past and its language of archaic belonging” (Bhabha 2004: 239) in order to perceive the people in terms of “homogeneous empty time”, and a parallel narrative which locates the people in a globalized world where English plays the most significant role as a medium of communication. In the words of Homi Bhabha, “the ‘foreignness of languages’ becomes the inescapable cultural condition” (2004: 239) that Nyati-Ramahobo’s research reveals. This condition is evident “through the process of disseminatiON – of meaning, time, peoples, cultural boundaries, historical traditions – that the radical alterity of national culture will create new forms of living and writing” (ibid.: 239).

Put in another way, and in terms of Bakhtinian linguistic registers, English, as a heteroglot (or global language) naturally supplants Setswana, a monoglot or monologue. This is because English – with

its centrifugal force and dialogic potential – is now a living language serving almost the entire globe, and has turned the Botswana state into a hybrid construction. This is a situation of linguistic consciousness whereby Botswana becomes a “dialogized heteroglossia” (Bakhtin 1934: 200).

This disjunction is significant and becomes pronounced in the light of yet another example with respect to the country’s ethnicity. In a paper entitled “Botswana’s Ethnic Structure: An Abortive Research Proposal”, Van Binsbergen undertakes an in-depth study of Botswana’s ethnic structure in an attempt to establish that country’s suitability to become an “African” model of ethnicity that would help the continent transcend its perennial problem of ethnic conflict. However, the attempt falls through, owing to multiple flaws not only in the country’s ethnic structure, but in its democratic system as well. Van Binsbergen is not impressed with Botswana, and thus compares the model to a flawed research proposal, and reaches the conclusion that Botswana is, potentially, a problem, and not a solution, given the inherent inadequacies just mentioned. In other words, the author finds that the Botswana case abounds with ironies that merely play up the myths of a monolithic ethnicity, despite the country’s prominent international image as an economic miracle and Africa’s super model of democracy. Binsbergen writes:

Botswana finds itself in Africa, where the potency of the ethnic phenomenon has been taken for granted since the late nineteenth-century Scramble for that continent, and particularly in Southern Africa, where the powerful neighbour South Africa is undergoing profound

transformation precisely in response to a history of some of the most entrenched ethnic conflict the world has yet seen. (2000: 4)

Some of the ironies, which date back to the colonial era of the then Bechuanaland Protectorate, include the suppression of difference, by recognizing only eight tribes of exclusively Tswana stock. These are some of the relics about which historian and anthropologist, Isaac Schapera, writes in the 1930s, and on which the newly independent Botswana superimposed its modern institutions in order to create a mosaic trope of ethnic unity, structured along the lines of South Africa's own problematic of "the rainbow nation".

In the case of Botswana, however, the 1980s ushered in a different era. For example, with the passing of the country's first president who had wisely united the people not around bankrupt notions of "monolithic ethnicity" but in terms of the rallying cry of Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural difference, a broad range of issues about identity began to take centre stage, starting with "the formation of the country's first ... recognized ethnic minority association, the Society for the propagation of the Ikalanga Language (SPIL) – a focus for much resentment on the part of Tswana-oriented politicians" (ibid.: 4). The idea of this association was to stave off the entrenchment of Tswana hegemony, manifested through, initially, the use of Setswana as a national language, and more importantly, the existence of "the notorious 'eight tribes' whose names, in alphabetical order, have found their way into the Botswana constitution" (ibid.: 1). Therefore it is interesting that this "protest" started with the Kalanga group, given

that they are the largest and most vocal minority group in Botswana, and are very much aware that “Botswana is the only political unit in the Southern African region which seeks to base its stability and integration on a publicly proclaimed Tswana identity” (ibid.: 2). Other examples pointing to Botswana’s inclination to Tswana hegemony include: the fact that “other ethnic groups do not receive treatment in their own right but appear as ethnic elements subsumed under Tswana territorial chiefs of any of the eight designations: especially those non-Tswana whom Tswana speakers call Sarwa (i.e. San in an established academic nomenclature, or Bushmen in a now discarded White ethnocentric nomenclature)” (ibid.: 2); that “historical divisions among the Tswana-speakers in Botswana are still relevant in the sphere of neo-traditional politics” (ibid.: 2); that “[m]ost of the parties active on the Botswana scene have been recognized to carry ethnic tones” (ibid.: 2). All this flies in the face of the fact that Botswana exhibits an international ethnic dimension to its population that takes in racial divides such as Afrikaner, English, Indian and Black. All these discourses on ethnicity and minorities find even more echoes in the texts by Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies to which I turn.

Partly history, partly travel writing, and partly journalism, Rupert Isaacson’s *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey* and Caitlin Davies’ *Place of Reeds* comprise a series of fragments ranging from little portraits to fully-fledged and well dramatized episodes which intervene in the consciousnesses of the authors who try to probe and understand the entire import of their African journeys, sojourns and experiences. In telling their stories, Isaacson and Davies are impelled

to juxtapose fragmentary memories and historical fact in order to fully understand the workings of culture, and, in doing so, to highlight the core issues of “unhomeliness” or displacement, the transitionality as well as the transnationality of identities as major preoccupations in their writing. By trying to establish what “home” means, Isaacson’s and Davies’ works demonstrate the elusiveness of the idea as the narrators find themselves betwixt and between worlds, worlds in which the narrators are thrust into real thresholds and become figures torn between continents (Africa, Europe and the Americas).

Rupert Isaacson⁴ writes, at once, with a gritty realism, and a self-reflexive take on the rather uncomfortable subject of African identity, largely challenging a reductionism that has framed the discourse from the heyday of colonialism. This reductionism manifests itself in the thinking and imagination of most black people in perceiving themselves as the indigenes of Southern Africa, a perception which is perhaps a far cry from historiography and documented reality. As I demonstrate in this chapter, Isaacson’s text foregrounds certain postcolonial anxieties emanating from land ownership in Southern Africa. This anxiety is played out most vividly in the postcolonial country of Botswana where, as shown earlier, from 2002 up until the close of 2006, the government was rocked by a landmark court case, with the Khoisan peoples of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve winning their land claim against the government. The postcolonial

⁴Fearless journalist, environmentalist and travel writer, Isaacson is a British person of Zimbabwe and South African parentage. Isaacson has written for *The Telegraph*, *Independent on Sunday*, *National Geographic* and many journals (see blurb of *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey*). Apart from *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey*, Isaacson has also written other books such as *South Africa on the Wild Side* (1998) and *The Wild Host: The History and Meaning of the Hunt* (2001).

uncanny here arises from the fact that, as a postcolonial nation with full sovereignty, Botswana seems suddenly to have become unfamiliar with itself as it grapples with the issues of the land rights of its minorities.

Homi Bhabha's work abounds with a deep concern for the identity of minorities around the world. For this reason, he has made it clear that "a minoritarian condition is, indeed, a kind of global citizenship" (2004: xxi). Thus Bhabha proposes the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism, which measures "global progress from the minoritarian perspective" (ibid.: xxi), as the touchstone for conceptualizing identity in our globalized world. Rupert Isaacson's *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey* resonates with this discourse concerning minorities, while casting in relief the debate about the paradox of identity:

In the beginning, so my mother told me, were the Bushmen – peaceful, golden-skinned hunters whom people also called Khoisan or San. They had lived in Africa longer than anyone else. Africa was also where we were from; my South African mother and Rhodesian father were very clear on that. Though we lived in London, my sister ... and I inhabited a childhood world filled with images and objects from the vast southern sub-continent. (2003: 3)

Isaacson's reflection is instructive in two paradoxical ways; firstly, the fact that Africa, a continent with black majority populations, or where the majority of its people are black, like countries elsewhere such as those in America and Australia is also home to certain minority groups who, though largely regarded as indigenes of the land, are

treated with utmost scorn and denigration; and secondly, the fact that even in a world where democracy is the watchword, Isaacson's story demonstrates the global predicament of minority groups and thus calls attention to Homi Bhabha's notion of vernacular cosmopolitanism, "global progress from the minoritarian perspective" (2004: xvi).

Through expressing his life as narration, the narrator goes further and examines his own identity as well as that of many white populations on the continent of Africa, who because of colonialism, were left dispersed all over the continent. Isaacson was born to Jewish immigrant parents who were Southern Rhodesians. Growing up in London, where he went to school following his parents' relocation from Southern Rhodesia due to Zimbabwe's independence war, the narrator is caught up in a cultural liminality, specially on being told that Africa is "the land of my fathers" (p. 23). Further, his mother and grandfather – two members of his family more reverent towards and adept at telling stories about Africa – remind the narrator of the continent as "our origins, about the dynastic lines going down the generations" (p. 10). As a grown man, he is able to reflect that the need to identify with the land of his forebears is "less pressing" (p. 24) and yet that need is always a "constant presence" (p. 24), prompting him to wonder whether he "would return to the land of my fathers"(p. 30):

As childhood turned to adolescence, it became less comfortable to be caught between cultures, to be part

English, part African. The stories, artifacts, white African friends and relatives that constituted my life at home began to clash more and more with the reality of living and going to school in England. I didn't fit in. Was our family English or African, I would be asked? Neither and both, it seemed. (p.19)

At present, this feeling of displacement is evident in sentiments of perceiving England as his home, sentiments which consign Africa to memories of a receding past where, as the narrator puts it, “[t]he need to identify with the land of my fathers seemed to diminish” (p. 24). This happens despite his being “restless in London” (p. 19) and feeling “like an outsider” (p. 19), making him long for Africa, while upon arriving on the continent a few days later, Isaacson is jubilant as he greets “the land of my fathers”. (p. 23)

Rupert Isaacson's experience is a condition that is faced by most “postcolonials” in the modern era, something that resonates with what Edward Said calls “the exilic, the marginal, subjective, migratory energies of modern life” (1994: 334). Thus to expand on Said's insights using Homi Bhabha's words, Rupert Isaacson has become a subject of cultural difference and occupies the space of cultural translation which is not unconnected with exigencies of movement and migration in general. Bhabha writes:

This liminality of migrant experience is no less a transnational phenomenon than a translational one; there is no resolution to it because the two conditions are ambivalently enjoined in the ‘survival’ of migrant life. Living in the interstices ..., caught in-between a ‘nativist’, even nationalist, atavism and a postcolonial metropolitan

assimilation, the subject of cultural difference becomes a problem...the irresolution, or liminality, of 'translation', the element of resistance in the process of transformation (2004: 321).

It is hardly surprising that this feeling of "at-homeness" and "not-at-homeness" is a recurrent staple of postcolonial literature.

The notion of liminality as cultural translation is also embodied in the story that Isaacson tells about Hardbattle, a white Englishman who comes to Botswana in the 1900s, marries a Khoisan woman and sets up a ranching business in the remote Botswana outpost of Ghanzi. Many decades later, John, Tom's eldest son, was to become a vehement campaigner for the rights of the Bushmen as a minority group in Botswana. As Isaacson records, "[i]n the early 1990s, John began campaigning for Bushmen political representation in Botswana, and more specifically, an end to the forced removals of Bushmen from Botswana's Central Kalahari Game Reserve" (p. 114).

As opposed to Rupert, John Hardbattle and his family represent those "postcolonials" deserving of Bhabha's in-between appellation of vernacular cosmopolitans precisely for regarding Africa as home and enjoying a right to cultural difference and "symbolic citizenship", both of which are at the heart of the migrant experience and lend credence to the reality of a gradually globalizing world.

Isaacson draws on his own experience of his "rootedness" in Africa to reflect on the events that he relates in *The Healing Land: A Kalahari*

Journey, a text which is, at once, an autobiography, a history of the Khoisan or the Bushmen, as well as a specially written piece of reportage (commissioned by the BBC's special assignment radio programme) detailing the plight of the Khoisan people in Southern Africa, especially the way that these first inhabitants of Africa have been mistreated not only initially by white settlers but also later by black African ones. By placing in the spotlight various Bushman land claims in Southern Africa at the end of the twentieth century, Isaacson's text brings into relief the hubris of the Botswana government, especially in its decision to expel the Botswana Bushmen from the Kalahari Game Reserve in the late 1990s, a case which was settled at the end of 2006. Broadly speaking, Isaacson's text provides an insightful examination of African identity in terms of three perspectives, namely that of the minority Bushmen, the majority black Bantu populations, and the white settlers. In other words, through representations of the Bushmen and others, Isaacson's text casts into relief the vexed subject of place and identity within colonial discourse. In Southern Africa, in particular, the Khoisan, a people supposed to be the indigenous heirs to the land have been "colonized" and portrayed as the "other" and have been subjected to untold suffering, both in terms of genocide and displacement. Homi Bhabha finds this debate radically stricken by a disabling ambivalence:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of

colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated (2004: 95)

In Southern Africa, Bhabha's point about construction and representations of otherness in discourse finds its most poignant expression in the lives and experiences of the Bushmen or KhoiSan peoples. It is a matter of tragic irony, for example, that although regarded as the "first people of southern Africa" (*A Kalahari Journey*: 25), a people generally untainted by warrior traditions, the Bushmen have always been subjected to colonization and marginalization, and always have been typecast as the "Other", the underclass or second class citizens (*ibid.*: 111). Oftentimes, the Bushmen are "othered" by being displayed in national parks for the amusement of tourists (*ibid.*: pp. 85 & 86) and by being described in official Botswana circles as RADs or Rural Area Dwellers.⁵ Another memorable example of the process of "othering" stems from the eighteenth century when a KhoiSan woman called Saartje Bartman was exhibited in Europe between 1810 until her death in 1815, for her inordinate sexuality, which aroused much curiosity and excitement amongst Europeans (*ibid.*: 85).

⁵ See Jeff Ramsay, a famous Botswana historian, who has written extensively on the Khoisan people and their mistreatment at the hands of the Botswana government and also on the country's rich cattle barons who often use cheap Khoisan labour.

In his famous essay entitled *DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation* Homi Bhabha sees the modern (Western) nation (or indeed any nation conceived in the womb of modernity) as being stricken with a disabling ambivalence. This ambivalence, Bhabha observes, manifests itself in the (modern) nation's aspirations to historicity, the homogeneity of its peoples and a holism of culture and nationhood. It is this discourse of cultural modernity that rears its ugly head and is played out in a dramatic way in modern postcolonial Botswana between 1997 and 2006 and that lies at the centre of Isaacson's text.

"There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (1973: 217), writes Walter Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Benjamin's remark is instructive in light of the current discussion which pivots on the strained relations between the Khoisan people living in Botswana and the(ir) Botswana government, and calls attention to Homi Bhabha's idea of vernacular cosmopolitanism and its importance for shedding light on the nature of minority identities in the modern world. In *The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey*, Isaacson remarks:

Larger than Belgium or Switzeland, the 52800 square kilometre Central Kalahari Game Reserve, which was set up in 1961, is the largest game reserve in the worldThe people commonly known throughout the world as the Bushmen, but more properly referred to as Basarwa, have been resident in and around the area for probably thousands of years. Originally nomadic hunters and gatherers, the lifestyle of the Basarwa has gradually changed with the times as they live in settlements, some

of which are situated within the Southern half of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Government is now encouraging these people to move to areas outside the reserve in order that they may be provided with modern facilities, schools, clinics etc. and integrate them into modern society.⁶

In recent times, conventional reporting concerning the San people who live in this Game Reserve has been portraying them as in conflict with the government of Botswana, replicating the tensions of frontier colonialism in which national hysteria about the “savagery” and “otherness” of the San people is played up. This was exemplified in the government’s attempts to relocate the San people from their homeland of many centuries into urban areas. Following a decision taken by the government of Botswana in 1997 to relocate the San people, the state found itself facing yet another landmark, identity-related lawsuit in 2002, the first being the citizenship case of 1994 involving Unity Dow. Filed in July 2004, the second involved the San people trying to regain their ancestral land, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, from which they were facing eviction by the government. The government’s basis for the decision was the integration of the San into mainstream Botswana communities where modern facilities which take the difficulty out of life were available. But the San people viewed the government’s logic and apparent gesture of goodwill with suspicion, arguing that, despite material benefits, any abrupt act of relocation would have destabilized their way of life, a life they had lived for centuries. In simple terms, cultures do not adapt through coercion, a process which could lead to a collapse of social

⁶ Isaacson quotes this information from official leaflets whose sources are not given.

cohesion and the positive spiritual aspects of ancestral culture. It became apparent at this stage that the government wanted to secure the reserve in order to pave the way for diamond exploration and mining.

Interestingly, in most press conferences, both at home and overseas, Festus Mogae, the current president of Botswana, gave support and credence to his government's decision that the relocation process should proceed, his stock response being as follows:

How can we continue to have Stone Age creatures in an age of computers? If the Bushmen want to survive they must change or otherwise, like dodo, they will perish.⁷

It must be pointed out that, rather than regard the above sentiments as something of a philanthropic appeal for help, I argue that the president's comments represent "the excess of signification or the trajectory of desire" (Bhabha 2004: 100). This is a representational practice that is "a regime of truth ... structurally similar to realism" (ibid.: 101), the whole subject discursively fixed in the diachrony of history. To be sure, the language underlying the text typically borders on social Darwinism, and also echoes Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry, with its "disciplinary double" (2004: 123). In short, the registers of mimicry are reflected in the President's "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*" (ibid.: 122). According to Bhabha, there is a great deal in his language suggesting the President's *a priori* understanding of the San people as knowable and being

⁷ Quoted by Tanyanika Samuels at <http://www.naj.org/front>

predisposed to atavism and primitivism. All that the President seems aware of is Bhabha's "pedagogical" use of modernity, according to which a nation is viewed as anteriority, rather than the "performative", where a nation is a construct. Little wonder that he invokes a stereotyped representational practice shored up by ideas of modernity (urbanization and progress) thus pointing up what Homi Bhabha calls "a contingent tension within modernity" (2004: 351). According to Bhabha, the President here contravenes the United Nations Charter on Human Rights. For example, Bhabha observes that

[a]rticle 27, one of the two main implementing conventions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, supports 'the right of minorities ... to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language'. (2004: xxii)

To quote Dirlik, the President perceives the San people as representing "enclaves of backwardness left out of progress, as the realm of rural stagnation against the dynamism of the urban, industrial civilization of capitalism, as the realm of particularistic culture against universal scientific rationality and, perhaps more importantly, as the obstacle to full realization of that political form of modernity, the nation-state" (1997: 463). For in the eyes of the President, the Khoisan underclass, perceived as locked in a time-warp of backwardness, must be catapulted from their Stone Age culture and way of life into the inimitably exciting modernity which his government enjoys in the name of progress, even if it means using coercion. Unfortunately, this representational practice does not

encourage Homi Bhabha's idea of cultural difference but rather sees culture as a totality – a perception which perpetuates self/other stereotypes, including those of race, gender, class, and so forth.

Further, President Mogae's tendentious comments seem to reveal a narrow nationalism, a nationalist ideal in which "the horizon of holism, towards which cultural authority aspires, is made ambivalent in the colonial signifier" (Bhabha 2004: 182). This begins with, first, the process of relocation itself which marks the beginning of an expensive and protracted legal battle in the country's history . After a few thousand of the San have been removed, the process is discontinued by the courts, describing the evictions as wrongful and illegal. And following the court ruling of 13 December 2006, the San people are awarded their claim to the Central Kalahari Game Reserve and advised to remain on the land.

Read against the backdrop of Walter Benjamin's historical materialism, with its emphasis on "brush[ing] history against the grain"(1973: 217), President Mogae suddenly yields to the Hegelian-Marxist dialectical temptation of reading culture in realist terms by collapsing time and space. As Bhabha would say, for Mogae, "[n]ational time becomes concrete and visible in the chronotype of the local, particular, graphic, from beginning to end" (2004: 205). Built into this dialectic is a historicism that presents the idea of the nation as a holism and therefore a veritable force in transmitting cultural modernity, in this case urbanization. Seeing Botswana as a globalizing nation, President Mogae falls prey to "transformational

myths and realities of global connectivity” (Bhabha 2004: xv), instead of invoking the cosmopolitan ideal. Mogae’s conviction about “living ...history ‘contemporaneously’, in a ‘homogenous empty time’ of the People-as-One ... finally deprives minorities of those marginal liminal spaces from which they can intervene in the unifying and totalizing myths of the national culture” (Bhabha 2004: 358). But the philosophical poverty of this appeal to modernity is demonstrated in the manifestation of the concept of dissemination in the courtroom where the High Court’s ruling (in favour of the San) effectively disrupts “the continuum of history” with which Walter Benjamin has so famously come to be associated (and which was prefigured in the relocation process). Instead, the case introduces the concept of hybridity through supplementarity where the space of the modern nation is not horizontal. As Bhabha puts it,

[t]his supplementary space of cultural signification that opens up – and holds together – the performative and the pedagogical, provides a narrative structure characteristic of modern political rationality: the marginal integration of individuals in a repetitious movement between the antinomies of law and order. From the liminal movement of the culture of the nation – at once opened up and held together – minority discourse emerges. (2004: 222)

“Nationalism”, Benedict Anderson reminds us, “is the pathology of modern developmental history” (1983: 14) and as such “invents nations where they do not exist” (Ibid.: 15). The architecture of the president’s argument here is perverse, precisely because it rests on the flimsy logic that the San desperately need modernity, when in actual fact the president wants to project the much more favourable

picture of an enhanced nationalism for his entire nation of Botswana. Deeply aware of nationalism's neurotic implications, Homi Bhabha too issues a caveat about articulating this form of historicism.

The Bushmen's victory affirms Homi Bhabha's argument about the liminality of the modern Western nation, which is to present the nation as a temporality, "an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture" (2004: 200). While the government searches for a holistic culture with a basis in modernity, the court ruling draws a parallel with Walter Benjamin's angel of history whose posture (as judgment) guarantees an openness of history rather than closure.

This notion of a resistance to closure is, according to Homi Bhabha, "the writing of cultural difference" and is characterized by "an enactment of undecidability" (2004: 180). This enactment makes nonsense of the notions of cultural diversity and cultural plurality which most probably initiated the relocations, in the name of "cultural ideals of progress, piety, rationality and order" (ibid.: 184). Cultural difference, Bhabha argues perceptively, is

the enunciatory disorder of the colonial present It lies in the staging of the colonial signifier in the narrative of uncertainty of culture's in-between: between sign and signifier, neither one nor the other, neither sexuality nor race, neither simply, memory nor desire. (2004: 180)

Hence the postcolonial nation of Botswana emerges from the court case and the subsequent ruling as a cultural temporality, dependent on cultural difference whose interpellation of identity is "always "incomplete" or open to cultural translation" (Bhabha 2004: 233).

Seen as a clichéd proposition of history, the country's notion of holism is made ambivalent by the court ruling. In short, the discourse of cultural difference introduces "the possibility for cultural contestation, the ability to shift the ground of knowledges, or to engage in 'the war of position'" and further "marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification" (2004: 233). To invoke Bhabha further, the minorities are "not (to) be contained within the Heim of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" (2004: 236). Culture – that realm of profound uncertainty – can no longer be perceived as transparent.

Culture's *unheimlich* nature is further explored in Caitlin Davies' piece of reporting, *Place of Reeds*. In this text, the narrator, Davies⁸ herself, dramatically introduces her "unhomely" world in the prologue to her story as follows:

I'm not quite sure how I got here. Until a few months as I was living in Maun, a southern African village on the edge of the Okavango Delta, a miraculous inland swamp in a land of desert. Maun was my home and I never thought I would leave. (POR p.1)

As the narrator she then ends her story with the following disclaimer:

The events portrayed in this book are true, but some names have been changed and, in some cases, fictional characters used in order to protect certain individuals.

⁸ Born in 1964, Caitlin Davies holds dual citizenship of Britain and Botswana, the former as the country of her birth, and the latter through marriage to a local Botswana man. She came to live in Botswana in 1990 following her marriage to a Motswana man she had met in America while studying there. Her return to England twelve years later was prompted by the dissolution of her marriage. Besides *Place of Reeds*, Davies is the author of *Jameston Blues*, *The Return of El Negro*, and *Black Mulberries*. She also makes contributions to *The Independent*. (Sourced from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caitlin_Davies.)

Both the opening lines of the novel and the disclaimer make the important point that Caitlin Davies' work draws on both her personal experiences: "[t]he events ... are true" and historical fact, but that they have been reworked to read like a novel. This explains why, like Isaacson's text, *Place of Reeds* is examined as an instance of reportage.

In her book, Caitlin Davies recounts the story of her sojourn in Botswana from about 1991 – a sojourn and relocation made possible by her marriage to Ron – up until the dissolution of their marriage twelve years later. On the one hand, Davies' story, which see-saws between history, journalism and anecdotal reporting, records the broad sweep of Botswana's history from the pre-colonial era right through to the twenty-first century. This historical range includes, for example, the gold rush of Francistown in the 1860s, the Botswana Chiefs' rejection of the Union with South Africa in favour of becoming a protectorate under the British, the establishment of Maun, "place of reeds", as the Capital of North-East Botswana in 1915, Sir Seretse Khama's controversial marriage to an Englishwoman before leading his country to independence in 1966, and De Beers' discovery of diamonds in 1967. On the other hand, Davies' narrative also concerns her ability to fictionalize some of the events which form the core of her story.

Of immense significance about her historical reporting is the focus she places on the diffusion not only of "international or multinational

capital” (Bhabha 2004: 346) but also of “the transnational dissemination of cultural modernity” (Ibid: 346), both of which herald the onset of globalization. The narrator here presents the Botswana nation-state as a locus for what Homi Bhabha calls “the people of the pagus – colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities – wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation” (2004: 236).

Amid all the chequered history of this postcolonial state, like Rupert Isaacson, Caitlin Davies peppers her narrative with the kind of reportage that certainly exposes the underbelly of Botswana: for example, the country’s mistreatment of and marginalization of its minorities, in particular, the Khoisan people, a case which she exposes whilst working for a Botswana newspaper. In addition, Davies’ story is about her life in a society where tradition is alive and well, modernity and globalization notwithstanding, the most notable example being the pervasive sense in which man and woman are seen as essentially different. In fact, the major preoccupation of the second part of the novel is the narrator’s unhomely life in a large extended family where she must grapple with banalities such as childbearing and family chores. It is partly tradition and partly the extended family system that reduce her to the status of a servant, a situation which leads to her breaking up with Ron, her husband. Finally, the immensely disturbing incident of her rape leaves the narrator shattered; nobody wants to talk about it; Ron is, at best,

silent, and his family members choose not to go to court to offer their support for the narrator's trauma. Everybody is so very insouciantly indifferent that the court appearance itself is a farce. This leads her to conclude: "[i]n Botswana people didn't want to talk about ... rape" (386). This marks the height of her feelings of displacement, exemplified by her involvement in an organisation called War Against Rape (WAR), believing that perhaps rape is an institutionalized form of violence in this society. This is also followed by the desire to leave the country. All these events bring to the fore the firm stand the narrator takes on matters of race and feminism.

Consequently, as she and Ron travel from Gaborone to Maun, for example, she feels "unhomed" by thinking in stereotypical terms and images about Botswana and Africa in her confession that

[t]here was a part of me that thought of Africa in terms of the Saturday morning *Tarzan* films I used to watch with my brother when we were kids. That Africa was jungle-like, full of wild animals and occasional natives, a place of adventure and danger. (p. 33)

But Davies presently gets disabused of this stereotyped view of Africa as she travels along a two-lane highway to Maun, "place of reeds".

Once her marriage to Ron is consummated, Davies likes living, and feels at home, in Botswana and Africa. This becomes evident when she is naturalized and is awarded, through a passport, Botswana citizenship, a gesture which leads to her renouncing her British citizenship, and says:

I was a Motswana now, an African citizen, and I could live and work as I liked. ...Botswana was my home. (p. 211)

The idea of home expressed here is not a place of rootedness, the locale where one was born, but an ideational and doubly cryptic one in which one reimagines, reconstructs and reconstitutes the new place of arrival as “home” in quotation marks. This notion is often etched on one’s memory and is common to all those who are affected by displacement and relocation – voluntary or otherwise – people such as exiles, immigrants, expatriates, and so forth. That the Botswana state allows Caitlin to be “contained within the Heim of the national culture” (Bhabha 2004: 236), is significant because she achieves a new sense of belonging, the sense becoming so intense that while in Britain on a visit one year, she recalls, “England was no longer my home” (p. 247). At this point, Davies becomes what Homi Bhabha terms a “borderline’ figure of a massive historical displacement – that is not only a ‘transitional’ reality, but also a ‘translational phenomenon” (2004: 320). This is “because the two are ambivalently conjoined in the survival of the migrant life” (2004: 320). This feeling of *heimlich*, of belongingness, extends and is enjoyed by Davies as she joins Ron’s family and expresses the following outpouring of positive sentiments about her new home:

I felt comfortable here now. I felt included in the family; I knew how to relate to its different members. With Eliah I was always polite, interested in her advice, quick to offer any help she might need. With Madintwa I could be more myself, telling stories and jokes, questioning her about life and Maun in the old days. And Ron softened in their presence, sinking down on to a chair with ease, proud of

the new house he'd built, his salary that allowed him to buy them meat, the way his daughter, Alice, knew him as a father and was growing confident and loving. (161)

However, as years go by, Caitlin Davies' feeling of belonging begins to be whittled away, and her world begins to shrink, giving way to a state of spiritual diminution and unhomely moments, all this in the wake of a stultifying tradition which does not allow her space to articulate her needs as a woman, and as a foreigner (p. 189). Instead, she becomes "an unhomely presence" (Bhabha 2004: 19) in the eyes of Ron's family. As Homi Bhabha would put it, Caitlin Davies' "recesses of domestic space become sites for ... the most intricate invasion. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused ... disorienting" (2004: 13). Thus the idea of unhomeliness is a product of the deleterious effect of the Botswana model of patriarchal ascendancy and the African extended family system, both of which conspire to gradually wear Caitlin down. The narrator feels searing moments of anguish and despair, real moments of *unheimlich* and dislocation, as her husband Ron turns into "a proper African patriarch" (p. 209) and cuts his wife out of all decision-making processes while at the same time allowing members of his family, especially his mother, to interfere in their marriage. Thus, benefiting from the two systems, Ron will neither consult his wife Caitlin on anything nor help her with the chores as he used to. Instead, his manipulative mother takes over the running of their family, thereby becoming the bane of Caitlin's existence. With the cleavage widening in the eight-year marriage, Caitlin becomes "increasingly isolated" (p. 314), and the idea of Botswana being home

becomes unhomely. As Bhabha would say, Caitlin literally “inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality”, “a borderline existence”, and finds herself “at the crossroads of history” (2004: 19). This feeling leads her to arrive at the conclusion that apart from Ruby, her daughter who could belong to both England and Botswana, Caitlin herself “didn’t belong in Botswana” (p. 434).

Secondly, the narrator reflects on the kinds of changes that have taken place in Botswana during her twelve years of living there. For example she considers that after independence in 1966 (p. 23), the combination of a culture of good governance and the discovery of diamonds in 1967 (p. 24) turn Botswana around into “a place where constructive criticism and opposition are actively encouraged” (p. 24). The wealth generated by the diamonds, together with the democratic culture instituted by the country’s leaders, ensures that within a few years, the country is “one of Africa’s shining success stories” (p. 24). Ten years on, not only is Gaborone, Botswana’s capital city, “one of the fastest growing cities in the world” (p. 34), but the “place of reeds” has also undergone a massive transformation. Says Davies:

Maun had now acquired an official status, with Internet cafes, a cinema, three shopping malls, plenty of bars and a handful of restaurants selling European food. Botswana itself was now reasonably well known in England, with a Miss World and an Olympic running star. (p. 392)

She here portrays a country that is slowly globalizing and becoming part of what Homi Bhabha calls “global cosmopolitanism” (2004: xiv), the kind of society whose “relative prosperity and privilege [are]

founded on ideas of progress that are complicit with neo-liberal forms of governance, and free-market forces of competition” (Ibid.: xiv). The internet, shopping malls, exotic food and participation in international events, among other factors, are telltale signs of global modernity in Botswana and project a cosmopolitan society where its inhabitants participate in a celebration of multiple cultures, thereby inhabiting “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983; Bhabha 2004).

But for all its much-vaunted democratic values and the rule of law, Caitlin Davies paints a picture of Botswana as a place where the good and the bad coexist, albeit uneasily. In her representations of journalistic narrative, Davies highlights some of the most enduring social ills with which the country will have to grapple, including the oppressive remnants of tradition which engender a discrimination based on gender, the suffering of marginalized groups, the suppression of minority rights, and the rise of other forms of discrimination such as xenophobia. Caitlin Davies finds herself at the receiving end of xenophobic behaviour from Ron’s relatives, especially when their marriage begins to show symptoms of rupture.

Whilst freelancing for the *Mmegi* newspaper and researching various topical issues, Davies almost places herself on a collision course with the authorities, following her recounting of the scoop in the paper she works for, concerning the looming scandal involving Government’s decision to forcibly remove the Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. With Davies herself at the centre of the controversial article, she observes that

the paper became caught up in the threatened removal of the Basarwa – or Bushmen – from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Ever since the 1980s, the Botswana Government had wanted to move the Basarwa out of the reserve, though it never really said why. The Basarwa didn't want to go and every time relocation plans were suggested the inhabitants of the reserve refused. (p. 196)

This report brings her into trouble with the government especially when it becomes evident that it carries insinuations of the government's use of strong-arm tactics as well as bribery to court the complaisance of the Khoisan in the relocation process (p. 196).

Further, she becomes involved in researching the issue of violence against women in North-West Botswana by writing for WAR. While doing so Davies garners significant but profoundly disturbing realities about traditional Botswana: that "rape was too unmentionable" (p. 341); that "a woman is raped in Botswana every twelve minutes"(p. 354) and concludes that this state of affairs accounts for the fact that the country exhibits "the highest HIV rate in the world" (p. 392). In a trial involving her own rape case, Caitlin experiences an intense awareness of the entrenchment of patriarchy in Botswana, despite modernity.

Homi Bhabha perceives "blasphemy as a transgressive act of cultural translation" (2004: 323). Further he argues insightfully that "[t]he borderline engagements of cultural difference ... often confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and

challenge normative expectations of development and progress” (2004: 3) Thus Davies’ engagements with WAR, as well as her involvement with the relocation of the San people situated her at the core of cultural difference and of experiencing culture as a matter of translation.

To conclude, all the examples of reportage in this chapter point to various attempts in the postcolonial nation of Botswana – the national language, the ethnic structure, and the position of the San people – to read the nation space holistically as a fixed narrative in the mode of realism. But as Homi Bhabha reminds us, the idea of nation is a temporality and a social construct:

To write the story of the nation demands that we articulate that archaic ambivalence that informs the time of modernity. We may begin by questioning that progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion – *the many as one* – shared by organic theories of the holism of culture and community, and theorists who treat gender, class and race as social totalities that are expressive of unitary collective experiences. (2004: 204)

That questioning of the progressive metaphor has been fully discussed in this chapter.

Conclusion

We should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. (Bhabha 2004: 56)

No return to the past is without irony, or without a sense that a full return, or repatriation, is impossible. (Said 2003: xxxv)

In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness – a *mestiza* consciousness – and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (Anzaldua 1987: 79-80)

The above passages encapsulate what the present research or study has established: the fact that the lives of the authors and their works have been presented as narratives which fully exemplify culture's borderline conditions, or stories that are a unique celebration of what Homi Bhabha has insightfully described as "[t]he 'middle passage' of contemporary culture" (2004: 8). It is important to note that the "middle passage" or liminal identity which I have outlined need not be mistaken for an impingement on or obfuscation of other identitarian positions, such as nativism or Pan-Africanism, which may have their place yet in valorizing origins. Crucially, the "passage" entails inhabiting an interstitial space – an in-between moment according to

which notions of originary and authentic traditions or cultures are thrown overboard. Or, to state this differently, rather than allow identity labels to be fossilized in their primordial dualities, Bhabha's Third Space opens up possibilities of cultural dialogue, ensuring that identity becomes a process of temporal movement within the liminal space, a moment of transition where the sign of culture is not left lodged in antagonistic oppositions but is made to constantly dissolve and release the power and possibilities for openness, exchange and eventually cross-cultural initiation.

To that end, I have used the hermeneutic of liminality which, as a form of criticism, is a kind of readerly engagement with texts whereby they are examined in their slippery openness, as effects of heteroglossia and dialogia, as against monoglot and authoritarian texts, to use Bakhtin's concepts, in their revelation of meaning. As I hope to have shown, such a textual reading is "catechrestic: reading between the lines" (Bhabha 2004: 269) or "a kind of reading against the grain" (ibid.: 250) which yields a kind of agency in the texts (where texts will mean persons, social situations or literary records) that is "intersubjective" (ibid.: 269). As a hermeneutic, liminality draws on Bakhtin's theorization of the novel as heteroglossia, "its many-tongued nature" (Doody 1996: 481), rather than as a monoglot. By doing so, Bakhtin suggests that, in its openness and openendedness, the novel aspires, and lends itself, to multiplicity and multivocality. This is an agency that is embedded not in one culture but rather is implicated in Bhabha's concept of celebrating hybridity, even if such a celebration is not seen as a seamless transition.

As has been demonstrated, this study remains true to Homi Bhabha's commitment to liminality, in this thesis represented by that postcolonial moment in the text which underscores the immanence of a particular restlessness, a moment that haunts, and which, as Bhabha rightly points out, is "no longer a synchronic presence" but "an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment" (2004: 4). As traditions slowly lose their efficacy, especially in the wake of capital modernity, that moment has become manifest in Botswana and Africa where subjects are seen as being jolted out of the crucibles of their own cultures and begin to occupy, indeed, negotiate borderlands of other cultures in what Bhabha calls the Third Space of enunciation. Hence these subjects come to experience culture as a mobile and performative commodity that transcends opposing positions.

In this thesis, I have noted the affiliation between Victor Turner's idea of the *limen* and Homi Bhabha's formulation of the postcolonial condition (as inherently intersubjective) to argue for the vexed and fluid nature of identities, and the need to explore the "others" of ourselves. I have been guided by the perspectives of Turner and Bhabha, and these theorists' sense that cultural enunciations take place in the liminal, intersubjective spaces, no matter how uncertain these contact zones may be. In so thinking, I have argued, both Turner and Bhabha are involved in thinking at or beyond the limit, to borrow Stuart Hall's usage, a thinking that shatters notions of overdetermined forms of signification. During the study, I have also

attempted to bear in mind Edward Said's ideas about contrapuntality, the "worldliness" of a text, exilic consciousness, to mention some; all of which have a purchase on the notion of liminality and point up paradoxes of identities in the postcolonial condition. Throughout this thesis, I have employed postcolonial theory as a discourse which uses the technical apparatus of discourse analysis to read texts. I have maintained that the vision of the postcolonial nation of Botswana projected in these texts concerns that "moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity" (Bhabha 2004: 2). Of further interest is that the writers themselves are located in that hybrid or intersubjective space where they perceive subjectivity as ever shifting, and identity as endlessly in process.

First, in this thesis I have attempted to demonstrate how Bhabha's intermediate space of liminality, that hybrid moment outside the sentence, is inflected and finds its most eloquent expression in the works of Unity Dow. I have done this by examining the writer's conceptions of identity through a reading of the famous court case "outside the sentence" (Bhabha 2004: 265), or "negotiating meaning and agency through the time-lag in-between the sign" (ibid.: 263). The reading of Unity Dow's case against her government provides moments of agency and identification which are nothing but subversive, a kind of subversion or individuation which is liberating. Little wonder then that it was through this case that libertarian Unity Dow ended up empowering Botswana women and children with rights. Further, an analysis of Dow's four texts, I have tried to show,

provides the reader with an opportunity to see Dow's vision expand from one which presents (female) bodies as products of cultural and male-derived belief systems, customs and traditions to an intersubjective perspective in which people, especially women, either transcend the confines of their culture or straddle more than one culture. In *Far and Beyond* and *The Screaming of the Innocent*, for example, Dow writes about a female oppression that is epistemic, and about an essential and stereotyped femininity, and therefore embodied subjectivities, as products of biologism. She does so through representations of female bodies that are entrapped in material frames and subdued by culture. But Dow challenges this mythology of an essentialized and fixed idea of selfhood through the identities of her characters, to whom she allows a degree of agency far in excess of traditional norms.

I suggest that through characters such as Mosa (*Far and Beyond*), Amantle (*The Screaming of the Innocent*), Monei (*Juggling Truths*) and Naledi (*The Heavens May Fall*), Dow's conception of the personal (in the court case) indeed becomes political in her fiction by creating a space of enunciation where, as Bhabha would say, "culture's authority is undone" (2004: 195). For example, through Mosa's subversive predisposition, Unity Dow tries to show that there is a light at the end of the tunnel in the lives of the domestically-bound women of *Far and Beyond*. This light begins to shimmer in *The Screaming of the Innocent* where the main character tackles hegemony head-on. Another dimension of culture (understood in the light of both tradition and modernity) emerges in *Juggling Truths*.

Monei perceives a great deal of contradiction in this notion of culture as a dualism, a motif which is pursued further in *The Heavens May Fall*, but she proceeds carefully and is thus able to dislodge and do away with such dualistic thinking. Set and located well into the twenty-first century, *The Heavens May Fall* abounds with representations of identities much punctuated by capital modernity and the *zeitgeist* of globalisation. In other words, Dow's political and writerly consciousness allows Naledi, her protagonist, to sniff out culture's nonsense, contradictions and its myriad disciplinary generalizations before throwing them into a relativist pot prior to moving on to negotiate a liberating, third space. In *The Heavens May Fall*, Naledi's expression of intersubjective agency in the third space is indicated, partly, by the following statement:

But, finally it is by the standards of the glossy magazines that we measure ourselves and it is by those standards that our peers judge us. (Dow 2006: 14)

Secondly, I have also discussed Alexander McCall Smith's Ramotswe as "living the borderlines of the present" (Bhabha 2004: 1) – that intersubjective space which Anzaldua calls the "third element" (1987: 78) or "a consciousness of the borderlands" (1987: 78). In this "state of perpetual transition" (ibid.: 78) Ramotswe is made to think "beyond narratives of ordinary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (2004: 2). Her subjectivity veers between the traditional which is seen as normative, if largely stereotyped, and the iterative or contingent, which is identity as performativity.

Ramotswe's own life is ample testimony to living an intersubjective existence. From time to time, she is made to rethink and redefine the cultural history of Botswana and Africa, and reconfigure new myths about place and identity through the lens and new symbols of capital modernity and related global flows.

Subjectivity formed iteratively or contingently is an intersubjective identity which embodies ambivalence and avoids binary closures, an identity manifested in Smith's characters such as JLB Matekoni and Grace Makutsi – both immensely self-reflexive characters who draw their identity as much from tradition as from modernity and offer different interpretations of their changing society.

Thirdly, through the examination of reportage as both reporting and non-fiction novel, it has been shown that the nation space cannot be fixed. In other words, it is a complex, "cultural unconscious, a liminal uncertain state of cultural belief" (Bhabha 2004: 206) which can be read from the margins of modernity. Thus efforts to make the Botswana national language into a monologic voice and a chronotope that aspires to and speaks for a homogeneous empty time of modernity are frustrated by dialogic performances and rituals of the modern national state. Reportage as presented in this thesis by Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies, in particular, is elevated to an art form and, as Bhabha would say, tries "to probe the uncanny unconscious of history's doubling" (2004: 280). This aspect of doubling has been demonstrated by attempts (especially by the President of Botswana) to invoke the rhetoric of nationalism or

modernity in general, in order to justify a massive marginalization and acts of manipulation of minority groups which would rather enjoy “symbolic citizenship” by seeking individuation than be bound to this pedagogical ideal of national culture. What is problematized in reportage is, to use Bhabha words,

an attempt to ... to universalize the spatial of modern cultural communities as living their history contemporaneously, in a ‘homogeneous empty time’ of the People-as-One that finally deprives the minorities of those marginal, liminal spaces from which they can intervene in the unifying and totalizing myths of the national culture. (2004: 358)

I conclude by offering a few observations regarding the implications of the study. The first is that Botswana is no longer a “bewitched crossroad”, a phrase Bessie Head used to describe Botswana’s cultural identity of apparent rustic purity, a society with a “culture almost intact” (1990: 78), and its ancient traditions undisturbed by the violence and turbulence of colonialism. That may well have been the case prior to the country’s independence but, as has been demonstrated in this thesis, Botswana has become a disseminated postcolonial state which incorporates “otherness” and others within its borders. To use Bhabha’s words, “there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities” (2004: 7). This is evident primarily in the lives, but also the works, of Dow, Smith, Isaacson and Davies. Unity Dow’s vision of culture is ineffably hybrid, one that abhors certainty; it is a non-positional kind of vision that envisages a society caught between

the local and the global. For Dow, culture is a gesture towards another space, another dream, a promise of freedom where one can reimagine and redefine oneself beyond dualities that overdetermine identity. Unity Dow reaches and sustains that moment of transition, a thinking outside self/other to which culture points and which is pervasive in those works discussed in this thesis.

Secondly, it is obvious there are other issues that are beyond the scope of this study, such as a feminist reading of either Dow's or Smith's fiction that would place emphasis on material and sexualized bodies. In this case, psychoanalytic, genetic, feminist and postmodern theories would have been used to bear witness to various representations of bodies, from gendered and transgressed bodies through to a celebration of cyborg, postmodern and postgender bodies which subvert culture and (rather romantic) notions of original wholeness. In Dow's case for example, *Far and Beyond* is largely concerned with material and claimed bodies whereas in *The Heavens May Fall*, naturalized categories of meaning, such as the concept of African beauty, are thrown overboard when modern women resort to women's magazines as springboards for defining those multiple spaces and borderlands which they inhabit. *Morality for Beautiful Girls*, Smith's third detective text, describes instances of beauty pageants as ways in which Smith presents the rather anorexic bodies of young women of Gaborone being transversed by multiple spaces and identities.

Thirdly, the study has also shown that Smith's fictional genre is ambiguous. In other words, it does not fulfill sufficient conditions for successful sleuthdom despite its pretensions to being detective writing, and especially the protagonist's constant references to Clovis Andersen's widely quoted detective manual which, as Ramotswe discovers, is full of oversights when it comes to the best way to gather intelligence. This is why Ramotswe's sense is to use her intuition and wisdom rather than adopt a slavish adherence to the rules contained in the manual. My reading of Smith's detective fiction has shown just how all absolutes and rigid oppositions can be scabrously dismantled to yield a cultural incommensurability, as Bhabha would say, which is at the core of the fiction. Such a reading, I contend, can be applied to many postcolonial texts in order to uncover underlying paradoxes and unanswered questions which render culture as a site of incomprehension, sometimes of miscomprehension, as demonstrated in the fiction of Alexander McCall Smith. As I hope to have shown, this has been my contribution to transnational literary study.

What remains of interest for further research is Smith's other series known as *The Sunday Philosophy Club*, which features the Edinburgh sleuth Isabel Dalhousie. A comparative study between this series and the detective fiction on Botswana would make for intriguing research. It would be stimulating, for instance, to find out whether the series on Edinburgh also gives expression to transition (as does the one on Botswana according to the present study), or gestures to Smith's break in his engagement concerning identity.

In closing, I invoke the words of Anzaldua and Keating who have argued that “[i]dentity, like a river, is always changing, always in transition ...” (2002: 556). This thesis has shown the force of Bhabha’s concept of liminality which Anzaldua and Keating echo above, presenting it as that transitional space of paradox and ambiguity whereby individuals experience reality as always fluid. In attempting to understand the paradoxical nature of identities in modern Botswana, the present thesis applied the liminal paradigm to the works of Unity Dow, Alexander McCall Smith, Rupert Isaacson and Caitlin Davies. As has been shown, liminality or the ambiguity of their positions, resonates in their fiction.

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