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“‘Yesterday’s another country’ – Losing the Farm in
Mark Behr’s *Kings of the Water* and Marlene Van
Niekerk’s *The Way of the Women*”

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Für Mama und Papa
In Liebe und Dankbarkeit

Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are equally truthfully acknowledged and identified.

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.....
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1. Introduction

Besides farming the land in a spirit of piety towards *voorgeslagte* and *nageslagte* (past and future generations), besides being a good steward, the farmer must also love the farm, love this one patch of earth above all others [...] (Coetzee (c) 86).

In his groundbreaking work *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988), J.M Coetzee ((c) 99) explores the very soul of the Boer, the South African farmer and discloses how the Afrikaner's sense of *Self* was closely associated with a "devotion of labour to the past and future of the farm [...], signed above all with the scars of the plough" for generations. Throughout his analysis Coetzee portrays the *Plaas* as the last sanctuary of Boer identity and reveals the predominant position land and landscape receive in South African literature in general, and in the *Plaasroman* in specific. In accordance with Coetzee's notion, Ewald Mengel (157), too, draws special attention to the *Plaas*, as a manifestation of white authority and the "cornerstone of [Boer] identity". Moreover, Mengel (158) comprehends the farm as a symbolic space, reflecting South Africa's political, social, and economic realities.

Thus, the *Plaasroman* not only emerges as an invaluable source for an exploration of Afrikaner identity, but, in the light of the topicality and explosiveness of the question of rightful landownership in the context of post-apartheid South Africa's attempts to redistribute land unrightfully seized from the native population in the early 20th century, the farm novels of the new millennium are, undoubtedly, highly relevant contributions to the prominent discourses about identity and reconciliation in South Africa's post-apartheid era.

In this respect, this thesis sets out to investigate how the depiction of the farm, in two selected contemporary *Plaasromane* (i.e Marlene Van Niekerk's *The Way of the Women* (2004) and Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* (2009)), determines and reflects the protagonists' conception of their *Self*. The analysis investigates, in particular, the correlation between conceptual power relations and the main characters' relationship with the land, and furthermore explores the farm as an identity forming place. For this purpose, this thesis employs an interdisciplinary approach and establishes the analysis on three different levels:

First of all, this research paper provides a historical analysis and outline of the socio-political events decisive for the South African's present-day identity crisis in order to contextualize Van Niekerk's and Behr's novels, for those works display, as the majority of South African literature, an "obsessive preoccupation with the past" (Mengel 147). In

addition, a historical disquisition on South Africa's colonial era, as well as on events such as the *Great Trek*, or the *Anglo- Boer Wars*, is inevitable in order to comprehend and understand what came to be known as the Afrikaner cast-iron identity.

Secondly, in order to provide further ground for an in-depth exploration of Boer identity as determined by his relation to the farm, the present survey presents Glynis Breakwell's (75) psychological model of identity formation, and eventually proposes Twigger-Ross' and Uzzel's (206ff) adapted version of it, to incorporate the category 'place' and investigate the significance of an individual's attachment to it. Thus, these theories build the grounds on which a contextualized analysis of the farm as an identity formative and supporting space is carried out in the close readings of the novels.

Eventually, this thesis applies a Foucauldian reading of the novels to provide an in-depth exploration of power relations and the farm as an identity supportive 'heterotopia'.

Owing to the fact that the Plaasroman genre developed from an initially patriarchal and nationalistic narration in support of Afrikaner ideology, into a powerful tool for literary reconsideration of previously sacred Boer notions, Van Niekerk's *The Way of the Women* being one of the most recent examples for this advancement, the paper outlines the historical development of this subgenre, before it considers the post-modern characteristics distinctive for the post-millennial Plaasromane that are subject of further analysis. However, due to the limited scope of this paper an extensive examination of the subversion of traditional themes of the Plaasroman genre can only focus on the most prominent instances, even though especially Van Niekerk's contribution would lend itself as a perfect source of investigation.

2. “Time. Chance. Coincidence”¹: The Making of South Africa

As already mentioned in the *Introduction* to this thesis, the all-pervasiveness of history in South African literature in general, and the Plaasroman in specific, is undeniable. Loader (qtd. in Loader and Niederle 21) emphasizes the importance of history in South African literature, portraying “how large public events became dramatically alive in the stories”. While the degree to which the Plaasroman depicts historical truths naturally varies with the story², a complete analysis cannot refrain from taking South Africa’s tortuous history into account. Conversely, with the emergence of post-modernism, historians have come to acknowledge that historiography “cannot give us direct access to objective facts”, for it “is simply the result of [...] the ideology of the historian” (Lerner 334). Thus, the contemporary Plaasroman as a depiction and (re-) interpretation of personal realities and individual truths inevitably contributes to an integral picture of South Africa’s past.

Accordingly, an exploration of the themes of change and loss in two selected postmillennial farm novels — as mentioned in the title of this thesis — has to comprise an outline of major historical events that were decisive for the nation’s and its individuals’ ongoing struggle and quest for identity.

2.1 Colonialism

It was the demand for spices — and the emerging quest to gain direct access to those valuable sources in order to increase profit margins — that eventually set off an Age of Exploration, leading the world not only into modern times, but implementing the seeds for the all-pervasive colonial trauma that signifies the 21st century.

As Standage (67) pinpoints in his *Edible History of Humanity*, it was “[t]he pursuit of spices [that] [...] remade the world, both by helping to illuminate its full extent and geography, and by motivating European explorers to seek direct access to the Indies.”

The quest for those “Splinters of Paradise” (Standage Ch. 5) triggered the discovery of the Americas, as well as the first circumnavigation of the globe. But, most importantly, at least with respect to South Africa’s tortuous history, the pursuit for direct access to the Spice Islands led to the emergence of the first — and presumably largest —

¹ Van Niekerk, *The Way of the Women*, 559.

² For example, Van Niekerk’s *The Way of the Women* subtly reflects South African history on various levels; however, direct accounts of historical events are rarely made, in contrast to Mark Behr’s *Kings of the Water*, which contains a high frequency of allusions and depictions of historical events.

multinational cooperation in history, the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), or the United East India Company.

While the Portuguese were the first to undertake a successful voyage to the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 under the command of Bartholomew Diaz, and eventually succeeded in finding a direct sea route to India a decade later³, it were the Dutch who began to realize the importance and benefits of the Cape in order to restock their ships with water and food before heading on either to Antwerp, or to Java, which, by 1610, had become the VOC's major hub in the highly profitable South East Asian spice trade (Ross 169ff).

When the VOC eventually decided to set up a permanent base at Table Bay, Jan Van Riebeeck was sent with three ships and the task to construct a fort at the South African Cape in 1652 (Ross 174). Van Riebeeck's (161 ff) Journal draws a vivid picture of the nature of the relationship between the first Dutch settlers and the native population and outlines a hostile atmosphere, in which trade with the native group of the Khoikhoi, nomadic herders at the time, was the dominant form of interaction. While the settlers were eager to retrieve cattle and sheep from the Khoikhoi — or the Hottentots, as the Dutch referred to them — the Khoikhoi were willing to trade their highly valued livestock in order to “satisfy a demand for narcotics and metals previously only incompletely met by trade with interior peoples.” (Elphick and Malherbe 8).

It has to be noted at this point that the VOC neither intended to create a “European-dominated society” at the Cape, nor tried to establish an expanding colony. In fact, it was Van Riebeeck himself who promoted the transfer of agrarian production to freeburghers, who were not necessarily Dutch, but “free blacks” (Elphick 531), and sought to establish a natural boundary between the Dutch settlers at the Cape and the farming lands of the Khoikhoi (Feinstein 24). Yet, the challenging climatic conditions for agrarian production which the Dutch faced at the Eastern Cape, and the increasing shortage of land in the face of an expanding Dutch society⁴, triggered a movement of the Dutch to the north, until they reached the natural frontier of the “mountains near Calvinia” in the 17th century. As Feinstein (25) points out, “in this frontier economy land was abundant and cheap, while labour and capital were scarce and expensive”, a factum ultimately shaping South Africa's formation and its history. The Dutch farmers, respectively Boers, reacted to this new abundance of land by adopting a “semi-nomadic

³ Vasco DaGama, 1498.

⁴ The company's insistence that all settlers speak Dutch and practice Calvinism led to a certain cultural uniformity and sense of group identity.

system of cattle-keeping”, and the VOC implemented a system of *leenings-plaatsen*, a leasehold system under which every farmer could select a vantage point, which together with the four corners of a rectangle one would reach after walking half-an-hour, yield a “farm of some 6,000 acres, over 9 square miles” (Feinstein 25).

However, the Boer settlement soon went out of control for the VOC, and with regard to the emerging new conventions as regards land ownership, De Kiewiet (17) emphasizes that “[t]he claim of each man to a farm of not less than 6,000 acres became ultimately an inborn right”, and a fundamental feature of Boer identity. While in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, the German, French, and British also settled at the Cape, the British eventually gaining control in 1806, the Boers’ seizure of fertile land from the Khoikhoi in the north and west, and the Xhosa in the east, became ever more violent and forcible; the new British government sought to regulate the relations of Dutch farmers with the natives with the implementation of the so-called “Magna Carta of the Hottentots” (Legassick and Ross 262f). Stating that the indigenous population, the Khoikhoi in this respect, was entrusted a “fixed place of abode”, the document failed to explicitly recognize native land rights and, thus, eventually facilitated the “oppressive controls” of the Boer (Legassick and Ross 262).

With the (re-) occupation of the Cape colony by the British during the Napoleonic Wars in 1806, the interior movement of the Boers gained momentum — for the changes the new government introduced, most prominently the abolition of slavery in 1834 and the attempt to introduce a more “rational scheme for the allocation of land”— proved unacceptable to most of the farmers (Feinstein 30). It has to be noted at this point that the colonizers always refrained from enslaving the native population and that the slaves at the Cape Colony were imported from other regions. However, the magnitude of (presumably) available land and the shortage of labor forces, as characteristic of South Africa’s predominantly agricultural economy at the time, prevented the Boer from gaining true profits from their farms, a phenomenon extensively discussed in Domar’s (18–32) hypothesis on *The cause of slavery or serfdom*.

Accordingly, as long as there was free land available, hired laborers would be expensive, or simply not available, for they would rather opt to farm their own plots of land. Eventually, the Boers’ conclusion of their dilemma was neither the implementation of slavery, nor serfdom, but “the closure of the escape route to free land” (Feinstein 34).

Germond (267) depicts the Boers' determination in this matter, describing how every chance was sought to

add farm to farm, pasture to pasture [...] to force the natives against some impassable range or drive them back into arid deserts; to leave them no space in anticipation of the future and of the increase in population [...] [so] that it becomes impossible to subsist on the produce of agriculture and livestock and to be compelled to offer their services to the farmers in the capacity of domestic servants and labourers.

Threatened by the new government's liberalism, the Boers — eventually referred to as *voortrekkers* — set out on the *Great Trek*, crossing the Orange River, and mostly settling in the region of Natal, where the farmers eventually established their own Republic, independent of British rule. While the British colonial government reacted to the Great Trek with an annexation of the Natal in 1844 and an assisted settlement of British farmers to ensure their interests in the region, the Empire's authorities in London had little interest in an establishment of British claims in the interior, and thus recognized *Orange Free State* and the *South African Republic*⁵ (or Transvaal) as two independent Boer republics, at the Bloemfontein Convention in 1854 (Feinstein 30f).

While by the 1860s, South Africa was officially divided into two Boer republics (Orange Free State and Transvaal), two British colonies (Cape and Natal colony), and several remaining African chiefdoms⁶, the discovery of gold and diamonds in the late 19th century altered the situation dramatically. In the course of the 18th and first decades of the 19th centuries, the indigenous population found themselves ever more disabled to retain their traditional pastoral modes due to the Boers' progressive encroachment on their lands, the discovery of precious minerals in the late decades of the 19th century most notably accelerated the process of dispossession, as previously described, for not just the extensive agrarian system, but also the success of South Africa's mineral exploitation, heavily depended on virtually unlimited access to cheap labour (Elphick and Giliomee 560f; Feinstein 3; 35; 43).

Furthermore, the newly identified gold and diamond resources in the Transvaal and Kimberley, again exacerbated the tensions between British and Boer, eventually leading to the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 and the first Anglo-Boer War from 1880–1801, which the Boers surprisingly won. However, the great influx of prospectors, mainly of British descent, to the Transvaal region, who were referred to as *uitlanders*

⁵ Not to be confused with the modern-day Republic of South Africa.

⁶ The Xhosa, the Zulu, the Swazi, the Pedi, the Venda, the Tswana and the Sotho.

(outsiders) by the Boers, and the economic rivalry as regards the region's precious gold resources, induced the British to launch a Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), notably Britain's last great imperial military intervention (Knight 3; 7f). Eventually, the British gained supremacy over both the Boers — whose Republics were absorbed into the British Empire, but granted self-government — as well as the native Africans — who were now additionally exploited by the “new and powerful interest group, [...] of mine-owners” (Clark and Worger 16; Feinstein 35). While the British, the Boers and the rapidly growing body of entrepreneurs were deeply divided over many questions, they joint in their antagonism toward the natives, sharing the conviction that only the perpetuation of the custom of continual dispossession yielded prosperity, a circumstance eventually fostering European dominance and supremacy over the black and colored population of South Africa. Stimulated by a growing racial discrimination, and in an attempt of resistance, the indigenous population made efforts to resist white domination by the formation of various political institutions, such as the South African Native Congress (SANC), in 1898. However, the colonizers' fears of future uprisings of the oppressed groups seem to have been intensified in the light of organized political black resistance, presumably facilitating the eventual unification of the British and Boer republics in the Union of South Africa in 1910 in order to strengthen their supremacy (Clark and Worger 18ff; Feinstein 35).

2.2 Apartheid

The formation of the Union of South Africa was succeeded by the implementation of a series of segregation laws to ensure gradual disempowerment of the African population, triggering the formation of various political oppositions articulating and organizing black resistance — most notably the African National Congress (ANC), founded in 1923. However, despite the growing hardships for the non-white population, resistance was scarce and emerged to be organized only in the 1940s, when the ANC Youth League was formed by Nelson Mandela, amongst others (Pienaar 56).

Feinstein (43) notices that the dispossession of the indigenous people was “not a single act [...] but a continuing process” in the course of the late 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, reaching “its climax in 1913” with the enactment of the *Natives Land Act*, prohibiting the acquisition or lease of white-controlled land. Despite the fact that the black and colored populace constituted the vast majority of the population, they

were allocated a mere 7.3 percent of the land. Thus, they were deprived of any chance of self-sustainment, or economic autonomy (Feinstein 43).

While racial segregation to ensure white supremacy was executed rather flexibly and informally in the early 20th century, the National Party's rise to power in 1948 resulted in the intensification and legalization of the system's fundamental discriminatory traits as regards politics, economy, and social life. While the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* (1949), as well as the *Immorality Act* (1950), rendered interracial marriages—and eventually even sexual intercourse — between whites, and blacks or coloreds, illegal, the *Population Registration Act*, passed in 1950, defined and classified South Africa's population into racial categories (whites, coloreds, blacks), thereby providing a legal foundation for the denial of rights based on ethnicity (Clark and Worger 46f; Feinstein 150f).

Furthermore, physical segregation was imposed by the enactment of the *Groups Areas Act* (1950), substantially relocating non-whites to separate areas and ghettos, granting them access to the urban white areas only in order to serve a white master (Feinstein 151f). The fact that the previously mentioned law — along with a reinforcement of the earlier established *Pass Laws* in 1952 — prohibited blacks and coloreds from entering white areas, working as underpaid mine or farm laborers was the only option left to them to sustain a living (Feinstein 64; 152).

Isochronal to the *Reinforcement of the Pass Laws*, the ANC launched the Defiance Campaign (1952), with the slogan “Open the jail doors, we want to enter!” calling out on disobedience of segregation rules. The government's brutal and violent reaction to black disobedience, however, forced the ANC to recant the program (Pienaar 58). The ANC's attempts of organized peaceful resistance in the form of boycotts or strikes eventually led to the passing of the *Public Safety Act* in 1953, a law effectively empowering the government to suspend constitutional democracy when “public order was threatened” (Pienaar 59). A substantial aftermath of the implemented Act was the additional implementation of the banning orders, which led to the confinement of thousands of political activists, and effectively silenced any opposition (Pienaar 59; Clark and Worger 57ff).

The *Bantu Education Act* (1953) and the *Extension of University Education Act* (1959) promoted further entrenchment of the National Party's segregation policies, most notably through the negation of access to higher education and skilled jobs, eventually leading to a wide gap in living standards between blacks and whites that are perceptible

to the present (Feinstein 158). The NP's provision of Bantu education—in order to equip blacks merely with the education they needed to serve their masters—effectively disempowered non-whites for decades. While acknowledging the impact this resolution would yield, the affected parties did not reach consensus as regards strategies of resistance. The African National Congress (ANC), now organizing resistance mostly from the underground, called for the boycott of Bantu schools; other voices, however, argued that such an act of resistance would deny their children any education, thereby putting them in an even worse situation (Soudien 214).

In 1959, the ANC split, and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) emerged as another oppositional group, which, in contrast to the ANC, refused to cooperate with non-black organizations like the Congress of Democrats, a group of white democrats rejecting apartheid policies. In the manner of peaceful resistance, the PAC organized another demonstration against the *Pass Laws* in front of a police station in Sharpeville in 1960. With the murder of 69 activists, injuries to another 180 people, and the eventual banning of the ANC and PAC, the forms of black resistance gained momentum, and arms were taken up to fill the political vacuum generated by the banishment of the former political oppositions and its leaders, eventually provoking the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement (BNC), initiated by Steve Biko in the mid-1960s. In the course of the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of political opponents were banned, arrested and tortured, and massive international criticism of the system emerged (Pienaar 62–66).

Owing to international bans on investments in the region, the government faced a total economic collapse of the country, and so was eventually forced to abolish virtually all segregation laws by 1986 (Feinstein 228–243). However, Feinstein (244) points out that while the apartheid system's major institutions had been disbanded by 1990,

[b]lack people continued to be denied access to decision-making [...], white children continued to benefit from massive discrimination in the provision of public education, and the inequitable distribution of land imposed by the Acts of 1913 and 1936 was not changed.

Accordingly, the period between 1990, when ANC leader Nelson Mandela was set free, taking up negotiations with the government, and 1994, the year of the first free democratic elections, was marked by political unrest (Feinstein 149).

2.3 Post-Apartheid and the Land Question

South Africa's transition to an equal, non-racist democracy in 1994 left the newly elected President Mandela and his ANC government with the challenging task to resolve deeply-rooted economic, social and psychological contradictions the nation's tortuous history had created (Feinstein 251).

Already, in 1994, the ANC proposed a *Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP)*, in order to promote the redistribution of approximately one-third of South Africa's agricultural land among blacks by the beginning of the new millennium. The ANC's land reforms were based on the restitution of land unrightfully seized in the name of the Native Land Act of 1913, which basically dispossessed black people, as well as on redistribution and the implementation of land tenure laws, to promote and support new black land-owners, which soon became the major pillars of South Africa's new land policy (Bernstein 11ff). However, the land question was—and still is—an explosive one, posing a “deep emotional resonance” (Butler 40). The government's improvement of black living standards left the majority of the black farm workers largely unaffected, for economic as well as social changes are naturally delayed in rural areas. The ratios of land ownership merely altered from the 87 per cent reserved for whites in the Native Land Act of 1913, until 1994, when the new Land Reform was established (Kumwenda, online).

In an attempt to lay the cornerstone for a truly unified nation, the newly elected government passed the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34* in 1995 and the subsequent implementation of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)*, not only served as a tool to “restore dignity to victims and promote psychological healing” (Chapman and Van der Merwe 4), but furthermore, was supposed to advocate “national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding that transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past” (Chapman and Van der Merwe 8), undoubtedly a critical endeavor. The TRC's tasks were manifold and, at times, contradictory. The establishment of an objective, authoritative historical record in order to implement a “‘collective memory’ or common history” (Chapman and Van der Merwe 4), for instance, seems inconsistent with the aspiration to “restore dignity” and “promote psychological healing”, an undertaking predominantly relying on the depiction of subjective truth. In his speech at the opening ceremony of the TRC, chairman Archbishop Desmond Tutu not only pointed to the nation's collective trauma, but also acknowledged the fact that both blacks and whites were traumatized by the legacies of

apartheid, even though apparently in quite different ways (Mengel vii–viii). With regard to the healing potential of “the creation of life-narratives and storytelling”, as promoted by the TRC, Mengel (144) points to the relevance of literature in the multilayered depiction of traumatic experiences, and he further identifies various subgenres of the Contemporary South African Novel, most notably the *Plaasroman* genre, eventually discussed in this thesis, as being particularly suitable for “the representation of trauma”. However, despite the promising and devoted work of the TRC, the legacies of South Africa’s past have undoubtedly influenced the nation’s present and future, and fundamental changes will not emerge rapidly.

While Mandela’s ANC government (1994–1999) made a promising start and hopes were high, President Thabo Mbeki, the second post-apartheid President elected in 1999, adopted a “black nationalist rhetoric” and launched Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies aiming to “transfer [...] white capital into black hands”, along with land redistribution policies implemented earlier, thereby attempting to create a new Black middle class (Louw 200f). Mbeki’s policies, however, only managed to heave a minority of blacks into a “capitalist class” (Louw 200), and the proposed large-scale land redistribution clearly failed, for “[b]y 2010 [...] only 8 percent had been reallocated” (Atuahene, online), and the initial, subsidized “willing seller, willing buyer” approach proved to be rather ineffective (The Economist, online).

Till date, the legacies of the Land Acts of 1913 and 1956, and the fact that neither Mandela’s, nor Mbeki’s, nor the current President, Zuma’s (reelected in 2014) governments succeeded in delivering fundamental economic improvements for the black masses, makes the question of rightful ownership of land one of the most hazardous issues in South Africa’s politics. The explosiveness of the matter became obvious in a large-scale opinion study conducted by James Gibson (qtd. in Athuahene, online), a political scientist, in 2009, who found that almost 90 percent of black Africans are convinced that whites unrightfully seized the land during colonial and apartheid times, and thus are not entitled to it. Even more alarmingly, perhaps, is the predominant notion that “land must be returned to blacks in South Africa, no matter what the consequences are for the current owners and for political stability in the country”, a stance 91 percent of the white population obviously objects to.

Considering prevalent definitions of a nation as comprising “a group of people sharing a common culture, language and history” (Soutphommasane 72), South Africa’s eventful and tortuous past inevitably prevents the young state from living up to such measures.

South Africa is still in a continuous process of transformation. While inequality and separation have been overcome on a political level, socio-economic changes seem to be much slower, and the discrimination systematized over four decades, displays its aftermath even well into the 21st century. However, the people of South Africa feel equally rooted in the country, and in the light of the new millennium, it seems that the necessity to redefine identities is what unifies the people of South Africa (Coker 291).

3. Afrikaner Identity Construction

While South Africa's recent history has witnessed a mediation from a system of racial segregation and apartheid to a free, liberal and equal democracy, the legacies of apartheid are still felt, most prominently in the economic discrepancies between a majority of blacks and whites, whose living standards merely deteriorated in the light of a dramatically changed political, and social environment. Yet, white South Africans are challenged on a more subtle level, for the continuing dedication to transform the nation and equalize historically implemented disadvantages for the black population, simultaneously invalidate the carefully constructed Afrikaner identity, thereby forcing them to reconsider their self-conception in the light of new realities (Vestergaard 19).

Social psychologist Glynis M. Breakwell (24) identifies “distinctiveness”, “continuity” and “self-esteem” as the three core principles operating in the identity formation of an individual or group, and further points to the potential threat to identity “any movement of an individual in the social matrix” bears (Breakwell 75). The psychologist outlines how fundamental social and political changes, as was the case with South Africa's transition from an apartheid to a post-apartheid era, have the power to seriously damage—or at least challenge—identity constructs and self-conceptions of specific groups (Breakwell 143). Pointing to the significance of social representations as main contributors to an individual's or a group's positive self-esteem, the dilemma Afrikaans-speaking whites, respectively Afrikaners, face in the light of the country's radical turn becomes evident (Breakwell 73).

As Vestergaard (19) pointedly states, “the premises for being Afrikaner [...] have changed dramatically” and, with regard to this thesis' exploration of the identity-threatening theme of “Losing the Farm” in two novels—notably pertaining in essence to a traditional Afrikaner literary genre⁷—a consideration of the historical construction of

⁷ As will be extensively discussed in the subsequent Chapter 4.

Afrikaner identity seems inevitable, in order to comprehend the magnitude such a loss would yield for the Afrikaner's—respectively, the Boer's—conception of the *Self*.

With regard to Breakwell's identification of the importance of sources to substantiate positive self-esteem individuals require in order to construct their identity, the Calvinist inheritance of the white settlers is to be clearly mentioned. As Vestergaard (20) outlines:

Afrikaner identity was based on values of God-fearing Calvinism [and] structures of patriarchal authority (husband and father, priest, school principal, political leaders—all of whom were representing God on earth).

In accordance with the Calvinist notion of being God's chosen people, white Dutch settlers felt the responsibility to continue—or, rather, repeat—Moses' epic trek to the promised land, a notion eventually transacted in the Great Trek (Cloete 43). The social historians Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (527) emphasize once more the importance of the Calvinist legacies brought to the Cape by the “Dutch and Huguenots fleeing [Europe] to preserve their religion”, and further point to the significant modifications the primitive Calvinism of the 17th century immigrant farmers witnessed “by nearly two centuries of increasing isolation and dispersion” after the Great Trek. The exclusivist self-conception of the Voortrekkers, paired with a deliberate intensification of religious cultures and traditions in the face of a rather isolated life on the farms in the new Boer republics, are identified as being the main hindrances in the development of a more pluralistic society, as was the case in the Far East (Elphick and Giliomee 526). The deeply entrenched Calvinist faith and its inherent self-serving bias of being elected to Christianize—and thereby civilize the uncivilized—serves as a paramount distinctive feature of the Afrikaner, and furthermore perpetuates the patriarchal order which assumes sacred status in the Afrikaner household, as described by Boonzaaier and Sharp (154):

Patriarchal tradition of the household is one of the most beautiful legacies of the Afrikaner [...] As main characteristic of the old farm house-hold [sic!] we can mention that it was a community of authority. In this small community the father was the highest authority. In other words, he was at the head of the specific authority structure. Since every authority structure can have only one head, the woman was under the authority of her husband [...] the mother, on the other hand, was pre-eminently the loving and understanding party who cared and served in silence.

Patriarchy consciously retains a “system of values in order to justify its objective” and is always presented “in line with the ‘will of God’” (Coetzee (a) 301). In essence, the

concept of patriarchy adheres to “the idea of the leadership of the fathers”, dating back to the Old Testament, and is notably “one of the strongest ideologies in cultures worldwide.” In South Africa, however, the notion of the leading, protective father of the family was extended to virtually all social spheres, eventually bestriding all social practices and discourses. Thus, patriarchy soon emerged as a “hypernorm”, especially in the Boer community (Coetzee (a) 300).

In order to ideologically integrate women into the male realms of Afrikaner nationalism, however, the *volksmoeder myth* was created, promoting the mother as an important “participant in the lives of their husbands and children”, thus again rejecting any active roles to the female gender, and Elsabè Brink (291) emphasizes that “[o]nly within this [...] role could women achieve social recognition.”

In coherence with Breakwell’s principle of distinctiveness as being crucial for identity formation, the creation of an Afrikaner identity was mainly based on Calvinist religious premises, the hypernormative installment of patriarchy, and eventually the systematically established political, cultural and social hegemony (Korf and Malan 151).

Language was used to demonstrate Afrikaner distinctiveness—initially from their British counterparts—and it eventually “became a vehicle for mobilizing a pan-South African Afrikaner identity” in the early 20th century (Vestergaard 26). The erection of the Taal monument in 1975 is significant, not only because it celebrated the 50th anniversary of Afrikaans becoming an officially recognized distinctive language, but moreover, the memorial points to the beginning of a distinct “narration of Afrikaner nationhood”⁸, which significantly linked the Boer’s language to the African landscape, thereby adding authority to their presumably legitimate landownership (Beningfield 151).

In an attempt to explore and describe the very soul of the Afrikaner farmer, J.M Coetzee ((c)109) accentuates the Boer’s “[l]ineal consciousness” as well as the farm as a “manifestation” thereof, two features inevitably corresponding to Breakwell’s accentuation of “continuity” as being distinctive for the construction of an identity:

[T]ranscendence is attained via conscious acceptance that the unit of life is the lineage, not the individual [...] the manifestation of the lineage in historical time is the farm, an area of nature inscribed with the signs of the lineage: with

⁸ The major role of Afrikaner literature, the Plaasroman in particular, in the creation of an Afrikaner Identity myth, especially during the emerging Afrikaner nationalism, receives an in-depth discussion in the subsequent chapter.

evidences of labour and with bones in the earth. Lineal consciousness brings about a liberation from the sense of being alone in the world and doomed to die: as long as the lineage lasts the self may be thought to last (Coetzee (c) 109).

The importance the Dutch descendant farmer attached to the inscription of the African land, in order to understand and possess it, was depicted as early as 1903, when a British visitor to the Cape noticed that

[t]oday one of the most striking differences between the Dutch and other white people in South Africa is that the former belong to the soil. They have assimilated South Africa; they are the native growth of the veldt, their roots are deep in its soil. (qtd. in Beningfield 78).

Both previous quotes clearly depict the Boer's fictional creation of an emotional connection to a land he actually perceived as an anti-Eden (Beningfield 76), a "dystopia" resistant to transformation (Beningfield 81), and his frequent attempts to "confirm [his entitlement] by historical continuity of association" (Griffiths qtd. in Huggan and Tiffin 82).

The Boer's vanity—to attain a "reciprocal, mutually uplifting relationship with the earth" (Huggan and Tiffin 108), by cultivating and inscribing his history with his own hands into the soil—was eventually idealized to an extent that "self-realization [...] becomes tied to landownership and to a particular kind of spiritual experience available only to landowners" (Coetzee (c) 87). The rural crisis—as triggered by the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and a progressing industrialization—resulted in the deprivation of many farms, thus turning many farmers into "an impoverished urban proletariat" (Verstergaard 21). Accordingly, Coetzee ((c) 83) explains that "the loss of [the Boer's] farm assumes the scale of the fall of an ancient house, the end of a dynasty", thus portraying the trauma a loss of the farm yields for the farmer's identity construct.

With the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, the South African farm became central to the representation of the "natural occupation of the ground" by the Afrikaner volk, thereby verifying the legitimacy of "white possession of the land" and, at the same time, offering "access to the past" to the Afrikaner, now also found in the urban areas, and thereby naturalizing their presence as well (Beningfield 76).

Returning to the formative features of identity explored by Breakwell (24), the distinction of the Afrikaner from the British and Natives was based on their Calvinist national values, and the retention and official establishment of Afrikaans, the language spoken by the Boers. A notion of "continuity" was implemented with the importance

attached to the progressive cultivation of land and the deeply entrenched lineal consciousness as a verification of the Afrikaner's legitimate presence in South Africa. Positive "self-esteem" was gained by adhering to the social norms, which were deeply entrenched in a system of patriarchy, and the values of the Afrikaner volk, a group identifying themselves "by virtue of blood, soil, culture, tradition, belief, and calling from an organic unitary society" (Meyer qtd. in Vestergaard 20). The embodiment of the "good Afrikaner" thus promised a high degree of self-esteem, consolidating Afrikaner identity, especially during the apartheid era. However, it is to be noted that what came to be known as the Afrikaner cast iron identity also meant that if members of the group failed to conform to Afrikaner norms, for instance, by means of another sexual orientation⁹, entire exclusion was the inevitable consequence (Vestergaard 21).

The previous exploration of the historical development of Afrikaner identity hopefully revealed the grave and substantially real identity threat this group experienced—and still experiences—in the course of the transition from an apartheid to a post-apartheid era. While political and social changes always urge individuals to reevaluate their identity, this is often a subtle and protracted development. However, in the case of South Africa, the Afrikaner saw virtually all the characteristics and norms distinctive for his identity abolished or reversed. The traditional in-group norms are invalid, and instead of promising a positive self-esteem, Afrikaner adherence to traditional values, in fact, evoke the very opposite in the newly established liberal democracy. Interestingly, a large-scale study conducted in 1995, and exploring the Afrikaner identity crisis since the fall of apartheid, found that Afrikaners apprehend "a threat to their group identity" as being more severe "than a threat to their economic resources" (Bornman qtd. in Korf and Malan 152), and Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert (87f) pinpoints the Afrikaner dilemma in the light of the 21st century, stating:

Whether I like it or not (and quite separate from my subjective battle), my social identity is also that of an Afrikaner [...] a rapidly ageing, confused and sometimes lost Afrikaner, nevertheless.

4. The History of the *Plaasroman*

As the previous chapters have outlined, South Africa is a somewhat incoherent and disunified country, featuring multiple languages and national identities. The South African state achieved official recognition not through gradual legitimization of the

⁹ An issue further explored in the novel analysis of Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* in Chapter 7.

existing social and economic conditions and growing self-awareness of the nation, but rather through the mechanical process of border markings conducted thousands of miles away in Europe (Boehmer 23). Furthermore, the heritage of apartheid continues to inhibit the establishment of true peace, for it is all too fresh to leave the state heal its bleeding wounds, and some scars on the fabric of mutual understanding and cooperation will last truly long.

The Plaasroman, or the farm novel genre, pertains to the literature of South Africa written in Afrikaans and English and reflects all of the principle conflicts and struggles experienced by this not so ancient state (Coetzee (b) 16). The present chapter draws a general picture of the origins and development of the farm novel before an attempt to place the genre within the broader context of South African Literature is made. Eventually, a more profound exploration of the main topics and metaphors used in the Plaasroman of early and later types will follow in order to depict the paradigm shifts in South Africa's social order.

4.1 Origins and Development of the Genre

The history of the Plaasroman spans from about 1883 (*The Story of an African Farm* by Olive Schreiner) to our present (*Agaat* 2004 by Marlene Van Niekerk; *Kings of the Water* 2009 by Mark Behr) and echos South Africa's experience of ideological, political and social changes. H.P. Van Coller (22) points to the importance of the farm novel "as an ideological reflection on political and social reality in South-Africa", a claim supported by Ewald Mengel's (158) depiction of the *Plaas* as a "symbolic microcosm that symbolizes the macrocosm of South Africa".

In particular, the Plaasroman tackles the problem of colonial conflict and racism, the domination of the white race, blossoming nationalism and drastic gender inequality. However, the genre underwent profound changes with regard to its ideological content and topic treatment, especially at times when the history of South Africa made radical turns (Devarenne 627). Through this self-transformation, the Plaasroman demonstrated just how closely intertwined the genre and reigning political ideology were. This widely employed type of fiction was actually used to justify the mode of 'traditional' oppression of black people and women and to perpetuate the status quo for as long as possible, making it a social norm that could not be doubted or questioned.

At the turn of the 19th century, the Union of South Africa was formed, and the eventual closure of the frontier effectively denied the Boers further access to unlimited free land,

thus terminating the long established Afrikaner practice of land seizure¹⁰. The 1930s witnessed a general economic depression, which further worsened the situation for the farmers (Devarenne 628). As a consequence, a new group of landless farmers emerged and the yearning for the old times when Afrikaner identity and tradition, as closely intertwined with the domination of the land, were still unchallenged, is reflected and portrayed in the early farm novel (Coetzee (c) 82 f).

With the emergence of the Afrikaner nationalist movement the farm novel genre reached its climax, and the history of South African farms was now taken as a proof of the rural origins of white Afrikaners. The traceable temporal continuum of existence and functioning of such farms on the land of south Africa was used as justification and evidence supporting the allegedly unchanged ‘white’ identity of Afrikaners; it also helped to promote and glorify the myth of ‘natural’ rights white farmers had to the land plots they owned (Coetzee (b) 2). The early variety of the Plaasroman typically promoted this ideology and canonized it through narrations in which land and farm played the central role, and the main conflict circulated around losing the property or keeping the family estate in the hands of its ‘natural’ owners.

With regards to the Afrikaner identity crisis, as triggered by economic and political changes that forced many farmers to abandon farm life and move to urban areas, Coetzee ((c) 79 f) points to the “pastoral solution” the Plaasroman provided:

[T]he programme espoused by the plaasroman is one of a renewal of the peasant order based on the myth of the return to earth[...]. Not only will the peasant proprietor and his sons and daughters recover their true selves by a return to the earth: their serfs too will come to recognize that town life is an aberration, that true happiness has to be found on the farm where they were born.

While the normative Plaasroman perpetuates an idyllic myth through labour and ownership of the land, modern versions critically reinterpret the values promoted in the framework of patriarchal capitalism.

Jennifer Wenzel (95) locates the most prominent features of the Plaasroman genre in a

pastoral response to new modes of agriculture and land ownership, its difficulty with the representation of black labor, and its narrative reliance on the threat of losing the farm as an epiphanic moment of ‘lineal consciousness’.

However, later novels tend to dismiss the idyll of the Plaas by subverting the dynamics set up between the protagonists and ‘their’ farm. Thus, the post-modern South African

¹⁰ As discussed in Chapter 2.1.

farm novel emerges as an anti-pastoral rewriting of a genre it is self consciously indebted to.

4.2 The Plaasroman in the Context of South African Literature

While South Africa can be considered a patchwork of languages and cultures; with eleven officially recognized languages, and presumably many more actually spoken, the question whether the South African Farm Novel can be treated as a national phenomenon, is a frequently discussed issue amongst literary scholars. National literature is expected to be written in one language and to reflect traits of a single culture (Eve 14; Oliphant 22f). However, the particular ethnic and cultural situation in South Africa calls for a different interpretation of this notion. For example, while representing the culture and ideals of a small fragment of the South African population, the literature in Afrikaans has shaped itself as a separate and repeatable concept. In its earliest stages the literary works in Afrikaans promoted a distinctive set of values of the white population living in the country for generations and these works were firmly rooted in the common cultural environment through various establishment affiliations, such as teaching, reviewing, dissemination and active promotion (Eve 15). While at the turn of the 19th century Afrikaans literature, and the Plaasroman in specific served “as a tool in the political struggle of the Afrikaner against British rule”, thus supporting and promoting Afrikaner nationalism and identity, the 1960’s witnessed the “beginning of a tradition of dissent against Afrikaner nationalist power by Afrikaans writers” (Vijoen, online). The new millennium eventually sees the normative Plaasroman revisited and reimaged, Marlene Van Niekerk’s subsequently discussed novel *Agaat* (2004) being one of the most recent and powerful subversive rewritings of traditional characteristics of the genre.

In the view of many critics, the literature created in English has merely extended English literary traditions to South Africa and thus cannot be treated as a truly national or indigenous literature in this region (Eve 18). African languages, such as Tswana and Tsonga, are not uniquely spoken in South Africa, but also used by Africans that live beyond South Africa’s borders. As a result, these languages are also spoken in Botswana and Zimbabwe. Thus, the literature created in these languages may be quite fairly considered the national literature of Zimbabwe and Botswana as well. Besides, the areas of diffusion of these languages are far too small to make them fit for regional

supremacy, or to allow them to contest with English and Afrikaans for the title of languages of national literature (Chapman 20f).

The previous overview of difficulties arising in the process of defining the boundaries of South African literature is necessary as it explains the approach taken to the placement of the Plaasroman within this literature. First of all, the most reasonable approach to defining the national literature and its genres is to take it as a totality of all literary works created in different languages by members of the various cultural groups existing within the borders of South Africa (Eve 19; Boehmer 38). In line with this approach the literature in Afrikaans (that features excellent examples of poetry and prosaic works), the literature in English (incorporating European patterns and style) and the literature in African languages (representing the unique view of the spirit of the continent), will together create a comprehensive image of the diverse literary landscape of the country. This inclusive approach also allows to incorporate the Plaasroman into the system of national literature, as the best samples of this genre were created both in Afrikaans and English (Eve 20).

Basically, the Plaasroman is a prose genre developed both in English and Afrikaans and dedicated to a particular Afrikaner phenomenon: a farm founded and run by white immigrants who exploited the resources of the land and labor of its colored population (Coetzee (b) 5). The prominent position of the Plaasroman in the hierarchy of genres within South African literature is determined by the agricultural nature of society and by the ideals and myths this genre helped to promote. During different historical periods the Plaasroman coexisted with the *dorpsroman*, a so-called 'town novel' that marked accelerated urbanization between the two wars, and with intellectually complex dramatic works, representing the current economic and social problems of South Africa. Other elements of South African literature are novels of magical realism, which are less influential in their trend-setting role, and samples of so-called border literature and literature focused primarily on racial conflicts (Eve 23). In the heyday of its existence the latter type of literature followed the rather worn mold of representing colored people as oppressed, voiceless and progressing from the remnants of extinguished tribes to the level of a nation. The white characters were represented as decaying and cruel individuals confined to their cocoons of heavily protected estates and doomed to oblivion. The actual situation, however, was neither simple nor clear-cut, for both parties of the colonial conflict showed both the good and negative sides of human nature. Yet the purpose of literature on racial issues was not so much accuracy of

representation, but rather an attempt to raise awareness of the problem and to push society towards a closer inspection of it (Eve 24).

Amidst this diverse literary heritage the *Plaasroman* preserved its topicality through literary skillful and complex representation of the reigning ideology, with all transitions and shifts in national ideas that occurred over this period. This genre also provided insight into the primary conflict that underlay major changes in the economy and social system of South Africa. The narration of the past glory of land owners (however illusory this glory might be) was employed and perfected in the early 20th century, when the Boers were losing their estates to banks, and the Afrikaner population became too large to supply every white male with a sufficient amount of land to support himself and his family (Devarenne 628). Destruction of the order that was deemed eternal, urbanization of the region, increasing availability of schools where young white and colored South Africans received access to education and learned about a world of opportunities beyond working on the farm, closure of the frontiers which could be further explored in search for lands for cultivation all contributed to what Ampie Coetzee referred to as “a sense of loss” of the past, and the brightest examples of the early *Plaasroman* were written with this loss in mind (Coetzee qtd. in Devarenne 628). Unable to keep pace with the changing economic situation by means of modernization of farming practices and unwilling to update their views on roles of women and the colored population within the social and political processes, most farmers were dispossessed of their family property, which meant the end of the world to them. This disaster was glorified and immortalized in the *Plaasromane* of the 1920-1940s.

The postmodern literary tradition and the radical shift in attitudes towards practices of apartheid led to a reframing of the major concepts behind the *Plaasroman*. A new type of the farm novel appeared that represented strong and active female characters and determinate colored actors, as opposed to weak and helpless white descendants of once rich and powerful farm owners. Disintegration of the old order and formation of the new, are aptly depicted through reversed relations between former masters and slaves/cheap laborers in the new variety of the *Plaasroman* that stems from the 1960s (Coetzee (c) 45).

Subsequently, an in-depth examination of the main topics and metaphors used in early and later varieties of the *Plaasroman* will contribute to an understanding of the shifts in

paradigm of the social order in South Africa and the accompanying changes in economic, ethnic and gender issues.

4.3 Early Patterns of the Plaasroman

Olive Schreiner's *A Story of an African Farm* is not a perfectly typical Plaasroman with regard to its plot and ideology, yet it was the first farm novel that represented the place of women within Afrikaner society and the proto-nationalist ideology and posed feminist questions long before this would become a widespread trend. Besides, it is the first novel about a South African farm written in English. The novel is also mooted to be the first feminist novel because of the particular structure and the way in which the narration was organized (Devarenne 627). The plot does not follow a coherent chain of events that have cause-and-effect relationships; rather it is a set of vignettes and pieces of narration united by the same trio of characters (Tant Sannie, Waldo and Lyndall). The novel offers glimpses from the childhood and adulthood of Waldo and Lyndall and represents farm life and the ownership of a woman. Schreiner has shown only the tiniest portion of the true life behind farming, the fundamental economic basis that provided the sustenance for the family, yet the author managed to show how the patriarchal order, which was worshipped as the only possible way of structuring life processes, gave way to the actual social conditions of a new age (Ogede (a) 254).

The farm is owned by a woman who claims that, without a husband, she is weak and unprotected. However, the farm generates sufficient profit and the owner becomes a target pursued by a trickster and sadist (Blenkins). Intrusion of a man into the life of a farm actually leads to turmoil and finally the intruder is expelled from this Eden. However, this almost traditional plot is not the ultimate message the author sends to the reader. The farm described in its daily routines and geographical details is deemed to represent the macrocosm of South African society in the miniature, shown as a microcosm. The town-like organization of the small but diverse society living on the farm is opposed to the vast and lifeless span of the African land. Empty and desolate in the sense typical for humans, the land is rich in plant and insect life, and the farm resting amidst the busy kingdoms of tiny creatures and immortal sky and land seems all the more a fussy and senseless artifact (Coetzee (b) 3). The farm is not a natural part of the landscape; it is opposed to nature and cannot be completely integrated into it. No matter how romanticized and venerated the story of farming generations may be, the truth is that farmers tried to 'rape' the land and to make it generate profit without

regarding the needs of those who were the actual inhabitants and owners of this land from times immemorial. The glorious tale of hard but fruitful labor on the family land is dispelled through the following metaphor: everybody living on the farm or invited to the farm from the external world experiences difficulties and woes of some sort. Those who stayed to live on the farm could never call it their home. Those who left the farm would sooner or later return – only to die or to be buried on the farm from which they tried to escape. The uncontrolled nature is banned from the farm and the only way to survive is to obey the rules set by the foreigners (Coetzee (b) 4). Thus the integration of people and land is impossible in its root – people who own the land are strangers and the land would not accept them as natives and would not nurture them (Coetzee (b) 4). Waldo, who attempts to live separately and earn a living by his hands, fails and returns to the farm. Lyndall escaped, but has lost her child and dies on her way to the farm. As a rebel and clear thinking character she has understood the incompatibility of normal life and the farm's limited and stifling world. For that reason she refuses to return to the farm while she is alive, even if this refusal is not depicted overtly.

The Plaasromane following this early-type reflect the seminal ideas of dawning nationalism, the tragedies of losing the romanticized farms and the microcosm of white Afrikaner society, as mirrored in the life of a typical family of farmers. Jochem van Bruggen's *Ampie* trilogy describes a farm and its owner as an ideal environment and a perfect mentor for nurturing a good man correspondingly. In the course of socialization of a wild white male child all biases and myths of the 1920s are represented. The sinfulness of the city, the greed and corruption of Jews and Muslim entrepreneurs, extremely hard work as the only way to be a proper farmer, the innate laziness and viciousness of the black population, and the perceived threat of any kind of modernization are the typical biases that serve as a pillar for the nationalistic views which take patriarchal order and white supremacy for granted (Devarenne 631). Hard work on the farm is presented as a holy duty that can not be breached, so opting for some other occupation in the city is almost a sin. The *Ampie* trilogy is the first mature sample of the Plaasroman promoting the sanctity of land owning and rural patriarchal order, in which a white male farmer is the master to females, children and colored inhabitants of a farm.

Each significant farm novel written before the 1960s contributes some important features or considerations to the cause of promotion of nationalism and the apartheid ideology. *Die Meulenaar* (The Miller) by Daniel Malherbe is a more complex and

multi-topical work than the *Ampie* novels; hence Ampie Coetzee identifies *Die Meulenaar* as the first proper Plaasroman. In *Die Meulenaar*, the story of a fight for the family farm and its loss is represented through the prism of expected self-sacrifice on the part of a female, in this case the obedient daughter Leonore Theron. She abandons her dreams about an artistic career for the sake of her parents and their farm (Devarenne 632). Her artistic nature is related to her female gender and consequently to nature and land. Leonore inspires admiration and desire in males, against her explicit desire, yet she refuses to succumb to their demands, and through comparison and metaphorical relation to Leonore nature is represented in a similar mode. The farm and the natural world require the attention and care of a farmer, just as females depend on him, and like females, nature remains always unpredictable and self-willed (Devarenne 631).

The story of Leonore also represents the image of an ideal female and dissects the practice of trading females for land or money. A self-sacrificing, religious, virtuous, kind, yet at the same time brave and integral woman should be a true example to others. This image was widely promoted because this kind of woman would 'know her place' and would not protest against her fate as a sexual and marital mortgage, in exchange for a loan or a profitable land trading deal (Van Niekerk 65). Leonore neglects her duty and refuses to marry a lawyer who helps to secure a loan for the farm and, as he insists on recalling the loan, the farm is lost.

So bringing up obedient women was a must in the world of land ownership and complicated economic relations relying on the free will of bankers and on chances of plentiful rains. However, despite the fact that patriarchal society was extensively promoted, the female characters of the Plaasroman in some way rebel against their destiny (Van Niekerk 65). If they obeyed silently, the narration would definitely lose its credibility and closeness to life. This nuance already predicted the advent of a strong emancipation movement of women and the colored population; in other words, of those oppressed in the framework of the idealized farming society (Van Niekerk 66).

Christiaan van den Heever's novel *Somer* (1935) perpetuates the above motifs and enriches them using the literary device of saving the farm and retaining it in the possession of the family through help provided by one brother to another (Van Wyk Smith 18). In this novel a female character is also deprived of free choice and personal freedom, and the saved farm appears as a prison impossible to escape from (Van Niekerk 68). In his works, Van den Heever also supports the ideal of *volksmoeder* (mother of nature) as a self-negating person who cares about others, praises the rural life

over the corrupted urban existence, and promotes the idea of a farmer being a husband to his land (Van Niekerk 69). The holiness of this union is maintained through permanent toil undertaken by generations of farmers on their family land, and rootedness into this land watered with sweat is an integral part of nationalistic ideology. Virtuous and hardworking farmers seem to be the perfect owners of the land and, against the background of their virtues, the black population looks pitiful and undeserving. This image helps to further promote the necessity of apartheid as a means of protecting the decent whites from lazy and wicked blacks (Wenzel 93).

However, in the majority of early Plaasromane the farmers lose their farms because of some overwhelming conditions; nothing can save their land-owning mythology from disintegration. This trend was completely in line with the tendencies gaining momentum in society. The 1960s witnessed the complete re-evaluation of ideas and metaphors of the Plaasroman and saw them reversed and reworked to demonstrate the reality of this farm-owning patriarchal order and its consequences for South African society.

4.4 The Plaasroman Revisited

J.M. Coetzee's novels *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Disgrace*, Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*, Etienne Leroux's *Seven Days at the Silbersteins*, Etienne van Heerden's *Tootberg* and *Kikuyu* (both written in Afrikaans and translated into English), and Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* and *Agaat* represent the revisited land owning ideology and are aimed at dismantling the nationalistic and apartheid mythology (Devarenne 634f). In these novels, with the help of various plots and metaphors, the authors demonstrate how landless marginalized white Afrikaners attempt to revive the honorable farming practice so valued by their forefathers. However, these Afrikaners find their attempts fruitless, because the prosperity of the farms and well-being of families actually rested on the exploitation of others' labor, commodification of the household inhabitants, and on general 'rape' of the land, rather than on careful and respectful cultivation. Such a predatory philosophy becomes understandable if one keeps in mind that the farmers were intruders to this land. They built their farms amidst the desolate landscape that favored a different approach to life and distribution of resources, and the land never accepted them as true owners or 'husbands', as the nationalist mythology held it. This idea is already evident in *A Story of an African Farm* by Schreiner and is aptly reflected and developed in *Tootberg*, in which the Moolmans

try to extort water from the land and exploit it violently. Not surprisingly, the conflict of this novel is built upon a death in the well (Devarenne 637).

Through parodying and reassembling of original elements of the Plaasroman *The Conservationist*, *Kikuyu* and *Triomf* openly declare that the culture of the farm is based on destroyed and negated culture of the previous inhabitants of the land – colored people and various ethnicities - who were ousted and dispossessed in times of rapid colonization. In *Triomf* (1994), a poor white Afrikaner tries to cultivate his backyard and digs deep in the ground, yet the deeper he reaches, the more rubble and wreckage he finds. The poor quarters of *Triomf* are built on the remnants of the demolished Sophiatown, the once black district (Devarenne 640). The message is clear: it is impossible to grow something on the spot where someone's life was destroyed. Besides, the image of a woman as a symbol of the nation is also reconsidered in this novel, because the 'mother of the nation', virtuous and self-sacrificing woman, is turned by her male relatives into a victim of rape and incest (Devarenne 640). The grim reality disproves the glorification of women and shows how urgent is the need for changes if the nation wants to survive. The idea about black history surfacing through the forcefully imposed white history is also visible in *The Conservationist*, in which a black townsman claims his right to the farm owned by a descendant of white farmers. The owner is justly insulted by such claims, yet he himself intends only to use a farm for the purpose of dating his mistress (Devarenne 639).

4.5 Brief summary

There have been significant changes to the ideology, political practices and social order prevailing in South Africa, and the Plaasroman, as a manifestation and promotion of Afrikaner ideology, accepted and hailed in society, changed correspondingly. From an initial patriarchal and nationalistic narration, the Plaasroman turns into a powerful tool for literary reconsideration of the previously sacral Afrikaner notions. The later variation of the Plaasroman employ complex postmodernist approaches and tools for better highlighting the wrongs committed against the oppressed members of society. The phantasmagorical nature of the novels of the later period excellently shows how absurd the previously existing social order was. The changes of the Plaasroman indicate how society changes and how feministic issues and question of prohibition of racial segregation enter the agenda. In the later novels, the oppressed and voiceless inhabitants of the farm eventually get their final word, even if in a circumventive manner. This

flexibility and responsiveness of the novel to trends in society make it a perfect genre for encapsulating the whole of South African society.

5. The Plaasroman of the New Millennium: *Self* , the *Other* and the Quest for Identity

While the previous chapter has demonstrated how far the *Plaasroman* genre has actually diverged from Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and tried to put the developments within this powerful subgenre into a socio-economic and socio-political context, chapter five eventually draws attention to the post-modern characteristics distinctive for the farm novel of the new millennium.

The *Plaasroman* of the 21st century is inevitably linked to and concerned with the legacies of apartheid and colonialism. While the contemporary farm novel is often discussed within the canon of post-colonial literature, South Africa's eventful history makes an examination of the novels in the light of post-modern rather than post-colonial writing more sensible, for, as O'Reilly (6) argues, the prefix 'post' in post-colonial "implies [...] the end of formal colonial rule", and in the case of South Africa a clear break never really occurred. It is to be noted at this point that one's understanding of post-colonialism mainly depends on the interpretation of the 'post' prefix in the term, and various attempts to do so have been made (cf. Thomas 1994; McClintock 1993; Williams and Chrisman 1993). However, an in-depth discussion of post-colonial theories in relation to the contemporary *Plaasroman* would go beyond the scope of this thesis, and thus the elaboration is restricted to a brief discussion of the concepts of *Self* and the *Other*, as relevant for an analytical interpretation of the novels.

Yet, the fact that post modernity and post colonialism can be viewed as two closely related ideational movements, for the colonization of the world and the European invasion into Africa, Asia, and Latin America also brought about modernity for those countries, thus approximating "the theme of post modernity" into post-colonial conditions, has to be acknowledged (Muthu Mohan, online). The emergence of post-modern conditions in the former colonies eventually "[encouraged] an inward, reflexive turn towards the self, the body and culture" (Kenny 118), thus giving rise to a new quest for individual and national identity. Typically, the collapse of the 'old world', respectively the colonial system, urges people and nations all over the world to redefine themselves. With regard to the colonial legacy in South Africa in the form of the

apartheid regime and the nation's eventual post-apartheid trauma, Coker (291) points out that "[w]hat the people of South Africa share is the need to create a new meaning to their lives". And it is this quest for and question of identity and belonging, which can be depicted as a post-modern, all-pervasive theme in the *Plaasromane* of the new millennium.

Furthermore, as already discussed in the previous chapter, the contemporary farm novel revisits the conventional *Plaasroman*, and modern examples of the genre refrain from portraying the *Plaas* "as the site of a clear, but 'fair', social hierarchy (patriarch, wife, sons and daughters, tenants, servants, beasts, and land)", but in fact, invert the social orders of race and gender (Cairnie 21). Especially the contributions of the 21st century emerge as an evolution, a subversive re-writing of the key features of a genre they are self-consciously indebted to (Ogede (b) xi).

In this respect Marlene Van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2004), or *The Way of the Women* (2006) as the title was translated into English, undoubtedly depicts one of the most impressive and highly praised recent attempts to transcend the *Plaasroman* by subverting or reversing traditional characteristics and themes. The prominence and prevalence of Van Niekerk's masterpiece is one reason why this novel was chosen as subject of further investigation in this thesis. The fact that Van Niekerk

revisits the traditional plaasroman in order to rethink one of the most problematic and troubling characteristics of Afrikaner whiteness in South Africa: the assumed ownership and domestication of the African land (Van Houwelingen 93)

makes it, of course, an extraordinarily feasible example for an analysis of the close interrelation of land and identity.

The second novel to be analysed in the subsequent chapters is Mark Behr's less renowned novel *Kings of the Water* (2009), which is interesting insofar as the author attempts to put his novel and South African realities into a global and rather contemporary context. Behr portrays the universality of the struggle for identity and the question of belonging as a dominating theme in a post-colonial world. He points to the fact that issues of land rights and identity are closely intertwined and all-pervasive, thus highlighting that South Africa's situation is not unique, and measured against global reality "South Africa, [...] [is] in fact, at last, quite ordinary", an approach which sets Behr's novel apart from most of the other South African farm novels (Behr interviewed by Hope, online).

6. The Way of the Women

Marlene Van Niekerk's powerful novel *Agaat* (2004) was originally written in Afrikaans and translated into English by Michiel Heyns in 2006, published under the title *The Way of the Women*. While Van Niekerk's literary work draws heavily on features of the normative plaasroman¹¹, and intriguingly explores “the very soul of the Afrikaner's being” (Van Wyk Smith 18), she simultaneously subverts and reconfigures traditional representations of the farm, ownership, and identity. Van Niekerk reverses the traditional master-servant relationship, and refines questions of landownership and rights through the portrayal of black labor, something the pastoral farm novel refrained from depicting, for emotional entitlement to land was intrinsically tied to the cultivating labor performed on it. Moreover, the traditional conceptualization of the farm as a patriarchal space is challenged by Van Niekerk's establishment of a matriarchal rule and the destabilization of hierarchies and power across gender and race divisions.

In the following, power relations within Van Niekerk's masterpiece will be explored. In order to comprehend the identity threatening tragedy of losing the farm, special attention will be drawn to the important role of cartography as legitimation of power and conquest, and the novel's powerful subplot of maps (ch 6.2), as reflecting shifting power relations and domination over the farm, a theme eventually receiving further special discussion (ch 6.3). Prior to an in-depth analysis as regards this thesis' title, however, an outline of plot and narrative structure is provided in order to ensure clarity (ch 6.1), for the events in *The Way of the Women* are not presented chronologically.

6.1. Narrative Structure and Plot Overview

Spanning from 1947 to 1996, the narrative about the complex and controversial relationship between Kamilla de Wet, mistress of the farmstead Grootmoedersdrift, and her black servant, Agaat, approximately covers the period of South Africa's implementation of the apartheid system and its eventual transition to a free democracy. Therefore, the novel reflects the realities of South Africa's history in the microcosmic depiction of individual realities on Grootmoedersdrift. Most notably, Kamilla's gradual disempowerment and the fracturing of her Afrikaner identity, as will be subsequently discussed in this chapter, significantly correspond with South Africa's progress toward the abolition of racial segregation and the quest to redefine a new national identity.

¹¹ See Chapter 3.

Interestingly, it is a collaborative, though at times painful, re-evaluation of their history, which eventually enables both women to (re-) create an identity in the light of the newly emerging political and social realities during the last decades of the twentieth century, a narration clearly reflecting the TRC-promoted way of Reconciliation and Forgiveness as a way to cope with past trauma and, at the same time, create a common history¹².

Kamilla de Wet, owner of the farm Grootmoedersdrift, is the sole narrator of the novel. However, the difficulty of compiling a chronological and 'true' history of the nation's past is reflected in the rather chaotic and fragmented narrative method the author applies to reveal the story.

The novel starts with Milla's first person account of her points of view as she atrophies by the motor neuron disease she is suffering from. Her representations are fragmented and unreliable. Accordingly, the reader has to critically reevaluate her accounts of events throughout the novel. The dubiousness of Milla's narration arises from the traditional Afrikaner perceptions she seems to be trapped in, as well as her progressively receding consciousness coupled with emerging feelings of guilt and shame regarding South Africa's, respectively the two women's, brutal histories.

Additionally, the passages written in the narrative present compellingly portray Agaat's ministration of Milla's paralyzed body, evoking notions of the farmer (colonizer) and the farm (colonized), yet the roles are clearly reversed. In this respect, Milla relates Agaat's written evaluations of the patient's physical health to lists of criteria in order to evaluate and describe land, thus depicting Agaat as the farmer, who evaluates her body:

She'll want to judge me in as many categories as she can think up, that's certain. Sphincter pressure, melting-point, share suction, sowing density, rust resistance[...]. (WotW 18)

While the Boer woman describes the tormented and paralyzed surface of her body as an accumulation of "hollow[s]" and "bumps" (WotW 19), she imagines that "[t]here is still vegetation, there is water, there is soil" (WotW 15) when describing her state of mind. By 1996 the old-world around Milla has broken down and, consequently, shattered her set-in-stone Afrikaner identity. The paralyzation of Afrikanerdom in the light of the realities of a new millennium is symbolically depicted by Milla's illness. Yet, the description of her still verdant mind alludes to South Africa's inner potential for reconciliation and the need for a communal creation of new realities.

¹² see Chapter 2.

Furthermore, Agaat's acts of physical care and mastery over Milla's body evoke the picture of a trial in which the dominant and dominated, in reversed roles, negotiate the (hi-)stories of past injustices. While at times Agaat's attendance seems to serve as punishment for past abuses by Milla, other scenes yield a picture of understanding and will to reconcile, expressed in Agaat's empathic physical proximity to Milla.

The novel's corpus draws on a second person narration by the protagonist, in which Milla, refers to herself by means of the second-person personal pronoun 'you'. These narrative passages recount about 40 years of her life on the farm, starting with her marriage to Jak de Wet in 1947, and concluding with her son Jakkie's escape from Grootmoedersdrift in 1985. With the employment of a second person narration, Van Niekerk generates a reproachful and reflective impact, enabling Milla to reevaluate and criticize her own past actions.

In order to further develop certain subjects, sections of streams of consciousness are inserted into the narrative. While at times those passages seem to impede comprehension, they, in fact, advance, most prominently, the theme of sacrifice, which recurs several times in the novel. Besides, the stream of consciousness passages, written in italics and disregarding punctuation, trace the development of Milla's illness. Thus, the chaotic and formless record of the protagonist's consciousness also reflects her increasingly distracted and perishing mind.

The novel's final narrative strand is built upon Milla's diary entries dedicated by herself "to the history of Agaat Lourier" (WotW 582) and covers the years from 1953 to 1979. Through those journal entries, the story of Agaat's adoption and Milla's one-sided version of the sacrifices she has made in order to save the black girl from a life in "damnation" (WotW 483) and civilize her, is told. The diary entries reveal the development of a kind of mother-daughter relationship between Milla and Agaat in the course of their exploration of nature and Milla's fostering of the girl. While moments of great intimacy are depicted in her journal entries, the mistreatments the girl faces in the process of her being civilized are illustrated as well and reflect the Afrikaner social norms to which Milla steadily reverts. While Milla's adoption of Agaat and the imposition of "the privileges of a good Afrikaner home" (WotW 582) on the black girl oppose the prevalent norms of segregation and Bantu Education policies¹³, the protagonist's approach to the girl still mirrors the Boer's attitude toward the wild land he

¹³ See Chapter 2.

occupied and tamed with his own hands (Coetzee (c) 99). Her perception of Agaat as her sole creation becomes evident in Milla's last diary entry, dated "9 July 1979", declaring:

Now with Jakkie gone like that & doing his own thing I get the feeling that the diary-keeping doesn't really make much sense any more. Don't have that much to report on any more. Agaat is Agaat. I think I made the best of hr [sic!] that I could. More I think than many other people could have managed. (WotW 367)

The diaries further tell the stories of Jakkie's birth and Agaat's subsequent demotion from an adored child to a mere servant, reversing the mother-daughter relationship to a master-and-maid relation. Agaat's removal from the family home and her placement in a separate room outside demolishes what promised to be the only meaningful relationship for Milla, and the attempts to comprehend this betrayal are significant for the women's interactions during the last days of Milla's life. The fact that the abandoned child is turned into the heir's nanny further complicates matters, for the emotional relationship that only Agaat is able to establish with Jakkie not only reciprocates the emotional abuses the maid had to suffer, but also undermines the core of Afrikaner consciousness, based on the lineal inheritance of land. Owing to Agaat's strong influence on Jakkie, the legitimate heir of Grootmoedersdrift rejects Afrikaner culture, eventually fleeing from the land he ironically depicts as "uncivilized" in light of the cruelties of the apartheid system (WotW 4). In the Prologue, Jakkie, too, wonders about the meaning of the name "Grootmoedersdrift" and, in an attempt to translate it into English, asks himself whether it stands rather for "Granny's Ford" or "Granny's Passion", an exploration characteristic of the historically biased love-hate relationship between the Boer and his land, the colonizer and the colonized, and Milla and Agaat (WotW 5).

While the first diary entries revealed to the reader are dated from 1960 to 1979, it is only much later in the novel that the black maid eventually finds the "third parcel" (WotW 371), recounting Agaat's early childhood on the farm. The women's mutual desire to seek understanding and reconciliation is partly depicted in the story of Milla's diaries, for Agaat not only reads them, but, in fact, reads them back to Milla, providing her own "omissions" and "additions" (WotW 559) in the booklets and is, thus, given a voice, and chance to rewrite Milla's authoritative account of their interconnected histories.

Milla's narrative of how she 'found' Agaat on the farm of her mother and rescued her

from the abuses she suffered from her own black family, is an ambiguous story, the protagonist eventually “forgot about” (WotW 559) to write down in her journals. While in her early entries, the Boer woman, according to her Calvinist faith, perceives herself as the chosen one who breathes life into Agaat, the dying woman eventually comes to recognize the factors “Time. Chance. Coincidence” to be truly decisive in the making of South Africa and ‘the making of’ Agaat (WotW 559).

Agaat's full story is then revealed in Kamilla's last second person narrative, and Agaat's personal account of things wrapped up in a fairy tale story for Jakkie, retold in his frame narrative.

Van Niekerk's masterly developed story starts with the depiction of the end of the matriarch of Grootmoedersdrift and, interestingly, concludes with a new beginning, for the farm is assigned to the black maid.

6.2 Mapping Identities

With respect to the topic of this thesis, it is to be noted that the protagonist in Van Niekerk's masterpiece is neither directly threatened with the loss of her farm to a bank, as it often happened in the early decades of the 20th century, nor by a forced farm transferal as initiated by the ANC government after the end of apartheid¹⁴. The farmer woman, in fact, loses her farm, respectively domination over it, because of the motor neuron disease she suffers from, and which captivates her not only in her room, but within herself. The story of her loss and the power shift from mistress to maid is, in fact, explored through the imaginary representations of power as symbolized in the subplot of “the maps” (WotW 25) and the protagonist's emblematic relationship with the land.

In the context of the critical view post-colonial literature yields on the portrayal of the *Self* and the *Other*, a concept initially described by Edward Said (1979) in his groundbreaking work *Orientalism*, Foucault's (1998) depiction of how the knowledge the colonizer (*Self*) produced about the colonized (*Other*) implemented an agenda of domination, will be explored in the subsequent. However, Homi Bhaba's (19) critical emphasis of an “ ‘in-between’ reality” and the fact that the colonizer and the colonized are more than *Self* and *Other*, the master and the dominated, as proposed by Said, will be taken into consideration as well, for Van Niekerk's novel inevitably adheres to Bhaba's counter evaluation of the *Self* and the *Other*, which he comprehends as being the sum of their histories (Bhaba 19).

¹⁴ See Chapter 2.

6.2.1 'Because the map I still must see'¹⁵

In his critique of historiography, Michel Foucault (qtd. in Harley and Laxton 55) points to the fact that historical truth is neither objective nor neutral but “intimately related to the ‘will to power’ of the truth seeker.” Foucault depicts “knowledge” as “a form of power, a way of presenting one’s own values in the guise of scientific disinterestedness” (Harley and Laxton 55), a notion Anthony Giddens (qtd. in Tucker 115) shares when theorizing about the power of “authoritative resources” to determine or maintain social hierarchies by means of control of knowledge.

While Giddens does not explicitly link his theory to cartography, maps are — and from a historical point of view, surely were — inevitably a tool to chart, verify, and legitimize power and conquest, especially in the context of colonial realities (Harley and Laxton 57).

In South Africa, too, geographical maps were used to support and exercise territorial power, and the importance of maps as “scientific” testimonies of the rightful ownership of the Boer, who ties his identity strongly to “the inscription of white history” on the South African soil (Beningfield 53), can be vaguely guessed when Milla de Wet ponders “[m]aps attend lifetimes. What is an age without maps?” (WotW 70), while her only craving on her deathbed is to

[...] see the maps of Grootmoedersdrift, the maps of my region, of my place. Fixed points, veritable places, the co-ordinates of my land between the Korenlandriver and the Buffeljagdsrivier, a last survey as the crow flies, on dotted lines, on the axes between longitude and latitude. (WotW 35)

For 304 pages (pp 35–339) the reader is frequently reminded of the importance Milla attaches to maps, the maps that the paralyzed protagonist knows by heart and remembers from her childhood, when her mother unfolded them “to show you the farm that would be yours one day” (WotW 25).

For more than 300 pages Kamilla de Wet, who is able to interact with her maid Agaat only by means of eye movements, tries to communicate her one and only longing before she dies and even makes an attempt, with her last muscle power, to put the word in Agaat’s mouth:

Find it, Agaat, find the word in my mouth, find the impulse from which it must sprout, fish it out as intention, as yearning. The outlines of Grootmoedersdrift, its beacons, its heights, its valleys. You cannot deny me that. (WotW 37)

¹⁵ WotW 90.

But Agaat, who usually ‘reads’ Milla so well, seems unable to pick up what her mistress longs for so badly. Milla wonders whether her nurse denies her to see the maps on purpose, while, at the same time, Agaat starts to bring in the smells (cf. WotW 109), and sounds (cf. WotW 18), and seasons (cf. WotW 112) of Grootmoedersdrift for Kamilla. Agaat cooks a Sunday meal for Milla, who is not really able to eat it anymore, but suddenly remembers “Sunday food” as being “a whole story on its own [...] on Groedmoedersdrift”, and she smells “the cinnamon, the cardamom [...] for all I’m worth to get all the messages” (WotW 109). While Agaat tries to bring down at least some spoons of the prepared food, Milla again makes an attempt to turn Agaat’s attention to the white wall, where she craves to see her maps displayed for her. By looking alternately at the white wall and the mirror, the protagonist actually sets out to trigger the analogy “[m]irror, map” (WotW 114) for her nurse to grasp, and, in the course of this action, Kamilla’s gaze falls on fragmented reflections in the mirror of parts of the garden, drawing her memories to the fig tree she is unable to make out but knows it is there:

[...] [T]he fig tree I can't see, that grows just around the corner. That I, Lord, can't see. The early figs at the top ripe bells. The first light-green figs on a plate arranged with a flare of purple bougainvillea, that was how I served them, for the season, to mark it, to celebrate it, midsummer on Groedmoedersdrift. My figs. (WotW 114)

When days later Agaat moves the side panels of the mirror so that Milla can have “a view of the garden” the woman on the sick bed mentally exclaims in delight:

My garden I see there, cut out on three levels, abounding with detail, most alluring prospects. [...] The mirror reveals a perfect result. The best I've ever experienced the garden. (WotW 132)

However, Milla, trapped not only in her paralyzed body but also caught in the traditions and world views of her Afrikaner past, is still obsessed with the maps as symbols of her control, insisting on her irrevocable desire:

Because the map I still must see. [...] They must take my head in their hands so that it doesn't become too heavy, and lift it up and lower it as the rod points on the map and the hand points over my world, so that I can see the map of Grootmoedersdrift and its boundlessness. (WotW 90)

The discrepancy that lies in Kamilla's yearning for a view of the map to see the ‘boundlessness’ of her world is indebted to the mere nature of maps, which, in essence, show the exact boundaries of a cartographic piece of land, and Milla herself provides a

lengthy account of natural boundaries, like rivers and mountains, that enclose her property.

Huggan (21) points to the “exemplary role of cartography in the demonstration of colonial discursive practices” and identifies the idea that space can be outlined on paper and verified with coordinates to be a very European one, supporting “the direct execution of territorial power” (Harley and Laxton 58).

Ironically, in the novel, it is now Agaat who has power over Milla, metaphorically depicted in the vivid description of the enactment of body care the nurse performs on her mistress. Recognizing the power reversal, Milla’s desire to see black-and-white proof of her authority becomes obsessive:

And you may have dominion over my hours that you count off there and apportion with your devious little snake-hand and your white casque in front of the clock face, Agaat. But there is also space, cartographed, stippled, inalienable, the mountains, the valleys, the distance from A to B, laid down in place names for a century or two or three, Susverlore or Sogevonden, farms Foundlikethis or Lostlikethat. (WotW 56)

It is in this context of powerlessness, forced upon Kamilla by the motor neuron disease, that one needs to understand Milla’s yearning for her maps, which she considers the only way to sense agency again, for, she contemplates “[h]ow to remember, without speech, without writing, without map [...] Shrunken away from the world I created” (WotW 140).

In the context of South Africa’s colonial history, the notion that the holder of the map is the rightful landowner was important ever since the VOC sent the first settlers to the Cape but gained new prominence with the emergence of Afrikaner Nationalism.

The Afrikaner nationalist movement intended to construct and legitimize Afrikaner identity, among other things, by means of maps that tell the narratives of their heroic past, as exemplified by Jennifer Beningfield (53):

The Personality map, printed in 1968 as ‘The Story of South Africa’, overlays thick coloured routes denoting Voortrekker routes onto a detailed map of the country while blue dots mark specific places in which significant historical events occurred (Plate 2.4). In this map, and others like it, the time of the landscape is measured only in terms of relationship to white settlement [...] This focus on the inscription of white history enacts a kind of erasure, in which the written and drawn representations of linear history supplant another experience of the land, recorded in the oral histories, poems and myths of tribal life.

In her explanation, Beningfield draws attention not only to the Afrikaner myth of identity as created by ‘authoritative resources’ such as maps, but further points to the

circumstance that the land the Dutch settlers took possession of was viewed, in an Eurocentric way, as being empty space that could be formed and shaped and enhanced with history, the Afrikaner history. When Milla starts to teach Agaat language—her language—she tellingly explains that “I want Agaat to understand that if you call things by their names, you have power over them”, a statement indicative of the Boer’s self-consciousness, as well as of the power the colonizers displayed by labeling the uncanny land they seized with their own terms, in an attempt to make the unknown familiar (WotW 450).

Milla experiences her paralysis as “an exile within myself”, and considering the previously discussed constitutional role of land and ownership regarding Boer identity, it is understandable that, to the Boer, the loss of his farm would mean the end of the world for him, triggering an acute identity crisis (WotW 140). While Milla has not actually lost her farm, she has lost her connection with it, for she finds herself confined to a single room, unable to move, speak, to see the farm she was living for. The protagonist seems to yearn for the maps of her land in order to reconstruct an identity she is unable to visualize without the cartography of her property. Trying to make sense of her patient’s hints, Agaat pointedly describes the desired item as “something that’s outside and inside at the same time” (WotW 178), a depiction of the farmers love for his land, as intrinsically tied to his identity, which becomes all the more physical when Milla muses:

Between the land and the map I must look, up and down, far and near until I've had enough, until I'm satiated with what I have occupied here.
And then they must roll it up in a tube and put on my neckbrace again like the mouth of a quiver. And I will close my eyes and prepare myself so that they can unscrew my head and allow the map to slip into my lacunae.
Because without my world inside me I will contract and congeal, more even than I am now, without speech and without actions and without any purchase upon time. (WotW 90)

The passage quoted above subverts a feature typical for the normative *plaasroman*, which J.M. Coetzee ((c) 86) describes as follows:

The final test that the bond between [farmer, lineage, and farm] is supramaterial will be passed when a mystic communion of interpenetration takes place between them, when farmer becomes *vergroeid* (intergrown, fused) with the farm.

In contrast to Coetzee’s depiction of a romantic bonding, an epiphany of the farmers soil, which he soaks up and makes part of himself, part of his identity, as being

significant for the traditional farm novel, Milla's imagined swallowing of the maps of her farm appear to be an incomplete and rather absurd imitation of this 'mystic communion'.

The fact that native history was negated and a white master narrative of history was imposed on the conquered land, also by means of maps as proof of rightful landownership, as well as the circumstance that maps are drawn by the gainer, also means that any map contains empty spaces. Kevin Hart (qtd. in Huggan 25) displays maps as being "both complete and consistent but [...] in each case there are hidden gaps of one kind or another", a position carried further by Huggan's (23) discussion of "blind spots [that] reveal flaws in the overall representation of the map" and allow for an alternative reading.

When Milla, again, imagines where her maps are stowed and the obstacles that might prevent Agaat from seeing them, she specifies "[t]here, behind the little blue books, lie the maps that I want to see" (WotW 56). The fact that the maps of Grootmoedersdrift and Milla's diaries, as the reader comes to identify "the blue books", rest in such proximity to each other "in the sideboard" (WotW 69), is, surely, not coincidental. Sue Kossew (371) notes the frequent accentuation of maps and diaries as "primary sources of history" and Al Saidi (2) emphasizes the fact that "writing itself can be seen as an act of colonization, of imposing one's authority [...] onto the *Other*". In this respect, Milla's diaries as well as the maps of her farm "serve to impose her master narrative on events", just as the colonizer drew the maps and told the stories of the colonized (Buxbaum 36). Yet, as mentioned earlier, a map just as Milla's diaries are merely a partial representation of reality, both containing 'blind spots' and omissions, primarily of Agaat's version of events.

6.2.2 'There is another story here'¹⁶: The map's 'blind spots'

When on page 339, the maps the protagonist has been craving for so earnestly, eventually arrive, Milla's first mental response is:

Yes I see. My eyes are open. I must believe them. With the rolls of maps held out in front of her on her arms she marches into the room solemnly. An offering. (WotW 339)

The realization that Milla eventually 'sees' seems to refer not only to the materialization of her maps, but perhaps more to the fact that in the course of the two women's struggle

¹⁶ WotW 303.

to gain mutual understanding of what Kamilla wants to see, Agaat starts to draw a map of sensations of Grootmoedersdrift by bringing in the sounds, the tastes, the colors, the soil, the seeds, and touches of Milla's world into the room she is restricted to. It is only in the epilogue that Jakkie's inspection of his buried mother's room sheds light on the fact that Agaat had brought her mistress's world and its true 'boundlessness' to Milla long before she thought of rolling out the maps:

One by one I picked up the objects and put them down again, the skull of a buck, of a baboon, a lizard's skeleton, a ram's horn, trocar and cannula. [...] There were my varnished birds' eggs in a bowl, the old binoculars in their leather case with the red lining, Opa's old telescope with which Ma taught me and Gaat about the stars. The moon and the stars, that's about all that was missing from the room. (WotW 580f)

In the course of Milla's desperate wait to see her farm "even if only in outline, place names on a level surface" (WotW50), Agaat "carr[ies] in just about the whole yard" (WotW 342) and, by doing so, draws a vivid map of Milla's property, more colorful and revealing than any cartography could ever be.

When the sought-after maps eventually find their way on the white wall in Milla's room, the protagonist's views and perceptions seem to have altered, a fact the mistress attributes to Agaat's presence early on when explaining to her neighbor Beatrice that "Agaat makes me remember things, opens my eyes, to things that get lost, things that I've neglected" (WotW 449).

Kamilla's first idea of what to do with her maps is completely at variance with all her previous fantasies about how the maps will restore her power and identity alike:

So put the ridges under my arse instead of your holy of holiest pan. From Bot River to Heidelberg, the municipalities, the districts, the regions. Unroll it under me, keep the edges together, and watch me make a sewerage farm out of them. And if the local is too lowly for you, bring the seven continents so that I can shit them into oblivion for you one by one. What does it matter in any case? Fold the water map into a little boat, set the contour map for a sail. Caulk the holds with pulp from Gootmoedersdrift. Then I sail away on my last voyage in it. (WotW 342f)

While earlier the maps were imagined to be a manifestation of Milla's power and dominion over her farm, Milla, under the influence of a strong laxative administered by Agaat, comes to perceive the maps as hollow signs and drawings without value and influence, a paper just good enough to empty her bowels on, or "[f]old [...] into a little boat" (WotW 343).

Agaat's physical mastery over Milla by means of the laxatives she has decided to dispense, and Milla's eventual reward of seeing the maps for the punishment, reflect the power reversal latently present throughout the novel, but undoubtedly reaching its climax in this scene. Milla, who has chastised and rewarded Agaat from early childhood on, "understands the trade-off":

A poop for a peep!
A panful for a panorama of Grootmoedersdrift! (WotW 340)

As Buxbaum (38) notes, "the symbolism of the map has shifted dramatically" and the symbolic interference of "an evacuation [and][...] an exposition" (WotW 340) dissipates the ideologically charged conception of maps as materialization of power and domination by restricting it to mere graphs and icons without actual value.

When the nurse eventually rolls open the maps "[e]verything is there, even the house plans and the schemes for the landscaping of the garden" (WotW 343). However, with the unfolding of the maps, the reader also enters a whole new narrative. While Milla recognizes "[a]ll the battle sites. Farms, stations, towns. Beach hamlets. Wheat storages. Settlements" (WotW 344), Agaat releases the town names "like a flood" (WotW 346) pointing at "[e]verything you [Milla] forgot and never even noted in your little books" (WotW 247). Until the maps find their place on Milla's walls, Agaat has no voice and her story is told only by means of the fragmented and questionable narration of her master. But, now, as the back servant recites the place names she finds on the maps and supposedly at times queers them, for Milla suspects that "[s]he's inventing half the names" (WotW 344) and identifies Agaat's recitations as "a litany of longings, aspirations, achievements, losses" (WotW 346), Agaat also starts telling her story of betrayal and how she was turned from an adored child to a mere servant girl:

Mailslot! Lowroof! Candle-end!
Lockupchild! Without pot!
Shatinthecorner!
Shatupon!
Dusterstick on Agaatsarse!
Au-Au-Au!
Ai-Ai-Ai!
Neversaysorry!
Sevenyearchild!
And then?
Can-you-believe-it?
Backyard!
Skivvy-room!
Highbed!

Brownsuitcase!
 Whitecap! Heartburied!
 Nevertold! Unlamented!
 Good-my-Arse!
 Now-my-Arse! Now's-the-Time! (WotW 348)

Milla pointedly acknowledges that “now it's Agaat’s turn to flush her system” (WotW 347), and by doing so Agaat starts to fill all the ‘blind spots’ in the map with her own story.

However, Agaat's *reterritorialization*¹⁷ begins much earlier in the novel, when she starts planting all over the farm the fennel seeds she has been given by Milla prior to her abandonment and retreat to the back room. When Milla wonders why Agaat regularly runs away and disappears, even though she is just as regularly punished for it, Agaat's answer is revealing:

I dig she says. I look at the nails, I see the soil. What do you dig! I ask. Little furrows she says. What kind of little furrows? For seed, she says. Then a great light dawned for me about the fennel that's shooting up everywhere in the garden & the yard & next to the irrigation frow & the orchard all the way to beyond the dirt road in the dryland I noticed the yellow heads of fennel in flower. (WotW 537)

With regard to the ‘blind spots’ in a map, Buxbaum (39) points to the fact that Agaat’s fennel would never feature in any official cartography of the farm, and yet the continuous spread of the herb can be viewed as a symbol of Agaat’s existence as a ‘blind spot’ on Grootmoedersdrift. By “infesting the place” with her fennel seeds, as Milla puts it (WotW 537), Agaat, in fact, “inscribes her own narrative into the earth” and thus reterritorializes the land that will be hers one day (Buxbaum 39).

As mentioned earlier, the ‘blind spots’ in a map not only stand for the erased history of the indigenous population of a colony, but also offer the chance of an alternative reading. While geographical maps have been discussed already as a tool of implementing colonial policies, Huggan (21) highlights the potential of metaphorical maps in order to “provide a framework for the critique of colonial discourse”.

The french poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (qtd. in Huggan 28f) examine the seemingly ambiguous notion of maps as “a shifting ground between alternative metaphors rather than as the approximate representation of ‘a lineal truth’”, a

¹⁷ The term *reterritorialization* is coined by the French philosophers and poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and refers to the restructuring of a place or territory that has experienced deterritorialization before (cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

discussion relocating the emphasis from “de- to reconstruction, from mapbreaking to mapmaking” (Huggan 29).

In this respect, Agaat’s symbolic inscription of identity by planting the fennel that becomes so much part of her that even Jakkie cannot think of Agaat without turning his thoughts to fennel (cf. WotW 3), as well as the alternate story she tells, her story, when going through the maps with Milla, must be viewed as a re-construction, a mutual mapmaking in order to make sense of and peace with the past, and neither Milla nor Agaat are able to create a map of their identity without the other’s contribution, without filling the ‘blind spots’.

Maybe, it is for this reason that after Agaat tells her sad story via the maps, she decides to restore Milla’s voice by means of the old alphabet chart she all of a sudden drags into the room. While Milla wonders why her nurse decided only now “to invest me with language” (WotW 372) and “[empower] me in my last moments here where I no longer hesitate to speak my mind” (WotW 370), the two women enter into a new mode of communication with Agaat making great efforts to equip Milla with the voice she lacks:

There is a whole grammar developing there on the wall. Everyday there's more of it. Question mark, exclamation mark, swearword, dots to mark an implication. A skeleton of language, written down in print and in script with Koki chlak, bigger, more complicated than Agaat on her own, than I or the two of us together could think up. (WotW 372)

The women’s previous sharing of maps triggers a new communicative system Agaat seems to extend ad infinitum and articulates for the first time “the cruelty of the omissions and exclusions she has suffered”, the face-to-face situation denying Milla the possibility of ignoring Agaat’s version of events (Fincham 137). The chart can be viewed as a language map enabling both women to articulate what has never been said and seems so crucial to come to terms with their identities for “the truth”, as Milla now realizes, might be “beyond what happened or didn't happen” (WotW 370). And, finally, after all the years, Milla finds the words of reconciliation only when she is mute: “Sorry. Powerless. Guilty. I am. I shall be. But. How am I to. Die. Question mark.” (WotW 374).

6.2.3 Metaphorical maps: Agaat's embroidery

Unfortunately, Milla's progressing disease terminates the two women’s newly discovered form of communication in which both “found a brief freedom”, shortly after

they painstakingly managed to break through the silence of their lives, and the reader is now left with Agaat's metaphorical maps: her embroidery (Fincham 139).

The importance of Agaat's embroidery is mentioned in the prologue to the novel in which Jakkie remembers Agaat's "starched cap" and the "fine handiwork, white on white" only he was allowed to look at or touch (WotW 3). By means of embroidering her cap 'white on white', using "shadow stitching", a technique indicative of white work embroidery and unique in so far as the fabric is embroidered on the backside, thus only a very close view, with full illumination from the back, will reveal the embroidered design to the observer (Michler 48), Agaat renders her art unreadable to anyone "except Jakkie when he was small" (WotW 318).

Interestingly, it is Milla who introduces the art of embroidery to Agaat after the girl is banished from the family home, moved out into the back room and is confronted with her new role as a servant, an event constitutive for Agaat's identity, or rather the loss of it. The impact of Milla's rejection and Agaat's forced assimilation to cultural norms, becomes evident only when Agaat answers Milla's burning question, "What, I ask you for the how-manieth time, happened to your brown suitcase" (WotW 378–9), when the women eventually start to 'talk' with the help of the alphabeth chart. The brown suitcase, as Carvalho and Van Vuuren (47) interpret it, symbolizes the "destruction of all that [Agaat] values" for her "beloved toys [are replaced] with Afrikaner cultural goods." Agaat's reply to Milla's question, a recitation of "the cutting-up of an ox" (WotW 379) from the Farmers Handbook, recalls not only the day the girl was rejected by her foster mother, but also Agaat's trauma when forced to slaughter her own hanslam. The maid's concluding remark, that "skivvy and lamb, both cut up much better than an old tough cow" points to the dreadful circumstance that, the day Agaat was forced out of the house, and had to slaughter her own hanslam, the black girl's identity was destroyed alike (WotW 379).

When pointing out how rich in "traditions from the domain of woman" embroidery is, the mistress also displays some religious motives typical and indicative of this feminine art (WotW 145). Kamilla's eventual explanation of one of the symbols for the Mother of God, and her assertion that she is only "secondary" to Jesus Christ (WotW 146), points to the deeply enrooted patriarchal order of Afrikaner society. Embroidery, as portrayed in Milla's embroidery book *Borduur sò*, quoted already in the novel's epigraph, and revealingly written by Betsie Verwoerd, wife of Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, is identified as a "specifically feminine" area,

“[contributing] to the refinement and beautification of the domestic atmosphere” (WotW ix), a notion in accord with patriarchal ideology and its suggestion of hierarchical gender roles and women's restriction to the “domestic” and “private spheres” (Coetzee (a) 302).

In this respect, the imposition of embroidery as Agaat's new pastime can be interpreted as Milla's attempt to restore the order on the farm, when eventually expecting the legitimate heir of Grootmoedersdrift, not only by relocating Agaat to an outside room, but also by teaching her to subjugate herself as a black woman in a hierarchical and patriarchal environment.

Milla emphasizes that embroidery “demonstrates the difference between a developed & an uncivilised nation” (WotW 145), and, while she tries to impress Agaat with representations of Afrikaner history and the prospect of being able “to tackle the scenes from History & then Heaven” (WotW 146) herself one day when practicing faithfully, Agaat's first major piece “the great rainbow” is anything but an icon of subjugation (WotW 186).

Instead of embroidering god, angels, and a clearly male-dominated heaven and the hierarchically ranked inhabitants of the world and their history, Agaat's first big embroidery enters a rather metaphysical dimension, displaying the yellow shades of the veld, and

the blue-green of the Waenhuiskrans horizon, [the] yellow-green shoots of self-sown oats, water green pineapple drink, lime peel, sunflowers, orange cannas, a dust-dimmed sun over stubble field, a harvest moon blood-red, a watermelon's flesh. And Geissorhiza radians, Babiana purpurea, amongst dark bracken the seven other purples of September. Swift effulgences, pleats of light. (WotW 186f)

What Milla initially comprehends as “an embroidery of nothing” is nothing less than Agaat's sensory map of Gootmoedersdrift (WotW 187), and with regard to the servant's earlier discussed reterritorialization, the rainbow can be viewed as her reconfiguration of the farm, Agaat's personal map of “the farm's flora and fauna, her own history, and particularly [illustrating] her love for Jakkie” (Ficham 140).

While Agaat has already made efforts to let her mistress sense her farm again, “[t]he rainbow” is the first map the nurse eventually brings into Milla's room. However, Milla has not yet arrived at an alternative perception of the world she is trapped in and wonders “[w]hat am I supposed to do with it all?” (WotW 187).

Milla's climactic paradigm shift becomes evident only when Agaat falls asleep at her feet, and Milla is able to "stare to my heart's content" on her nurse's embroidered cap, "that zone above Agaat's forehead" that was "[o]ver the years ever more forbidden" (WotW 318). The protagonist's interpretation of Agaat's subverted creation story embroidered on her maids cap is revealing:

But I can't stop looking. It's like looking into clouds. Everything is possible. Wings it looks like, angles' wings. They arch out gracefully from the backs of the musicians. But the trumpet – player has a pig's snout. And the beak of the harpist is that of a bat. A wolf, grinning, beats the tambourine. A baboon with balloon-cheeks blows the syrx, a rat with tiny teeth hangs drooling over the lute. (WotW 318)

As Fincham (138) pointedly notices, Agaat's embroidery effectively ignores categories and, thus, "trespass[es] equally against state, race, class and gender boundaries."

Kamilla's interpretation of the motives displayed on her maid's cap and the realization that '[e]verything is possible' in Agaat's embroidered world uncovers the ample transformation of Milla's world view and perceptions (WotW 318).

In this light, Agaat's embroidery not only serves as an alternative map enabling Agaat to metaphorically reterritorialize the farm, but also renders the possibility of filling the blind spots on the official maps, thus allowing the maid to collaborate in creating a new reality. Milla, on the contrary, is able to escape the binaries of Calvinist theology supporting patriarchal structures only by means of comprehending and learning to interpret Agaat's embroidery, as Milla herself realizes, when concluding, "[m]y eye that can't blink becomes all-seeing" (WotW 498).

Agaat's masterpiece, the shroud-cloth for her foster mother, eventually turns out to be "Genesis and Grootmoedersdrift in one, a true work of art, [that] must have taken a lifetime, every stitch in its place" as Jakkie describes the maid's final embroidery in the epilogue (WotW 579). Significantly, Agaat embroiders Milla's shroud on the Glenshee linen Milla endowed to her maid "for one day when she will have mastered the art", as she stated when introducing the art of embroidery to the black girl (WotW 555). Back then, Milla also pointed to the significance of the shroud to ensure the deceased's arrival in heaven "wrapped up in his culture & history & faith" (WotW 146), a task Agaat seeks to accomplish and yet "takes much longer than she thought" (WotW 376). The "unpick[ing] and redo[ing]" (WotW 376) of Agaat's embroidery seems synonymous with the actual process of writing and is indicative of the writing and rewriting of histories in general. Embroidery, just as writing, gives one the opportunity to reevaluate,

correct, rewrite and simply add or alter the story, and, as Van Niekerk comments in an interview with De Kock (148), embroidery, as a “tool of the cultured nation”, lent itself as a trope of self-reflection. The ambiguous nature of the Afrikaans word *borduur*, hinting at the notions of using artisanry to inscribe the ‘truth’, but also to hide equivocal messages, seems predestined to serve as a device to “[embroider] [Agaat's] life story, and erecting [...] something for [her]self that makes [her] autonomous and sovereign” (Van Niekerk interviewed by De Kock 148).

The incertitude of the term, *borduur*, however, also correlates with the ambiguous nature of maps, which have been “projected as ‘scientific’ images” for centuries (Harley and Laxton 55), but are, in fact:

open and connectable in all [their] dimensions; [a map] is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on the wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or mediation. (Deleuze & Guattari 12)

The map features identified by Deleuze and Guattari in their poststructuralist approach are indicative for Agaat's embroidery as well. While, in essence, being a tradition to facilitate women's subordination in a patriarchal and Calvinist society, Agaat turns her embroidery into an autonomous art in which the black servant constructs her own allegories, her own identity, and, thus, demonstrates her resistance, though in a very subtle way. Fincham (139) argues that by learning to decode and comprehend Agaat's embroidery, “Milla begins to let go of her immersion in patriarchy” as well, an actuality Milla knows whom she is indebted to when realizing that only through Agaat “I see the world through fresh eyes” (WotW 545).

When Agaat eventually presents the shroud to her mistress, she seems to have succeeded in embroidering a life story, in filling in all the blind spots, and portraying the truly significant events in the mistress' and the maid's, the mother's and the daughter's lives:

Look, it is finished. she says. She unfolds it. She holds the big cloth before me. The one she was labouring all this time. [...]
I spy on the frock the sea at Infanta, I spy the land at Skeiding. In laidwork and blackwork and braiding and cross-stich and canvas.
It's the fire, it's the flood, it's the feast.
The shearing, the calving, the way of the women, a heron against the sky, a blue emperor on the forest, everything from here to the Hottentots Holland, all the scenes of Grootmoedersdrift. (WotW 499)

In the guise of Milla's shroud, Agaat creates an identity map for Milla, which detaches itself "from the 'over-signifying' spaces of patriarchal representation", an attribute Huggan (29) identifies as distinctive of feminist cartography, and Milla is able to apprehend only on her deathbed. Significantly, the shroud has been "hung here next to my bed on top of the maps", illustrating how the two women have eventually reconceptualized their world, and, by doing so, liberated themselves from the traumas of their past.

6.3 Losing the Farm? — Shifting Powers on Grootmoedersdrift

While the previous chapter (6.2) discussed Foucault's concept of knowledge and power with respect to the empowering nature of maps—geographical and metaphorical ones—as a tool of control, the subsequent chapter further explores Foucault's conception of power in order to provide a rudiment for further analysis of the power shifts in the novel, as being emblematic of the loss of control over the farm.

Foucault (63) locates power not only in knowledge, respectively in maps as a specific set of power knowledge, but "everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere". Gaventa (1) accentuates Foucault's deviant position to other theories, for the postmodernist conceives power as

diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them.

In Foucault's sense, power constitutes one's identity, for he dissociates power from politics and interprets it rather as an embodied phenomenon. The philosopher further draws attention to the function of discourse as a transmission of power, while identifying discursive practices as both "an instrument and an effect" of the very same (Foucault 100).

In *The Way of the Women* agricultural discourses occupy vast portions of the narration, and knowledge about farming seems to be significantly tied to power.

As mentioned earlier, Afrikaner identity is intrinsically tied to the ownership and cultivation of land, for the Boer feels a strong obligation to his ancestors, who were "[h]ack[ing] [the farmland] out of the primeval bush" (Coetzee (c) 85). The Afrikaner farmer inscribes and, thus, establishes his natural right to the land by means of labor, and, by taming the landscape with his own hands, he reclaims the land generation by generation. The duty to sustain and ideally increase "what the ancestors built" is

important for the farmers' self-esteem (Coetzee (c) 86). However, while vainly trying to create an affective connection to his land, mainly "confirmed by [the] historical continuity of association", the farmer seems to fail to develop a true sense of belonging (Griffiths qtd. in Huggan & Tiffin 82). Huggan and Tiffin (82) chronicle the Boer's struggle to truly connect to his land, as is apparent when Milla deplores the "ambiguity of the place" and finds it impossible "to act rightly and justly" (WotW 250):

The crisis of belonging that accompanies split cultural allegiance, the historical awareness of expropriated territory, and the suppressed knowledge that the legal fiction of entitlement does not necessarily bring with it the emotional attachment that turns "house and land" into home. (Huggan and Tiffin 82)

In their exploration, Huggan & Tiffin point to the previously discussed matter that the white settlers claimed any land that was empty, and that their hegemony was based on the effective suppression of native ancestral claims to it. Yet, being an eligible owner of the land is not only tied to legislative mechanisms and tools verifying ownership (and notably implemented by the colonizers), but perhaps even more to "the emotional possession of a place" (Huggan & Tiffin 82).

However, it seems the inability to establish a language to communicate with the land, the white settler has always perceived as a dystopia, is what designates also Milla's ambiguous relationship with her farm. In failing to associate and truly connect to the land, she eventually disaffects and alienates herself from it, thus losing her farm in an emotional and literal sense to Agaat, who connects by means of an emotionally more genuine approach to nature.

6.3.1 'Mrs. Soil Expert'¹⁸ and the 'Soilmaster'¹⁹: Milla's struggle for power

The lineal consciousness of the Afrikaner farmer and the importance attached to it regarding the legitimate and emotional possession of the land is reflected not only in the farm's name, Grootmoedersdrift, which points to Milla's matrilineal inheritance, but also in the importance Milla attaches to her cattle, particularly obvious when she grieves over the deaths of many of the cows due to botulism:

The best of them were descendants of the animals you had known as a child. Aandster's great-great-grandchild, Pieterella's distant cousins, all the meek caramel-coloured mothers. (WotW 200)

¹⁸ WotW 59.

¹⁹ WotW 103.

Interestingly, the traditional patriarchal order characteristic of the normative plaasroman is subverted in Van Niekerk's novel and replaced by matriarchal regency, yet deployed in an analogous manner to traditional patriarchal dominion. Houwelingen (98) notes that "Milla's matriarchal lineage also charts, maps, and inscribes the land" and she further indicates the fact that the traditionally male directed domination and (re)shaping, thus cultivation of the African soil, is a particularly "feminine project" in *The Way of the Women*.

At the very beginning of the novel, power is clearly inherent in Milla's mother, for she is the one in possession of all the maps of both farms and the knowledge required for successful farming, as demonstrated in her speech before handing over the maps and the keys of Grootmoedersdrift to Milla. Kamilla adumbrates the power her mother holds by means of her agricultural knowledge, when she describes her mother's lecture as a "whole sermon on the correct way of working with sheep and wheat and cattle" and notes how she does not dare "to look her in the eye when she spoke like that" (WotW 22). Milla further wonders whether her mother is "talking about more than just mixed farming" (WotW 22), and it soon becomes evident that her parent sets out to devalue Jak's 'natural' position, according to Afrikaner ideology, at least, as head and master of the farm, insisting that

[i]t's in Kamilla's blood, you must realize [...] Her great-great grandmother farmed there all alone for thirty years after her husband's death, way before the days of Hendrik Swellengrebel. There was a woman who could get a grip and hit home, blow for blow. [...] If you can't do that, young man, then you'd better stand aside [...] (WotW 25)

While the relationship between Milla's parents, and the fact that it is the mother who evaluates her daughter's fiancé in terms of his appropriateness as a heir of Grootmoedersdrift, is suggestive of a conscious dismantling of patriarchal structures, the power the matriarch commands is inevitably based on her knowledge of farming, rather than her deliberate resistance to patriarchal ideology, a fact unfolded by Jak when reciting Milla's mother's conviction that "an Afrikaner woman makes her way in silence and forbearance" (WotW 42). And Kamilla, too, is trapped in her Afrikaner upbringing, as displayed when the protagonist delights at the prospect of getting married and "at least be complete. Somebody's wife" (WotW 21). However, Jak and Milla's father, it seems, are assessed by the old matriarch and eventually by Milla herself only with regard to their agricultural knowledge. While Jak is described by Milla as "rich", "educated", "attractive", and "witty", her mother still wonders "what do you

[Milla] want him for?" (WotW 22). For, what the landless man surely lacks is knowledge and practical understanding of any farming matters.

The power of knowledge, thus, endows the legitimate power over land, as well as connection with it, both being intrinsically tied to male realms of dominion, in accordance with Afrikaner ideology, and, ironically, subverted in the novel by vesting the weak gender with expertise in everything concerning farming matters.

Having received the maps of Grootmoedersdrift along with the keys from her mother, Milla is on the way to her farm with her "farmer boy", as she significantly refers to Jak when crossing the Tradouw pass (WotW 23). Power has shifted from her mother to Milla, who exemplifies again to Jak who is the master of this land, disclosing that she "know[s] everything about farming" (WotW 29), while contemplating how she is now "the one who directs everything, the roughly ranked rock faces, the dark waterway far below, the curves in the road, the clouds far above" (WotW 27). However, Jak's tautness while listening to Milla's claims of her ability to handle the land and his eventual reply advert to his ambition to reinstall order, hence, patriarchy on the farm:

There was something in his voice, in what he said then you [Milla] didn't want to hear, you thought you were imagining things.
Yes, he said, [...] you'd better teach me and you'd better help me so that I can get the taste of it. And you better show me everything. I want to see where I'll be farming. I can't wait. (WotW 29f)

The passing of the Tradouw, "the way of the women in the Hottentot language, as [Milla's] father had explained" (WotW 30), is particularly significant in the narrative, for it indicates change and, more significantly, power shifts on Grootmoedersdrift. Although this first crossing of the mountain pass is a symbolic depiction of Milla's attainment of ultimate power over land, her land, and her liberation from her mother's domination, it is also indicative of the power struggle Milla enters with her husband to be.

Milla's romantic visions of her physical unification with Jak on her own property and soil, turns out to be a mere reenactment of traditional power relations, for Jak "threw you [Milla] onto the old bed [...] and had his way with you" (WotW 41). Milla's envisioned sentimental and rather mystical fusion with Jak has to be examined in the context of the Afrikaner pastoral myth and the Boer's constant endeavor to establish a connection to his land as described by Coetzee ((c) 86):

Beside farming the land in a spirit of piety towards *voogeslagte* and *nageslagte* (past and future generations), besides being a good steward, the farmer must also

love his farm, love this one patch of earth above all others, so that this proprietorship comes to embody marriage not so much between himself and the farm as between his lineage (family) and the farm.

Coetzee's remarks again emphasize the importance of lineal consciousness, but also point to the relation of marriage and the farmer's love for his land. Milla, in fact, perceives herself as being "the soil" (WotW 496), expecting Jak to be 'a good steward'. The husband, however, is anything but a good steward, revealing his attitude toward both wife and farm when threatening Milla with the remark:

If you want to be my soil, I'll do on it as I want to. [...]
What does one do with soil, eh? What does one do with it?
You drive a post into it, you grub it, you quarry out a dam. (WotW 99)

As mentioned in the previous chapter (6.2), Coetzee ((c) 86) further portrays a "mystic communion of interpenetration" in which the farmer fuses with his farm and eventually establishes a reciprocal communication, a mutual understanding of the previously encountered dystopian land, a pastoral fantasy Milla longs to realize on her own land and with her land, and, yet, the couples' future relationship is characterized by Jak's coarse and indifferent attitude toward both his wife and the farm, viewing them solely as property that God has given him the right to exploit.

Interestingly, the ideological differences regarding their approach to farming are frequently mirrored in the couples' sexual intercourses. While in the beginning, Milla makes great efforts to "teach him about soil", which the protagonist perceives as being "the beginning and the end of everything", Jak "just stood there [...] kicking at clods" (WotW 58). When Jak eventually wonders how "to get rich on poor soil", Milla's answer, "slowly and gradually", recalls her pleadings during their first sexual relation on the day they took possession of Grootmoedersdrift (WotW 59). Jak's reply and Milla's subsequent subjection to his desires are symbolic of their relation in the first years on the farm:

Regular activity, my wife, that's necessary, on the home front as on the farming front. [...] And you lay back and for a second time let him have his way. [...] [y]ou think you possess me, but you don't know me. (WotW 60)

Milla's recurring thoughts when Jak takes advantage of her indicate Jak's lack of understanding regarding the farm and his wife. Milla views Jak's modern capitalist approach to farming as a betrayal of the traditional agricultural modes that her ancestors had successfully introduced, and presumably yielding greater respect for natural cycles.

While in the early years on Grootmoedersdrift, Milla tries to convince her husband of the traditional ways of farming, which also promise the much-longed-for emotional connection to the land, the protagonist eventually resigns, a choice again reflected in the couples' intercourse, for Milla, eventually,

no longer guided his hand over your body to teach him how to touch you. You were after something else. You bent your head and sucked him off and caught his semen in your hand and tried to inseminate yourself.
His preference in any case. (WotW 76)

While Jak, as regards knowledge about farming, is Milla's inferior and not really master on the farm, he attempts to reestablish his patriarchal position by domination over his wife, not only sexually but also physically, as most prominently portrayed when Milla recalls the night before their wedding, when her future husband "[d]ragged you by the hair across the back step [...]. Pushed and shoved you in the chest so that you fell on the cement. Left you lying just there and walked away" (WotW 40).

While Milla dominates the farm, it seems Jak dominates his wife in a very physical sense to restore his Afrikaner identity, a pattern Milla obviously comprehends when contemplating, "[p]enetrate, you thought, invade me. What are you without my surfaces for you to break?" (WotW 60). Yet, Jak's treatment of his wife is also indicative of his attitude toward animals and the farm as such, because he shows respect for neither, considering them as his property meant to serve him. In return, Jak is not respected as a farmer, which becomes evident when Dawid Okkenel, one of the black laborers, reports an incident between Makkelwyn, a highly admired man among the black workers, and Jak:

Mister Makkelwyn ticked off the baas. [...]
Over what?
Because the baas rides the horses through the piss and then Mister Makkelwyn has o struggle with foundered horses for days. [...]
Then Mister Makkelwyn said he wouldn't shut his trap and he wouldn't be sworn at and shoved around by a pipsqueak who had no respect for a noble animal.
(WotW118)

When Jak eventually burdens Milla's farm with "a loan from the Land Bank" to buy "a large tract of adjacent hilly land to the south" (WotW 61), the couple enters their ultimate battle for hegemony. While Jak tries to establish his power and prestige in the community by farming separately, drawing on modern approaches with disregard for preexisting natural conditions, Milla adheres to the traditional modes, frequently pointing to the tremendous long-term effects the application of fertilizers and the use of

new wheat sorts alien to the South African land might have. But “[f]ortune favoured him [...] No summer rain to speak of, [...] no sign of fungus” (WotW 61), and by proving his understanding of agricultural matters, as verified by Jak's economical success, power over the land shifts to Jak, which he demonstrates when pointing out to Milla that “[n]ow it’s only you who must show that you can increase abundantly” (WotW 61), a statement indicative not only of Milla’s inability to render fertile soil but also emphasizing the fact that the protagonist herself seems to be unfertile, thus unable to fulfill another fundamental role in Afrikaner society.

Jak’s agricultural success and the supremacy it establishes, however, is only temporal for the understanding he develops of the land is purely theoretical, and an emotional connection or understanding is never aspired for or achieved. After his initial and obviously rather coincidental success in crop farming Jak “thinks he’s now shown what he can do with wheat & isn’t all that interested in the farm any more” (WotW 32), diverting his interests to the dangerous exploration of the wilderness and extreme sports in order to prove his manliness.

6.3.2 ‘Regent of the whole Tradouw’²⁰: Agaat’s empowering presence

The moment Milla ‘adopts’ Agaat, bringing her over the Tradouw to Grootmoedersdrift, seems to be the true beginning of Milla's connection to her farm and the development of the mystified reciprocal communication the farmer woman craves for, a desire originating in her Afrikaner pastoral idealism.

As previously discussed (chapter 3), it is the knowledge about nature and the soil that assumes sacred status in the Afrikaner, and especially in Boer, society and is thus treated as such. Interestingly, it seems only Agaat's rather different and truly respectful approach toward the land and Milla's gradual understanding of it is what eventually enables Milla to connect to her farm.

Milla, depressed by her childlessness and inability to create the nourishing paradise she hoped to build after her inheritance, blossoms in Agaat's presence. Recalling her childhood memories of exploring nature and the farm with her father, Milla now teaches Agaat about it, delighting at the girl's enthusiasm and spontaneousness:

Those were your best moments, those excursions, those long hours in fragrant nurseries with your reference books looking at the exotic flowering-habits and feeling the leaves of all the unfamiliar plants. [...] With the map on her lap Agaat

²⁰ WotW 28.

followed as you drove across Kloof Nek and read the names out loud of the corners and the bays and the heads. (WotW 398)

Throughout the novel, Milla and Agaat seem to connect to each other best and impartially when immersed in nature. It seems that it is only during those moments in nature that Milla is able to see the child, and, later, the woman in a non-hierarchical, non-racist way, for, once back in the farmhouse, Milla at once regains her Afrikaner views, in which Agaat is nothing but a project, an empty land Milla has to shape and cultivate. It is, again, a reflection of the Boer's attitude toward (the colonized) land and its history in general that becomes evident when Milla comiserates herself pondering:

I feel I must prove something. To myself, to Jak, to my mother, to the community. Why do I always give myself the most difficult missions? The most difficult farm, the most difficult husband, and now this damaged child without a name? (WotW 441)

The struggle to give Agaat a name is representative of the colonizer's attempt to understand and know the unknown, the dystopia he entered, by imposing his own terms on it, thus making the alien familiar. Milla's and the pastor's connotation with Agatha, respectively Agate as a "semi-precious stone" reaching its full value only "if it's correctly polished" (WotW 416), recalls the notion of civilizing the "uncivilized", and taming the wild (WotW 145). However, Milla anticipates the effect the black child has on her when defending Agaat's inclusion into the family to Jak stating that the girl has "been given to me to learn something about myself" (WotW 532). Yet, Milla constantly tries to impose her Afrikaner interpretation of the world on Agaat, who, just as regularly, does not deviate from her personal, rather pagan, perceptions of things, thus frequently challenging Milla's deeply enrooted views. In the face of Agaat's baptism for example, the girl contemplates about the conception of heaven as previously explained by Milla:

Heaven is a stone she says out of the blue. Yes I say precious stone walls of jasper & streets of gold. No she says that's not what she means & she showed me the stone with the fossiled fern leaf. That's the soul she says trapped in heaven [...]. (WotW 535)

Milla's struggle to name the girl and, thus, impose not only a name, but also a whole identity on her is, however, subtly undermined by Agaat's personal interpretation of her name, showing her affective connection to nature and the land, as is unfolded by Jakkie's recollection of childhood memories:

What does the water sound like when the sluice opens the irrigation furrow?

He answered his own question.

G-g-g-g-a-a-a-t. [...]

Do you remember, Gaat? The sound of the sea in a shell? The sound of the wind in the wheat? Do you remember how you made me listen? And everything sounded like your name. Gggggg-aaat, says the black pine tree in the rain, the spurwinged goose when it flies up says gaat-agaat-agaat, the drift when it's in flood from far away, do you remember? (WotW 503)

With the traumatized child, initially mute, shy, and locked up within herself, a situation eventually mirrored and reversed by Milla's illness later, Milla manages to establish communication only by means of eye contact (WotW 413) and, most importantly, through nature (WotW 448). The emperor butterfly, a special butterfly Milla admires, but did not get to see yet, and is eager to show to Agaat, again, can be interpreted as symbolizing Agaat, hence, the colonized South African land, for, Milla describes it as, "black on the outside and inside blue like an eye when it spreads its wings. The jewel of the forest. *Apatura iris*. The eye that guards the secret of the soul." (WotW 488). The emperor butterfly seems to metaphorically depict the nature Milla fails to see with her heart, thus understand, as long as she is trapped in her Afrikaner views of knowledge as an imposition of identities and histories. Interestingly, Milla eventually comes to see the admired butterfly only in Agaat's presence, when silently following the maid and Jakkie into the forest, where she observes Agaat luring the Great Emperor with fermented banana mash and the power of thought:

So there we sit the three of us with closed eyes & I add my will to theirs to make a miracle happen & there is happens!

The first thing I see when I open my eyes is Jakkie's face with a shiny spot reflecting from the lid onto him. [...] Between the lids he to-&-fros. The span of its wings greater than you can imagine. As large as two open hands with crossed thumbs. *Nymphalidae* the family of the carrion eaters. (WotW 255)

Milla delights at the 'miracle' she gets to witness, but her struggle and urge to put the beauty of the moment into words completely fail when she tries to establish a connection, hence understanding of the wonder by taking recourse to the textbook knowledge about the butterfly.

Earlier in the novel, when asked by her black foster child whether they could catch the butterfly, Milla's reply, "[n]o, [...], a butterfly is like the soul of a person, it dries out in captivity" (WotW 488–9), and her insistence that "everything that's free, and everything we didn't make ourselves, everything we can't cling to & tie down", is holy, leaves Agaat wondering: "But you caught me & tamed me" (WotW 536), a piece of thought

once again challenging Milla's presupposed and rather partial views, unleashing for the first time a feeling of "shame" in her (WotW 536).

Milla's knowledge about nature is imposed on her by the Calvinist structures she adheres to, and Agaat continuously shatters Milla's view of the land, for the black girl's annotations, and, at times, disturbing reactions, when exploring nature with Milla, expose new meanings and possible readings to the protagonist, which clearly deviate from the familiar and known, thus discomforting the Boer woman. Agaat appears to have a more genuine appreciation of nature, and Milla soon notes that the girl "has a good eye, remembers all marks, sees things that I don't notice" and further emphasizes how through interaction and exploration with Agaat, she herself "learn[s] remarkable things" about the land she owns (WotW 534).

When Agaat becomes passionate about fossils, starting to pick up rocks and asking Milla to break them open, the farmer woman wonders how the girl can tell with such accuracy, which stones will eventually reveal something. Agaat's answer that "some stones are warmer than others" leaves Milla with the astonished question, "[c]an it be that the child has a second sight?" (WotW 534).

As their communication in and with nature progresses, Milla notices how the girl "opens my eyes" (WotW 449) and during the time she spends exploring the farm with the child, Kamilla feels for the first time that she understands the true nature of things, thus establishing a genuine, emotional connection to her land:

It's the first time in my life that I understand it like this, the impersonal unity of all living things. It doesn't matter who is who. The speaker and the listener. The shell and the sea, the mother cat and the human hand that stirs her blind litter, the wind and the sighing pine, the dry drift and the flood. It's one energy. We are one, Agaat and I, I feel it stir in my navel. (WotW 445)

Interestingly, it is during the time in which the little Agaat unites Milla with the farm, enabling her to see the wonders of nature, and teaching her to communicate in a natural way with her land, in which Kamilla gains (emotional) power, respectively knowledge²¹, over her farm. This newfound approach to nature, and the mutual language Milla finds to verbalize her insights as regards her land, but also Agaat, eventually results in the conception of the heir of Grootmoedersdrift, which ultimately empowers Milla and establishes her supremacy over Jak. The powershift from the farmer to his wife is vividly depicted in Milla's disclosure of the consequences of her

²¹ Cf. Foucault

husband's ignorant approach to the land and his reckless dispersal of fertilizers, in the presence of the whole farmer community:

I'm speaking of the wheel of Lady Fortune, you said, and I'm speaking of her assistants the moneylenders, my dear husband, they who make themselves indispensable by offering certain essential services and goods on credit, and I'm speaking of monopolies. [...](WotW 95)

All the fertilizer crops may make you rich, but it's not a long-term investment in the soil. Fallow is the answer. It's a tradition born of respect for nature. In a state of psydo-death you restore your substance. Even a frog knows that. (WotW 97)

Having (re-) established her identity as a farmer, able to connect to her land and, thus, approximating the Afrikaner ideal of a metaphorical fusion with the soil, as well as fulfilling her role as a woman who is eventually expecting the longed for heir, Milla's newly gained assertiveness seems to entitle her to express her personal views on farming even in the male dominated community. With her remarks on farming matters, Milla humiliates Jak in public and officially installs her matriarchy, a reality articulated by one of the farmers in the audience who calls out, "[a]sk, Jak, looks like she's got him under her thumb!" (WotW 96)

6.3.3 Paradise lost: Agaat's coming to power

The decline of Milla's power coincides with her rejection of Agaat as a family member and the reestablishment of the supposed order on the farm by relocating the black girl to an outside room so that "she would throw in her lot with the others [...] just so that she can learn to know her place" (WotW 143), in expectation of the legitimate heir of Grootmoedersdrift. Milla's attempt to distract emerging feelings of guilt when noting in her diary that she "suppose[s] it's the right thing to do for everyone's sake" and that "it's not as if there was any other way out" (WotW 32) reflect the protagonist's use of prevalent social norms and ideology as an excuse for her actions and the deed she performs. Abruptly, Agaat is turned from Milla's adored child, with whom Milla explored the world around her, to a black servant girl, who is brutally reminded of her otherness, the roles reversed from being a daughter to being a servant, the woman Agaat refers to as being her "Mème [...] [her] only mother" (WotW 541) suddenly being the girl's master.

Milla cannot apprehend Agaat's frustration and emotional discomposure in light of these new events, for the protagonist has never ventured beyond the colonial heritage, which prevents her from establishing a genuine and equal relationship with the girl she feels such a close bond to at times that she "want[s] to press her to me" yet withdrawing

for she knows that “that’s against the rules” (WotW 444). As Van Houwelingen (97) notices, “Milla dominates and domesticates” and she further describes these characteristics as an intrinsic feature of Afrikanerdom, “form[ing] part of her consciousness [and][...] identity.”

Accordingly, in restoring the order on the farm by restoring hierarchies and traditional modes, Milla not only loses connection with Agaat but also with her farm. For, being degraded to a servant, stripped off her identity and voice, Agaat’s ‘second sight’, as an enriching source of Milla’s knowledge and perceptions, also vanishes, and is replaced by the Afrikaner curriculum (i.e. *Borduur sò, FAK Volksangbundel, Hulpboek vir Boere in Suid-Afrika*) imposed on the servant upon her forced assumption of her new role as a subaltern.

The metaphorical and ultimate power shift from Milla to Agaat, again, takes place on the Tradouw pass, when Agaat delivers, and, thus, takes possession of Jakkie, the rightful inheritor of the farm. While Milla knows that Agaat is quite capable of delivering calves and sheep, for Milla herself has instilled all the knowledge in her as part of the servant girl's training as a farmer, Kamilla doubts Agaat’s knowledge and competence when it comes to providing assistance in case of Jakkie's birth. However, the birth is a difficult one, for the child gets stuck in the birth channel, and, in the course of events, Agaat proves that, in terms of knowledge, she is on a par with Milla, a fact the mistress acknowledges when recalling Agaat’s instructions and attempts to console her during the birth:

Now you must, now you must, Agaat coaxed. Softly, rapidly, urgently, the language you spoke to the Simmentals that had such trouble calving. You heard yourself, your voice was in her. You heard your father with animals, when you were small and stood next to him in the old stable of Grootmoedersdrift [...]. (WotW 155)

The birth scene is the first in which it is evident that Agaat is, in fact, Milla’s child, or at least the creature she has brought to life as it is in her view, for Milla's voice and knowledge are undeniably intrinsic to Agaat’s. However, Milla comes to understand that Agaat’s knowledge exceeds her own, a fact evident from Agaat’s able handling of Jakkie’s delivery, a performance Milla clearly values, for she refers to Agaat as “[t]he brave little servant! how will I ever be able to repay her?” (WotW 171). It is also apparent from Agaat’s “remarkable way with Jakkie” (WotW 173). Presumably suffering from postnatal depression, Milla “[f]eels weak in the face of the task” of motherhood further underlining her difficulties with the child, noting that he is “scared

of my hands of my face & I have trouble suckling & as it is I have so little milk” (WotW 174). Agaat, on the contrary, seems to fulfill an exemplary maternal role, leaving Milla to feel being “inferior by far in terms of patience & ingenuity” (WotW 174).

Unable to take on her role as a mother, Agaat clearly starts to take possession of Jakkie as his emotional mother, a fact reaching its figurative climax when Milla spies on Agaat, who identifies with her maternal role to such an extent that she is actually able to breast feed Jakkie despite the fact that she is not his biological mother (WotW 177). The male heir in the narrative, thus, functions as a source of power, for it was her eventual pregnancy that granted Milla’s supremacy over Jak, and it is now the developing emotional bond between Jakkie and Agaat that empowers the maid. Significantly, it is Agaat who eventually raises the male heir of Grootmoedersdrift, and not only becomes Jakkie's stronghold, but establishes his identity by emotionally connecting him to the land he comes from, a reality Milla comes to notice when she opens, without authorization, Agaat's letter to Jakkie, who, meanwhile, has joined the South African Air Force in realization of his father's dream:

The way in which she wrote up the tiniest impressions, struck you. A love letter compared to yours. [...] You were amazed at the grasp she had of everything, from piss-ups amongst the farm workers to the service schedule of farm vehicles and the number of bales of whool, the variation in the quality of the milk and the cream in the spring and the fall, the treatment of the wheat seeds against fungus. [...] She predicted the rain for Jakkie [...] and guessed the wind for the following week for him and estimated the surge in the mountain streams and rivers for him with the naked eye and compared it with the average of the seasons. As if the farm belonged to him and her. (WotW 385f)

Agaat’s letter depicts not only her deep attachment to the child, but is also a declaration of love for the farm and the nature surrounding it. Agaat’s natural and self-evident approach toward animals and the genuine love she puts into them is also portrayed by Milla's recollections of the efforts the maid makes in taking care of her own herds she is eventually granted to have, and how “her cows yield more milk” than Milla's and “her sheep's wool is better” because of Agaat’s love (WotW 334).

By raising Jakkie and passing on her personal and rather pagan interpretations of the world around them, Agaat undermines Afrikaner ideologies that are strongly tied to their lineal consciousness. Through Jakkie’s emotional connection to the black servant, Agaat eventually prevents Afrikaner notions of supremacy, hierarchy, and racism to be carried on to the next generation, a circumstance Milla begins to realize when she

notices that her son never “fitted in altogether” (WotW 208), a development which, in fact, is almost as traumatic for the Boer, for whom lineal inheritance is crucial, as the literal loss of his farm.

Agaat's rise to power, however, is not only depicted through her ‘occupation’ of Jakkie, but, above all, through her knowledge and understanding of nature and farming. During the years of Jakkie's infancy, a series of catastrophes trouble the farm and Agaat's informed, determined resolutions earn her Jak's, as well as the black laborers' respect. Milla notices this in retrospect, evoking that after the outbreak of botulism, presumably triggered by Jack, “it was the first time you saw him give Agaat a present” (WotW 215), after the servant has dedicated three days to the autopsy of the perished Jerseys. While Milla feels faint in light of those disasters, Agaat tries to make sense of and analyze such dramas by immersing herself in knowledge about farming, trying to restore order of things by labeling and naming them, as she has been taught by Milla:

Open at page 221, Agaat said. Her voice was clear. She put the old Farmer's Handbook on your lap. End of October it was, 1960, the year of the botulism. Ask me from the beginning, she said, ask me all the symptoms, and all the cures, ask me trick questions, I've learnt it all, I know everything know, I'll never make a mistake again. [...]
First bone-hunger, then general dirt-craving, she started. First osteopha-gia, then allo-tri-opha-gia. (WotW 214)

Ironically, Agaat's “call[ing] things by their name” (WotW 214) does not have a consoling effect on Milla in a sense that the incomprehensible (alien) is made comprehensible and familiar, but, in fact, makes Milla “cry more” (WotW 214) presumably due to the deep emotional connection she feels for her Jerseys as a symbol of her ancestors as discussed earlier in the chapter. In this respect Agaat shows that she has eventually learned the colonizers language, yet her mimicry depicts the emotional emptiness of it, insufficient to describe the unthinkable.

About a year after the botulism incident, Agaat gets to prove her accumulated knowledge about animals and farming, when Jak's newly imported Simmentaler cattle, alien to South Africa—and again a subtle allusion to the white settlers' strangeness to the South African land—feed on poisonous tulips. Milla remembers on her death bed how “Agaat issued orders non-stop while she worked” and how the mistress herself “just stood there, your legs paralysed” (WotW 218). While Agaat organizes and controls “the whole rescue mission” (WotW 219), instructing everyone in the preparation of the medicines and treatments for the cattle, the maid leaves no one in doubt about who is in charge now, a matter recalled by Milla's analysis of the

“cunning” face of one of the other maids, who has “seen Agaat ordering [Milla][...] about and [the mistress][...] doing everything exactly as she said, a little servant-girl of hardly thirteen” (WotW 220). When the whole crowd arrives at the cattle enclosure, Agaat's self-imposed objective is the rescue of the precious “Hamburg” bull, which, in order to be treated safely, must be moved from the “camp” to the “crush pen”, an undertaking possible only with someone holding the courage to lead the most threatening animal on the farm with his own hands:

Plumb towards the dead strip between the bull's eyes Agaat advanced, bold and high her mien. [...] She hooked her finger into the nose-ring, turned her back, took a pace forward. [...] His small sunken eyes were on the cross of Agaat's shoulder-straps. Soon she was invisible. You could only deduce, from the steady pace at which the bull moved forward, that she was there walking ahead of him, and that she was exerting a constant force of traction on him. (WotW 222)

As Milla pointedly remarks in her recollection of events, “[s]omething changed gear that afternoon on Grootmoedersdrift” and the protagonist further notices the “sudden subservience of everybody, big and small” (WotW 221). With respect to the progressive and subtle power shift on the farm Agaat's domination over the most powerful animal on the farm has undoubtedly established her supremacy over Milla in the eyes of the black laborers, and, to some extent, in Milla's subconscious perception as well, for the mistress seems to disconnect more and more with her farm.

Having rejected the only person Milla ever felt she can connect to, and with Jakkie's eventual absence as he grows up, studies, and joins the military, Milla dissociates from the farm that once was her “everything” (WotW 57), by tranquilizing herself to an extent that she “could sometimes not remember whether you'd taken [the pills], so dosed yourself double in the evenings and then was too drained the next day to do anything” (WotW 513). It seems that Milla's paralysis at the prospect of the decline of her power on the farm starts much earlier than with the actual outbreak of her illness, and the final years before she is eventually bound to her bed are characterized by Milla's “faints [...] [or] weakness that sometimes overcame you in the middle of wool-classing or during the stamping of the wool bales.” (WotW 389).

The gradual power shift on Goortmoedersdrift temporarily coincides with the Black Consciousness Movement gaining momentum in the 1970's. This is briefly indicated when Milla asserts:

It sickened you. You tried to keep yourself going with hard work, but then there was always the apprehension, the suspicion in those years, the late seventies, early eighties.

You went to see the doctor. He prescribed a stronger tranquilliser, better sleeping draughts. (WotW 389)

The protagonist's progressive insulation from her farm and the political realities around her reflect Milla's inability "to integrate a past of white privilege with a present within which she is confronted with the systematic wasting away of everything that once characterized her as white and Afrikaans", as Van Houwelingen (103) aptly depicts. The notion correlates with Kossew's (367) interpretation of Milla's diseased body as a representation of "the static, set-in-stone nature of the historical past" and Afrikaner identity in general.

6.3.4 Paradise regained

Owing to the fact that it is the farm, thus the cultivation of and domination over its creatures which defines Milla's identity, the systematic loss of power over and connection to her land, disconnects the protagonist from herself, shattering her Afrikaner identity, which is metaphorically depicted in the motor neuron disease she is suffering from, disengaging Milla from her land in a very real manner.

However, when Milla finds herself "locked up" within herself in "this last room, the domain remaining" to her (WotW 19), she not only starts making an attempt to restore an identity, most vividly depicted in the two women's collaborative de- and eventual reconstruction of maps, hence identities, as discussed in depth in the previous chapter (6.2), but she also realizes that it is now Agaat who "breath[es] life" (WotW 451) into her analyzing that "the lamer, the more nothing I became, the more she put into me", referring to herself as "the great God [that] had to shrink to make room for his creation" (WotW 204). This quote indicates the power shift reaching its climax with Milla's paralysis and Agaat's physical domination over her, and also shows Milla's Afrikaner world view in which she perceives herself as the chosen one, the one who creates and shapes in a Godlike manner, and, unable to do so now on her death bed, she cannot come to terms with her identity.

In light of Milla's progressing disease, Agaat starts to empty out the mistress' room in order to retain space for the tools and utensils required for the physical care the nurse has to perform on the now paralyzed and mute patient. However, the clearing out of Milla's room evokes the symbolic picture of the abandonment of Milla's ideology, so

that “I, as I am drained of myself, can fill up with what is outside myself” (WotW 132), hence Milla’s *Self* starts to grow in the light of the *Other*. Initially, Milla’s unreliable narration presents Agaat as a rather threatening presence, accusing her of being “witched” (WotW 133) and blaming her for the disconnection she vainly feels with her farm, assuming that the maid “cannot abide to see other life in my room” (WotW 67), and further describes her nurse as a “starched-aproned dervish” (WotW 50), denying the mistress’ rights, primarily to see the maps of her homestead, “as if I’d done her something wrong” (WotW 50). However, during the last weeks on her death-bed, and by means of the dolorous emergence of a reciprocal communication with Agaat (see 6.2), Milla comes to alter her views and leaves the ideological corset she was trapped in all her life behind, an actuality which becomes evident in Milla’s growing resentment and the realisation that her internalized ideology has spoilt what could have been the only meaningful relationship in her life:

Oh, my little Agaat, my child that I pushed away from me, my child that I forsook after I’d appropriated her, that I caught without capturing her, that I locked up before I unlocked her! (WotW 462)

Milla’s mental transmission is most prominent when she starts to interpret Agaat’s embroidery, disregarding the social conventions she has had internalized, especially the Great Rainbow, which she initially deciphers as a depiction of “neither place nor time [...] an embroidery of nothing” (WotW 187) and eventually comes to evaluate as “[t]he origin, the fullness, the foundation of all” (WotW 187). Milla alters her Calvinist idea about the importance of “[p]erfection, purity, order” eventually identifying them as “the devil’s own little helpers” an insight the protagonist “burns to tell [Agaat] [...]! Now that I can see it. Now that it’s too late.” (WotW 187).

The fact that Milla, even though establishing a matriarchy and power over Agaat, trapped herself in an ideology she subjected herself to and used as an excuse for everything that went wrong, is articulated by the servant when replying to Milla’s half-hearted excuse for throwing the christening robe Agaat embroidered for Jakkie into the dam: “You too, you always imagined your hands were tied, with everything. But the work of my hands you were strong enough to pick up and throw into the dam!” (WotW 382).

While, opposed to Milla’s previously dominant and one-sided narration, the two women now collaboratively retell the (hi-) story of their lives, Milla starts to reconnect with the woman that was once her child, progressively stripping off her immanent Afrikaner

perspectives, and eventually finding freedom in the notion that “[God] has become a woman. He is now named Agaat” (WotW 231), a thought not only significant for Milla’s subversion of the patriarchal structures that captivated both women, but also indicative of Agaat’s progressive growth of power as correlating with Milla’s mental transition from her Calvinist to a rather pagan belief, which she comes to identify as “a whole lot more honest” (WotW 231).

By means of (re-) connecting to Agaat, the protagonist is able to connect to the farm the nurse fondly makes accessible to Milla again, even though tied to her deathbed. Thus, ironically, it is only on her deathbed, suffering from a disease which renders Milla mute and paralyzed, that she starts to develop a true understanding of Agaat, who “knows the soil. [And] [...] knows the language” (WotW 583).

With respect to the protagonist's initial Afrikaner notion of the land, as well as Agaat, as empty space, hence non-existing prior to Milla’s cultivation and development according to a “plan” (WotW 81), Milla’s changing attitude is reflected also in her recollection of the first impressions of the garden of Grootmoedersdrift. While the protagonist perceives the neglected garden as “untidy”, “overgrown” and “unruly” (WotW 38f), hence wild, back then, she, in retrospection, comes to realize that “it was a paradise already” (WotW 39), an awareness indicative of Milla’s re-evaluation of Agaat, respectively the colonized land in general, and the confession of the deed she (the colonizer) has performed by taming it.

The fact that only on her deathbed Milla transcends her attitudes and, thus, achieves genuine appreciation for Agaat and the farm, is depicted in the patient's last will to transfer her farm to the maid:

[M]y last will and testament my farm on leasehold and also the homestead go to agaats [...] my life I give into her hands for as long as she can carry me [...]
 I am her sick merino sheep her exhausted soil her fallow land full of white stones her blown-up cow and acre of lodged grain her rusty wheat her drift from now on in flood she must have my hole dug and have the ring wall neatly whitewashed carve the meaning of everything on my headstone in her mouth I place my last word and in her eye over my departed body the last curse or blessing
 because she knows what it is to be a farmer woman. (WotW 362)

The Boer woman not only transfers ultimate power over the farm to Agaat, but also surrenders herself to the nurse and, in doing so, gains ultimate freedom and peace. Milla again relates herself to the ‘soil’ and describes herself as a ‘sick merino sheep’, but, this

time, her allusions seem to reflect a genuine emotional attachment to nature, animals, and Agaat, who, the woman knows, will be a ‘good steward’ to her and her farm.

In the novel’s final scene and Milla’s last stream of consciousness, the reader is confronted with an altered woman, who has abandoned the restricting norms of Afrikanerdom, and has adopted Agaat’s holistic views of nature:

Is this the beginning now this lightness? can I venture it on my own? am I at least membrane between a willow and its reflection? A meniscus that transmits an image? Am I the crown of leaves in the air like the crown of leaves in the water? Yes without lamentation without sighing a permeable world world without end this rustling region culm inclining to culm the stone on the bank like the stone in the dam carried from cloud to cloud on the south easter where the clover does not know of the humus and the stalk of the wheat does not deny the ear its fullness and the blue crane rises clamouring above the ripples of her beating wings framed by the reflected cloud and the reflected cloud and the reflected tree on the wash of the still river whose call returns to her for a last time from the valley in carillons in canon-thunder where to the smallest circling water-creature zealously writing everything reflects so with open eyes into the white light so whispering to my soul to go
in my overberg
over the bent world brooding
in my hand the hand of the small agaat (WotW 576)

The fact that Milla evokes the picture of the ‘smallest circling water-creature’ in her last thoughts, clearly alludes to the impact Agaat has had on Milla’s life, for it was the day she ‘found’ Agaat, when Milla started to connect to nature again, wondering about the “whirligigs [...], about the beauty of their existence, however insignificant, wrinkles on the water, circles that vanish without ever having been anything, except that I’ve seen them.” (WotW 563). The impact of seemingly insignificant things, we come to know, bothers Jakkie as well, for he wonders, “What happens to the whirligigs, the little writers on water, when there is no water?” (WotW 5) a question he assumes not being of interest to his mother, thus reflecting Milla’s loss of affective connection to nature during the years of Jakkie’s childhood, corresponding with the emotional rejection of Agaat.

Milla’s resurrection of the image of the whirligigs and the impact of their subtle, fragile writing on the one who opens his eyes and looks at them, metaphorically displays the protagonist’s transition and the language she has found to express both her love for the land and Agaat.

In this respect, the moment of Milla’s death, being, in fact, the moment Milla literally loses her farm to Agaat, who inherits it, also seems to be the moment in which the

protagonist finds a language to truly connect to her land, and, thus, for the first time emotionally occupies the space she actually loses.

7. Kings of the Water

In contrast to the previously analyzed novel *The Way of the Women* (2004) by Marlene Van Niekerk, Mark Behr's book *Kings of the Water* (2009) does not emerge as a deconstruction or subversive rewriting of traditional themes inherent to the plaasroman genre, but embraces “a ‘new’ kind of self-consciously global writing” (Jackson 176). Refraining from exposing apartheid cruelties, Behr updates the plaasroman “for a global era” (Jackson 177), portraying the new, post-apartheid South Africa and its place in an interconnected world. However, the author “does so almost entirely through confinement to a remote farm steeped in fraught apartheid history, where the family patriarch, though withered, still reigns” (Jackson 179). Mark Behr seems to aspire to what Caren Irr (660) describes as “the global, planetary, international, or simply ‘world’ novel”, for his narration is predominately concerned with the “enact[ment] [of] interconnection” (Jackson 177). However, through his all-pervasive intertextuality, specifically with his allusions to works of André Brink²² and Nadine Gordimer²³, the writer leaves no doubt that he himself places *Kings of the Water* within the literary tradition of South African rather than global literature.

Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* not only emerges as a South African farm novel packed with historical and political details, but also tackles the prevalent themes significant for the 21st century, frequently alluding to the interrelation of South African and global issues in a globalized world. Nevertheless, the novel is, in essence, a narrative of homecoming and the repossession of a home the protagonist believes to be irrevocably lost, only to discover that the “inevitability of change” (Behr qtd. in Crocker, online) does not even stop at the microcosm of the South African farm, which has always had “its own measures of time and space” (Coetzee (b) 2).

The questions of identity and belonging are repeated throughout the novel, and are alluded to on multiple layers, such as the portrayal of various characters, as well as frequent references to contemporary music and literature, which will be briefly analyzed in context. It is to be noted, however, that due to the scope of this thesis not all literary allusions in the novel can be mentioned and discussed, and that, for the present

²²*An Instant in the Wind* (cf. KotW 2).

²³*July's People* (cf. KotW 54).

purpose, only some references are being investigated in more detail (Chapter 7.1), before attention is paid to the significance of the farm, home, and identity with regard to the novel's protagonist's loss and eventual repossession of the farm and an identity alike (Chapters 7.2 – 7.3). In order to provide a holistic picture of the various facets through which the theme of 'Losing the farm' is explored in Behr's novel, the veritable possibility of the actual loss of the farm in the light of global neo-liberalism and South Africa's post-apartheid land policies, is eventually discussed in chapter 7.4.

7.1 Intertextuality and the all-pervasive Question of Identity

While Michiel Steyn's loss, quest, and eventual redefinition of identity in the light of a new millennium and a new South Africa, as will be explored in the following chapters, is dominating in the novel, the questions of identity and belonging are all-pervasive and set the background music, for the reader is frequently confronted with questions such as "Who am I?" or "Where do I belong to?". Thus, the question of identity and, in particular, the necessity of redefinition in a changing world is alluded to throughout Mark Behr's book.

In this context, the reader is confronted not only with Michiel, son of a mother of English descent and a Boer father, a homosexual struggling to define himself in a patriarchal apartheid regime, a South African abroad trying to "to soften his accent" so no one would "[mistake] him for a conscript AWOL from the SADF" (KotW 128), but also with his boyfriend Kamil, "son of a Palestinian father and a Jewish mother" (KotW 136), and his parents, Malik and Rachel—"communists forced from their homeland" (KotW 136)—thus placing the issue of new identity formation in a global context.

The questions of home, exile, and belonging, as closely intertwined with the quest for identity, are further dealt with through allusions to the destiny of many Black workers in the apartheid regime — "whose fingertips no longer have prints, scuffed away in washing white people's laundry" (KotW 99). While black people lost their homes, their voices, and their identities under the apartheid regime, the new millennium brought about vast new opportunities for the former servants, leaving Michiel to wonder how Lerato, the "kaffir girl" (KotW 48) his brother Benjamin refused to sit next to in the car when they were children, and who is now representative of the new Black Middle Class, "relates to this part of the farm" (KotW 54f) and "at which point in her climb up the corporate ladder [...] she [was] allowed from the kaya into the rondavel" (KotW 124).

While, in the course of the novel, Michiel seems to accept himself, as he realizes that not only the system and the country, but everybody else as well has changed, and that even Dirk, representative of the Dutch Reformed Church, declares that “I think and act differently from the way I did then” (KotW 175), the protagonist also comes to understand that sometimes people are merely victims of their time, and that “[y]esterday is another country” (KotW 158). In an interview, Mark Behr (qtd. in Crocker, online) himself states that, for him, “it is at heart a book about the fluidity of life and the inevitability of change — personal, political, psychological, environmental, discursive”, thus emphasizing once more the all-pervasive nature of the theme of identity even on a global scale, as reflected in his novel.

While Behr illuminates the universal question of identity not only in the South African, but, through his various characters, also in a global context, the novel furthermore reflects upon this central issue by means of numerous allusions to contemporary pop culture, such as music, or literature. The question of identity, and in particular the necessity of frequent redefinition in a changing world, is addressed throughout Mark Behr’s book, and the ubiquitous nature of its intertextuality calls for a brief analysis, even though the restricted scope of this thesis does not allow for an in-depth discussion of all allusions.

Already the initial reference to Leonard Cohen’s song *Anthem*, which “traces this cycle of decay and regeneration” (Rohter, online), sets the tone of the novel. When Michiel comes home to a new South Africa, he turns on the radio “as Leonard Cohen’s voice [...] sings, *ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering, there is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in*” (KotW 1). Having been abroad for fifteen years, Michiel encounters a different South Africa after the fall of the apartheid regime, and it seems to be seminal that Behr chooses the centerpiece of an album called *The Future* as the very first song Michiel is exposed to upon his arrival in South Africa. Cohen typically traces “the connection between the collapse of an old order — political, psychic, or spiritual — and the rising of a new one” (Whiteis, online) in his songs. Thus the allusion to *Anthem* not only reflects South Africa’s ongoing transition from an apartheid to a post-apartheid era, but also mirrors Michiel’s personal journey from an identity, a home, a ‘Paradys’ lost, to one regained, when, despite the traumas he suffered in this part of the world, he eventually “admitted to himself that rarely, if ever, has he known fulfillment—happiness?—as he has here”, eventually feeling the urge to allow himself “the sense of belonging” (KotW 215).

Further allusions to contemporary novels such as André Phillipus Brink's *An Instant in the Wind* (KotW 2), Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (KotW 6), Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines*, or the citation of Derek Walcott's poem *Love after Love* (KotW 82), as well as a mention of *The Collected Poems* by Audre Lorde (KotW 144), again, bring up and emphasize the question of identity and belonging. While Brink's novel deals with "an interracial love affair in the hinterland of South Africa" (Sokolov, online), thus relating to Michiel's relationship with Kamil, as well as his affairs with solely colored men, the mention of Brink is also interesting insofar, as he was, alongside Jonker and Breytenbach, one of the key figures in the Afrikaans literary movement known as *Die Sestigers*, which sought to prove that the "Afrikaans language can — and must — be something different from the language of Apartheid" (Brink, online). Furthermore, Brink (online) points to the „peculiar position of the Afrikaans writer“, describing that "it is not just a struggle aimed at the liberation of blacks from oppression by whites, but also a struggle for the liberation of the Afrikaner from the ideology in which he has come to negate his better self", thus alluding not only to the emergence of a new Black identity, but also to a necessary and rather difficult new identity formation of white South Africa.

The white South African's feelings of guilt and shame are reflected in Behr's novel, when Michiel steps out of the South African microcosm, traveling through Australia and Europe:

When on occasion his accent was questioned [...] he offered the new South African traveler and émigrés stock phrase: I left because I couldn't abide that terrible system. No one, ever, black or white, had supported, been complicit in or privileged by apartheid or any other kind of exploitation. By its own magnificent volition, a system existed without human agency. (KotW 134)

Kings of the Water, therefore, not only traces the imperative of personal change and the individual's quest for a new identity, as triggered by political and environmental changes, but also hints at the trauma of South Africa's white population, especially the veterans, who are uncertain about how "to remember their experiences of the Border Wars in view of the altered political landscape" of the 21st century (Baines, online). This circumstance and trauma is depicted in Michiel's frequent flashbacks to situations he encountered during his time at the SADF and his attempt to justify his failure to act:

Only rarely were members of the local population (LPs) brought in for debriefing and interrogation by intelligence officers. What kind of interrogation? That happened on one side of the camp. I had nothing to do with it. How could

you not have known? It wasn't part of my job description. Ignoring, Kamil said, differs from ignorance in that it is harder work. (KotW 79)

Being an ex-SADF soldier himself, Mark Behr seems to have made rather autobiographical attempts to deal with his own sense of trauma and guilt in his novel *Kings of the Water*, and perhaps even more so in his previous novel *The Smell of Apples*. However, the South African journalist Karen Whitty (qtd. in Baines, online) points out that “[b]ound by a sense of honour to their fellow troops and the patriarchy still espoused by white South Africa, few men have come forward and spoken about their experiences, however barbaric and mundane, in South Africa’s border wars”.

The topicality of the issue of identity, as related to the way a nation or group chooses to commemorate its past, becomes obvious in the discussions around the launching of South Africa’s heritage project *Freedom Park* in the year 2000. While the project includes a *Wall of Names* dedicated to those “who endured pain so we can enjoy freedom” (Mandela qtd. in Matsinhe 180), the new ANC government has refused to include the names of SADF veterans whose interventions remained unheard (Matsinhe 180).

Given the fact that under the apartheid regime, more than “600,000 young men were conscripted to perform national service” and “[a]lmost all white, male South Africans now between the ages around 35 and 60 donned the nutria brown uniform of the South African Defence Force (SADF)” (Baines, online), Serote’s quote on the monument’s plaque - “Because at the depth of the heart of every man beats the love for freedom”- seems somewhat hypocritical (Serote qtd. in Baines, online), for, ultimately, due to the prevalent authority structures, even a white South African man did not really have the freedom of choice, as Michiel, when questioned by Dr. Glassman about why he chose to be actively involved in war instead of becoming a truck driver, pointedly reveals his dilemma: “I was too embarrassed not to go. Too ashamed not to be an officer.” (KotW 40).

South Africa’s conflicting voices, obviously still prevalent in the light of the new millennium, are not only paralleled by Michiel's inner conflicts, especially with regard to his memories of his time at the SADF, but are also reflected in the mention of Audre Lorde’s literary work, for she is generally known for her exploration of conflicting differences within the individual (Lorde 17), as is indicative of Michiel’s character, who feels “relentlessly ashamed of being part of [the oppressive system of apartheid] and at the same time so apart from it.” (KotW 181).

The theme of identity crisis is furthermore mirrored in allusions to Roth's *The Human Stain*, which explores the identity crisis of an African-American who has been presenting himself as a Jewish man, and Walcott's *Love After Love*, a poem essentially aimed at instructing the reader on how to love oneself.

7.2 Michiel's fall from 'Paradys'

Michiel, the novel's protagonist, is the son of an Afrikaner father and an English descendant mother, whose identity seems to be strongly determined by the "deep-rooted structures of domination that permeate [South African] society and perpetuate an ideology such as patriarchy" (Coetzee (a) 304). In this respect, Michiel's identity is closely linked to the structures of domination that are particularly pervasive in South Africa's rural areas—the patriarch father, the Calvinist church, and the military—as aptly depicted in Michiel's description of an old photograph:

The first and only family portrait without Peet: both remaining boys in uniform between Oubass and Ounooi. Framed in the church's Gothic entrance. Benjamin in the khaki jacket with the two silver pips; Michiel, in whites, the gold looped bands of the ensign's epaulettes on his shoulders. Ten weeks before he would be relieved of those. (KotW 40)

This quote not only pictures the "patriarchal tradition [...] as main characteristic of the old farm house-hold [sic!]" (Boonzaaier 155), but also points to the Afrikaner notion in which "[p]atriarchy assumes religious status", and the "'rule by the fathers' was made into an idol, a supposed god" (Coetzee (a) 301). This very idea of the patriarchal authority structure, as a Calvinist legacy in the South African Boer community, seems to be crucial for Michiel's identity formation, respectively his trauma when unable to live up to the community's ideals.

Michiel's homosexuality is a threat to everything in which the Afrikaner believes, for, in essence, it violates the legitimacy of the god-given patriarchal order, which functions only through the promoted "heteronormativity" in which "gender roles are entrenched and held up as fixed" (Msibi 71). Msibi (71) argues that in order to "hold hegemonic masculinities in place", deviations from the norms are naturally punished, thus homosexuality was considered a crime during the days of apartheid, which caused a "deep-seated and widespread homophobia" in South African society (Posel 128).

While Michiel left a country in which "[s]odomy was a criminal offense" (KotW 138), and homosexuality was viewed as an illness that men could be "cured of [...] by psychologists" (KotW 73), in 2001, he returns to a post-apartheid South Africa that

now “contains a clause protecting people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation” (KotW 180), making South Africa’s new constitution the first in the world to ensure gay equality (Massoud 301).

However, despite the new open-minded constitution, a deep-rooted homophobia and even a denial of the existence of homosexuality seems to be defining not only for the apartheid South Africa Michiel had once left, but also remains during the country’s transition to a post-apartheid nation, as Michiel witnesses during the presentation of the ANC’s *Freedom Charter* in London, which essentially states that “the rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, color, or sex” (KotW 132), leaving Michiel to wonder whether “this movement [can be] something he could belong to” (KotW 130). However, when questioned on the issue of LGBT rights, the spokes woman reveals the ANC’s stance:

Gay men and lesbians are jumping on the back of the democratic movement and exploiting the struggle for their own ends. I don't see them homeless or hungry or suffering. Where does this business come from? It's very fashionable over here in the West. It will disappear along with colonialism and racism. We haven't heard of this problem in Africa until recently. In a liberated South Africa people will be normal. Tell me, are lesbians and gays normal? If everyone was like that the human race would die out. (KotW 132)

This quote reveals probably the only issue on which blacks and Afrikaner seem to largely agree, even after the fall of apartheid and the patriarchal structures it was based upon, namely the fact that homosexuality is unnatural and abnormal. The ANC spokeswoman even describes homosexuality as a western import, and as rather un-African. However, the ANC eventually came to acknowledge the existence of homosexuality and took a stand for equal rights even for gay people, although the majority of South Africans—black and white—“did not support gay rights” (Massoud 301). This shows that the issue of homophobia, as a symptom of patriarchal structures, is not only restricted to the Afrikaner apartheid society, but in fact reveals that “[p]atriarchy is ‘one of the strongest ideologies in cultures world-wide’” (Coetzee (a) 300).

While pointedly portraying the eminent authority structures upon which Michiel’s, respectively the Boer identity is predominately based, Michiel’s description of the Steyn’s family portrait, as quoted at the very beginning of this chapter, furthermore refers to Michiel’s eventual betrayal of the Afrikaner image of a man, when alluding to the fact that, eventually, Michiel is “relieved” (KotW 40) of his military ranks after

being found out to be homosexual.

With regard to the military as yet another power structure supporting the patriarchal system, Coetzee ((a) 303) emphasizes the military's "central role [...] in the construction of concepts of 'manhood' and in justifications of the superiority of maleness in the social order". When his psychotherapist Dr. Glassman asks him why he opted to become an officer who had to actively participate in the war, Michiel's reply that "he was too ashamed not to be an officer" reveals the fact that, caught in his Afrikaner upbringing and the ideals he was exposed to ever since, he had no choice but to prove his masculinity by risking his life (KotW 40).

Interestingly, it is also in the context of the military as a hyper-masculine space that Michiel's queer sexual desires are eventually disclosed. When Michiel is stripped of his ranks, he seems to be stripped of his identity as well, for he is cast out by the military, his dominant father, the church, and, as we come to understand throughout the novel, most tellingly, by himself, for Michiel "[l]eaves. Fights. Resists. Unbecoming a man. Somewhere in this small world. Always." (KotW 231).

Having grown up in a patriarchal, violent, and emotionless world that forbids any deviation from Afrikaner norms, Michiel, unable to live up to the standards of Afrikaner masculinity, finds himself without any choice but to flee the country. However, even though it represents the oppressive system of South Africa in its very heart, Michiel's home—the farm Paradys—still has a comforting and consoling effect on the novel's protagonist, and, eventually, it is his father, the farm's patriarch, who expels Michiel from Paradys unless he "play[s] by the rules" (KotW 58), refusing to "acknowledge this thing and what you are" (KotW 58).

Michiel's only choice is to abide to the rules set by the Afrikaner patriarchal community, which are especially alive on the Boer farm. This also reflects the farm's nature of what Michel Foucault (online) identifies as a "heterotopia" — a place in which "entry is compulsory, [...] or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures" (Foucault, online). Thus, the farm Paradys is "a place without a place" for Michiel — a space in which his true self has no place, and yet is so much part of his identity (Foucault, online). Michiel's father tries to force his son to return to the army "and face [him]self" (KotW 58) and Michiel's refusal to adhere to his father's command eventually leads Oubaas to the announcement that "[t]hen you will never set foot on this farm again" (KotW 58), thus effectively banning Michiel and sending him into involuntary exile.

While Oubass is portrayed as a stubborn and unforgiving patriarch — “the man who owned [...] the farm. The world.” (KotW 58) — thus, being the epitome of the Boer farmer, a man who drove Michiel’s homosexual and HIV-infected brother Peet into suicide, and Michiel into exile, we come to know that it is the fact that Ounooi, Michiel’s mother, did not stand up for him but “instead [...]took me to a preacher and abided by his verdict” (KotW 173), which ultimately disaffected Michiel with the farm.

Ounooi, in sharp contrast to Oubaas, is depicted as a kindhearted, communicative, and educated woman of British descendant, displaying a healthy aloofness towards the primitive ways of the Voortrekker nation. Michiel’s mother, in fact, finds words to take a stand against the racist hegemony of apartheid South Africa, when “choosing sides” in favor of Little - Alida, the daughter of the domestic servant, against her son Benjamin (KotW 48). When Ounooi takes the black girl to “farm school” (KotW 47) before dropping off her own offspring, Benjamin, the middle brother, whose “character radiated everything Oubaas wished for” (KotW 76), refuses “to return to his side of the back seat”, furiously grumbling:

‘Ek sit nie waar’n meid gesit het nie. Ek gaan nie na kaffer ruik as ons by die skool aankom nie.’ I’m not sitting where that kaffir girl sat. I don’t want to smell of kaffir when we get to school. (KotW 48)

Ounooi’s reply that “[n]ow, I have warned you three a thousand and one times that our family does not use that language. I don’t care what you hear at school; in our family we do not speak of people like that” (KotW 48), exemplifies her self-esteem, for she dares not only to counter prevalent norms by chauffeuring Little-Alida in the family Mercedes, but in fact also punishes Benjamin for his disrespectful language by casting him out of the car and telling him to walk to school.

Against this background of past experiences, Michiel’s mother’s shame and silence as regards her two sons sexual orientation, seems all the more painful for the émigré. Though the open-minded woman finds the courage and words to stand up for a black girl, her language of solidarity is replaced by the compulsory silence indicative of the patriarchal heteronormative space of the farm, and in extension of the apartheid regime. This compulsory silence about non-normative behavior is what characterizes the relationship between Michiel and Oubaas from the beginning, for the protagonist notices that “[s]ilence has always reigned between us” (KotW 32). Ounooi’s decision to

remain silent about Peet's "simple drowning" (KotW 88), which is revealed as being Peet's choice of "[d]eath rather than shame" (KotW 114) in the light of his betrayal of the community's norms, as well as her denial of Michiel's true reasons for his, in fact, rather involuntary emigration, as portrayed in her references to the prodigal son as "her traveler" (KotW 85), again reflect the compulsory silence on which the Afrikaner patriarchal society was based on. Thus, Michiel and Peet, both, by means of their homosexuality, challenge the ideal "utopian" values of the Plaas and the Boer, thus turning Paradys into a "heterotopia" where, "in a single real place", several others "that are in themselves incompatible" are juxtaposed (Foucault, online).

Cast out, and desperately disappointed by his mother, Michiel concludes at the very beginning of his psychotherapy in San Francisco that he has "no need for them in my life. It's over and done with." (KotW 83). By cutting his ties to the farm — his home — he ultimately loses all means to restore an identity that he found impossible to form in the context of Afrikaner realities, and yet ultimately relies on Michiel's internalized experiences of the past and his home.

Fleeing his country, his past, and his disgrace, Michiel ends up as "an Afrikaner with English connections, Australian memories, and an American passport", his identity seemingly dissolving as he tries to define it (Hope, online):

Exile. He thinks of the word as belonging in the realm of politics and coercion. To the lives of Malik and Rachel. And Sam Thabane. It has never been appropriated for himself, for whatever he is it does not make him blood kin of exile: a bourgeois émigré, an expatriate like the Australians who went troppo in the Solomons. He only left here with a white skin, a thousand and one choices, change to spare and only personal scores he wasn't sure he wanted settled. (KotW 94)

7.3 Homecoming and an Identity Restored

Having explored Mark Behr's all-pervasive depiction of the theme of identity, as well as tracing Michiel's "expulsion from paradise" (KotW 73) and his eviction from the Afrikaner community, tying in with the previously discussed theory of identity formation, as proposed by Breakwell (1986)²⁴, the present chapter sets out to explore the farm Paradys as an identity-formative and supporting space, and Michiel's only means of coming to terms with his own history.

While Breakwell (75) essentially argues that the (social) environment is a formative factor as regards an individual's sense of identity, and identifies "distinctiveness",

²⁴see Chapter 3.

“continuity”, and “self-esteem” as the three core principles operating in the identity formation of an individual or group, Twigger-Ross and Uzzel (206 ff.) extend Breakwell’s theory to the realm of place and an individual’s attachment to it.

With regard to Breakwell’s promotion of “distinctiveness” as a formative feature for the development of a stable identity, Twigger-Ross and Uzzel (207) point out that “people use place identifications in order to distinguish themselves from others”. Highlighting the importance of “continuity”, the psychologists further argue that “places act as referents to past selves and actions and that for some people, maintenance of a link with that place provides a sense of continuity to their identity” (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel 207). In accord with this theory, it seems that it is Michiel’s rigorous dissociation from his family and his country which makes it almost impossible for him to define an identity for himself. Proshansky *et al.* initially framed the construct of “place identity”, which “describe[s] the person's socialization with the physical world” (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel 206), as being distinct from social identity. The notion of “place identity” correlates with Albie Sachs’s (Beningfield xii) portrayal of the mostly unconscious significance of one’s relation to the land one populates:

Landscape is [...] not only a sensory medium of soil, grass, stone and water [...], not only physical typography. It is an experienced world which is drenched with meaning [...] We must recognize that landscape is not simply or even primarily a setting in which homes and cities are built. Our vision of the land is a central if unacknowledged protagonist in every design conceived, and every planning decision made.

Michiel, the novel’s protagonist, does not inherently have what psychologists now refer to as “place identification”, a term relating to the expression of “membership of a group of people” (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel 206). In the act of being himself, Michiel deserted “the Calvinist dichotomy between the chosen and the damned [...] [that] provided the [...] Afrikaners with an appropriate conceptual scheme for the interracial circumstances of the frontier” (Du Toit 925), thus disgracing his family, his tribe, and himself. Aware of his own shortcomings with respect to Afrikaner ideals, Michiel wonders “[h]ow to face the Chosen, the one in three who did not betray a single expectation” (KotW 59), when he is about to meet his brother Benjamin again after fifteen years of absence.

Unable to live up to the norms and expectations of the Afrikaner community he grew up in, and disgracing himself and his family with the involuntary disclosure of his homosexuality and the “thing” he is (KotW 35), Michiel eventually escapes from the claustrophobia of the farm, respectively South Africa and its ideology. While the

protagonist apparently finds contentment and self-acceptance in his new life in San Francisco, the narrative Michiel struggles to reverse from one of forced exile to one of voluntary emigration, progressively reveals that, even though he refers to himself as “little more than a voyeur” (KotW 49), the farm in fact turns out to be Michiel’s “only meaningful source of self-identification” (Jackson 180). Thus, “place identity”, as previously defined and further explored by Albie Sachs, is, as we come to know, still very present in the protagonist’s (sub-) consciousness, and reconnection to the farm and the family “through more than memory” is proposed as Michiel’s source for healing on the very first day of psychotherapy (KotW 83).

Already the first lines of the novel are a vivid depiction of the South African landscape, and Michiel’s first encounter with the farm on which he has not set foot on for fifteen years, is inevitably a “multi-sensory experience of homecoming” (Jackson 179). Michiel remembers the paths of Paradys like the “lines on his own hands” (KotW 1) and he remembers the excursions on horsebacks “like a story known without quite imagining all that could be found in its reading.” (KotW 1). As he smells the “recent rain on grass and soil”, we come to know that for Michiel, after all these years, “[i]t is as if he has never been away” (KotW 1). Throughout the novel, as Hope (online) comes to conclude in his review of the book, the “American sections [are] pale alongside life at Paradys”, and indeed, the reader is frequently confronted with vivid pictures of “apricot trees in late bloom” (KotW 51), “pink and yellow water lilies drift[ing] on the crystalline river” (KotW 57), “verdant hills” (KotW 77), “the sickly-sweet scent of baobabs in bloom” (KotW 103), “grasshoppers skitter[ing] up in rapid color”, “butterflies tumbl[ing] over yellow and orange wild flowers” (KotW 194), and the beauty of his homeland Michiel comes to identify as “[s]eduction in the eye — in the heart and mind — of the beholder: someone else may find it banal.” (KotW 148).

In contrast, Michiel’s recollections of Sunday afternoons spent with Kamil on Baker Beach in San Francisco seem empty and characterless, containing nothing of the emotional depth the encounters on Paradys evoke:

Michiel and Kamil stroll by men sunbathing nude on Baker Beach. They clamber across rocks towards the Golden Gate Bridge. This here, beside the brutal channel—2.3 million cubic feet of water per second—entering and leaving the bay twice a day is what they do on Sunday afternoons. (KotW 114).

The death of Michiel’s mother, which forces him to return to the farm, and face the inevitable confrontation with his past, is what spells the beginning of a process of

healing and emotional reoccupation of a home the protagonist thought to be irrevocably lost. The tragedy also encourages a retelling of (hi-) stories, through which Michiel comes to reevaluate and consequently reconcile with the past.

Upon his arrival, the protagonist makes out the reflections of an entirely new world, in the mirror he looks into before bathing the old, broken patriarch in order to prepare him for Ounooi's funeral, and which "he knows for certain is that of his youth" (KotW 26). The returning image of the bathroom's old mirror, seemingly the one and only thing retained during a process of renovation and redecoration of the homestead, points to the fact that the fall of apartheid broke a silence and triggered an all-pervasive national and individual redefinition of identities in which, due to his disconnection, Michiel could not take part. Instead, Michiel struggles to define an identity in the absence of his past. It seems that the long avoided glance in the mirror of "his youth", his past, thus the reevaluation of the reflections of a new world still framed in its ineradicable history, is the protagonist's ultimate source of healing and redefinition of his identity.

The farm of Michiel's youth is inevitably a place that contains both the past and the present, as opposed to the domicile he established in San Francisco, and is thus the only means through which Michiel can reestablish an identity. Eventually, Michiel comes to terms with his past, and realizes that "[w]hatever that little crack is [...] nowhere but here is it restored" (KotW 215). While initially it seems that Michiel's decision to leave his past has yielded more gains than losses, Michiel eventually acknowledges that Paradys reminds him "of what in your abundance of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness you live constantly without." (KotW 215).

Michiel is now a witness, not only of a transformed South Africa, but of individual transformations that would have been unimaginable at the time of his flight from home. When bathing the "declining patriarch", Michiel "meets his father's eyes, sensing that something between them has altered" (KotW 30), wondering whether "this fugitive moment contain[s] something of what the religious call grace?" (KotW31). Michiel finds – "drifting at his son's mercy" (KotW 30) – an old patriarch, the godfather of two possibly HIV- infected black children, and a man who can pull out a joke about Michiel's sexual orientation, while the latter is washing his father:

'I'm thinking, Pa, how life brings us to unexpected places.' He lathers and washes the diminished thighs, rubs the cloth closer to the protruding bones of the hips. The old man coughs once. And then says, 'Next unexpected place you'll be is my dick.' He guffaws and Michiel chuckles, unable to stop himself from laughing. Oubaas's laughter comes from his belly, his head thrown back. His chest rises

and falls. A soapy cascade over the tub's side drenches Michiel's jeans. Still smiling, Michiel returns his eyes to Oubaas's face. What he sees now cannot be mistaken for mirth. The mouth is open, with the lips drawn into a snarl, the eyes stretched to bursting. The face is contorted and there is no sound from the throat. The arms bring up the hands, somehow manage to place them, again doddering, over the open eyes, leaving visible only the mouths soundless gape. (KotW 32)

While Jackson (185) interprets the abrupt change of mood in this scene as an indication of “Oubaas’ reinvigorated tenacity and patriarchal authority”, I, on the contrary, argue that the shared joke, and the mutual relief of laughter is what triggers the old patriarch’s painful awareness of the excruciating price he has to pay, for growing up with an ideology that he never had the chance or means to question or escape, and thus cannot dissociate from even now. While Michiel refuses to invoke the oppressive language of his youth, calling his father ‘Pa’ instead of Oubaas, he eventually seems to comprehend that even his father is nothing but a victim of his time, someone tied to a now “burning branch” of a “jacaranda in flames”, as vividly depicted in Michiel’s nightmare during his supposedly last night on Paradys.

The protagonist furthermore learns that his mother had dedicated her life to fight the stigma of AIDS, because she realized that “silence is killing our people” (KotW 93), a realization of course relating to her own painful loss of two sons as a consequence of her own compulsory silence. However, the greatest healing potential perhaps is inherent to Karien’s revelation that

[t]o Ounooi, Peet was a wound that never healed. Neither did you, Michiel. It wasn't your leaving or your lifestyle that bothered her. She was ashamed of not standing up to Oubaas. (KotW 174)

While the physical reconnection with the farm and his family provides the basis for Michiel’s psychological healing and reconciliation, thus the emotional repossession of a place he could never quite live without, the prodigal son is somewhat surprisingly confronted with the actual inheritance of Paradys:

'Contrary to what you seem to think, it's also yours.'
 Michiel keeps his eyes on his brother's face.
 'You haven't mentioned it to him, Karien?'
 'We've had a lot to talk about. The estate hasn't been foremost in my mind.'
 'One third is mine,' Benjamin says, his tone gentle as he continues to look at Michiel. 'One third is Karien's.' A smile plays at his lips. 'And one third is yours.'
 He awaits the prodigal's response.
 'I had no idea,' Michiel says, looking from his brother to Karien.
 'Ounooi said nothing.'
 [...]

'I assumed I was cut from the will. That's what I got from Oubaas the day I left, unless I completed my time. In the army.' (KotW 166f).

Having arrived as “little more than a voyeur” (KotW 49), a cosmopolitan expatriate, Michiel now feels “like I've been here every day of the last fifteen years”, fantasizing about whether he could be “some kind of Oubaas here” and wondering where

Kamil [would] be while he is in the shed? And how do I say—looking away while I wash the spinach—*a third of the farm in Africa is mine?* I had no idea, Kamil, but I would like to run my mother's orchard. Will you come with me?” (KotW 188)

About to leave South Africa, reconciled, and contemplating what it means to be back, Michiel is forced to think about what it means to return to the States, whose heart lies broken amongst the debris of the World Trade Center.

The fact that Mark Behr ends his novel with the mention of the happenings of 9/11 not only reflects the vicious circle of imperialism and points to colonial legacies as an all-pervasive sign of the 21st century, but also hints at the “inevitability of change” (Behr qtd. in Crocker, online). Not only has the nature of war changed at the turn of the new millennium, but so has the victim, and Michiel comes to understand that “[t]omorrow has its own colors and different garments” (KotW 225).

7.4 The Possibility of Losing the Farm in the Light of New Realities

While Michiel Steyn's emotional reoccupation of his homestead is eventually followed by the actual inheritance of the farm, South Africa's altered political landscape at the beginning of the 21st century, and new policies in order to empower the black population, resulting in occasionally controversial approaches to the land question in the light of neo-liberalism, raise the very real threat or at least possibility of losing the farm again.

Michiel's father Oubaas, who is described as “the old man” who “believes the world ends where Paradys meets the N2” (KotW 84), finds himself in the midst of the broken fragments of his world, and now faces a new South Africa in which, in his view, “[e]verything's gone to the dogs” (KotW 62). On the other hand, Lerato, daughter of the black housemaid Alida, who could at best dream of “[w]orking in the big house” (KotW 54) under the old regime, surprisingly emerges as a “woman in the black pantsuit” (KotW 55) with a “degree from university” (KotW 19), “driving in a new Swedish car” (KotW 50). Thus, Lerato is depicted as a typical representative of South Africa's new

Black Middle Class, which, under Mbeki's rule, was supposed "to form the heart of South Africa's new ruling elite" (Louw 203). With respect to the ANC's efforts to grow a "Black capitalist class" (Louw 108), the *African Renaissance* served as an ideological basis for the president's project, which was "conceptually tied to the 'defeat' of white South Africa and the transfer of resources/land into Black hands." (Louw 184).

While the ANC government's BEE policies were implemented "to force the transfer of white capital into black hands", thus triggering a fast growing Black Middle Class, a land redistribution legislation was aimed to "transfer white farms into black hands" (Louw 201).

Already in 1994, the ANC proposed a *Reconstruction and Development Plan* in order to promote the redistribution of approximately one-third of South Africa's agricultural land to blacks by the beginning of the new millennium. The ANC's land reform was based upon the restitution of land unrightfully seized in the name of the Native Lands Act of 1913, which basically disposed black people (Bernstein 11), and Michiel refers to as "legalized theft" (KotW 98), as well as on the redistribution and implementation of land tenure laws to promote and support new black land owners. These soon became the major pillars of South Africa's new land policy (Bernstein 11ff.), and Karien explains to Michiel that "[t]hey've set up a court with the same power as High Court to look at tenure reform. Land restitution and redistribution. Something that was never properly done in Zimbabwe." (KotW 161-2). Karien's statement also points to the political explosiveness of the land question, as is the case in Zimbabwe, where "white-owned farms are being given over to black war veterans" (KotW 99). The fear of many white farm owners of being dispossessed themselves in the wake of land restitution is also articulated by Benjamin's wife Giselle, who evinces:

[W]ho knows when they'll decide to make a claim on this land? [...] You'll turn it into a tourist haven, spend millions, only to see it taken away [...]. We see the circus in Zimbabwe. I say sell before we're forced to give it away when some land commissar decides that Paradys belonged to King Moshoeshoe's ancestors five hundred years ago. (KotW 161)

Giselle's articulated concern arises from the fact that land restitution is "rights- based" and that in some areas already "three- quarters of the commercial farm land is under claim" (Cousins, online), and Michiel too wonders: "[H]as Mamparra's time come?" (KotW 99).

However, Benjamin reminds his wife that "the policy is one of compensation, not confiscation" (KotW 161), for the Mbeki government adopted a " 'willing buyer willing

seller' approach, paying market prices for land that white owners are prepared to sell" (BBC, online). While subsidies are granted by the government, black claimants are still required to make a contribution towards the cost of the compensation paid to white farmers, a policy that excludes the poorest layers of the black population altogether, once again leaving the alreadymentioned minority of the new Black Middle Class as the great beneficiaries of the reforms (Bernstein 12).

Consequently, "[e]ighty per cent of agricultural land is [still] owned by white South Africans, who make up only 10% of the population" (BBC, online) at the beginning of the 21st century, triggering the wrath of poor landless blacks, which eventually lead to 3000 Boer killings since 1994, as estimated by The Sunday Times (McDougall, online). Michiel is confronted with the Boer killings, that are perceived by the farmers "as having a political motive, based on an organized political attempt to dispossess them" (Human Rights Watch 144), when Ounooi visits him in the States referring "only in passing to the Oberholzer murders. For a while Michiel read online of the farm killings. On average, three a week in South Africa." (KotW 155).

The growing crime rates, as a result of the governments raise of expectations by popularizing targets such as the redistribution of 30% of agricultural land, which it failed to realize (Bernstein 13), and the fact that, despite all liberties, the new South Africa is also characterized by a farm with an "electric fence and burglar bars—also at her kaya and the rondavel" (KotW 20), present the dark side of the new post-apartheid South Africa in 2001, the time the novel is set.

Another contemporary problem with regard to the land reforms and tenure laws that were supposed to empower farm workers by giving them at least a theoretical opportunity to become farmers themselves, is the fact that "a loss of agricultural skills [...] took place in the apartheid era" (Cousins, online), disadvantaging black farm workers despite the new land and tenure laws. This is alluded to in the novel when the farm's heirs Benjamin, Michiel, and Karien reflect on how to progress with the farm, as Oubaas cannot attend to it anymore. They consider the role of Pietie, one of the long-serving black farm workers on Paradys:

Pietie, knowledgeable and reliable as he is, cannot supervise the sprawling enterprise alone. Of fiscal intricacies and export contracts he knows nothing: the man has only a standard – three education. It's a long shot leaving him in charge of the harvest, though that might be what they have to do, with Karien keeping a close eye. Unless a temporary farm manager—no one says a *white man*—can be hired. (KotW 160)

This scene clearly depicts the complexity and difficulty of transferring farms back into black hands while keeping up productivity, especially in the context of the ongoing globalization and South Africa's need to be competitive on a global scale.

With regard to the issue of land redistribution, the recent political developments, as well as the conflicting views represented by government officials, are also adverted to in *Kings of the Water*, for, around the new millennium, South Africa experienced a shift from the ANC's former social democrat *Reconstruction and Development policy* "towards the neoliberalism of Growth" (Louw 185), as promoted by Mbeki, in order to adjust to globalization and attract foreign capital to South Africa.

Benjamin's views reflect these neo-liberalist policies, because "more than being a farmer [he] wanted to make money" (KotW 40). He points out that small-scale farming "is a dying concern" (KotW 161), and promotes "to go the tourist route", which involves "[b]uild[ing] chalets beside the stream, [and] turn[ing] the manor into a top-notch guesthouse." (KotW160).

Karien and Michiel, however, seem to sympathize more with the ANC's promotion of small-scale farming in order to increase the number of black beneficiaries and empower black farm workers (Cousins, online) through "models of profit sharing, of giving people stock in the land and an interest in the harvest" (KotW 166), while Benjamin reflects the doubts of opponents to the ANC's program, drawing attention to the fact that "[i]t's been tried all over the country. Within a year there was nothing. Bankrupt. Should we all go that route, like lemmings?" (KotW 166).

However, what the different problems and views with respect to South Africa's land question have in common is the fact that the *Plaas* — the Boer's farm — that has been reinstated generation after generation, is inevitably lost in the light of the changes brought about in the new millennium. While there is a very real threat of losing the farm because of a farm transfer based on the newly implemented land reforms, the liberation of many aspects of South African life is clouded by the Boer killings—a violent wresting of the farms from their Afrikaner owners. However, the inevitability of South Africa's adjustment to neo-liberalism and globalization in order to attract foreign capital and trigger economical growth of the new rainbow nation, leads to the conversion of the traditional South African farm either into a tourist hotspot, as proposed by Benjamin, or into small-scale farms, which will inevitably decay because they are impossible to run economically. One way or another, it is obvious that Oubaas' world is shattered and the

farm on which Michiel grew up and defined and redefined his identity is lost, for it will never be the same again.

8. Conclusion

The analysis of Marlene Van Niekerk's *The Way of the Women* and Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water*, two of the most recent examples of South Africa's Plaasroman genre, has shown a strong narrative significance of the depiction of place, respectively the portrayal of the farms *Grootmoedersdrift* and *Paradys*. It has been outlined that the protagonists' relationship with the farms determines their interactions and identities to a high degree, and that the loss of physical and/or spiritual connection with the farm equals the loss of identity.

This thesis opens with a disquisition on South Africa's torturous and eventful history; it demonstrates the still-relevant explosive issue of land rights, which is a historically implemented and highly emotional topic. Further, the development of the Afrikaner identity has been portrayed in historical context and analyzed on the basis of Breakwell's psychological theory of identity formation. This historical and psychological exploration of the Afrikaner identity shows that considering South Africa's development from a system of racial segregation and apartheid to a free, liberal, and equal democracy, the Boer faces the sudden invalidation of his carefully constructed and historically implemented identity, and thus is forced to reconsider his self-conception in the light of a new millennium.

The post-apartheid government's continuing dedication to transforming the nation and abolishing historically implemented disadvantages for the black population, for instance, through the implementation of the *Reconstruction and Development Plan* or *Black Economic Empowerment* (BEE) policies, leads to fundamental social and political changes that, according to the psychologist Glynis M. Breakwell (143), have the power to seriously damage the Afrikaner's identity construct. With respect to South Africa's power reversal in the 1990s, Vestergaard (19) points out that "the premises for being Afrikaner [...] have changed dramatically." Regarding this paper's exploration of the identity-threatening theme of "Losing the Farm", the consideration of the historical construction of the Afrikaner identity, as well as the psychological discussion of "distinctiveness", "continuity", and "self-esteem", the three core principles generally operating in identity formation, disclose how such a loss of connection with the farm impacts the Boer's conception of the *Self*.

The further discussion of the principle of "continuity", has shown that the Boer's lineal consciousness is deeply rooted in the farm; therefore, the *Plaas* is not only a

“manifestation of the lineage in historical time” (Coetzee (c) 109) but also the place where the Afrikaner can establish a sense of belonging and identity.

The Afrikaner’s struggle and quest for identity in the light of new realities is reflected in the Plaasroman of the new millennium — particularly in Van Niekerk’s and Behr’s contributions. Chapter 4 has demonstrated how the Plaasroman, as one of the oldest subgenres in South African literature, has managed to reinvent itself in the 21st century. It has also been outlined that while the traditional Plaasroman reached its climax as a manifestation and promotion of Afrikaner patriarchal and racist ideologies, concerned with the representation of an idyllic past, the contemporary farm novel, in a spirit of truth and reconciliation, is concerned with the future. The modern Plaasroman emerges as a subversive rewriting of the genre, giving a voice to the formerly voiceless—even though in a circumventive manner—and simultaneously exploring the Afrikaner’s soul, who, in fact, is nothing but a victim of his time.

Thus, the historical analysis of the Plaasroman, along with the interpretation of two prominent examples, has proven that the genre’s flexibility and responsiveness to social and political changes make it a perfect mirror of South Africa’s macrocosm, thereby turning contemporary works of the genre into an invaluable source for further investigations into South Africa’s and the Afrikaner’s ongoing process of identity formation.

The analysis of Van Niekerk’s *The Way of the Women* is based on the theoretical, historical, and psychological considerations of the first part of this thesis; it additionally employs a Foucauldian reading to portray how the depiction of the farm Grootmoedersdrift determines and reflects the protagonist’s conception of *Self* and to trace the correlation between conceptual power relations and the main characters’ relationship with the farm.

In Van Niekerk’s masterpiece the power shifts on Grootmoedersdrift reflect South Africa’s transition from an apartheid to a post-apartheid era, thus tracing the Boer’s lost and regained identity in the light of severe social and political changes. The novel’s in-depth investigation has revealed that the author explores the Afrikaner identity by means of the protagonist’s relation to her farm and for this purpose also employs the powerful symbol of maps, which, in fact, is turned into a subplot narrating the power shift from mistress to maid.

A discussion of Foucault's concept of knowledge and power with respect to the empowering nature of maps — both geographical and metaphorical ones — as a tool of control exhibits the important role of cartography as an “authoritative resource” to legitimate power and conquest; it explains the protagonist's desperate craving to see the outlines of her farm. The maps are not merely a proof of Milla's authority and ownership of the land but are deeply linked to her identity, and the mistress seems to be able to restore the very same only by means of the maps that promise to reconnect the paralyzed woman to her farm again.

Maps and Milla's diaries are identified as reflections of the colonizer's fragmented master narratives; hence, it is the women's collaborative interpretation of the maps which makes the two women equally powerful regarding the narratives of their lives.

The discussion of potential “blind spots” in a map has opened up the analysis for an alternative reading. Deleuze's and Guattari's (12) view of maps as an open rather than homogenous construct draws attention to Agaat's embroidery as a metaphorical map. By means of her embroidery, Agaat fills the “blind spots” and collaborates in a mutual revisualization of history. The master narrative, respectively power over the farm's history, shifts from Milla and the maps as a symbol of her authority to an equal status of the women, for both are able to tell their stories by means of reading the maps of Grootmoedersdrift in the climactic map reading scenes and the introduction of the alphabet chart. Eventually it is only Agaat who has the sole power to narrate their story via her embroidery, particularly Milla's shroud. Yet, by learning to interpret and understand the value of Agaat's embroidery, hence her language, the protagonist disengages herself from the binaries of the Calvinist, patriarchal structures in which she was trapped all her life.

The discussion of the cartographic representation of the farm and the protagonist's relation to it is eventually followed by an exploration of Foucault's (100) conception of power as an embodied phenomenon. Foucault's emphasis on the function of discourse as a transmission of power is described in support of the argument that knowledge about the farm, thus agricultural knowledge, works as a reflector of power in the novel. The pastoral ideal of a “mystic communion of interpenetration” in which the farmer establishes a relationship with the soil by cultivating it (Coetzee (c) 86), and Milla's inability to establish a true connection with the land is emblematic of the loss of her farm. In the context of the critical view post-colonial literature yields on the portrayal of

the *Self* and the *Other*, respectively the colonizer and the colonized (cf. Said), Agaat's character has been revealed as an allegory of the South African soil and therefore it is only by means of connecting to and understanding the language of Agaat, most importantly her embroidery, Milla is able to connect and gain emotional power over her farm, hence truly merging with it.

While in *The Way of the Women* the farm, respectively its surrounding nature and animals, are instrumental not only in the depiction but also in the subversion of traditional pastoral ideals and utilized to portray shifting power relations between the characters, Mark Behr's novel *Kings of the Water* places the concern with the nation's apartheid legacies and the country's quest for identity within a larger global context, yet against the backdrop of the farm Paradys, which is discussed as an identity supportive space and the protagonist's only means to access his past and restore a lost identity.

In Behr's novel the themes of loss and quest for identity are explored on various levels. On the one hand, the novel, in a post-modern tradition, employs intertextuality and particularly provides a vast amount of allusions to contemporary pop culture, literature, and music. Therefore, it has been shown that the narrative skillfully establishes its affiliation to the Plaasroman genre and at the same time illustrates its evolution from it by placing the protagonist's struggle to redefine his identity in an ever-changing world within a global context. However, the intertextual scope of *Kings of the Water* is enormous and deserves an investigation in its own right.

Furthermore, the farm in Behr's narrative emerges as a "heterotopia" in Foucault's (online) sense, and yet, according to Proshansky's (qtd. in Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 206) theory of "place identity", it is identified as an identity-supportive space and Michiel's only way of coming to terms with his past. Again, in this Plaasroman, nature, the South African landscape, respectively the farm, is employed not as a mere setting for the narrative but also to enrich and add depth to the story, as the depiction of the land clearly reflects the protagonist's emotional connection with the farm and emphasizes from the beginning where his true self is, even though the protagonist's actual utterances with regard to the farm and his connection to it try to paint a different picture.

Based on the historical background provided in the beginning of this thesis, the theme of 'Losing the Farm' in Mark Behr's novel is eventually explored in the light of post-apartheid issues on land rights, as well as neo-liberalism and globalisation. In this

regard, it is argued that, besides the prospect of losing the farm through transfer to black farmers or murder, the *Plaas* itself has lost its identity, for neo-liberalism and globalization left their marks on the farm as well. Financial and competitive considerations inevitably transform traditional South African farms into tourist hotspots, or promote small-scale farming to increase the number of beneficiaries, thereby leaving the farm to die due to economic unsustainability. One way or another, it has been illustrated in the analysis, the Boer's world is shattered and the traditional farm is lost—for it will never be the same again.

In contrast to most research on South African literature, which focuses on trauma and narrative, predominately employing categories of race and gender for analysis, the main contribution of this thesis is perhaps the exploration of the Afrikaner trauma — a group usually identified as the oppressors and initiators of the apartheid system, as well as the implementation of “place” as a category of analysis in its own right.

The analysis of two selected examples of the contemporary *Plaasroman* has illustrated that place—in this case, the South African farm and its constitutive elements (nature, landscape, animals)—has a function beyond being mere setting. In fact, the depiction of the farms in the novels is identified as a functional element with great impact on the characters. In the *Way of the Women* the place of the farm reflects the protagonist's conception of *Self*, and conceptual power relations are mirrored and explored via the protagonist's relationship and connection with the farm. In *Kings of the Water* the *Plaas* functions as an identity formative and supportive place with a great healing potential for the protagonist.

Further, the present research finds that both novels portray the farm as a reflector of South Africa's macrocosm by depicting how the people on the farm (i.e., blacks and whites) are united just as much as they are divided. Consulting Geertsema's (7) view of literature as “a mediation of the social and thus [...] an imaginative engagement with society that helps shape it”, the contemporary *Plaasroman* undoubtedly deserves further investigation into the ongoing process of the formation of a new post-apartheid identity in South Africa, which is vividly captured in the post-millennial works of this genre. Besides, the farm novel is an invaluable source of information as regards the question of how far the new rainbow nation has actually moved beyond its past.

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11. Appendix

11.1 Abstract

In the light of the topicality and explosiveness of the question of rightful landownership in post-apartheid South Africa, the *Plaasroman*, the South African Farm Novel, not only emerges as an invaluable source for an exploration of Afrikaner identity, but contemporary works are, undoubtedly, highly relevant contributions to the prominent discourses about identity and reconciliation in South Africa's post-apartheid era.

This thesis particularly explores the themes of change and loss in Marlene Van Niekerk's *The Way of the Women* and Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water*, and it pays special attention to the depiction of the *Plaas*, the South African farm, as a 'heterotopia' in Foucault's sense and a symbolic place reflecting South Africa's macrocosm.

Starting with an outline of South Africa's torturous and eventful history this thesis demonstrates that the currently still explosive issue of land rights is a historically implemented and highly emotional one. Furthermore, the development of Afrikaner identity is portrayed in historical context and complemented by psychological theories on identity formation. Those theoretical considerations, together with a discussion of the historical development of the *Plaasroman* genre in order to demonstrate the genre's flexibility and evolution, which makes it a perfect medium to explore South Africa's ongoing process of identity formation, provide the context for the eventual analyses of two novels in the second part of the thesis.

Foucault's concepts of 'power' and 'knowledge and power' are employed to reveal how the depiction of the farm in Van Niekerk's novel determines and reflects the protagonists' conception of their *Self*, and, to trace the correlation between conceptual power relations and the main characters' relationship to the farm. The farm in Mark Behr's *Plaasroman* is, according to the theory of 'place identity', identified as an identity supportive space and the protagonist's only way of coming to terms with his past.

Place, in case of the novels analysed, the farm, deserves special attention in this thesis. The South African farm and its constitutive elements (nature, landscape, animals), is investigated far beyond its mere function as a setting. In fact, the depiction of the farm in the novels explored is identified as a functional element with great impact on narrative and characters. This thesis provides an in-depth investigation of the

protagonists' relationship with the farm and portrays how this relationship determines their interactions and identities. The loss of physical and/or spiritual connection to the farm thus emerges as a reflection of the characters' loss of identity.

11.2 Abstract (German)

Angesichts der fortwährenden Aktualität und Brisanz in der Frage von rechtmäßigem Landbesitz in Südafrika tritt der südafrikanische Bauernroman (Plaasroman) als Quelle von unschätzbarem Wert für die Untersuchung der Identität des Afrikaners hervor. Moderne Werke des Genres weisen überdies eine große Relevanz in Bezug auf die vorherrschenden Diskurse über Identität und Versöhnung in einem Südafrika jenseits Apartheid auf.

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit ergründet im Speziellen die Themen *Veränderung* und *Verlust* in Marlene Van Niekerk's *The Way of the Women* und Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water*. Das Hauptaugenmerk der Analyse liegt dabei auf dem Plaas, dem südafrikanischen Bauernhof, als eine „Heterotopie“ im Sinne von Foucault und als symbolischer Ort, welcher als Spiegel des Makrokosmoses Südafrikas fungiert.

Beginnend mit einer Darstellung der Schlüsselereignisse südafrikanischer Geschichte wird die Tatsache demonstriert, dass das bis dato sehr emotionale und politisch entzündliche Thema des Bodenrechtes historisch implementiert ist.

Des Weiteren wird die Entwicklung der Identität der Afrikaner in historischem und psychologischem Kontext beleuchtet, was gemeinsam mit einer anschließenden Diskussion der Entwicklung des südafrikanischen Bauernromans, welche das Genre als perfektes Medium für die Erkundung der aktuellen Identitätsbildung der südafrikanischen Nation hervorhebt, die Basis für die Romananalysen im zweiten Teil der Arbeit bildet.

Aufbauend auf Foucault's Konzepten von „Macht“ und „Wissen und Macht“ wird analysiert inwiefern die Darstellung des Bauernhofes in Van Niekerk's Roman die Konzeption des *Selbst* der Protagonisten bestimmt und reflektiert. Außerdem wird, basierend auf Foucault's Theorien, die Korrelation zwischen der Darstellung konzeptioneller Machtverhältnisse und der Beziehung zum Bauernhof, die die Charaktere herstellen, dargestellt. Der Bauernhof in Mark Behr's Werk wird, basierend auf der Theorie von „place identity“, also der Annahme, dass Identität vor allem auch durch den Bezug zu Raum und Ort gebildet wird, als Ort identifiziert, der sich positiv auf die Identitätsfindung des Protagonisten auswirkt und sich als die einzige Möglichkeit der Vergangenheitsbewältigung darstellt.

Dem Ort, beziehungsweise im Fall der analysierten Romane dem Bauernhof, wird in dieser Diplomarbeit besondere Bedeutung beigemessen. Der südafrikanische Bauernhof und seine konstitutiven Elemente (Natur, Landschaft, Tiere) werden weit jenseits ihrer

Funktionen als Schauplatz der Handlung (Setting) analysiert. Die Darstellung der Farm in den untersuchten Werken wird als funktionelles Element identifiziert, welches große Auswirkungen auf die Erzählung sowie die Charaktere hat. Diese Diplomarbeit stellt eine tiefgreifende, interdisziplinäre Untersuchung der Beziehung zwischen den Hauptcharakteren und dem Ort des Bauernhofes dar und illustriert wie diese Beziehung die Interaktionen und Identitäten der Betroffenen bestimmt. Der Verlust physischer oder spiritueller Verbundenheit mit dem Bauernhof tritt dabei als Reflektor des Identitätsverlustes der Protagonisten hervor.

11.3 Curriculum Vitae

Persönliche Daten

Name: Ulrike Gartlehner, BEd
 Geburtstag: 29.09.1980
 Geburtsort: Steyr
 Familienstand: verlobt, 3 Kinder (3 und 2 Jahre)
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Schulbildung

1987-1991 Private Volksschule Kloster Gleiss
 1991-1995 Private Hauptschule Kloster Gleiss
 1995-2000 Bildungsanstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik der Schulschwestern
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 Juni 2000 Matura

Studium

2001-2003 Pädagogische Akademie der Diözese Linz
 (Hauptschullehramt Englisch / Geschichte)
 2003-2006 Pädagogik Studium an der Universität Wien
 Schwerpunkt: Psychoanalytische Pädagogik
 2008-2010 Pädagogische Hochschule der Diözese Linz
 (LA Englisch und Geschichte; Bachelor of Education)
 WS 09/10 Mater Dei Institute of Education Dublin, Irland
 Erasmus Auslandsstudienaufenthalt mit den Schwerpunkten:
 Shakespeare's Theatre, Irish Literature, Irish Cultural Studies
 SS 2010-SS 2016 Universität Wien
 Lehramt Englisch und Geschichte mit den Schwerpunkten:
 English literature;
 Globalisierung im Mittelalter; Globalgeschichte

Beruf	
2000-2001	Junior Flugbegleiterin bei Lauda-air
2004-2006	Senior Flugbegleiterin bei Fly Niki (Labor Pool)
2006-2008	Tauchlehrer & Tour Leader in Thailand (Long Beach Divers)
2010-2012	vertragliche Hauptschullehrerin in der KMS Hasenleitengasse, 1110 Wien (SSR Wien)
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