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"A Sense of an Absent Future." Pervading Post-apartheid South African Literature: Re-conceptualisations of Temporality in André Brink's Transitional Writings

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Abstract: Numerous commentators have recently indicated a prevailing sense among South Africans of a historical repetition, a pervasive sentiment that the country has failed to shake off the legacy of apartheid, which extends into the present, and possibly also the future. [1] Such an observation has led South African psychologist, Derek Hook, to conclude that in order to adequately address the post-apartheid reality and allow the process of working through trauma, there is a need to abandon the linear Judeo-Christian model of time derived from the Enlightenment. Instead, Hook advocates to start thinking of post-apartheid South Africa not as a socio-economically or racially stratified society, but rather as a country of unsynchronized, split, often overlapping temporalities. Thus, he offers to perceive of 'chaffing temporalities' of the contemporary predicament. Resende and Thies, on the other hand, call for a need for a reconceptualised approach to temporality not only when dealing with heavily traumatized postcolonial countries such as South Africa, but more generally when addressing the geopolitics of all the countries of the so-called

[1] Among others, Derek Hook in *(Post)Apartheid Conditions* (2013), Elleke Boehmer in "Permanent Risk: When Crisis Defines a Nation's Writing" (2012) or Achille Mbembe in *On The Postcolony* (2001).

'Global South.' My paper will discuss the manner in which reconceptualised postcolonial temporality has been addressed by South African transitional writings by André Brink. I will argue that, although Brink's magical realist novels of the 1990s imaginatively engage with 'the chaffing temporalities' of the post-apartheid predicament, their refusal to project any viable visions of the country's future might ultimately problematise the thorough embrace of Hook's 'ethics of temporality.'

Keywords: 'chaffing temporalities'; ethics of temporality; re-conceptualisations of time; post-apartheid literature; André Brink

In their study of the geographies of time in the so-called 'Global South,' Resende and Thies call for a need for a reconceptualised approach to temporality when addressing the geopolitics and psychosocial realities of all the postcolonial countries belonging to the so-called 'Global South.' As the theorists have noted, social theory has always favoured spatial metaphors in search for a terminology designating geopolitical difference, the Third World, the Threshold Countries, the Global South being just a few examples among many. Nevertheless, a semantic shift from constructing the South in terms of geographical scapes to conceptualising it in terms of timescapes would actually allow for a far more complex, more perceptive and less essentialised theorization of the region's socio-political and geographical intricacies (Resende and Thies 2017: 3). Thus, they propose instead to perceive of 'the Global South' as the zone of multi-layered entangled temporalities. It is their assumption that such a semantic shift would equally contribute to the reinvigoration of the global debate concerning a reconstituted approach to ethics. As they assert:

> There are decisive ethical reasons for turning our gaze Southwards. It has become clear that concepts of time, far from being abstract philosophical issues remote from real-world practices, have been one of the fundamental factors in the conquest of the globe and the destruction of the global biosphere [...] The importance of studies of temporality, in the light of the shrinking planetary futures of the global populace and retreating horizons of political hope, cannot be underestimated. In such a context, the "alternative" and "heterogeneous" temporalities to be found in the Global South may harbour future perspectives of vital significance for the entirety of the planetary polity. (Resende and Thies 2017: 6-7)

The psychoanalytic framework of reference appears to be especially well-adapted to the purposes of such re-conceptualisation of temporality. Assuredly, it has been developed with detailed attention to the way memory operates and elaborated in recognition of the need to retrieve, reorganise and work through the past while simultaneously maintaining a forward-looking orientation

adapted to the prospects of future change. Such a perception of historical time as operating in cycles accords well with Lacan's notion of psychic time and his insistence on the primary significance of the present perspective in the process of historical retrieval:

> In the psyche, present events affect past events a posteriori, since the past exist in the psyche... as a set of memories which are constantly being reworked and reinterpreted in the light of present experience. What concerns psychoanalysis is not the real sequence of events..., but the way that these events exist now in memory. [What Lacan] means by the term 'history' is not simply a real sequence of past events, but 'the present synthesis of the past'... the past insofar as it has been historicized in the present. (Evans on Lacan quoted in Hook 2013: 195)

Such continuous folding of heterogeneous temporalities: the past, the present and the future is not only restricted to the present incessantly revising and re-organising the past, but it also manifests itself in the way the future returns upon the past and the present to confer direction upon them and imbue them with a new meaning. Indeed, psychoanalysis explicitly inscribes a marked sense of the manner in which the future can intervene in the present and the past. As Slavoj Žižek, a fierce promoter of psychoanalysis in cultural studies, notes:

> In a properly historical perspective as opposed to evolutionist historicism, the past is not simply past, but bears within it its proper utopian promise of a future Redemption: in order to understand a past epoch properly, it is not sufficient to take into account the historical conditions out of which it grew – one has also to take into account the utopian hopes of a Future that were betrayed and crushed by it – that which was 'negated,' that which did not happen – so that the past historical reality was the way it was. (Žižek quoted in Moonsamy 2015: 78)

This has led Žižek to conclude that the "present can only be conceived as the outcome of (not of what actually happened in the past, but also) of the crushed potentials for the future that were contained in the past" (Žižek quoted in Moonsamy 2015: 69). In a related line of argument, when referring more specifically to the African postcolony, political theorist and philosopher, Achille Mbembe, calls for the understanding of the present as experience of time as a moment when different forms of absence get interposed one on another: "absence of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past)," but also vitally, "absence of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future)" (Mbembe 2001: 16).

Crucial for the acknowledgement of the impact of the future on the process of historical recovery is also the awareness of the cyclical nature of historical time, its tendency for repetition. Such consciousness clearly underlies Nicholas

Dames's understanding of 'proleptic memory,' which he defines as the recognition that "what is remembered is remembered because it will recur; we recall the origin of what will also be an end; we remember in the light not only of past relevance but, more important, in the light of future relevance" (Dames 2001: 136). Thus, such an awareness of the bi-directionality of mnemonic processes and the undeniable interdependence of the past and future in the act of historical retrieval may seem to be of vital importance for our understanding of the manner in which temporality is experienced and perceived in postcolonial countries such as South Africa.

Indeed, in his illuminating psychosocial inquiry into 'the post-apartheid condition,' *(Post)Apartheid Conditions,* when relating to the outbreaks of xenophobic violence in South Africa in 2008 as well as to the more recent Marikana massacre, [2] Derek Hook (2013:1-2) points to a pervasive sense among South Africans of a historical repetition, a prevailing sentiment that the country has failed to shake off apartheid history whose legacy extends into the present, harbingering even more disruptive forms of social unrest to arrive in the near future. Similarly, Elleke Boehmer (2012: 29) diagnoses such post-traumatic tendency for repetition compulsion that has apparently beset South Africa in the post-transitional period. Indeed, in a country where the suffering inflicted by apartheid is only perpetuated by the national crisis of the AIDS epidemic, the soaring crime, a sense of massive social inequality reinforced by the ANC's macro-economic policies, and the recurring outbreaks of xenophobic violence, a sense of temporal dislocation, an inescapable feeling of being haunted by the past might prevail. Such a sentiment is only compounded by a widespread recognition that rights and freedoms promised by the advent of modern democracy have never been delivered, pointing towards areas of social and political stasis. In such a context, the traditional understanding of progress, as change over time which assumes an irreversible, expansive and unchangeably forward-looking trajectory, proves particularly difficult to apply.

Derek Hook (2013: 5) explicitly depicts everyday South African experience as marked by historical dissonance, "by the continuous juxtaposition of forward- and backward-looking temporalities." He further admits that:

> Post-apartheid temporality pulls simultaneously in two different directions. There is the continual hope of transcending the apartheid past, the prospect- admittedly, already itself now somewhat dated – of what a genuinely *post*-apartheid society may be. And then there is the 'pull-back' effect of the myriad instances where adequate structural change has either

[2] The Marikana massacre is believed to be the single most lethal use of force by South African security forces against civilians since the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. In the event, 44 people got killed, among whom 42 were striking miners shot by police between August-September 2012.

> not come to pass or stalled, threatening even in some cases to regress, to reverse into an intractably backward trajectory. (Hook 2013: 6)

Interestingly, such a bi-directionality of post-apartheid temporality characterises not only social experience, but also South African historiography and literary interrogation of history in the transitional and post-transitional period. Indeed, such dual temporality seems to underlie the very process of forging national identity and, as such, accompanies the emergence of nationalisms not only in South Africa but globally.

Nevertheless, a remarkable feature that specifically distinguishes post-apartheid temporality is its concurrent interweaving of bi-directional temporal shifts and long periods of stagnation and resistance to change, much in the vein of Nadine Gordimer's perception of South African transition as a state of interregnum in which "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" (Gordimer 2005: 262). Indeed, this difficult period of political transformation in South Africa has generously lent itself for interpretations in terms of a fracture in time, a moment of suspension. Michael Green observes that:

> [P]unctual transitions since 1990 in South Africa, which cumulatively fulfill the standard narratological requirements necessary for the status of an event ('the transition from one state to another state') in a rather literal political sense, have equally been forceful and public enough to qualify as a rupture, a break, and end to history itself, as South African history has been so long conceived. (Green 1997: 4)

In the post-apartheid predicament a wide-felt disenchantment with a limited scope of the political transformation, events such as the premature completion of Thabo Mbeki's presidency and his successor's Jacob Zuma's long-running reluctance to step down despite recurrent political pressures might have only compounded the sense of a temporal stasis, a time of historical suspension which resists any impulses for change. Hook (2013: 6), thus, recapitulates that "the post-apartheid period, then, is characterized not only by the double temporality present in the equivocal term of '(post)apartheid,' but also by the staccato tempo of abrupt truncations and precipitate beginnings."

It is, therefore, Hook's postulate that, in order to adequately address the post-apartheid reality and allow the process of working through traumatic impasses of historical experience in a societal context, there is a need to abandon the linear Judeo-Christian model of time derived from the Enlightenment, which has manifestly lost its ability to address meaningfully the postcolonial reality inhabited by South Africans. Indeed, as Hook underlines, it would be more fruitful to start thinking of post-apartheid South Africa in a new key, not as a society that is socio-economically or racially polarised, but rather as a country of unsynchronised, split, often overlapping temporalities. Following Edward Said's concept

of 'contrapuntal time,' which he, in turn, borrowed from the theory of music, as a "time in which harmony and syncopation break down such that we have two divergent times and tempos," Hook (2013: 197) coins the term of 'chaffing temporalities' of the post-apartheid predicament. Emphasising the transformative potential of such a re-conceptualised approach to the notion of historical time, he asserts that it is precisely through such folding of history, where the past, present and future are thrust into overlapping propinquity that a hitherto unactivated facet of history may be brought into light, endowing history with a new meaning and a distinct political relevance. Thus, he incites us to perceive of 'the chaffing temporalities' of the post-apartheid situation as: "productive frictions that produce new lines of sight, that break through the imaginary coherence of self-protective narratives and exclusionary identities predicated on leaving the past behind" (Hook 2013: 197).

In the conclusion of his psychosocial analysis of the contemporary South African predicament, Hook (2013: 195) argues for the adoption on the part of psychologists, socio-political commentators and public intellectuals of what he terms 'an ethics of temporality.' Such an ethical approach would imply the narrative inscription of "non-linear vicissitudes of time"; the recognition that there is a need, when addressing people's experience of South African history, to take into consideration the continuous irruption of the past into the present, the past's incessant revising and re-organising of the present and future alike. Only such an approach, Hook asserts, would enable South Africans to reach critical distance to the traumatic experience of the violent past and present through gaining psychological cognition of the processes governing our remembrance. It is vital to stress that the acknowledgement of "non-linear vicissitudes of time" does not involve collapsing of the distinction between different temporal frameworks, thus stranding the traumatized South Africans subjects in a temporal loop, which some trauma theorists warn against (LaCapra 2001). It only foregrounds the mutual penetrability of separate timeframes, while simultaneously allowing the differentiation of the coexistent, yet heterogeneous temporalities, and, in the process, it insightfully illuminates the manner in which collective South African memory operates.

Therefore, the recognition of the 'chaffing temporalities' of (post)apartheid dispensation, Hook claims, would have an ethically transformative capacity of opening up the future to possible re-articulations, liberating the future from its bondage to the past and counteracting its compulsion for repetition. Inciting future academics of psychosocial studies, historians and artists alike to enact this ethical quality of time, Hook, therefore, calls for the new conceptualisation of multi-layered, enfolded temporality: "'An ethics of temporality' entails a continuous juxtaposition, a folding of times, whereby the past might be radicalized

and the future re-envisaged, altered on its trajectory from a continuous recapitulation of what was" (Hook 2013: 204).

In the light of such theorization of the post-apartheid South African temporality, it is historical contingency that presents itself as a new ethical modality by which the South African past, present and future could be enrichingly approached and re-interpreted not only through the lens of psychosocial studies but also in the literary field. Thus, this article will discuss the manner in which André Brink's novels published in the period of transition, thus directly after the demise of apartheid, address the issue of post-apartheid multi-layered, enfolded temporality. The ongoing analysis will focus in detail on three texts' engagement with the notion of time, namely *The First Life of Adamastor* (1993), *Imaginings of Sand* (1996), and *Devil's Valley* (1998). My assumption is that, although Brink's magical realist novels of the 1990s imaginatively engage with 'the chaffing temporalities' of the post-apartheid predicament, their refusal to project any viable visions of the country's future might ultimately problematise the thorough embrace of Hook's 'ethics of temporality.' Such a refusal to anticipate what comes after the demise of a totalitarian system is shown to be symptomatic of the predicament of many countries which are entrapped at the threshold of change, and as such, it inscribes itself in a wider trend of a large body of post-apartheid novels that tend to shut down on tomorrow, displaying a well-marked reluctance to speculate about future. Indicating certain well-marked socio-political and cultural developments in contemporary South Africa, my article suggests possible directions in which post-apartheid or, for that matter, post-postapartheid South African literature might follow.

All the novels in question are clearly located at the crossroads of postmodern and realist conventions, deftly interweaving elements of fantasy and realism, and thus inscribing themselves in a wider shift in South African literature of the transitional period of the 1990s. Indeed, a turn towards magical realism as a flourishing narrative strategy wilfully adopted in the 1990s by a number of South African writers such as André Brink, Zakes Mda, Mike Nicol or Ivan Vladislavić would be hard to pass unnoticed (Grzęda 2013). Thus, similarly, all the three of Brink's transitional novels smoothly integrate irreducible elements of magic within objectively verifiable settings that fully correspond to the general demands of realism.

In *The First Life of Adamastor*, events that surpass the boundaries of rational explanation abound within a fairly realistic account of the protagonist T'kama's journey into the South African interior. Torn bushes suddenly appear, surrounding the camp overnight, a lion provides tribesmen with food, and T'kama's penis starts to grow uncontrollably until it is snapped off by a crocodile and substituted with a clay replacement which later turns into flesh. In *Imaginings of Sand*,

the main character Kristien's grandmother's stories from the past are infused with events belonging purely to the realm of the surreal: Kristien's female ancestors could turn their sheep into stones, lost their shadow, left messages inscribed in the sand, and disappeared with their footprints simply stopping. Furthermore, the seamless incorporation of fantasy into the plot is not only confined to the past, it equally permeates the present story level. In the realistic context of South Africa's first democratic elections, omnipresent birds appear to attend to Ouma (Grandma) Kristina's wishes, ancestral spirits materialise at the graveyard and at Ouma's bedside, mysterious paintings keep reappearing in the mansion's basement, and after her death, Ouma disappears, turning into an unusual bird. *Devil's Valley*, on the other hand, is distinguished by the entire plot's aura of the supernatural. The very setting of the novel, a remote valley where a small community of Afrikaners who separated from the Great Trek settled and remained isolated for 150 years, seems rather surreal. Yet, judging by the history of Afrikaner colonisation, such an object world, if somewhat nightmarish, does remain within the confines of historical realism. [3] What does not, though, is the awareness of various female characters of their continuous reappearance in the protagonist Lochner's dreams, the presence of semi-animal, semi-human figures, as well as the harmonious co-existence of the community members with the dead. In his theoretical discussion of recent developments in South African literature, Brink (2009: 16-17) has even asserted that "foregrounding of ancestors who continue to intervene actively in the affairs of the present, an easy gliding between the world of the living and the dead" is an inherent component of a distinctly African form of magical realism which is rooted in the long tradition of African oral narrative.

Yet, in the light of Derek Hook's aforementioned call for the adoption of the ethics of entangled temporality, his insistence on the narrative inscription of 'non-linear vicissitudes of time,' it is the manner in which each text addresses the notion of time that seems to be of greater significance for the sake of my analysis. Assuredly, all the novels discussed may be seen to promote alternative perceptions of South African temporality in the way they clearly disrupt linear, chronological and teleological readings of history, what is more, often even fundamentally collapsing the possibility of differentiation between separate time zones. Indeed, whereas in the case of Brink's *Imaginings of Sand* clearly demarcated temporality constitutes a crucial aspect of the plot, timeframes operative

[3] In fact, in the remote Northern Cape Provence there exists a whites-only enclave, Orania. Being one of the last outposts of racial segregation, Orania was established in 1991during the last years of apartheid in an attempt to create a stronghold for Afrikaans and the Afrikaner identity by preserving their culture and language. The community of around 1.500 inhabitants boasts a radio station and its own currency, the Ora. Interestingly, the community was founded by the descendants of the late prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid.

in *Devil's Valley* and *The First Life of Adamastor* are highly elusive and indefinable, truly in the postmodern vein.

Yet, even when the temporal setting is clearly outlined as in the case of *Imaginings of Sand*, the narrative clearly breaks out of the realist mould of logical linearity and finality. The novel's storyline continuously shifts forwards and backwards between two alternate timeframes: the year 1994, around the time of the first democratic elections, and the temporality of Ouma's stories that delineate the family's female genealogy that reaches back 400 years. When discussing *Imaginings of Sand*, Brink conceded, "I did not want to write in a linear way. It was a fascinating challenge for me to try and imagine our history in a completely different way and from a different angle" (quoted in De Waal 1996: 4).

Indeed, the novel engages in a zigzag dialectical course with Ouma's recollections being related in instalments. Such a non-linear, cyclical and open-ended narration that resists teleological progress and closure is revealed here as typifying a strictly female perspective. Thus, Ouma Kristina, presented as a receptacle and the custodian of the family's history, passes her stories with an explanation: "Let's keep the men out of it. They came with verse and chapter. Our story is different, it doesn't run in a straight line [...]. It's us I am talking about. The womenfolk [...]. No one knows where we began. We go back to the shadows. I think we have always been around" (Brink 1997: 174). Such a statement only foregrounds the ambiguity of Ouma's narration. Indeed, right from the outset Ouma's reliability as a narrator is severely undermined. Alternate, often mutually exclusive versions of the same events abound, whereas some historical periods, such as apartheid years, are mentioned only in passing, thus inscribing narrative black gaps that expose the fragmentary nature of the plot. Although some events of recorded history are identified, others, such as the result of the 1994 elections, are never stated. Throughout the narrative, factuality is revealed as irrelevant and dismissed as essentially inadequate recourse to truth. It is imagination that is granted priority over factual documentation in narrating history. As Kristien inquires towards the end of the novel: "The configurations may be interchangeable; the myths persist, she has lived them into being. Why demand the truth, whatever that may be, if you can have imagination?" (Brink 1997: 324).

Such fallibility of the narrative is equally stressed by the clearly marked limitations of Ouma's memory, namely the fugacious, ephemeral and easily mutable nature of the process of remembering which consistently guards access to truth. Indeed, the fragmented plot of *Imaginings of Sand*, inscribing numerous blank spaces and multiple celebrations of contradictory accounts, is shown to be informed by its inclusions to the same extent as its exclusions, its presences to the same extent as its absences, resulting in a narrative that brings out the intangibility, essential unavailability of any fixed, singular Truth (Dixon 2004). Truth, if

it can ever be made accessible, is rather shown as the revelation of meaning that materialises through continuous imaginative combinations of those unreliable, porous individual stories. Thus, far from approaching history in terms of the grand national narrative, *Imaginings of Sand* clearly advocates a conception of history as a palimpsest of highly fragmented, seemingly paltry and essentially transient personal stories, leading the main character, Kristien, to conclude that "what used to be stories has suddenly begun to coalesce into a history, hers, mine, ours" (Brink 1997: 126).

The First Life of Adamastor was also conceived as a historical counter-narrative designed to offer an alternative perspective on the first colonial encounter between the Portuguese explorers and the indigenous population of the Eastern Cape. Narrated by T'kama, the first reincarnation of Adamastor, the mythical giant depicted by Camoens in his *Lusiads* (1572), the novella cuts across time, making continuous references to successive reincarnations of Adamastor whose life spans a period of 500 years. Thus, it creates a space where time dissolves and expands in an endless continuum. In his perceptive study "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," Slemon (1995: 411) identifies as one of the key characteristics of magical realism the so-called "foreshortening of history so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long process of colonisation and its aftermath." Indeed, exposing the epistemological gap between invaders and indigenes through its engagement with the theme of the African man betrayed by a European woman, the novella comes to epitomize the colonial process as such. Thus, of the novels discussed, *The First Life of Adamastor* most pronouncedly espouses such a 'foreshortening of history.' Such a conceptualisation of time is also what allows to stress the unreliability of memory and the fugacious nature of remembrance, thus only foregrounding the fundamental inaccessibility, intangibility of historical truth. On numerous occasions, T'kama admits: "Looking back across five centuries it is hard to recall one particular morning" (Brink 2000b: 43). The very formulaic opening of the novella: "Once upon a time there was and there wasn't" equally serves simultaneously to assert and destabilise reality (Brink 2000b: 1). Indeed, history and mythmaking are intertwined in this narrative inspired by a web of cross-references, anchored within widely recognised facts of European history, thus supported by historical sources, yet aided by a highly imaginary plot.

Although mirroring *Imaginings of Sand* in its thematic engagement with the difficult moment of South African political transformation, the temporal setting of *Devil's Valley* is decidedly more vague. Brink consistently refuses to engage in historical specificity, as no dates or historical names are mentioned, [4] yet the

[4] The only exception being here virtually one side remark that refers to President Mandela (Brink 2000a: 205).

moment remains suggestive of the transition period directly following the transfer of political power to 'the blacks.' Staging a small community of Afrikaners who separated from the Great Trek, settled in a remote valley, where they remained isolated for 150 years, thus retaining the social structure of a typical Afrikaner colonial settlement, the novel once again generously lends itself for interpretation in terms of the magical realism's propensity for 'foreshortening of history,' invoked by Slemon. Indeed, as Ezeliora points out, in its deeply symbolical, parabolical nature, *Devil's Valley* can be interpreted "as a mythical aggregation of the many Afrikaner settlements in South Africa and [...] the many centuries of Boer perception of South Africa as 'the promised land'" (Ezeliora 2008: 96).

Narrated by Flip Lochner, an unfulfilled crime reporter and a failed historian driven by a desire to research the history of the settlement, the storyline of *Devil's Valley* accords central place to the very process of investigating and recovering the past, to the historiographical enterprise as such. Yet, drawn into a web of multiple, mutually exclusive versions of the same events, as revealed by the inhabitants of the community, the only historical truth that his research arrives at is the one of the irretrievability of the past and the fabricated nature of history which must for ever remain determined by its absences, its blank gaps, shrouded in doubt and uncertainty. Towards the end of the novel, Lochner, admits: "With the lies of stories – all the lies, all the stories – we shape ourselves the way the first person was shaped from the dust of the earth. [...] We fabricate yesterdays for ourselves which we can live with, which make the future possible [...], an intimate lightning to illuminate the darkness inside" (Brink 2000a: 299).

Although essentially innovative, Brink's employment of temporality in *Devil's Valley* remains problematic in the way it dangerously veers towards "the denial of co-evalness" traditionally performed by colonial culture's discourse (Fabian 1983: 55). In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, Fabian lamented anthropology's tendency, through its disciplinary practice, to represent its spatial and cultural others as occupying a temporally prior position on the evolutionary ladder. Such a temporal unevenness, juxtaposition of differently valued temporalities, which Fabian termed *allochrony*, denies 'coevality' and explicitly situates foreign cultures as steeped in the past, backward and embroiled in the projects that have long been accomplished by colonial culture. Brink's depiction of the Devil's Valley's community clearly performs such a task, only reversely. Situating the population of this remote village as leading a pastoral life that has remained unchanged over many generations, a community which continues to live in ignorance, spiritual blindness, gerontocracy, ruled with the authority of the Old Testament patriarchs, might, indeed, be read as "a post-apartheid satire on the primitivism and inadequacies of apartheid as a system of separate development," staging a direct reburial of the Afrikaner past (Ezeliora 2008: 93).

The utter disrespect and condemnation with which the author approaches such a primitive community is evident in the extent of hypocrisy prevalent in this society, which, although extremely pious, is riven with social aberrations and grave immoralities such as incest, child abuse, adultery, domestic violence and murders. Clearly, this "community of physically and mentally handicapped people in the mountains, the sad outcome of generations of inbreeding" is on the verge of decline (Brink 2000a: 14). Bearing in mind that racial purity has always been one of the foundational myths of Afrikaner identity, and given the extremely patriarchal nature of Afrikaner culture, it is symptomatic that its final demise is imaginatively staged here via an incestuous community physically and mentally degenerating as a result of inbreeding.

Manifestly, all the texts tend to question realist assumptions about time in their adoption of a non-linear, cyclical, and open-ended mode of narration characteristic of orature, which is consonant with Hook's concept of 'chaffing temporalities.' Indeed, the novels' story-lines move continuously forwards and backwards in time and space, various temporal and spatial settings interweave, alternate accounts of the same historical events intertwine, and repetition is employed as a narrative principle. Thus, all the magical realist novels published by Brink in the period directly following the collapse of apartheid evocatively inscribe South African experience as marked by historical dissonance, "by the continuous juxtaposition of forward- and backward-looking temporalities" outlined by Hook (2013: 5). What is more, the storyline of *Devil's Valley* clearly also indicates certain areas of stasis, a time of historical suspension which resists any impulses for change, truly in the vein of Hook's conceptualisation of (post) apartheid condition as being marked by abrupt truncations, a sense of stagnation. Yet, there remains one aspect of the novels' engagement with temporality that might prove to problematise the embrace of Hook's 'ethics of temporality' whose ultimate purpose is, as Hook stressed, to open up the future to possible re-articulations, liberating it from its bondage to the past and counteracting its compulsion for repetition.

Such a problematic facet of the magical realist texts under consideration is undoubtedly their persistent refusal to envisage the future in other than strictly utopian terms, or their denial to engage with the future whatsoever. When invoking postcolonial literatures and probing their obsession with historical retrieval, Huyssen (1995: 101) observed that they occupy a strictly "utopian position vis-à-vis a chic and cynical postmodern nihilism on the one hand, and a neo-conservative world view on the other that desires what cannot be had: stable histories, a stable canon, a stable reality."

Indeed, the future vision of *Imaginings of Sand* is clearly founded on a highly pluralist, inclusive form of national identity based on the shared love for the

land, an identity that appears to seamlessly incorporate white and black South Africans. Thus, the imminent elections seem to epitomise a new beginning that will finally enable this optimistic vision to materialise. The fact that Ouma's recollections exceed the boundaries of logical explanation, that they are so opaque and fugacious also serves to stress that the future is uniquely a matter of choice. Kristien has clearly made up her mind. Despite personal failures and the family catastrophe in the form of her sister's suicide, she is resolved to stay in South Africa, because, as she explains, "there is work to be done" (Brink 1997: 351). Such a conception, although acknowledging the extent of effort that will have to be invested in the process of re-building a nation, displays a highly optimistic, even utopian impulse. Yet, insightfully, the work still refuses to project any viable vision of Kristien's future beyond this liminal moment of national elections, as if what comes after this political rupture remained beyond representation, defying perceptive powers of our imagination. Thus, Kristien's story is somehow abandoned half-way through her transformation and left suspended between the two poles – the turbulent past and the much anticipated peaceful future.

Similarly, *The First Life of Adamastor*'s prospect of the future seems to be encapsulated in the figure of the child born out of the interracial union. Ending on a note of affirmation, registering a belief that a fruit of miscegenation might transcend racial prejudices and colonial restrictions, such a vision clearly records the embrace of the notion of unproblematic cultural fusion and uncomplicated racial hybridity. Yet, although it may intimate possibilities of seamless socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic integration contained in miscegenation, the novella's denouement simultaneously displays reluctance to envision the future in any materialised form. All we are left with is this suspended perspective of future multiethnic generations to come, yet a diffidence about casting any clear-cut future prognostications remains well-marked. This ultimately results in a narrative suspension of vision, rather than staging opening up of social possibilities.

Devil's Valley, on the other hand, refuses to engage with the future in any substantiated form. Although the old conception of South African social life is vehemently discredited as highly hypocritical and ultimately self-destructive, no future vision is proposed instead, as if again locking, transfixing the author and his readers between the two extremes – the violent past and the hoped for, peaceful future. This rather dystopian dimension of the novel's message is enclosed in the words of the community's patriarch, Lukas Seer, who towards the end of the novel warns Flip that "there's nothing one can do about tomorrow. It comes as it must" (Brink 2000a: 321). Indeed, although the earlier novels seem to ultimately project an optimistic vision of the future, *Devil's Valley* rather displays a host of dystopian indications, as if issuing a note of warning about the future aimed at withholding one's hopes and enthusiasm concerning the direction in

which the country, or at least this part of the country that remains steeped in Afrikaner colonialism, is heading. As *Devil's Valley* is clearly a novel published towards the end of the so-called transitional period of the 1990s in South Africa it seems that dystopian impulses become more pronounced the later the works were published.

Thabo Tsehloane views such a utopian/dystopian orientation as testifying to what he terms "the end of history" dispensation in transitional South Africa. Drawing on Francis Fukuyama's theory outlining a global phenomenon, Tsehloane (2010: 80) asserts that post-apartheid South Africa projects itself as located at "the ultimate point of human social development which cannot be perfected by any form of social change." He claims that after an extended period of anticipating the advent of a new order and the emergence of a new, united society that would supplant the much-maligned apartheid, South Africans experience a "struggle fatigue" or "hope fatigue" that precludes envisaging any further possibilities of socio-political change. [5] Similarly, Clingman (2012: 647) points towards "the sense of an absent future, invoked largely through its looming pressure yet essential unknowability," which emerged in the domain of the political and the cultural South African life in the period of interregnum. Consequently, South African society finds it impossible to conceive of a future different from its current situation or, in fact, to imagine any future at all, despite an ever-growing disillusionment with the present and widely marked longing for an alternative social condition. Thus, according to Tsehloane (2010: 80), the post-apartheid dispensation represents itself imaginatively "as the end of history which cannot be transcended. It perceives itself as a perfect society and state beyond which no kind of different future is possible."

Yet, given the current reality of the acutely felt non-realization of such utopian longings, one can observe the emergence of a large body of post-transitional narratives which are highly ambivalent, equivocal about the new predicament, and highly dystopian in their future projections. As Moonsamy (2015: 69-70) has observed, there is a widespread consensus among cultural theorists that "post-apartheid 'nation-building' has had more narrative appeal than sociopolitical value," as narrating the period of transition in terms of ultimate socio-political perfectibility has left no space for considerations of what might follow in the

[5] A similar point is made by Hein Marais, who observes that as the ANC's policy-makers located the main source of oppression and injustice in the apartheid state, the key to liberation was perceived as lying "in the process of political transformation which centered on the winning of state power, and which would serve as a deux ex machina, enabling [the party] to gradually vanquish social and economic inequalities" (Marais 1998: 85). What would have to follow was hard to imagine, and as such, was rarely raised in political debates. Gillian Hart also notes that for much of its history, the liberation movement "focused on a single, cataclysmic event – the seizure of state power" (Hart 2002: 22), leaving no space for considerations as for what might follow in its wake.

wake of the seizure of state power and, as such, it has failed to address possible trajectories for change. As a result, such a utopian orientation of South African fiction has actually worked against the aims of political reform. Indeed, a number of critics have indicated that such utopian orientedness of post-apartheid literature has ultimately only served to undermine the works' political potency (Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010; Barnard 2012).

Such an observation chimes well with Faris's discussion of magical realism as an inheritor of romance in Fredric Jameson's theorization. Indeed, Jameson's analysis of realism and romance in the 19th century in his seminal work *The Political Unconscious* (1981), and, more specifically, the manner in which Jameson's theory has been adopted by Faris to conceptualise magical realism proves exceptionally helpful here. Positioning magical realism as an inheritor of romance, Faris invokes Jameson's contention that the new romance's "ultimate condition of figuration" is this transitional moment of suspension when two disparate modes of socio-economic development overlap. Since at this initial stage their disagreement is not yet socially manifest, the resolution of the conflict, which will necessarily follow, is still projected as "a nostalgic, or a utopian harmony, and hence is ultimately not politically progressive" (Jameson quoted in Faris 1995: 181). My assumption is that it is, indeed, Brink's works' engagement with the future, namely their utopian orientedness (in the case of *The First Life of Adamastor* and to an extent *Imaginings of Sand*), or their refusal to project any visions of the future whatsoever (in the case of *Devil's Valley*), which is undoubtedly determined by the liminal, transitional nature of the historical context that the novels grew out of, that has effectively undercut their socio-political purchase.

The magical realist texts under consideration may function as counter-narratives creating imaginary openings into the past, yet they ultimately fail to enable alternative options for the future. It may, therefore, be claimed that it is the novels' narration of the future in terms of an ultimate perfectibility that has most directly contributed to the relative short-livedness of the magical realist narrative strategy in South Africa (Grzęda 2013). Indeed, not only Brink, but also other South African authors renowned for their recurrent embrace of magical realism, such as Zakes Mda, Ivan Vladislavić or Mike Nicol, have all gradually abandoned this narrative mode in the post-millennial period. Thus, it appears that magical realism has been discarded by South African writers on the basis of its inability to exert any significant political influence, and most of all, its incapacity to visualise the post-apartheid dispensation beyond the socio-economic stasis of the difficult transitional moment burdened with severe criticism levelled against the TRC hearings. Bearing in mind Tsehloane's (2010: 80) observation that a large body of post-transitional writings have now begun to reflect "a new context in which literary discourse has been disabused of grand illusions about its activist

and transformative role in society," one may indeed be inclined to believe so. Assuredly, the works discussed explicitly refuse to engage in attempts at projecting a viable vision of the future, one that would not only address but also calibrate itself to the intricate realities of South African contemporaneity. Such marked failure to enable alternative options for the South African future to materialize undoubtedly problematises the thorough embrace of Hook's 'ethics of temporality' whose ultimate purpose is, as the theorist stressed himself, to open up the future to possible re-articulations, liberating it from its bondage to the past and counteracting its compulsion for repetition. Such an arrest of future vision that is most pronounced in *Devil's Valley* might be interpreted as testifying to the still much perceptible "sense of an absent future" of the post-apartheid subject, invoked by Clingman (2012: 647).

In *Conscripts of Modernity* (2004), anthropologist and political theorist David Scott identifies the contemporary exhaustion of happy endings as narrative devices employed by postcolonial discourse. He sees such a postcolonial fiction's fixation on themes of disillusionment and the loss of hope as testifying to a certain disjuncture between the narrative patterns adopted by postcolonial discourse to analyse history and the demands of the contemporary postcolonial reality. According to Scott, the progressive, teleological narrative of "anticolonial romance," as a story of overcoming and vindication, of salvation and redemption, which has dominated readings of history for over two centuries has lost its conceptual purchase in the modern-day postcolonial world. In his view, it is mostly the temporal structure of Romantic and post-Romantic readings of history with their teleological impulses that stage oppression as a long struggle culminating in emancipation that may no longer have any analytical value. Scott asserts that:

> [T]he critical languages in which we wagered our moral vision and our political hope are no longer commensurate with the world they were meant to understand, engage and overcome. And consequently, to reinvoke Raymond Williams deeply poignant phrase, we are living with "the slowly settling loss of any acceptable future" […] Such a tragic sensibility is a particularly apt and timely one because, not driven by the confident hubris of teleologies that extract the future seamlessly from the past, and more attuned to the intricacies, ambiguities, and paradoxes of the relation between actions and their consequences, and intentions and the chance contingences that sometimes undo them, it recasts our historical temporalities in significant ways. (Scott 2004: 210)

In a similar vein, in 1998 Elleke Boehmer suggested that South African fictions of the late 80s and the early 90s, thus of the end-time of apartheid tend to stage closing down of possibilities, a sense of delimitation, of cultural and artistic

pessimism, which results in a narrative suspension of vision, resistance to the novelistic imagination and refusal to envision the future altogether. Boehmer pointed out that such abeyance of vision, a sense of artistic impotence and narrowing down of possibilities was perhaps best marked at the moment in the narrative which implies both retrospection and anticipation, and which either implicitly or explicitly points onwards, namely the ending. Thus, she views the literature of the end of apartheid as characterised by suspended 'zero endings,' the so-called 'closed openness' (Boehmer 1998: 47, 46). As Boehmer asserted, at this particular moment in history:

> Narrative uncertainty, its suggestiveness and tease, were constrained within the deathly binaries of a long history of oppression and opposition. Hoped-for but as-yet-inconceivable, the long delayed moment of liberation, too, forced its own particular hiatus at the end of the South African narrative. What lay beyond that moment was a gap, a space of which it was impossible to imagine the shape. Often, therefore, tales are end-stopped by social breakdown, exile, leave-taking […] or simply by resistances to the novelistic imagination, to envisioning the future, imposed by the apartheid world. (Boehmer 1998: 45)

Consequently, a large body of late-apartheid and early transitional novels tend to shut down on tomorrow, they display a well-marked reluctance to speculate about future. The novels endings promise no new beginnings and they decisively refuse to give any positive reading of what the future may bring. If anything, a sense of an always impending disaster is staged (Boehmer 1998: 48). According to the theorist, such an arrest of the late-apartheid and early transitional ending constraints artistic experimentation, it forecloses the possibilities for formal risk-taking, which in themselves would offer a key to surpassing such an imaginative impasse. Since endings themselves offer us "different kinds of jumping off places for speculations about what has happened and what is to come," a potential shift in the syntax of projections for the future would create patterns within which it would become possible to think anew, to imagine as-yet unrepresented future (Boehmer 1998: 47). Thus, it would be the blending of heterogeneous forms, generous structural syncretism that could provide a framework for new beginnings that have been so yearned for.

In his monograph, on the other hand, Scott calls for a need to abandon the dominant heroic narrative of the struggle of the oppressed which tends to be teleological in its temporal structure and redemptive in its ideological scope. Instead, Scott proposes a reconceptualised approach to temporality that would address the contingencies of the present and pay attention to the promises of the future in order to modify our anticipation of what is to come in "less determinative, more recursive directions" (Scott 2004: 135). Thus, tragedy is advocated as

a narrative mode that is better suited to narrate our contemporary histories of the collapse of socialism and the pandemic of failed postcolonial states, as the adoption of tragedy as a narrative frame would enable to conceptualise future not as an uninterrupted movement forward, but rather as a slow, gradual, yet sometimes reversible series of ups and downs.

In a later publication, when drawing on Scott's theory for her analysis of the post-apartheid dispensation, Elleke Boehmer (2012) suggested that although Scott may be right that the highly optimistic visions of the future that develop unchangeably onwards and upwards from the present and tend to represent the future in terms of uplifting scenarios might no longer be calibrated with the everyday realities of the post-apartheid moment, there is nevertheless a marked need for narrative endings that will not only address the contingencies and the paradoxes of the present, but which will simultaneously look for inconclusive, necessarily open-ended, yet still present directions for progression, however moderate and gradual that progression might seem (Boehmer 2012: 43). Therefore, Boehmer calls for the modification of literary anticipations of the futures in a way that would not surrender to optimistic expectations or unrealistic hope, yet which would nevertheless point to a possibility of "incremental yet perceptible 'progression'" (Boehmer 2012: 43). She views such a narrative turn as the only solution to overcome what she terms "the crisis reiteration" that besets post-apartheid narrative, in other word the current South Africa's overwhelming fixation on crisis and trauma (Boehmer 2012: 42).

As my analysis of the works discussed seeks to prove, Boehmer remarks might indeed point a way forward. Perhaps it is from now on that the years of suspended visions shall give way to a time of fresh starts and reconstructive imaginings of future. Indeed, even though over the last two decades the climate has become decidedly more hospitable to artistic experimentations and formal explorations, including creative re-conceptualisations of South African temporality, as the works discussed have convincingly demonstrated, certain imaginative constraints still operate as many post-apartheid South African writings still refuse to give the future of South Africa any meaningful shape. Indeed, as Thseloane, Moonsamy and Boehmer all indicate a large body of not only transitional but also post-transitional, or post-millennial South African literature still displays well-pronounced dystopian impulses. Perhaps South Africa has for too long remained what Boehmer (1998: 52) terms "the parched place," a society of dead-ends, of multiple restrictions, political, spiritual and intellectual blockages where more urgent social needs would necessarily receive priority. Perhaps, due to the prevailing sentiment that the country has failed to shake off apartheid history whose legacy extends into the present, harbingering even more disruptive forms of social unrest to arrive in the near future, the prescriptive atmosphere

of the 1980s which disallows imaginative open-endedness that would help to pave way for diverse ways of imagining future still permeates. After all, the tarnishing of the concept of the Rainbow Nation has been widely recognized. Some commentators have even pointed out that the current South African political predicament displays such a close affinity to the socio-political situation in the years directly following the unbanning of apartheid that the contemporary dispensation shall be designated as "the second transition" (Gevisser 2009). Given the persistence of inequality, both locally and on a global scale, it is patent that a variety of pressing questions of socio-economic nature remain largely unchanged, and structurally unresolved.

Perhaps, more time would need to pass before South African artistic activity can substantially liberate itself from the ghettoes of apartheid imagination. Boehmer (1998: 53) pointed out that three decades had to elapse between the time India, another postcolonial country, gained independence and the efflorescence of the Indian novel in English in the 1970s and the 1980s. Indeed, for a fully regenerated national literature to emerge, what is required is not only the passage of time, but more importantly, significant social transformations would need to occur. Among some of the changes that would denote such a civil turn, the broadening of educational system and the successful re-connection of the nation-state with the culture of rights and a truly participatory democracy are perhaps the most significant ones. Although such a socio-political makeover has definitely not fully materialized as yet, some transformations may indeed be under way. Thus, is there a possibility that the return of endings which will embrace choice, which will allow for new beginnings beyond highly dystopian projections and the dramatization of diverse forms of continuity is soon to come? Indeed, it needs to be stated that a large body of post-apartheid South African writings by authors such as André Brink, but also J.M. Coetzee or Zakes Mda has already actively engaged with re-conceptualisation of South African time in line with Hook's postulates for the embracement of the ethics of entangled temporality. After all, such an abandonment of a narrative that is linear and teleological in its temporal structure and redemptive in its ideological scope is precisely what Scott views as a precondition for a literary paradigm shift, a shift that would enable us to essentially modify our anticipations of what future holds.

While pondering the developments in South African literature beyond 2000 Chapman (2009: 3) classifies the question of how to cope with the notion and practice of difference as the key pursuit of cultural debate since the 1990s, the conundrum at the heart of not only post-apartheid debate, but also crucial to the modern-day discussions concerning post-colonialism or post-modernism, thus not only in South Africa, but also globally. Given the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe, which still wishes to perceive itself as predominantly white and

bourgeois, or the North American debate concerning the US own increasing and heterogeneous minorities, the topicality of the issues concerning approach to difference and sameness has indeed attained global dimensions. And yet, the theorist signals that the disposition of priorities might be about to alter. While, he openly acknowledges that South Africa is still far from being a monolithic society, in fact South African nation being sufficiently stratified not to continue being called a community at all, the socio-cultural priority in the decades to come might finally shift from how to approach difference to how to connect and in the process begin anticipating a common future for South African community (Chapman 2009: 14). He identifies at least two factors that might help to enable such a shift, factors that brought together denote what Chapman (2009: 15) terms a commonly felt "widening of the social/imaginative spectrum both 'nationally' and 'transnationally'" characterising the contemporary cultural predicament. Thus, first of all, he indicates that South African cultural space begins to be populated by new, increasingly voiceful presences such as a 'born-free' generation of different colours whose existence has not been affected by racial polarization to an equal extent as their parents' lives. He equally points to the growing importance of the Indian voice, with its ambiguous location as an outsider community liberated from apartheid-connected legacies. Secondly, what he sees as potentially transformative for the contemporary set-up of cultural preoccupations is the emergence and consolidation, on the African scale, of the multi-coloured middle class which is "educated, entrepreneurial and empowered by technology and is leading calls for change across the continent" (Birrell quoted in Chapman 2009: 15). Thus, it seems to be Chapman's claim, the gradual materialisation of such a shift to human connectedness might indeed finally provide South African literature with tools to conceive of itself not so much as post-apartheid, and thus still entrapped within the constraints of political, spiritual and intellectual restrictions of apartheid era, but decidedly more proudly as post-postapartheid (Chapman 2009: 15).

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