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Subjectivities of Whiteness

Sarah Nuttall

Abstract: This article focuses on constructions of whiteness in South African autobiographies and other narratives of the self. It attempts to understand how the category of whiteness—racial, social, political, and economic—is given meaning in this context. The essay departs from US- and British-based studies of whiteness, as well as from African studies of “settlers.” It aims to draw out the particularities of the South African context and the ways in which whiteness emerges within the tropes of looking, watching, masking, concealment, transfiguration, and secrecy in these texts. It shows that the play between visibility and invisibility emerges as a central paradox in this body of writing. Thus it attempts to shift contemporary South African discussions away from racism per se toward a discussion of how race works in psychical, symbolic, and political terms. It considers amplifications of whitenesses which may have been at odds with official and critical orthodoxies in order to approach registers out of which whiteness may come to be situated differently in this context.

Résumé: Cet article se concentre sur les constructions de la notion de blancheur dans les autobiographies Sud-Africaines et autres récits narratifs du soi. Nous essayons de comprendre comment, dans ce contexte, est attribué un sens à cette catégorie de blancheur—raciale, sociale, politique et économique. Cet article se démarque des études sur la race blanche basées aux États Unis et au Royaume Uni, ainsi que des études africaines des “colons.” Notre but est d’isoler les particularités du contexte sud-africain et les manières dont la blancheur émerge dans ces textes dans les tropes du voir, regarder, masquer, cacher, de la transfiguration et du secret. Notre article démontre que le jeu entre visibilité et invisibilité émerge en tant que paradoxe central dans ce corps d’écriture. Nous tentons ainsi de transposer les dis-

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cussions sud-africaines contemporaines en deçà du racisme en lui-même, dans la direction d'un débat sur la façon dont le concept de race fonctionne en termes psychiques, symboliques et politiques. Nous considérons les extensions de la blancheur qui ont pu se trouver en désaccord avec les orthodoxies officielles et critiques, afin d'aborder des registres hors desquels la blancheur, dans ce contexte, pourrait bien se situer de manière différente.

This essay will focus on contemporary constructions of whiteness in South African autobiographies and other narratives of the self. It is not a study of whiteness per se, but of ways in which people referred to as whites, and who understand themselves as such, account for this in narrative in a specific set of texts. Most of the texts I look at are autobiographical, and most are from the 1980s and 1990s, but my discussion also includes biography, social history, and texts which draw on a number of different forms of self-narrative. I discuss these texts as a means of understanding how this category of whiteness—racial, social, political, and economic—is given meaning: how it is mobilized in a more general economy of signs, some of which are racial and others which are not necessarily so.

The essay departs, as I will make clear below, from US- and British-based studies of whiteness, as well as from African studies of “settlers.” I will aim to show some particularities of the South African context—without falling into a form of South African “exceptionalism”—and also the extent to which whiteness in these texts, far from being normative or consistent, emerges within a range of formations or constellations, in particular those which have to do with masking, concealment, transfiguration, and secrecy on the one hand, and with the politics and practice of visibility (not least through writing itself) on the other. Indeed, it is the play between visibility and invisibility that emerges as a central paradox within this body of texts.

The texts I have chosen to discuss below are not a representative selection of texts by whites from the last several decades, but they nevertheless have been selected consciously and carefully to illuminate aspects of the representation of whiteness I am concerned with here. I discuss texts largely from the 1980s and 1990s since this period marks, in my view, the time when a major shift took place in the ways whiteness is looked at. It is also the period during which the embeddedness of race in the legal and political fabric of South Africa began to crack. Many of the texts I have chosen are written by whites who themselves were involved in the struggle against apartheid, and in some cases the military dimensions of that struggle. Clearly such whites are not representative in demographic terms of the white population, although they are representative of a certain historical tension within the white population and in the history of its relationships with black people. It is largely these whites who have written autobiogra-

phies and memoirs. It is they, moreover, who enable us to ask: In what ways does this involvement in the nationalist and military antiapartheid struggle situate, at least potentially, the production of whiteness differently? Does the notion of the “settler” shift and break down, and if so, when and how? Certainly, in considering the lives and texts of Ruth First, Joe Slovo, Mary Benson, Bram Fischer, and others, we are considering the most publicly visible white people who believed powerfully in, and acted upon, a political credo in which race would be erased.

It is clear nevertheless that I could have looked at texts like the autobiography of de Klerk, *The Last Trek: A New Beginning* (1998), Jacques Pauw’s *Into the Darkness* (1997), or James Gregory’s *Nelson Mandela: My Prisoner, My Friend* (1995). These are all texts for a further study. Moreover, I have decided to look at constructions of whiteness by whites themselves. This is a constraint which also suggests the need for further study. At the same time, the texts I look at here stand in intimate relationship to changing registers of how blacks see whites, and of blackness itself. It is my argument, then, and a guiding assumption of this essay, that those texts by whites involved in the antiapartheid struggle, or who have written from an oppositional stance, will be those most invested in changing registers of whiteness and of particular interest in the postapartheid context, which itself situates the production of whiteness in new registers. What follows is a small part of what must necessarily be a wider study.

It is most often in terms of the “settler” that white identity in postcolonial African contexts has been given content and meaning. A discussion of representations of whiteness in the South African context reveals a set of nuances and transformations in the term which have seldom been looked at in other contexts. Michael Chege, in his article “Africans of European Descent” (1998) offers an overview of white identities in countries such as Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. But while he states that “the meaning of whiteness in Africa is in flux,” he gives little specific content to that statement. For Chege, being white in Africa “covers diverse, sometimes conflicting loyalties,” and those whites who have remained in a colonial mindset are “unreconstructed whites.” Little attention is given to how such “white Africans” construct their identities and whether the diverse contexts he discusses have much in common in relation to these “whitenesses.”

The notion of the settler, which always also implies a native, carries with it in its originary sense a master–slave dialectic based on land—a dialectic, that is, in which the settler occupies a position of power based on the conquest and the ownership of the land through violent means, leading to the dispossession and subjugation of the native owners of that same land. It is a dialectic in which the “master” will relinquish such power only under force; and in which that power is based on the labor of others who have been dispossessed. It carries with it, then, a process of identity-making based on one party acting and another being acted upon, on response

rather than co-invention. The settler, in this configuration, is marked as “coming from elsewhere” rather than being “of the place.” The term *settler* shifts as the move is made from the politics of conquest and subjugation to the politics of negotiation and belonging. The question of the settler and the person who ceases to be a settler is also a question about what it means to be a “white settler” specifically (as opposed to a black settler, say) and attendant on that, of what might differentiate a white person from a settler in this context. Moreover, the politics of belonging can be differentiated in terms of the notion of belonging separately, as under apartheid, or belonging together (sharing), as in the postapartheid context. Among the issues that South Africa’s postapartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission so powerfully marked was the move from the register of conquest to the register of negotiation (including the question of the claims on belonging after the logic of conquest has been delegitimized). As such, it marked the move, potentially at least, from settler to citizen. It confronted whites with the fact that in the new context, belonging could not be assumed: Rather, a process of mutual negation had to be replaced by a process of mutual recognition which could then lead to belonging. Deprived of the archaic identity of the settler, it also conceivably deprived them of citizenship in the present. It presented them with the specter of privilege without belonging, and hence with the task of inventing or negotiating new forms of whiteness.

Recently studies in Britain and America have attempted to bring whiteness into focus as a sociohistorical construction.¹ In a critique of work produced so far on whiteness, Alistair Bonnett (1996) argues that “the call to abandon or challenge whiteness is directed at this group as if it were a discrete agent, a real social group (as opposed to a discursive construction) with a collective will” (151). White culture, Bonnett contends, is seen as an entity that reacts, interacts, and has the power of volition; whiteness is conceived of as a set of people rather than as a discourse. In South Africa, however, where whiteness and blackness have been legislated for, their status as discourse has had to defer to a structural politics of race. I would also take issue with Bonnett’s argument insofar as he posits whiteness as an opposition between essentialism and constructivism. Rather, the more accurate question to ask is this: How do false or imaginary assumptions about race come to have such powerful social and political effects when, in effect, race does not exist? Here we might employ instead the notion of race—as Deborah Posel (2000) does in this volume—as “common sense” made juridical: that is, as translated into a set of apparatuses and technologies, the aim of which is the regulation of the everyday perceptions, imaginations, and behaviors of people on a large scale—as a form of “governmentality,” to use Foucault’s formulation.

In most South African studies to date, the question of racial identity is conflated with the question of racism, which is rightfully cast in a moral language of condemnation. The emphasis, in other words, has been more on racism than on race, and this has tended to foreclose a complex investiga-

tion into how race works. Moreover, there has been a tendency not to attend to those amplifications of whiteness that may have been at odds with official and critical orthodoxies. While race has been a vector of segregation, especially in terms of macro spatial arrangements and judicial dispositions, it is also clear that in everyday life there have been spaces—some public, others private, domestic—in which if not intimacy, at least a close proximity of “oppressor” and “oppressed” developed. This was true not only of the house but also of the prison, for instance (see Nuttall & Michael 2000). The ambiguities of “being together” and the rituals of interaction, the shared epistemologies that developed, were not devoid of violence or cruelty, but they are yet to be opened to critical scrutiny in South Africa.

Looking

It is in the context of all of the above, I turn to the first of the texts to be discussed. Ruth First, one of South Africa’s best known white antiapartheid activists and intellectuals, first published her prison memoir, *117 Days: An Account of Confinement and Interrogation under the South African Ninety-Day Detention Law*, in 1965. It precedes the other texts I discuss here by twenty or thirty years, but I begin with it because of the powerful insights it reveals about First’s construction of her political and racial identity. The book is an account of her solitary confinement as a political activist at the time of South Africa’s Treason Trial. One of the first things we notice in reading the text is the many qualifying clauses that First uses when referring to herself, and the ways in which she shows us herself watching herself as well as watching others watching her.

I, a prisoner held under top security conditions, was forbidden books, visitors, contact with any other prisoner; but like any other white South African madam I sat in bed each morning, and Africans did the cleaning for the “missus.” (35)

Every morning as the cha-cha cleaners were on their way out, the ward-dress on duty would thrust a large aluminum bucket at one and order him to bring hot water for the “missus.” That was me. (37)

[The] . . . complacency [of men], I told myself, was a clear complicity. (38)

I minced in my high heels and thrust my bosom out firmly in my charcoal suit, free to impress them, I thought, while I was still outside my cell. (59)

As we look at some of the phrases above—“I, a prisoner,” “That was me,” “I told myself”—we can begin to decipher Ruth First’s sense of her whiteness, her politics, and her views of herself as a “political white” (142),

a phrase she uses toward the end of her book. In the first passage we see that even as a prisoner, she cannot escape being a white “missus” with black prison-worker servants: She cannot escape a notion of whiteness, that is, as being served. In the second, we see her watching herself being a “missus” (“That was me”), a watching which functions both as an acknowledgment and as a dissociation. In the third, she watches men at a city restaurant across the road from the prison cell in which she is incarcerated and tells herself of their complicity. Here she captures her own yearning for freedom and good living, but also the constructedness of her political identity in the face of a whiteness that signifies the privileges of good living. She reasserts and exposes to the reader (by inserting the phrase “I told myself”) the deliberateness of the process of distancing herself from a culture of whiteness in apartheid South Africa. Elsewhere, First comments on living a “more and more schizophrenic existence”:

There was the good living that white privilege brought, but simultaneously complete absorption in revolutionary politics and defiance of all the values of our own racial group. As the struggle grew sharper, the privileges of membership in the white group were overwhelmed by the penalties of political participation.” (114)

Privilege is undercut by punishment, power by penalty. In the final statement above, First both gently disparages herself (“free to impress them, I thought”) for her feminine strutting and reveals her complex dissociation of “taste” and “privilege” through the construction of her political identity. Well known for her sense of style and “expensive tastes,” First nevertheless managed to separate these aspects of her persona from the structural dimensions of white privilege.

There are other ways in which First’s text reveals her attitudes to whiteness. For instance, it is a consistent feature of her book to place the word *white* in parentheses to identify any person or group whose status depends on a structural white privilege which would have been denied to black people. Thus she writes about seeing from her cell “the recreation grounds of the (white) Prisons department staff and their families” (61); or of her work for the Johannesburg city council researching the number of supervisors for “(white) children in (white) parks” (115). Another textual and political device is to place parallel to her own experiences what would have been happening to black people in the same situation. First’s contribution, as her imprisonment itself testifies, was far more than pointing out the iniquities of the system that black people faced; her work as a leading activist and intellectual finally resulted in her death by assassination in 1982. What her text often reveals, however, is the watching that her version of whiteness brings: the watching of herself and the watching of others, black and white, watching her. It also brings about a splitting, the schizophrenia of a

political whiteness which, as we have seen, scrambles privilege and punishment, power and penalty.

Let me elaborate on the notion of “watching” which seems to be so suggestive here. It implies an identity constructed around distance—or at least a dialectics of distance and proximity. It contains within it an active element of work—the work of “watching you watching me.” And this work of watching takes place in a context that is necessarily one of concealment, in several senses. First, her whiteness, particularly at the historical juncture in which she writes, makes her visible. Her whiteness, in other words, accords her the social, political, and personal power of being seen in a context in which those who are marginalized labor under a certain pall of invisibility (here we may recall the title of Ralph Ellison’s novel of black America, *Invisible Man*). By “visibility” I also mean that by virtue of her whiteness she is seen by black people as a symbol of that cruelty and oppression. Her aim is to make herself—the self of her whiteness—less visible, to separate herself from a culture of repressive whiteness. Implicit in watching is also the fear of being caught watching. What penalty would one pay for being caught watching in a context of concealment? To be caught watching is to be caught enacting what one is trying to conceal—in this case, one’s whiteness as a master signifier. It is within this trope of watching, then, that we begin to see the workings of color and the attributes it carries with it, at least in this text. It shows that in the very acts of watching, looking, and seeing, whatever the subject attempts to conceal is in fact reproduced; as First attempts to erase her whiteness, she marks herself as white even more strongly.

It is interesting to compare what emerges from First’s text with Judith Butler’s (1993) notion of identities and constructions of the body as “performative.” She defines performativity “not as the act by which the subject brings into being what she/he names but, rather, as the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (2). While Butler relies heavily on a Foucauldian theory of the relationship between discourse and power, First, through her use of tropes of seeing and perception, is positioned much closer to the work of Fanon, who himself uses the tropes of seeing and watching to disclose the workings of racialized identity. And one might also ask how, and on what terms, these historicized racial subjectivities relate to Lacan’s more universalized elucidation of the split subject, in the phrase: “I am unable to see myself from the place where the other is looking at me.”²

Thirty-seven years later, in 1997, Ruth First’s daughter, Gillian Slovo, published her memoir, *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*. The text in part tells the story of Gillian’s parents (her father was Joe Slovo, the famous South African Communist antiapartheid activist and head of the African National Congress’s armed wing, Umkonto we Siswe), and in part the story of Gillian herself as the daughter of famous and politically committed par-

ents. Gillian Slovo points out that her parents were two of the few white people buried in largely black cemeteries (Ruth in Maputo and Joe in Soweto). Their burials thus represented a final act of transgression at a symbolically charged site, an erasure of race in terms of a recognition by the “Other.” The symbolic force of death and burial here can be compared to Bram Fischer’s death in 1975: The state was so nervous about what Fischer symbolized as an Afrikaner Communist and antiapartheid activist that it confiscated his ashes and buried them secretly. Gillian Slovo reminds us, too, that her father was seen by black South Africans as a black man—an identity which, within the racial dynamics of apartheid, signified a rupture in the system and an important act of dissociation. In a context in which one would normally “belong” on the basis of one’s skin color, in which one’s racial origins signified everything, espousal of a political cause changed the very ontology in which he was embedded.³

We might note with equal interest that Ruth First herself was never accorded the honor of a black identity, a difference worth reflecting on particularly in the light of Joe Slovo’s recently published *Unfinished Autobiography* (1995). The book is a collection of largely anecdotal and often humorous fragments of Slovo’s life which he had started writing before his untimely death from cancer in 1995 (less than a year after he had taken up office as the Minister of Housing in the new ANC government). It reveals Slovo’s background as a working-class Lithuanian Jewish refugee who came to Johannesburg at the age of ten, worked as a clerk, and lived with his father, a fruit seller, in various boarding houses after his mother’s early death. Slovo joined the Communist Party at the age of nineteen as a white worker living in poor circumstances in one of the low-income areas of the city (“the suburb of Doornfontein, which was one of the lowest rungs of the Jewish residential ladder” [14]). It was only after his war service that he was given free entry to Wits University in Johannesburg where he studied law—and met Ruth First, an upper-middle-class daughter of a long-standing Communist family. While First was always regarded as the more engaged and engaging intellectual, and at times a renegade in the Party, Slovo was known for his military strategizing. Thus we see in the figures of Ruth First and Joe Slovo diverse maneuvers in relation to their political whiteness, based in part on different class backgrounds, and with differing results. Joe Slovo, the “black man,” Jew, and white man who had never owned property of his own in South Africa until he was married to Ruth First, achieves a transfiguration of white identity that was different from First’s (and seldom as self-consciously articulated, at least in writing). One of the ways in which this difference manifests itself, as we shall see below, is in relation to specific tropic economies of the white look.

Gillian Slovo’s text, when dealing with the fashioning of her own white identity in relation to that of her parents, adds a further layer to the configurations of whiteness in her family. Her childhood, as she writes of it, is marked by a sense of exclusion. One of her fears is that she will be “found

out,” that she will reveal the secret of who she is to other whites: the secret, that is, that she is not “white like them,” or that she is, in a sense, “passing for white,” an imposter.⁴ In Gillian Slovo’s use of the word *white*, it is not skin color that is in question but her membership in a “culture of whiteness.” The only other white child she identifies with is the daughter of Hilda Bernstein, also an antiapartheid activist, who looks frightened when a white man asks her what her (notorious) name is. In the world Gillian inhabits, the color of her skin, which should be a passport to belonging, is not. But neither does she belong to her parents’ world of political community; as a child her deepest memory is of exclusion. Years later, when she returns to South Africa for a short stay, now technically “a member of the new ruling elite,” she feels at one point as though she is “a Jewish interloper from the ghetto” (176). Slovo’s experience of her whiteness is of a fake identity—one imposed by others without their knowing who she is. Once an imposter in political terms, she now has, in the postapartheid moment, a heightened awareness of another layer of her identity—her Jewishness. Both politics and ethnicity thus place her at an angle to conventions of whiteness; her whiteness in each of these contexts has to do with distancing and masking, and the keeping of secrets.⁵

In Ruth First’s case, then, white identity is defined in terms of a watching and a splitting; in Gillian’s, a masking, or even stronger, of guarding secrets. Both sets of identities work within the register of a distancing of the self from the self. These tropes of watching and looking, of visibility and invisibility, are virtually nonexistent in Joe Slovo’s text. This may in part have to do with his particular class background and the political affiliations he was able to build on that basis. Yet Slovo was also white, and in his early days of political coming-to-being, as he says in his text, he worked to recruit members to a trade union registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act whose provisions excluded all Africans from the definition of “employee.”

One set of explanations that such divergences suggest is a gendered reading of the construction of self-identity. Here we may reintroduce the psychoanalytic notion of “splitting,” particularly the ways in which post-Freudian theories of subjectivity have understood the splitting of female identity. John Berger, in *Ways of Seeing*, writes:

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. . . . Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. . . . [The woman] turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.” (47)

Such views of “the gaze” have been developed by Luce Irigaray and other feminists in their work on language in particular. But looking and watching are also part of a racial scopophilia: sets of racially coded solicited and unsolicited looks or, following Fanon in particular, exchanges of looks

which structure the psychic relation of colonial desire.⁶ And such racial looking, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is also a site of splitting. In this sense the texts we have been looking at present us with a new set of questions. How crucially is whiteness gendered in these narratives of the self? How much are the tropes of looking and watching in First's and Gillian Slovo's texts attached to their gendered identities, and how much are they attached to a political and psychical vocabulary of racial looking? Are race and sexuality inextricable from one another, especially as formulated in writing reflecting upon the self? If Joe Slovo was accepted as a "black man," was this at least in part a consequence of the masculine nature of the political-cultural discourse in which he and Ruth First were involved? Could a white woman ever have been accepted as a black person in the context of the struggle, given the nature of gendered splitting?

I will return to these questions later on in the essay. Here, though, I want to reflect further on Gillian Slovo's sense of her identity by looking again at the subtitle of her text: "My Family, My Country." In the first case, "my country" is clearly something that Gillian, who has lived in London since 1964, has "put out of her head": "my country" here is both a claim and a renunciation. Not only was she banned until 1994 from entering South Africa, but she also distanced herself from her parents' "obsession" with South Africa during her adolescence in London. It is only after her mother's death by assassination that she realizes that she has to come to terms with "South Africa." Thus, in another constellation of whiteness that is forming here, we see that a relationship to country, to nation, can also involve the capacity to exit the framework it sets up—exit that framework in order to undertake or achieve the setting up of the self, of who one is. For Gillian, the "my country" of her subtitle is not the same claim, the same place, as it was for her parents. "My country," here, is more of an imaginary place; Gillian is less a settler, an exile, than a fugitive from South Africa. In this she speaks powerfully of that other narrative of whiteness, the narrative of leaving. Her story, as the daughter of two famous antiapartheid activists, also reveals that the history of whiteness as a narrative of belonging in South Africa is not linear. Belonging, and leaving, may not follow in sequence: Here it is the parents who come to inhabit the frame of belonging and the daughter who is less securely or unambiguously tied to place, politics, and country. Notions of leaving and staying, which are crucially tied to the production of whiteness in this context, are ones which recur in texts I look at in the rest of this article.

We have seen, then, the different versions of whiteness that emerge from the histories of a single family. I have used the striking examples of texts by First, and Gillian and Joe Slovo, to open up some of the questions that seem the most suggestive for an analysis of subjectivities of whiteness. The lines of inquiry and the constellations of racialized identity that the First and Slovo texts introduce bear strong relation to configurations found in other South African self-narratives. Thus they suggest a wider set of tropic specificities

which have regulated the production of certain whitenesses in this context.

In 1989, Mary Benson, an activist, writer, and journalist, published *A Far Cry: The Making of a South African*. Benson's text, as Dorothy Driver (1991) has shown effectively, is constructed around a series of "splits" in her identity, one of the most striking of which is the younger, shameful, white self that is later rejected as a false self. The "split" or conversion turns on a move to political enlightenment and activism, and it is a move from a white to a nonracial or "true" South African identity. While the text tries to keep intact these "splits" between a "younger" and a more "mature" self, or between a "false" self and a "true" self, ongoing confusions are revealed at the level of identity.

Benson shows herself leading a "strange double-life" between the worlds of her political work and writing and the "old familiar" South Africa of white friends who condone injustice by their inactivity. She secretly aids the high profile antiapartheid activist Bram Fischer—and at the same time listens to her friends' "idle speculation" about Fischer's disappearance underground. Her whiteness, then, is marked by a duplicity which is in part a complicity—now with her old friends, now with "politically committed" South Africans. There is to her white identity a doubleness, a multiplication of the self, a sustaining of two different characters in one life, a play of visibility and invisibility. This recalls the "masking" of identity we saw in Gillian Slovo, and even the watching of self in a context of concealment that I discussed in relation to Ruth First.

Yet the site of Benson's white identity is more ambiguous and less vigilant than in the texts above; hence the doubleness here invites the stronger terms of dissociation, of complicity and duplicity. Stephen Clingman's 1998 biography of Bram Fischer makes striking use of configurations of visibility and invisibility in the context of "disguise." Fischer, wanted by the state for the life imprisonment to which he would later be condemned, goes underground and adopts a disguise. He becomes "the negative in the camera, the translation whose inner reality negotiates with outer difference, the being whose eyes are blurred" (365). Moreover, Clingman writes:

Bram cast himself among the unseen and invisible world, in the way that blacks were normally unseen and invisible to whites. In that sense his action was what he called it, a protest, a refusal to participate in iniquity; but it was also a positive search, in a displaced identity for an alternative identification, a radical statement of the possibility and necessity of a new and undivided world. So long as he remained at large, these meanings remained at large within him. (376)

Clingman, then, chooses to describe the paradox and possibilities of white identity in this context in terms of the tropes and political realities of visibility and invisibility. It is a highly visible act when a white Afrikaner of Fischer's stature decides to make himself invisible; it is also highly significant that Fischer chooses, despite multiple avenues of possible escape that were

open to him, to live as a fugitive in a world of invisibility, with the certain outcome of jail and death for his political beliefs.

Intimacies

One of the most important texts to emerge from the postapartheid context in South Africa has been Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*. Published in 1997, the text is many genres in one. A biography of others, through the recording of testimony given at South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is also the autobiography and sometimes fictionalized autobiography of Krog herself. Mostly written in the style of personal journalism, it also, at certain moments, moves into poetry, Krog's "first medium." The book is dedicated to "every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips." Krog knows that her language "carries violence as a voice" (216). It is also to Afrikaans that she turns as a kind of litany when she faces the most trauma: "Mispel, maroela, tarentaal" (48), she chants after the testimony of a man whose family has been burnt to death. Krog introduces an ethnic specificity into her engagement with her whiteness, using it in the text as a marker of a set of intimacies which take on different valences. The first of these is language, her intimacy with a language which is indigenous, which captures the cadences of the local, and which has shaped the syllables of the country's darkest acts. It is in the context of her Afrikaner identity that Krog's text introduces a difference from, and a specificity in relation to, the texts I have discussed above (although Fischer was an Afrikaner too).

The second intimacy that Krog's Afrikaner identity holds for her is an intimacy with the perpetrators, the "men of my race" who appear before the Truth Commission. Rather than using a language of political conversion to mark her separation from these men, Krog both resists and insists upon this intimacy. The text plays, in a self-conscious way, with the paradox of the visibility of her opposition and the apparent invisibility of her intimacy, her closeness to them. "They are as familiar as my brothers, cousins and school friends. Between us all distance is erased," she writes. She asks, too: "Was there perhaps never a distance except the one I have built up with great effort within myself over the years? ... What do I have in common with the men I hate most?" (96, 92).

Looking deeply into herself Krog finds that she "abhors and cares" for these men (97). She is not the only one watching, however: An "English-speaking" colleague says to her, "Your whole body language changes when you are with these men. I couldn't hear what you were talking about, but there was a definite intimacy..." (92). Krog, then, writes a text that takes us close to a psychological and political crisis of whiteness: partly because of the intensity and sense of complicity that her Afrikaner identity brings, partly because of the changed political moment she writes within and the kinds of narratives it makes possible and even insists on, and partly because

other people also can see what she sees (Krog, too, is engaged both in acts of looking at herself and at other people looking at her). While Krog sees clearly the “evil” of the men of her race, she also expresses a certain familiarity on the basis of what Geschiere (1997) has called in another context “primary patriotisms”—proximity, neighborhood, family, ethnicity, language. Yet it is her intimacies (with Afrikaners, with apartheid) which are also her terms of belonging—as long as repentance has taken place. Thus while the crisis of whiteness she examines is enabled by the new context, it is also her condition of belonging. Speaking for Afrikaners in the absence, as she sees it, of leaders who will do so, she writes: “We are so utterly sorry. We are deeply ashamed and gripped with remorse. But hear us, we are from here. We will live it right—here—with you, for you” (99).⁷

Strikingly, though, despite the crisis of whiteness one finds in Krog’s text, it is sometimes as if whiteness for Krog hardly exists. It is her Afrikaner ethnicity that shapes her most profound reactions. This is an important point in a context in which the process of living certain identities turns not only on self-identification but also on the continual identification of the self by others. Krog knows this. Near the beginning of the book, drawing on tropes of picturing and perception which lie close to those of looking and watching, she writes: “And the idea of truth. Even if it’s not spelt with a capital... Nadine Gordimer once asked a black writer: ‘Why do you always picture a white woman lounging next to a swimming pool? We are not all like that!’ He replied ‘Because we perceive you like that!’ Gordimer admits that she has to take cognisance of that truth” (15). This anecdote obviously has strong political resonances for Krog. For black people whiteness is, on the one hand, the key signifier of racial power and difference. On the other hand, there has been in South Africa since the 1980s a public discourse by blacks to the effect that they would rather deal politically with Afrikaners than with the brand of liberalism said to characterize English-speaking South Africans. Krog herself expresses strong animosity toward what she perceives to be some of the dominant traits of white English-speaking South Africa. For her, whiteness as a general category carries a European inflection which she rejects. She frequently distances herself in the text from Europeans and Americans, thus reinstating a sense of ethnic difference and history into the idea of whiteness.

It is interesting, then, that one of the rare moments in which she refers to herself on the basis of her whiteness is one that is most “dangerous” for her sense of future belonging. Krog has the following thoughts while watching the testimony of Winnie Mandela before the Truth Commission:

This hearing is about my country, I am thinking. And whether there is space for all of us. And the conditions for this space. I also have a distinct feeling that for now this hearing has nothing to do with me, with whites. Blacks are deciding amongst themselves what they regard as right and wrong. They are making that decision here, today. Either a black person may kill because of apartheid—or none of us may kill, no matter the rea-

son. This hearing has little to do with the past. It has everything to do with the future. (258)

Krog names South Africa as “my country” but also sees herself at this moment as outside of the ambit of a natural belonging. In watching black people “deciding amongst themselves,” she also knows that her own belonging will have to be given by others. Until it is given, she faces the possibility of privilege without belonging. The energies of Krog’s book, however, and the directions it takes insofar as the working through of her own identity is concerned, are frequently generated and animated by the realm of the psychoanalytic and the working through of traumas which take on highly personal dimensions. The Truth Commission and all that it represents about the past shakes her to the foundations of her identity and leads her to try to answer the question “Who am I?” in a highly traumatic way. Watching and listening to herself and watching and listening to others who are watching her marks itself on her body. The psychic intimacy of her involvement in the process of the Truth Commission and all that it represents manifests itself in the form of a breakdown, skin rashes, and her hair falling out, but it is also played out in the violence she sometimes “perpetrates” on those close to her.⁸

Krog responds in a highly personal way to a narrative that is also always collective. Yet her text also scrambles these registers in ways which enable us, too, to reread earlier texts of political commitment or conversion in the the South African oeuvre. The constructing of one’s identity is always a public, political, but also a private, act. If this process of identity-making has resulted in a commitment to a cause or to a new nation, it has also been about breaking from the collective conformity of whiteness itself. Why is this? To be white in the context with which these texts are concerned is to carry a past and a language that is on trial. To break with this is to depend on the possibility of not being found guilty. As such, it depends upon the possibility of becoming an individual, a separate self. Thus one of the mediating moments in the complex set of identity transformations in white autobiographies is necessarily the birth of the individual self. At the same time, what is desired is the birth of a new collective in which one could belong—while still being oneself. One of the registers, then, in which to unscramble meanings of whiteness in these texts and the ones that follow is in relation to questions of the making of individual identities, and the articulation of collective modes of understanding and belonging: the question of selfhood in this context as it emerges in relation to registers of singularity and belonging.

At the end of the book, Krog takes stock of her “privilege” in the following terms: “Whereas this privilege used to upset me in the past, now I can hold it against a truth that we are all aware of. No longer an unaware privilege, but one that we know the price and mortality of” (272). Privilege is something that has to be paid for, and it is also something, in its form as

structural white privilege, that will end. It is in fact in the working toward, the final embracing of, a collective identity—for Krog this also represents an engagement with patriotism itself—that Krog finds possibilities for self-reconstruction. In one of the last scenes in the book, Krog is asked by her brother if she would die for her country. She replies she would not, since “no one, no country, no politician, has the right to ask anyone to die for them. They can make claims on my life, I’ll make sacrifices in that, but my death is my own” (274). By the end of the book, however, standing on a wall on Robben Island as she is interviewed by a local radio station, Krog looks back at the continent of Africa:

It is mine. I belong to that continent. My gaze, my eyes are one with the thousands of others that have looked back over the centuries toward Africa. Ours. Mine. Yes, I would die for this. It slips out like a smooth, holy sound. And I realise that it is the Commission alone that has brought me to these moments of fierce belonging. (277)

Belonging carries with it a pledge of one’s life, of death, then, if necessary. Krog has traveled a path that has led her to a thought akin to Mandela’s famous statement from the dock, “It is an ideal (for a democratic and free society) which I hope to live for and achieve. But if needs be it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die” (1987). At the same time her path remains marked by her history of or in whiteness. Despite the above assertion, the claim performs itself into being. And the text also marks the instability of her position, because it is a claim that also always has to be a question or even a plea, as essential vulnerability. Writing in her first medium, Krog ends her book with a poem:

. . . A new skin

I am changed forever. I want to say:
forgive me
forgive me
forgive me

You whom I have wronged, please
take me

with you. (229)

Narcissism

In 1997, J. M. Coetzee, South Africa’s best-known novelist, unexpectedly produced a memoir. The book is called *Boyhood*, and it is written in the

voice of a third-person narrator named John. It seems to me crucial to discuss Coetzee's text alongside those above, since one cannot understand whiteness in South Africa without also understanding the powerful forms of the private and the singular that such an identity has sometimes taken on. Moreover, it is through the articulation of the private, and of "privacy," that forms of visibility and invisibility play themselves out in his text. Coetzee, unlike the authors whose texts I have discussed above, has never been involved in political struggle per se, although he has always made his oppositional stance clear. What, then, does a self-conscious white writer like Coetzee do with the questions of looking and watching, whiteness and visibility, in the context of writing the self?

In Coetzee's memoir we move from the political subjectivities of the texts I have discussed above to what I would call the politics of narcissism. To the notion of narcissism, however, I would immediately add Foucault's idea in his late work of "caring for the self." Foucault seeks to replace the more traditional epistemology of "knowing the self" with that of "caring for the self." He identifies the latter as relating to three processes: The first has to do with the question of pleasure—its anxieties and its uses; the second with an insistence on attention to the self; and the third with an individualism in which a retreat is made into private space. In Foucault's argument, caring for the self is also a public act, one of the main principles of social and political life and conduct (Martin et al. 1988).

The child narrator in Coetzee's text is a child "set apart" (15), a term Coetzee returns to in its full ambiguity many times in the text. He is set apart, or sets himself apart, in the first instance, from a culture of conformity. Born into a family of mixed English and Afrikaans descent, he is alienated from Afrikanerdom, from Afrikaner nationalism, which relies on just such notions of collective conformity. It is an alienation that is marked at the level of the body and almost always carries the threat of violation—what he terms "a lack of privacy." As Shaun Irlam (2000) has remarked, this is part of a poetics of setting apart at a broader level: The child is segregated from a culture of segregation. He occupies an ambiguous space of privacy and shame. Fearful of "being like everyone else," his setting himself apart, his privacy, and his "separate development" protect him, save him, and endow him with a sense of his own specialness: a specialness that prefigures his vocation as writer but also constitutes a shuddering away from community in any version.

Here, then, is the register of individualism and retreat. Space is given to the private as a way of shielding the self from the polity, from the collective. A withdrawal from the polis, from civic and political life, a valorization of private life and a search for personal forms of enjoyment all find expression here. Coetzee's narrative, unlike Krog's, is marked by a refusal of belonging itself. The only place to which he "belongs" is Voelfontein, the Karoo farm of his grandfather ("the secret and sacred word that binds him to the farm is *belong*" [95]), and it is passing out of the family. Yet the farm

exists from “eternity to eternity” (96), so far beyond him and his desire to belong to it that it belies the only claim of belonging he is able to make. “I belong to the farm” (96), he says, knowing that he should not and cannot say “the farm belongs to me.”⁹

The narrator is torn between enjoyment, or pleasure, and austerity. To both, the body is central. His uncertainty about his body, his responses to his emergent child’s sexuality, is also about his concupiscence in relation to the body of the racial other. Prominent in the story are a number of his interactions with young coloured boys (that these are isolated incidents in a culture of segregation is made clear when Coetzee writes, “Josiah was the fourth native he [John] had known in his life”). In one of these, he sees a young coloured boy “wearing pants so short that they sit tightly across his neat buttocks and leave his slim clay-brown thighs almost naked.” He is “disturbed by the feelings that the legs of these boys . . . create in him. What is there that can be done with legs beyond devouring them with one’s eyes?” (56). In another interaction with a coloured child, John has wrestling matches with Eddie, who has come to work for his parents: “The smell of Eddie’s body stays with him from these bouts, and the feel of his head, the high bullet-shaped skull and the close, coarse hair” (75); “There is a moment when the two of them wrestle when his lips and nose are pressed against Eddie’s hair. He breathes in the smell, the taste: the smell, the taste, of smoke” (76). When Eddie is arrested by the police after he has tried to run away, he “spoils” John’s Saturday morning. We are shown the white child’s forms of looking at the body of the racial other which “devour” their subject; here is desire in looking, the consuming of the image and the body of the other. The racial eye is devouring as the child narrator asks his child’s question: “What is desire for?”

The body of the racial other pleases him and repulses him (as a body “not taken care” of as it should be). It is the site of a “feast,” or it is that which “spoils.” His uncertainty about his own body is also his uncertainty about pleasure. This anxiety is avoided by a regime of austerity. The tension between austerity and pleasure is part of a wider insistence on the attention one has to pay to the self, and the amplitude of the vigilance that is required in doing so. In all of the above we see the intensity of the relationship to the self—of the forms in which, in Foucault’s terms, the self is called upon to take itself as an object of knowledge, a domain of action, to transform, correct, purify, and save itself. In Antjie Krog’s book, and for the most part in the other texts I have looked at above, the activity of self-disclosure takes place in terms of another, in relation to others, even the “Other.” This could be called an epistemological technology of the self. By disclosing the self in dialogue, the self is constituted. Coetzee’s text emphasizes the discernment or deciphering of what the self already is. This could be referred to as an ontological technology of the self. Each reveals different forms of providing public definitions of who the self is; each reveals the genealogical modes of discourse within which whiteness in this context has operated.

If Krog's book operates within a paradigm of truth, with its attendant ambiguities (the truth about the past, about history, about the self) Coetzee's story deals in secrets ("Whatever he wants, whatever he likes, has sooner or later to be turned into a secret"). The narrator craves concealment, invisibility, in order, not least, to cover the spoor of his singularity. Thus he writes the autobiography of a liar; as Irlam (2000) says, "his difference from other boys . . . is bound up with his lying too." Coetzee, then, in the context of revealing the truth about apartheid, leads us to a different ontological question: What is the truth of a liar? Secrets, lying, and the powers and distresses of privacy, of setting the self apart, become the major tropes of identity, which is also a white identity, shot through with a complex brand of privilege and despair. Configurations of visibility and invisibility in this text take on the shapes of truth and lying, or hiding.

I said above that we cannot understand whiteness in South Africa without understanding the forms of the private and the singular that such identities also take on. In Coetzee's book, the exaltation of the self's singularity is in part a shielding of the self from a collective culture of conformity, the culture of whiteness. It is also a shielding of the self from the "other" of the white, a shielding from a wider community which includes black people. We may thus see, beyond Coetzee's text itself—which, it is important to remember, is written within the register of childhood—that such modes of privacy and singularity may account for why so many whites say they had nothing to do with apartheid, and why some can shield themselves so effectively from postapartheid South African society.

Visibility

In the final part of this article I want to refer to a text that reveals lucidly two further configurations without which a discussion of whiteness would be incomplete. I do so briefly, omitting a full discussion of the text, in order to highlight the specific set of points in which I am interested. The text is Charles van Onselen's *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894–1985*. Published in 1995, it is a historical biography, the story of Kas Maine, a black man "who, if one went by the official record alone, never was" (3). Maine spends much of his life as a sharecropper, a form of labor tenancy practiced in rural twentieth-century South Africa in which black men exchanged their labor and skills for the chance to farm on white men's property, to their supposed mutual benefit. The text is important because it returns us, in the first instance, to the question of whiteness and property.

There is a significant moment in *The Seed Is Mine* when Kas Maine says the following to one of the white landowners for whom he worked: "You know, one day God will allow us to purchase property—just like you—and I will hire you and overwork you just as you are doing to me" (116). What

Maine is recognizing here is not only that racial identity operates according to a principle by which whiteness is synonymous with freedom and blackness with slavery, but also that property and the capacity to put others to work are central in relations between white and black on the highveld. What van Onselen reveals, in telling the intricate story of Maine's life over a large part of the twentieth century, is a context in which whiteness is invested in, like property, and is also a means of accumulating property.¹⁰ He reminds us again—and now specifically, with the publication of his book in 1995, in postapartheid South Africa—that to be white in that country has almost always been to own property. Whiteness, then, is not only a matter of how one perceives oneself, but also of how one is perceived by others. For many blacks (and whites as well), whiteness is still bound up with ownership.

It is also interesting to note the terms on which van Onselen inserts himself into the narrative. He makes a brief appearance in the preface and again at the end of the book, at Kas Maine's funeral: "A tall white man, one of Kas's friends, slipped into the back of the gathering and he, too, spoke." After the body has been buried, "the tall white man stayed behind and waited until the cemetery emptied . . . He looked down (into the grave), made a silent promise and then turned to leave" (532). The promise is clearly that van Onselen will tell Kas's story and will publish it. He will use his power of visibility, of making visible (a power that he, on one level correctly, assumes is part of the social and economic power of his whiteness) to tell the story of the invisible man, the man who "never was." Whiteness becomes caught within the paradox of the surrogate voice, the voice that gives voice to the voiceless, that writes "history from below," that lays claim to seeing or speaking for or on behalf of others. Yet van Onselen published his book in the emergent postapartheid moment, the moment when the "Other," in a way not possible before, can speak for himself of herself, the moment when whiteness is no longer a condition of voice and visibility. What, then, is left to the white voice in this new context? Perhaps what is left is the capacity or the responsibility to write within and not beyond whiteness, to remain within the terms of the only claim that it ultimately can make: to speak or to write as itself, that is, as the voice of a white person, with the possibilities and limitations inherent in that.

Conclusion

In concluding this article I refer to the words of one of South Africa's foremost writers and critics, Njabulo Ndebele, speaking on the occasion of the first Steve Biko Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town (2000). Ndebele begins by reminding us of the naked, manacled body of Biko, his miserable and lonely death on a mat on the stone floor of a prison cell and of an Afrikanerdom that became entitled "to each and every black body."

Biko's death belongs within a history, Ndebele says, of the things that those who are white can do to black bodies. Thus it is that the heart of darkness is less the preserve of blackness than the condition of whiteness. Ndebele says that the quest for a new white humanity will begin to emerge from a voluntary engagement

by those caught in the culture of whiteness of their own making, with the ethical and moral implications of being situated at the interface between inherited, problematic privilege, on the one hand, and on the other, the blinding sterility at the centre of the "heart of whiteness."

Ndebele criticizes what he calls white abandonment of responsibility toward the only history that can promise salvation to "whiteness" and argues,

If South African whiteness is a beneficiary of the protectiveness assured by international whiteness, it has the opportunity to write a new chapter in world history. It will have to come out from under the umbrella and repudiate it. Putting itself at risk, it will have to declare that it is home now, sharing in the vulnerability of other compatriot bodies. South African whiteness will declare that its dignity is inseparable from the dignity of black bodies. (forthcoming)

In signaling "the empty heart of whiteness," Ndebele's formulation echoes Toni Morrison's essay sequences on whiteness in *Playing in the Dark*. Commenting on the functioning of whiteness in the American literary imagination, she finds a figure that is "mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable" (59). By contrast, it is the figure of blackness which signals the figure of the human, in its complexity and its modernity. Black slavery, Morrison provocatively writes, enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the "not-free" but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the "not-me." The result was "a playground for the imagination." American Africanism was "a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire that is uniquely American" (38). This Africanist other, via which the American nation negotiated its disdain and its envy, became the means of thinking about

body, mind, chaos, kindness and love; provided the occasion for exercises in the absence of restraint, the presence of restraint, the contemplation of freedom and aggression, permitted opportunities for the exploration of ethics and morality, for meeting the obligations of the social contract, for bearing the cross of religion and following out the ramifications of power. (47)

An African idiom, in other words, is used to signal modernity: Images of blackness emerge in the literature as “evil and protective, rebellious and forgiving, fearful and desirable—in all of the self-contradictory features of the self” (59). It is whiteness alone that is mute.

Both Ndebele and Morrison look for the content, for the heart, of a whiteness that is seemingly dead, silent, mute, and not fully human. Both also help to create the condition for the emergence of white culture as a human culture, as a culture of the human. By placing the desecration of the black body, of black humanity, central to his analysis, Ndebele simultaneously places there the question of white humanity. In so doing, he allows a space and a possibility for the personhood of white people to be restored.

In this article I have tried to draw out the signs, codes, and literary strategies that have shaped representations of a whiteness which has attempted to move beyond a condition, a culture, and a politics that white people themselves built. I have tried to give some content to whiteness in a context in which, as Ndebele formulates it, there appears to have been an empty heart of whiteness. I have aimed to move toward a conversation about how whiteness works, notwithstanding a long history of white racism. I have looked at what seem to be powerful tropes of watching and looking, visibility and invisibility. Even in so doing, different levels of self-awareness emerge—and new sets of questions. If the paradox of visibility–invisibility has often appeared in these texts, we may further ask: If these are the texts’ own description of the paradox, can we accept their versions? What is it that is not foreseen by these writers? What kinds of politics and self-constructions are invested in the form versus the content of what is expressed? Who are the trustworthy commentators and which the unwitting fictionalizations? Autobiography at some level always is about secrets and lying, visibility and invisibility. And how does race work, formally, technically, in the context of the paradox of visibility and invisibility that I have identified here? Yet these questions do not in themselves belie a serious intellectual effort to see how race works in the imagination and practice of the lives of white people. As such, the texts above dramatize the dilemmas of selfhood in the specific context of racial identity. They tell us a great deal about the process of becoming someone who you were not in the beginning: of becoming someone else. They reveal histories of how individuals in this context act upon themselves, and the technologies of selfhood that they respond to and employ. These involve real activities rather than just attitudes.

The category of “whiteness” no longer carries the same meanings that it did under colonization or apartheid. I have attempted to track the genealogies of the narratives within which certain forms of whiteness have been articulated and imagined.¹¹ Although the “white condition” is not so fluid as to detach it from power, privilege, and oppression, the experience of Africans of European origin is a contingent and situated identity.¹² Because it is, it enables us to keep the question of whiteness open, to resist

the tendency to foreclose its meanings. Equally we need to resist the foreclosure of subjectivities of "blackness."¹³ Both "whiteness" and "blackness" are ideas, lived experiences, and practices in the making. New studies now are needed urgently in order to help us understand the complexity of both, and to deconstruct often somewhat ossified versions of each.

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Notes

1. Based on the understanding that whiteness has tended to be constructed as a norm, an unchanging and unproblematic location, a position from which all other identities come to be marked by their difference, such studies point to its historical and geographical contingency. Bonnett (1996) points out that two analytical tendencies have emerged: (1) whiteness as an agent in the history of class struggle (see, for example, Roediger [1991]); and 2) whiteness as an individual and diverse "lived experience" (see, for example, Frankenberg [1993]). E. Ann Kaplan and others have argued that the recent fascination with the topic of whiteness, particularly by white male scholars, has been a result of the destabilizing pressures and critical interventions by black studies and women's studies in the last two decades (see Kaplan in Hill 1997). Essays appearing in the recent *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (1997) tend to offer elucidations of white racism (or the impotency of a whiteness based on guilt in the case of liberal leftists) rather than a more wide-ranging and critically astute analysis of how whiteness works. In other words, at least some of this work reveals a complex combination of self-deprecating and self-flagellating moral discourse in relation to racism.
2. Jacqueline Rose (1986) glosses Lacan's formulations as follows: "The subject is not just caught by a look which subjects it and cancels its position as 'pure' observation; it is caught by a look which it cannot see but which it imagines in the field of the other; and it is literally caught in the act, that is, in its role as voyeur or support of desire" (193).

3. This seems to me to be a historically specific case as opposed to generalized arguments which have begun to emerge in the United States for the “assimilation” by whites of blackness. As the editors of the journal *Race Traitor* write: “When whites reject their racial identity, they take a big step towards becoming human. But may that step not entail, for many, some engagement with blackness, perhaps even an identification as ‘black’? Recent experience, in this country and elsewhere, would indicate that it does” (quoted in Bonnett). Such a discourse, as Bonnett points out, can easily slip over and resuscitate the idea of race as a badge of moral character. The powerful invocation of Slovo as a black man belongs to a particular set of political dynamics, which would have changed fundamentally, for instance, in postapartheid South Africa.
4. “Passing for white” is a colloquialism of the apartheid period which referred to coloured people who tried to have themselves reclassified as white and thereby gain entry to the privileges of whiteness as endowed by the apartheid state.
5. There are also interesting points of tension in the text between views of South African whiteness from the position of exile as opposed to how it might be viewed from within. Toward the end of her narrative, Gillian Slovo is lunching with her father, Joe, now the Minister of Housing in the new government, at a plush Cape Town restaurant. Looking down at the beach she sees white women lying “spreadeagled” as “overallled Africans” shovel the remains of an oil spill from the sand. She views these white women with animosity, using the inscription of sexuality to imply moral corruption: As someone who lives elsewhere, whiteness in South Africa is a monologic sign of privilege except where it is renegotiated within the political movement itself.
6. Fanon has famously described blackness as the figure of colonial otherness (“the white man’s artifice inscribed on the black man’s body”) in terms of the white child who says, “Look, a Negro! . . . Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” (112). It is the look of the other that fixes him into the differentiating order of otherness, so that “identification is always the return of an image of identity which bears the mark of splitting in that ‘other’ place from which it comes.”
7. It is the Afrikaner leaders of the apartheid state, the men who refuse to be shamed, to take the blame, that she is most angry with. In a thinly disguised reference to de Klerk, whom she talks to at a Truth Commission party, she writes:

I look at the Leader in front of me, an Afrikaner leader. And suddenly I know: I have more in common with the Vlakplaas five than with this man. Because they have walked a road, and through them some of us have walked a road. And hundreds of Afrikaners are walking this road—on their own with their own fears and shame and guilt. And some say it, most just live it. (99)
8. A psychologist explains to Krog: “The more you empathize with a victim the more you become the victim; you display the same kinds of symptoms—helplessness, wordlessness, anxiety, desperation. But for some people it is so unbearable being a victim that they become a perpetrator instead. You get rid of the pain by putting it in someone else, you become violent and make someone else your own victim. So be very aware of that” (170).
9. He also sees that Freek, a coloured man who works on the farm, is a hired man who “can be given notice and sent packing” at any time, but that he “belongs here more securely than the Coetzees do—if not to Voelfontein, then to the

Karoo. The Karoo is Freek's country, his home" (87). Here Coetzee is self-consciously writing within the registers of a tradition of "settler writing," as well as within the dominant tropes he identifies in his own critical study, *White Writing* (1988). The nature and dilemmas of belonging have usually characterized settler writing, persisting from those experienced by early travelers and colonialists. As Boehmer (1995) has remarked, these dilemmas of belonging constituted a problem of the imagination but also provided imaginative resources for self-definition. In *White Writing*, Coetzee discusses the writing of whiteness as the writing of the land. In an analysis of the Afrikaans "farm novel" he shows the anti-individualism of a lineal consciousness at the heart of the paternal farm, based on a sacred trust with the ancestors. Here, the submergence of the individual is not in the race but in the family line. In *Boyhood*, by contrast, the family farm is being sold to a "mere purchaser" outside of the family, and John asks himself: "Is there no way of living in the Karoo—the only place in the world where he wants to be—as he wants to live: without belonging to a family?" (91).

10. For a discussion of whiteness as cash value—as an identity which provides resources, power, and opportunity—the relationship between whiteness and asset accumulation, and the connection between attitudes and interests, see George Lipsitz (1998).
11. One of the subnarratives I have been developing in this article has to do with the ways in which notions of whiteness often turn around issues of "staying" and "leaving." It is interesting to note a recent work by South African-born Rob Nixon, who positions his memoir *Dreambirds: The Natural History of a Fantasy* as a migrant text that traces the multiple valences of whiteness within his South African family of immigrants. He writes at one point: "It was hard, sometimes, to know just who we were. Officially, all of us, our whole family, were English South Africans. The choices were clear-cut. If you weren't black or Coloured or Indian, you had to be white. White came with two choices: English or Afrikaans. They called you by what you spoke. All the boys at my school were English—including the Jews, Hungarians and the Portuguese. The same with our family. . . . I was born an English South African into a family of fierce Scottish nationalists. It was our job to dislike the English, so I knew something strange was going on" (27). Nixon begins to unpack the many strands, partly through the complex ethnicities of his own family, which exist within the blanket term "white South African."
12. See Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 2000. Just before the completion of this article, a small delegation of students—in this case white—from my graduate class in critical theory came to my office. They wished to know if they could write their semester essay using Fanon, whose work we study, to read (their) whiteness. It was Fanon, they said, who described how they felt when they walked down the street, the way they looked and were looked at. This seemed an interesting moment—in the history of my work with students, and for what these students were saying about their lives. It was also, I suggest, a moment of almost deceptive self-reference and self-regard, of narcissism even, when one remembered that such students may have suffered a loss of both privilege and belonging but had not experienced oppression on the basis of their skin color per se. That they were women may have added to a subject position which was caught by a look—which they imagined but could not see.

13. For a particularly useful discussion of political and philosophical understandings of blackness in contemporary Africa, see Mbembe (2001). I also want to signal that although I have privileged “whiteness” and “blackness” for the purposes of the discussion in this article, I am aware of the limiting dimensions of such a conversation for those who identify themselves as coloured or creole or who wish to theorize these identities in the African context. Again, there is a need for the discussion I have begun to be extended, and made increasingly complex through the refraction of racialized identities beyond the polarities of whiteness and blackness.