

**Narratives of Identity, Belonging and Dispossession Represented Through
Land Ownership and Expropriation in Contemporary Southern African
Fiction**

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DZUNISANI SIBUYI

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SUPERVISOR: PROF AP ROUX

CO-SUPERVISOR: DR M VAN GRAAN

13 November 2025

DECLARATION

Name: Dzunisani Sibuyi

Student number: 42070953

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy in Languages, Linguistics, and Literature

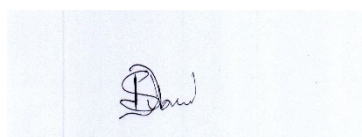
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SUMMARY

This study investigates the embedded story of land found in contemporary Southern African fiction, with a particular focus on South Africa. It explores how land as material resource and symbolic site that functions not only as narrative backdrop but also as structuring principle, shapes character development in various contexts, event progression, and thematic resonance, forming the generated meaning emerging from a constructed outcome of narrative relations and contexts through the interaction between characters and their spatial environments. Drawing on a robust interdisciplinary framework that integrates genre theory, postcolonial theory, structural narratology, and narratological character theory, the research foregrounds what it terms story of land politics, abstracted from the investigated texts. This is achieved through nuanced analysis of three primary novels that includes Marguerite Poland's *A Sin of Omission* (2019), Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018), and Harry Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017). With this, the study was able to trace the evolution of land discourse across three historical phases, widely known as colonial imposition (territorialisation), resistance and reclamation (deterritorialisation), and post-independence reconfiguration (reterritorialisation). These texts were read as literary cartographies that reflect and critique the socio-political transformations of Southern Africa, of which South Africa constitutes the dominant representative. It is here that this study is at pains to reveal that land proves central to the construction of identity, belonging, and exclusion. Also, it demonstrates how colonial and postcolonial regimes deploy biopowers in the form of political instruments such as war, religion, language, and racial classification to regulate access to land. This manifests when characters are depicted as ideological agents, whose identities are shaped by their proximity to land ownership, as well as their ability to navigate exclusionary structures in the form of reigning governments in various contexts. Ultimately, this study argues that the investigated fiction provides critical space to reimagining justice and memory in the form of fictionalised and mirrored history, as well as postcolonial futures. By privileging narrative over history, the study also affirms the capacity of literature to explain the affective, ideological, and experiential dimensions of land politics in Southern Africa in such ways that historical records may not.

Key Terms: Apartheid; Biopower / Necropower; Colonisation; Democracy; Dispossession; Harry Kalmer; Simphiwe Gloria Ndlovu; Marguerite Poland; Identity and Belonging;

Johannesburg; Land; Land Expropriation and Ownership; Postcolony; Racial discrimination;
Resistance and Reclamation; South African History; Zimbabwe

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

In *Southern African Literatures*, Michael Chapman (2003: xiv) reveals that fiction from the Southern African region consistently reflects the “uncertainties and aspirations of [their] time”. He further notes that questions of “identity in relation to massive socio-political change” have come to dominate the literary landscape by shaping the thematic concerns as well as narrative strategies of published fiction (Chapman, 2003: xiv). Within this broad literary and historical framework, the genres of the farm and city novel have acquired particular significance not only because they offer a unified historical explanation, but also because they provide narrative spaces in which shifting relationships to land, power, and belonging can be explored through the lived experiences of characters situated in specific times and places.

The importance of investigating the so-called story of land across a historical trajectory in the Southern African region lies precisely in the fact that, in this specific context, land does not function as a static backdrop. Land operates not only as a narrative backdrop but also as a structuring narrative force where identity, the created sense of belonging, and exclusion are articulated in various historical events in Southern African fiction. Rather than functioning as inert setting, land actively shapes narrative logic, character formation, and ethical tension from colonisation, resistance, and democratic contexts transitioning into post-independence. Tracing land across these historical configurations allows this study to investigate how changing regimes of power continually reconfigure who belongs, who is excluded, and how identity is narratively produced. During the colonial period, Southern African literature – mainly represented through South African texts in this study – frequently depicts systemic violence, racial discrimination, and the abuse of state institutions such as the military and police alongside emerging forms of political and cultural resistance. In the democratic era, these concerns persist but are refracted through new social and ethical pressures that include endemic crime, corruption, dominating public health crises such as HIV/AIDS and COVID 19, gender-based violence, immigration, and xenophobia. Tracing land across historical periods from colonisation to democracy does not produce a linear or settled narrative, but instead allows for investigation of how meanings attached to space, ownership, and a created sense of belonging are continually unsettled and reimagined in response to changing socio-political conditions.

Chapman's (2003: xvi) observations provide a useful context deployed to frame this study; not because the selected primary texts simply confirm his claims, but they extend and complicate them through distinct narrative forms and aesthetic strategies. The motivation for selecting *A Sin of Omission* (2019), *The Theory of Flight* (2018), and *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) is based on the texts' shared engagement with land, as discussed further in section 1.5. In these texts, land becomes a recurring concern across different historical events from colonisation to democracy, and these fictions are not aligned with a single interpretive agenda. Each text stages land differently through rural, transitional, or urban settings, and in doing so these stories foreground varied narrative responses to the pressures of history, authority, and social change.

Marguerite Poland's *A Sin of Omission* (2019) is conventionally read as a farm novel. It explores early colonial encounters as well as the gradual imposition of European authority structures that unsettle and displace natives' indigenous systems of social and cultural practices. Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018) is described as a farm-to-city text. It engages with colonial resistance and political mobilisation while also remaining attentive to the psychological and ethical tensions that accompany liberation struggles. Harry Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) is also a farm-to-city novel that relies on the urban space to examine how political power, memory, and belonging are negotiated across colonial, apartheid, and democratic regimes. Rather than offering a single, cohesive account of land politics, these texts present different narrative angles from which land emerges as a shifting and contested site.

Collectively, the study does not treat these texts as providing authoritative or the so-called correct interpretations of Southern African history. Instead, this study abstracts from the texts their diverse narrative events that can function as provisional and exploratory story of land that is reconstructed in a chronological sequence for analytical purposes. This approach is not intended to impose coherence where the texts themselves resist it, but to clearly explain recurring patterns, discontinuities, and contradictions in the ways land is imagined across time. In this respect, the study aligns with the call of Phelan and Rabinowitz (2005) to move away from prescriptive claims about narratives in general to more context-sensitive analyses that attend to how specific texts operate within particular historical and cultural conditions.

In *A Sin of Omission*, the events revealing a gradual segregation of black and white missionaries are read as a narrative feature hinting at the relationship between coloniser and colonised as this culminates in spatial, institutional, and moral separation. This development points toward the early consolidation of colonial authority and land expropriation without

reducing these processes to a singular causal logic. In *The Theory of Flight*, efforts to reclaim alienated land generate instability, political upheaval, and displacement within contested spaces such as Beaufort Farm and Estate, as this foregrounds resistance as a complex and costly practice rather than a unifying solution to end colonisation. *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* traces everyday experiences under successive regimes of British imperialism, apartheid, and democracy by revealing how patterns of exclusion and state violence persist even as political systems change.

The complexity of presenting the story of land across these texts thus necessitates an investigation into land not only as a thematic concern, but also as a narrative and structural principle that shapes character development, plot movement, and ethical tension. This approach resonates with Akinola's (2020: 216) observation that South African history is "riddled with land dispossessions during colonialism and, [especially during] apartheid", with the post-apartheid period remaining marked by "land inequality, hunger, and conflict". Kepe and Hall (2018: 131) similarly emphasise that land has functioned as both the centre of colonial conquest and a powerful symbol of resistance. Importantly, however, the investigated texts in this study do not simply reiterate these historical realities but rework them imaginatively, producing layered representations that invite multiple interpretive responses.

Within this approach of a literary frame, land emerges not only as a material resource but also a symbolic locus of identity, belonging, and power. The ways in which characters relate to land, or are denied access to it, reveal lasting social structures while also opening spaces for ethical reflection and narrative ambiguity. Equitable access to shared space is not presented as an uncomplicated solution but as a condition that demands inclusive governance, historical reckoning, and sustained negotiation.

As part of this chapter, the remaining sections present the research outline, including the background and rationale for the selection of primary texts, the problem statement, research questions, and objectives, as well as an overview of the theoretical framework and methodology. Through this structure, the study traces the embedded story of land politics and its associated questions of ownership, created sense of belonging, and identity, as they evolve from colonial dispossession to democratic contestation. This temporal movement aligns with what De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015) conceptualise as *chronotopicity*, which is the anchoring of narratives in specific configurations of time and space that shape how stories are told and understood. In the sections to follow, they outline the rationale for text selection, the study's aims and methodological approach, and the theoretical tools through which this structuring role of land is analysed.

1.2 Motivation and choice of primary novels

Two of the three texts selected for this study are set in South Africa, while the other is situated in a fictionalised Zimbabwe. Despite this, the study is deliberately framed within the Southern African region. Land politics, historical dispossession, and contestations over belonging have unfolded across Southern Africa through interconnected colonial and postcolonial events. Although national histories differ, the region shares a common trajectory of conquest by white colonists, racially coded land ownership, forced removals, and post-independence struggles over restitution and identity. By positioning the study against this regional background, the analysis foregrounds Southern Africa as a historically intertwined socio-political space rather than a collection of isolated national narratives. Zimbabwe and South Africa, in particular, have almost parallel land histories. These histories date from the entrenchment of invading white colonists with their influences towards resistance mired by violent unravelling or renegotiation of territorial control to achieve independence. These processes inhabit a space that justifies the inclusion of a Zimbabwean text that is critical to the contextual scope, comparative resonance, and theoretical depth of this study. The three novels were chosen not only for their differences, but for their complementary engagement with land across Southern Africa's interconnected phases of colonialism, resistance, and democracy.

From a Southern African perspective, Poland's *A Sin of Omission* (2019), Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018), and Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) were not selected to confirm a predetermined argument. These novels were chosen because each text is closer to revealing a distinct historical phase in the long story of land in Southern Africa. The central research focus of this study, "*Narratives of identity, belonging, and dispossession represented through land ownership and expropriation in contemporary Southern African fiction*", required texts that do not incidentally feature land but that engage with it as a structuring force. These three texts collectively enable a multi-layered reconstruction of land as material resource, cultural symbol, site of trauma, and political battleground across time that includes colonisation, resistance, and democracy where identities and a shared sense of belonging are made. The depicted periods create a historical trajectory of land and its story, which is revealed in this study.

It is here that examining the revealed story of land along a historical continuum becomes critical, because land dispossession in Southern Africa is not a singular event but a

lengthy process. As explained in Chapter 2, territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation are not isolated stages but deployed to represent cumulative shifts, not only in land ownership, but also in political power dynamics that continuously shape identities, boundaries of belonging, and the meaning of citizenship. A chronological approach drawn from the specified stages enable this study to show how the following processes unfold. First, how the colonial conquest laid the ideological and legal foundations for racialised land ownership. In the second place, how anti-colonial resistance destabilised imposed territorial orders and reopened questions of identity. Post-independence, in the third place, reveals how societies reconfigured or reproduced colonial spatial hierarchies.

With this, the selected texts reveal the underlying historical arc in ways uniquely suited to demonstrating continuity, rupture, and reinvention within Southern Africa's land politics, as this is a central motivation in all three selected texts. Although the novels differ in genre, setting, and stylistic orientation, it is precisely these differences that make them productive for analysing land, identity, and a created sense of belonging across time and space from colonisation to democracy.

The first text, *A Sin of Omission* by Marguerite Poland (2019), is a novel grounded in rigorous historical research and situated firmly within colonial South Africa. Poland's positionality as a South African writer is deeply informed by Xhosa culture, missionary archives, and colonial ethnography and this enables her to reconstruct the initial phase of territorialisation when white colonial powers imposed their influence and systems on indigenous communities. The narrative's style of portraying an African Anglican deacon destabilised by missionary assimilation systems reveals how early land dispossession also entailed spiritual, cultural, and linguistic displacement, thereby laying the groundwork for later crises of identity and belonging.

The second text, *The Theory of Flight* by Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu (2018), reveals Ndlovu's diasporic Zimbabwean positionality. It is informed by the Gukurahundi massacres as well as the silenced post-independence histories that inform a text concerned with deterritorialisation – known in this study as the resistance against colonialism – while ushering in a new postcolonial state that is mired by violence and corruption. By blending myth, magical realism, and suppressed national memory, Ndlovu (2019) foregrounds land as a site of ethnic tension, historical erasure, and contested belonging in Zimbabwe. The text's fictional setting functions as an allegorical mirror for the unresolved legacies of land dispossession in the region, as this makes it indispensable for a study concerned with Southern Africa's shared colonial inheritance.

Although it is primarily a city novel, *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* by Harry Kalmer (2017) is strategically critical for examining reterritorialisation. It is a phase in which democratic societies inherit and renegotiate colonial spatial orders. Kalmer's multilingual and multicultural grounding as South African writer enables him to depict Johannesburg as a palimpsest whose layers reveal migration, inequality, xenophobia, and the endurance of colonial spatial logics. The city becomes a microcosm of South Africa's broader struggle to redistribute land from colonisation to democracy, reconfigure belonging, and resist the persistence of racialised spaces.

Other contemporary Southern African texts dealing with land issues were excluded out of methodological necessity. The three chosen texts closely span different historical moments in colonisation, resistance, and democracy. Also, they represent diverse national and cultural positionalities from South African, diasporic Zimbabwean, and bilingual as well as multicultural urban South Africa. In addition, the texts employ distinct strategies to hint at the land story through historical realism, magical realism, and palimpsestic urban memory. Moreover, the texts embody varying spatial registers that include rural landscapes, mythic territories, urban geographies. Together, these texts provide a complementary yet non-redundant framework for investigating how land continues to shape identity, belonging, and exclusion across Southern Africa. Their differences ensure that the study's investigation is approached from multidisciplinary as well as multi-spatial angles, thereby preventing the selection from appearing biased, narrow, or predetermined.

In summary, the selected texts collectively reveal that the story of land in Southern Africa is neither linear nor uniform, but is a constantly shifting discourse in which colonisation, resistance, democracy, and memory intersect. By analysing these novels that represent successive phases of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation, the study demonstrates how land politics continue to influence notions of identity, a sense of belonging, and justice. The Southern African frame used in this study is not only a geographical construct but also a historical, thematic, and conceptual framework that captures shared regional concerns whose literary expressions remain vital for understanding contemporary debates on land, belonging, and dispossession.

1.3. Problem Statement

In Section 1.1, the texts chosen for this study are positioned within the broader context of Southern African fiction and its persistent return to land in memory, loss, and promise; yet, this

generous theme remains understudied in its full historical and aesthetic complexity. The lacuna prompts this study to argue that examining the story of land across a historical trajectory and through a carefully selected set of diverse texts provides critical insight into how Southern African fiction imaginatively negotiates identity, belonging, and socio-political transformation, without reducing literature to predetermined meanings or singular ideological narratives. This enables the study to address a critical gap by investigating land as a structuring narrative principle across historical phases in Southern African fiction.

With this, the study outlines one of the compelling yet underexplored dimensions in the scholarship surrounding the selected texts of this study, which is the embedded story of land and interrelated issues such as land expropriation and ownership, as well as the construction of belonging and identity. While previous criticism has often foregrounded familiar literary concerns that included character developments, allegorical motifs, and nationhood, this study addresses a notable gap by examining land as a structuring principle in Southern African fiction with specific emphasis on South Africa. Given the region's historically complex and contested relationship with land – which is highlighted by colonisation, dispossession, resistance to colonisation, and uneven post-independence transformation – this focus provides a meaningful opportunity to consider how literature imaginatively engages with these legacies. Importantly, the approach in the study does not assume that the texts collectively advance a singular historical narrative. However, the study seeks to understand why and how land recurs as a significant imaginative and symbolic concern across different periods and genres in Southern Africa as this shapes a historical trajectory.

Questions about land have shifted across time as they were reshaped by colonial settlement, segregationist policies, liberation movements, and democratic reforms. Tracing this shift through literary texts allows for a comparative understanding of how fiction writers from different contexts and backgrounds – including those in this study – conceptualise, remember, and rearticulate land as an issue intimately tied to identity, belonging, and social organisation. This diachronic method does not impose a teleological sequence but instead highlights the continuities, ruptures, and imaginative possibilities that arise when fiction reflects on land at different historical junctures. Also, the diachronic method further enables attention to how narrative form, aesthetic choices, and literary strategy shape shifting engagements with the symbolic and material significance of land as depicted in the texts covered in this study.

The analytical germ of this research lies in its interdisciplinary conceptual theoretical orientation, which draws from postcolonial studies, genre theory (specifically the genre-based approach to Southern African farm and city novels), Genette's structural narratology, and

narratologically informed character theory. As outlined in Chapter 2, these frameworks are applied systematically to develop a cohesive method through which the story of land may be uncovered and analysed. While each the conceptual theory is independently used within literary scholarship, their combined application to the question of land in Southern African fiction remains comparatively underexplored. Each framework contributes distinct and complementary insights. Postcolonial theory is useful when exploring the selected texts without reducing them to political commentary. In farm and city novels, genre theory supports the analysis of socio-environmental contexts and how they mediate experiences of belonging or estrangement. Genette's structural narratology provides structure in the analysis of narrative order, duration, and frequency when identifying how representations of land are structurally embedded and temporally shaped in the texts. Narratological character theory also facilitates deeper insight into character motivation, agency, and development, especially where land serves as emotional, existential, or symbolic anchor.

Together, these frameworks support an interpretive practice that is rigorous yet open-ended. Also, the approach enables a nuanced engagement with how land functions not only as setting or symbol but also as a dynamic site of identity formation, socio-political struggle, and historical memory while preserving the aesthetic complexity, narrative inventiveness, and interpretive possibilities of the texts.

1.4 Research Questions

Drawing upon the study's aim and objectives as set out in Section 1.5 and the research problem outlined in Section 1.3, this section formulates the guiding research questions that underpin this investigation:

1.4.1 What form of land expropriation is represented in each text?

The selected texts articulate complex portrayals of land expropriation by foregrounding the contested dynamics of land ownership between indigenous populations and white colonial settlers, as well as between the white settlers themselves. These depictions mirror the historical course of Southern Africa as represented by South Africa (Section 1.2) and are rendered through literary representations that span colonisation, resistance, and democratic transitions.

In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), the narrative evokes a fragmented colonial landscape as well as the symbolic confrontation between invading white colonial forces and native resistance. The white colonists deploy mechanisms of domination, such as militarised violence and incarceration of resistance leaders, systemic neglect, and policy-driven dispossession to assert control over indigenous land. Also, these technologies of power are not only physical, but extend into the realm of social engineering, where religious institutions such as the church function as instruments of spiritual and territorial conquest.

Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018) presents events where land is reclaimed, using armed resistance as well as negotiated settlement. It is here that the text suggests that the struggle for land is not only monolithic, but also encompasses violent upheaval, as well as democratic processes aimed at redressing colonial injustice. However, this transition is mired in residual colonial legacies and civil unrest as this complicates the ideal of peaceful land restitution as well as the lost indigenous cultural practices.

Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) traverses all three historical epochs in colonisation, resistance, and democracy within the South African context. The novel introduces racial discrimination as a persistent and catalytic force in land disputes, demonstrating the way in which it transcends temporal boundaries. Notably, even within a democratic context, xenophobic violence emerges as a mechanism for asserting control over reclaimed land, as this is revealed in the enduring entanglements of race, power, and territory.

1.4.2 How is expropriated land used and reimagined by its new owners?

The three historical contexts consistently portray land as a conduit for consolidating racial dominance and socio-economic advantage. The utilisation of expropriated land is primarily oriented towards settlement and industrialisation, as this serves the interest of the prevailing racial group(s) positioned to reap economic benefits.

In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), the colonists' acquisition of indigenous land facilitates the establishment of both settlements and religious institutions. The church, which is initially a site of spiritual refuge, evolves into a mechanism of marginalisation that functions to enforce policies that exclude and oppress native populations. The protagonist, Stephen, who is a representative of the colonised, becomes the emblem of this systemic disenfranchisement by being subjected to situations not limited to neglect, curfews, forced labour, relocation, and cultural erasure.

In *The Theory of Flight* (2018), post-independence land restitution enables the resettlement of dispossessed natives at the metaphorical area of Beaufort Farm and Estate. This reclamation signifies a partial restoration of ancestral ties and communal belonging, albeit within a socio-political landscape still haunted by colonial legacies.

Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) foregrounds the industrialisation of Johannesburg's land. The etymology of the city's name, derived from colonial surveyors, symbolises its transformation into a fortress of economic power. Control over the city provides access to industrial wealth, which is unevenly distributed due to the perpetuating racial hierarchies from an era of colonial rule well into the democratic era.

1.4.3 Do expropriated land conditions restore or alienate characters from their environment?

The texts employ elements of focalisation to variously reveal the socio-spatial consequences of land expropriation, oscillating between alienation and restoration as observed by the narrators and the experiencing characters. In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), Stephen's displacement exemplifies the alienation of indigenous people from their ancestral lands and cultural practices. The colonists' relocation policies and practices sever spiritual and cultural ties, rendering the natives strangers in their own land. The enforced distance from missionary settlements highlights a racialised logic of exclusion determined by skin colour and language, as well as perceived identity.

Conversely, *The Theory of Flight* (2018) envisions land restitution as a restorative act. The post-independence reclamation of Beaufort Farm and Estate fosters a sense of communal belonging across racial lines. Despite the internal tensions in the form of civil wars, the narrative affirms the possibility of identity that includes all people, as well as their reintegration into the new environment.

In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017), the city of Johannesburg is depicted as a site of contestation, alienation and restoration of various racial identities. During colonisation, natives are dispossessed and marginalised. In the democratic era, control ostensibly shifts to the formerly colonised. However, this restoration is complicated by xenophobic violence against black foreign nationals as this reveals a new form of exclusion within a supposedly inclusive society.

1.4.4 Does ownership of expropriated land shape characters' belonging and identity?

The question of belonging and identity in relation to expropriated land is central to the thematic structure of each novel, as this reveals how spatial possession intersects with cultural and psychological self-definition in each context.

In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), white colonial settlers assert their belonging in the colonised land by embedding their cultural norms, religious beliefs, and institutional structures into the landscape. This imposition of identity is not benign, but enacted, and at the expense of the indigenous population, whose own cultural systems become systematically marginalised. The colonists' ability to shape the colony according to their values facilitates their dominance, while simultaneously rendering the colonised as outsiders within their ancestral land. The protagonist Stephen becomes emblematic of this alienation, where his identity is fractured by the denial of cultural continuity and the reduction of his social role to that of a labourer subjugated by racial hierarchies.

In contrast, *The Theory of Flight* (2018) presents a narrative of reclamation of not only land, but also of identity. The postcolonial society becomes a site of reconstitution in the land, where formerly dispossessed individuals and communities begin to forge a new collective identity. This emergent identity is inclusive, while shaped by the convergence of diverse racial and ideological groups that includes both white liberal allies and native populations. The reclaimed land functions as both a literal and symbolic space of belonging where historical wounds are acknowledged and new possibilities for coexistence are imagined.

Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) provides a panoramic view of identity formation across three historical epochs, namely colonisation, resistance, and democracy. The city of Johannesburg serves as a contested space that represents South Africa, where racial groups seek to inscribe their identities. During colonisation, white settlers, in the form of British and Afrikaners, asserted their belonging, with exclusionary practices functioning to relegate non-whites to peripheral zones, to deny them full access to land and its economic benefits. This spatial segregation is a direct expression of racialised identity politics. The dawn of democracy in 1994 ostensibly reconfigured the city as a shared space for all. However, the persistence of xenophobic violence against black foreign nationals reveals the fragility of this democratic identity, where the attacks suggest that colonial legacies continue to shape ideas of belonging.

1.4.5 How does land discourse contribute to meaning-making in each novel?

The discourse of land defines the narrative course in each novel, whilst deepening their interpretive resonance. Through distinct yet interconnected portrayals, the novels collectively construct a literary cartography of South/ern African history. *A Sin of Omission* foregrounds colonisation – the initial rupture by which indigenous settlement patterns are disrupted by white colonial incursion. It is here that the land becomes a site of spiritual and cultural dislocation shaped by the tensions between imposed identity as well as ancestral memory. Elsewhere, *The Theory of Flight* advances this discourse by foregrounding the aftermath of colonial resistance. It is here that land is not only reclaimed but reimagined as a space for healing and identity reconstruction. The novel's meaning is enriched by its portrayal of land as a medium for social transformation, where colonial injustices are set to be addressed by the introduction of inclusive governance as well as communal reintegration.

A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg synthesises these historical threads by offering a composite narrative that spans colonisation, resistance, and democracy. It is here that the city of Johannesburg is portrayed as a symbolic locus of power, identity, and exclusion, due to the novel's engagement with land discourse. It reveals the cyclical nature of belonging and alienation, while foregrounding the way in which access to land and its ability to shape identities remains a contested and evolving process. Taken together, the novels articulate a complex land politics that reflects the complexities of Southern African history, especially through a South Africa perspective. The discourse of land is not only thematic, but also constitutive of the texts' communicated meanings, providing a way to trace the socio-political evolution of identity, belonging, and resistance across time.

1.5. Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study foregrounds fiction to reveal how land politics is abstracted through narrative form rather than functioning as a historical verification project. This approach positions the study to investigate how fictional narratives organise experience, memory, and power around land rather than adjudicating historical truth claims. The focus is more on narrative construction, representation, and meaning-making as they operate within specific socio-historical contexts from colonisation to post-independence. As Ryan and Bell (2019) argue, fictional worlds diverge from the actual world and serve as rich sites of aesthetic and cognitive engagement that

provide interpretive possibilities that cannot be reduced to historical verification. Elsewhere, Gordon (1984) highlights the function of stories that serve to mediate societal structures through which societies can relate to reality and its social behaviour, as this is a process mirrored in literary representation. Fludernik and Ryan (2019) further note that narratives simultaneously gesture toward factual accuracy while exploring the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction as this makes them uniquely suited to deal with complex socio-political concerns.

With this being said, the central aim of this study was to investigate how the selected fictional narratives function to articulate a Southern African land discourse across different historical moments that span colonisation, resistance, and post-independence governance. The study does not presume that these texts collectively present a unified or prescriptive narrative. Instead, the study explores the extent to which the texts engage with abstracted recurring concerns related to land that include expropriation, ownership, a created sense of belonging in various contexts, and identity, while recognising that each text contributes a distinct imaginative interpretation shaped by its narrative strategies and socio-historical framing. Although the texts may be inspired by or loosely connected to historical events, the operative concern of this research was how these stories are constructed to generate meaning rather than whether they “accurately” reflect historical progression of story of land events.

The specific theoretical approach functions to signal an attention to deployed narrative strategy, thematic construction, and modes of representation. This orientation invites an inquiry into the literary mechanisms through which land and its associated politics are rendered visible, contested, reimagined, or symbolically charged within the chosen texts. With this, the study favours fictional events over actual history, while recognising the capacity of fiction to clearly explain affective, ideological, and experiential dimensions of land politics in a way that conventional historical sources cannot.

In alignment with the stated aim, the long-term objective of this study was to uncover the narrative modalities through which stories of land politics are depicted and to investigate how these representations shape the understandings of identity and created sense of belonging. This inquiry did not seek to confirm predetermined assumptions, but rather to trace how each narrative negotiates these issues within its own imaginative parameters. The objectives guiding this study were as follows:

- to examine each novel in order to reveal the forms and methods of land expropriation depicted while acknowledging that each text represents a discrete yet interrelated

temporal moment in Southern Africa's historical trajectory as represented by South Africa;

- to determine how the representations of land expropriation in each text contribute to literary understandings of land ownership, belonging, and identity, especially in relation to the socio-political context in which each narrative is situated;
- to analyse the narrative environments in which the story of land unfolds by examining how characterisation, particularly the relationship between characters and their spatial contexts, shape the production of meaning dominated by land discourse.

Through these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to a nuanced literary understanding of the story of land as a key motif in Southern African fiction. Rather than proposing a singular or definitive account, the study traces how different texts engage with the evolution of land politics from colonial dispossession through its various contestations and into the democratic era. In doing so, the study aims to clearly explain ways in which fiction functions to reflect, critique, or imaginatively reconfigure socio-political realities related to land, identity, and belonging in the region, especially within the South African context.

At the same time, this study remains attentive to how the story of land is continuously reimagined in the 21st century, which is highlighted by literature's capacity to produce diverse and sometimes divergent interpretations of events instead of converging on a singular implied correct reading of the text.

1.6 Research Methodology

The methodological research framework underpinning this study is multifaceted, integrating various qualitative approaches to interrogate secondary literature as well as fictional texts. This strategy enables a complex and critical engagement with the research problem (Section 1.3) and the research questions (Section 1.4). The study integrates literature review, close textual analysis, historical contextualisation, and theoretical interpretation to enable a multidimensional reading of land politics.

1.6.1 Literature Search and Secondary Data Engagement

As a point of departure, a comprehensive literature search was undertaken to identify relevant secondary data sources that included critical essays, as well as scholarly analyses of the fictional texts. This process facilitated the construction of a robust theoretical and contextual scaffold as detailed in Section 1.7 and reflected in the bibliography. The literature search not only informed the interpretive perspective of the study but also enabled a critical synthesis of existing publications exploring the discourse of land ownership and expropriation, as well as a sense of belonging created in various contexts, and the identities shaped in the process.

1.6.2 Textual and Contextual Analysis

The core of this investigation is a close textual analysis supported by historical contextualisation, critically theorised as detailed in Section 1.8. These methods were employed independently as well as in concert to yield a holistic reading of the novels. This included textual analysis as a method that involves a careful examination of the narrative structure, language, and thematic content of the texts, as well as the identification of recurring motifs and symbolic representations related to land and identity.

The analysis was conducted through the following sub-methods of the qualitative approach:

- **Content Analysis:** following Bhandari (2023), this approach is facilitated in the extraction of thematic patterns and interpretive insights abstracted from the narrative content. Additionally, content analysis is traditionally suited to humanities research, which is the realm of this study, where depth as well as various possible interpretations of the produced meaning reign supreme.
- **Discourse Analysis:** This method interrogates the linguistic and rhetorical construction of meaning within the texts, taking into consideration the way in which language mediates experience, and how it reflects on the socio-political realities during colonisation, resistance, and democracy, as encapsulated in the texts.
- **Narrative Analysis:** It focuses on the structural, including the stylistic presentation of the recounted events. Additionally, this approach examines how the narrative is organised and presented, and how meaning is generated through mirrored events, characterisation, and temporal sequencing provided by the text in relation to the story.

1.6.3 Historical Contextualisation

Historical contextualisation situates the topic within the socio-political context of Southern Africa as exemplified by South Africa's colonial, resistance, and post-independence trajectories that inspired the texts. This method benefits textual interpretation by aligning fictional representations with historical realities that include cultural norms, legal frameworks, resistance movements, and socio-economic transformations. What is important is that such contexts serve to explain the ideological undercurrents that shape the narratives but also to reveal how power, identity, and authority are negotiated within changing historical conditions. It is here that the investigated texts get to encode competing ideologies. They include colonial domination, nationalist resistance, and post-independence disillusionment through the representations of land, governance, and social relations. Understanding the portrayed contexts is essential to help grasp the embedded story of land as produced by narrative dynamics, but also in exposing the implicit critiques of inequality, dispossession, and ideological continuity or rupture within the texts.

1.6.4 Theoretical Frameworks

The study relied on various theoretical perspectives to achieve its analytical scope. These include structural narratology, which helps to examine the narrative structure of presented events. Genre theory helps situate the texts within literary traditions and conventions, such as farm and city novels. Postcolonial studies facilitate the interrogation of themes of power, identity, and resistance during colonisation, as well as in its aftermath. From a narratological perspective, character theory is the framework for analysing character development and its relation to thematic concerns, manifesting with the interaction of land and belonging with a required identity. Together, these theoretical frameworks are briefly introduced in Section 1.8 and further elucidated in Chapter 2.

The methodological design of this study is well-suited to its objectives by providing a rigorous and multidimensional approach to the analysis of fictional representations of land and identity. By integrating textual analysis, historical insight, and theoretical interpretation, the study constructs a comprehensive narrative of land politics and its approach to expropriation and ownership, with a created sense of belonging and the shaping of identity.

1.7 Literature Review

Existing scholarship consistently positions land as materially but also symbolically central to identity and belonging in Southern African fiction. Despite the sustained attention to land, comparatively little work has investigated land as a structuring narrative principle operating diachronically across historical phases. This study addresses the gap by foregrounding the story of land politics, which is regarded as a thematic and an ideological thread that traverses colonial dispossession, resistance, and post-independence contestations of land. It is here that land emerges not only as a backdrop to narrative action, but also as a structuring force that shapes characters' socio-political and existential trajectories. In addition, land functions simultaneously as a material resource, symbolic locus, contested site of power, a memory, and sense of belonging. Patterns of expropriation and ownership become cultural, psychological, and ideological incursions that continue to redefine who belongs, who is excluded, and how identities are constructed or erased.

Although the story of land has not been systematically theorised as a unified discourse, several scholars have explored its constituent elements. Lisa Propst's (2014) analysis of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), *Room 207* (2006), *Coconut* (2007), and *Young Blood* (2010) function to demonstrate how urban fiction grapples with landlessness, displacement, and the emotional toll of self-dispossession. Furthermore, her readings of Fugard's *Skinner's Drift* (2006) and Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006) highlight how inherited traumas of land shape characters' attempts at reconstituting identity. Similarly, Prinsloo and Visagie's (2009) focused investigation of land ownership and belonging in Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2009) demonstrates how the plaasroman genre registers anxieties over land inheritance, racialised ownership, and the continuity of settler identity. Elsewhere, Caren van Houwelingen (2012) extends this line of inquiry by critiquing the nostalgic mythologies embedded in the traditional plaasroman by arguing that *Agaat* (2009) rewrites Afrikaner land imaginaries through intimacy, ambivalence, and unhomeliness. Becky Jacobs (2006) makes a related observation in her study of *Triomf* (2006), where she demonstrates how land expropriation and its ownership become intertwined with white working-class identity and historical amnesia.

Beyond the South Africa borders, scholarship on Zimbabwean fiction reveals similar entanglements between land, memory, and identity. Vambe's (2006) analysis of Shona fiction

traces an allegorical representation of land seizure and betrayal while Chan and Primorac (2004) investigate how Zimbabwe's land occupations are imaginatively refigured in fiction not only as a political trauma but also as a narrative opportunity to explore the silenced topics. Elsewhere, Magosvongwe (2014) adds to this conversation by detailing differing portrayals of land expropriation by white and black authors in Zimbabwean fiction from 2000 to 2010 and the project reveals the ideological fractures inherent in national storytelling.

Within the region of Southern Africa, Ashraf Jamal (2021) outlines landlessness as a recurring motif. It spans a century in fiction created by Black South Africans, and includes Vilakazi's *No Matter When* to Mngadi's *Home Is Nowhere* by demonstrating the historical depth and emotional gravity of spatial displacement. Graham's comprehensive study in *Land and Nationalism in Fictions from Southern Africa* (2009) similarly situates land as a fundamental ideological site in regional literary imaginaries, and explains the symbolic weight it carries in articulating nationalism, belonging, and exclusion. Land continues to be a central literary preoccupation in studies prior to this one, such as Walker's (2021) reading of Damon Galgut's *The Promise*. The reading contextualises the text within South Africa's constitutional debates over land redistribution by illustrating how contemporary fiction continues to grapple with unresolved historical injustices.

Together, these studies reveal that land, dispossession, and identity are not marginal concerns but foundational elements in Southern African literary production. The present study builds on these insights while offering a more integrative narrative-based argument that connects these themes across temporal, generic, and political contexts from colonisation to democracy.

With this and to situate the specified literary explorations within the broader historical frameworks, this study draws on foundational work tracing the evolution of land dispossession in Southern Africa. McLachlan (2019) provides a crucial overview of land seizure from the seventeenth century onward, while Nkosi (2021) and Potts (2012) detail the violent tactics and legal mechanisms through which colonial administrators dispossessed indigenous populations. Bennett (1996) and Smith (1990) demonstrate how such dispossession reshaped indigenous social structures, while Magubane (1983; 1986), as read through Nyoka (2023), emphasises the role of racialised capitalism in entrenching unequal access to land.

Contemporary debates in land reform and restitution in South Africa highlights the lasting importance of land in shaping identity in various contexts as well as socio-economic realities. Notable scholars in this discourse include Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Tafira (2016) who argue that land represents not only dignity but also belonging for indigenous communities.

Elsewhere, Weideman (2004) highlights how unresolved land injustices threaten the postcolonial era, especially post-apartheid stability. Ntsebeza and Hall (2007) contribute a trenchant critique of the limits of South Africa's land reform programme by suggesting that meaningful transformation requires structural rather than incremental change.

Against this backdrop, the present literature review establishes the critical foundations for a study that seeks to reframe readings of contemporary Southern African fiction through the perspective of land discourse. While many scholars have addressed identity, race, gender, and trauma, the explicit narrative and ideological functions of land – including its expropriation, its ownership, the belonging it creates or denies, and the identities it shapes – remain largely unexamined as a cohesive field of literary inquiry. Existing scholarship on the selected primary texts affirms this gap. The scholars include Le Roux (2019), Brown (2016), Van Marle (2018), Stobie (2020), Gagiano (2020), Jaji (2021), Oumar (2022), McKinnon (2020), and Robson (n.d.) who all offer valuable analyses. However, these scholars leave unexamined the depicted story of land through the narratological and thematic implications of land within these novels from colonisation to democracy. The absence of sustained engagement with land and the revelation of the story of land underscores the need for a study that systematically foregrounds this discourse.

With this said, Elizabeth le Roux (2019:11) offers a panoramic overview of the South African publishing landscape by noting that local literary criticism continues to search for coherent thematic and generic frameworks, including character studies. Her observation builds upon Duncan Brown's influential essay, *Reimagining the 'Literary' in South African Literary Studies* (2016), which calls for the deployment of theoretical models that reimagine an approach to fiction. This study responds to Brown's (2016) imperative by deploying various theoretical frameworks, such as postcolonial theory, genre theory, structural narratology, and character theory, from a narratological perspective, to uncover latent stories of land politics within the selected texts.

Van Marle (2018) exemplifies an early response to Brown's theoretical challenge to be applied in South African fiction by applying a theoretical conceptual approach to *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017). Her analysis is focused on the "spirit of place" as a thematic construct capable of revealing pluralistic worldviews. However, her focus bypasses the story of land and its associated issues of expropriation, ownership, and identity, by reinforcing the need for a more targeted investigation into land politics.

In her study of speculative fiction, Cheryl Stobie (2020) engages with *The Theory of Flight* (2018) through the perspectives of precarity and conviviality, while her analysis of

Genie's experience of sexual violence and HIV infection, although insightful, does not extend to the story of land. The brief mention of Genie's relationship with Vida de Villiers touches on belonging, but only in a limited interpersonal sense, rather than in relation to land, with its created spatial identity.

Annie Gagiano (2020) comments on the complex narrative structures found in *The Theory of Flight* by noting their role in shaping character experiences. However, the review does not cover noticeable narratological elements in the analysis to explain how these structures mediate the story of land and its thematic implications. The absence of engagement with identity, belonging, and land ownership highlights the need for a comprehensive interpretive framework.

Tsitsi Jaji (2021) adopts a parochial approach in her discussion of debut novels by Zimbabwean women, including *The Theory of Flight*. While her work contributes to gendered literary discourse, it does not address the land narrative or its socio-political resonances, as this leaves a gap in the land dimensions that shapes identity formation.

Tasmiyah Oumar (2022) employs spiritual realism and postcolonial theory to investigate themes of flight and self-actualisation in *The Theory of Flight* (2018). The analysis provided foregrounds the interrelated stories of Genie and her father (in Golide Gumede) to consider the issues of freedom and identity while the story of land remains in the periphery, despite its thematic centrality to the novel's socio-political context.

Judith McKinnon (2020), in her review of *A Sin of Omission* (2019), focuses on the protagonist Stephen Mzamane's marginalisation within colonial society. While there is an acknowledgement of the racial dynamics of the depicted period, she does not investigate the traces of narratological structure. She also does not explore the implicit story of land, especially with regard to cases of land expropriation, and the denial of belonging through imposed colonial identities, at the expense of supplanting those of the colonised.

Angela Robson (n.d.) similarly reviews *A Sin of Omission* (2019) by tracing its chronological events, including the missed context of the amaXhosa cattle killings and missionary encounters. Her thematic focus on colonial inequality is valuable, yet she overlooks the underlying land discourse and its implications for ownership, identity, and spatial belonging.

In summary, the reviewed scholarship demonstrates not only the richness of Southern African literary studies but also the absence of a unified examination of land as a narrative, symbolic, and ideological force. By situating the inquiry of land within this wider intellectual tradition, this study fills a critical gap by analysing how the chosen contemporary fiction

constructs, negotiates, and contests the story of land across historical moments and narrative forms guided by postcolonial theory, structural narratology, genre theory, and narratologically informed character theory.

1.8 Conceptual Theoretical Framework

The study draws on theoretical concepts from influential scholars working genre theory, postcolonial theory, structural narratology, and narratological character theory as an integrated analytical conceptual framework. This integrated framework positions the study to investigate land simultaneously as a narrative space, a historically contested resource, and a structuring force shaping character, temporality, and meaning. Rather than operating as discrete approaches, these theoretical traditions are mobilised in relation to specific analytical tasks across the chapters that follow. The integrated frameworks do not function as supplementary to one another, but also constitute the analytical structure through which this study abstracts and interprets the embedded meanings. These meanings include the story of land and its entanglements with expropriation and ownership by the elite class, who set the standard of belonging along with the formation of identity across the historical continuum from colonisation to democracy.

In this study, genre theory provides a foundational perspective for identifying and analysing the discourse of farm and city novels, which function as narrative spaces in which socio-political norms are both encoded and contested. These genres serve to foreground the dynamics of land ownership by the ruling class, who determine not only access to land, but also the terms of belonging and identity within a specific historical context. A genre-based approach enables complex reading of how spatial environments mediate power relations and cultural hierarchies enforced by invading white colonisers and resisting colonised. Postcolonial theory complements what genre theory uncovers by interrogating the ideological legacies of colonialism and the cultural negotiations that emerge in post-independence societies. This theory facilitates a critical examination of how land is imagined, claimed, and contested by different stakeholders, not limited to white colonists and the colonised across various temporal contexts. The framework helps to articulate the discursive tensions between imposed colonial identities and emergent postcolonial subjectivities.

The organising framework that underpins and stabilises the study's analysis

structure is structural narratology – developed by Genette (1980) and including expansions by other scholars. This theory has proven indispensable for analysing the structures of the texts for its generated meanings as a constructed outcome of narrative relations and contexts.

It allows for the dissection of narrative order, duration and frequency, thereby revealing the way in which the story of land is temporally constructed and perspectively mediated. Through this perspective, the study identifies embedded narrative structures that trace the evolution of land politics and spatial belonging with a required identity in each context. Elsewhere, character theory approached from narratological perspective further enriches the discussion by emphasising character agency, motivation, and development in relation to land as narrative objectives and existential anchors. It elucidates how characters navigate the socio-political terrain of land expropriation and ownership, including how their identities are shaped by these interactions within the broader historical framework of Southern African experience.

Together, these theoretical frameworks operate independently and synergistically to provide a multidimensional approach to possible textual interpretation. They also enable the study to engage with the selected texts from multiple vantage points, while uncovering the latent story of land politics that has been overlooked in previous studies. These theories and their application are presented in Chapter Two, where they are discussed according to the needs of this study.

As a conclusion, this section outlined the conceptual theoretical terms employed to not only to unpack but also to engage with the generated meaning of these texts. The study draws on genre theory, postcolonial theory, structural narratology, and character theory as complementary approaches to investigate the texts. While genre theory, postcolonial theory, and structural narratology provide the general analytical framework, character theory is specifically approached from a narratological perspective. Together, these frameworks help enable a critical investigation of the story of land, its politics, symbolism, and socio-historical resonance.

1.9 Structure of the rest of the Study

This chapter introduces the study by outlining foundational aspects. These entail the historical and literary background that informs the selected texts, the rationale for the selection of fiction, the problem statement, research guiding this study, aims and objectives, and methodological approach to the study. Each of the six chapters contributes to the overarching investigation into

the story of land within the socio-historical context of Southern Africa. The emphasis is on South Africa, with its interrelated discourse of land expropriation and ownership, as well the construction of belonging and identity in the contexts of colonisation, resistance, and democracy.

1.9.1 Chapter Two: Conceptual Theoretical Framework

This chapter elaborates on the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study. It explicates key conceptual theoretical terms drawn from genre theory, postcolonial theory, structural narratology, and narratological character theory, by demonstrating how these frameworks inform the possible interpretation of the story of land and its socio-political implications.

1.9.2 Chapter Three: Marguerite Poland's *A Sin of Omission* (2019)

Chapter Three initiates the textual analysis with Poland's *A Sin of Omission*, which represents the colonial phase of South African history. It foregrounds violent contestation over land between resisting indigenous people and the invading white colonists, including the subsequent racialised systems of exclusion enforced by the temporary colonial winner. This is revealed through the life of Stephen Mzamane, since the text is able to reveal how land expropriation and racial identity intersect to produce marginalisation and cultural dislocation.

1.9.3 Chapter Four: Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018)

Chapter Four examines Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight*, which bridges the colonial and post-independence periods. The text explores the reclamation of land through resistance, negotiation, and market transactions. It also addresses the new forms of reconstruction of identity and belonging in a newly democratic society. The narrative, which is centred on Imogen 'Genie' Zula Nyoni and her father Golide Gumede, reveals the complexities of restoring cultural and spatial agency amidst lingering colonial legacies.

1.9.4 Chapter Five: Harry Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017)

Chapter Five investigates Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, set in a democracy. The novel traces the experiences of multiple characters across successive regimes in British imperialism, apartheid, and democracy, by highlighting the persistent redefinition of land ownership and identity. Through the character of Zweig and his interactions with others, the text reveals how race and language, as markers of identity, continue to shape access to land and urban space as this perpetuates overt and covert forms of exclusion.

1.9.5 Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusion

The final chapter synthesises the findings of the study, revisiting the problem statement, research questions, and objectives. It functions as a medium to articulate how the selected texts collectively construct a structured and evolving land discourse by revealing the socio-political mechanisms through which land is expropriated, owned, and imbued with identity and belonging in Southern Africa as represented by South Africa.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a comprehensive outline structure of this study and it situates each chapter within the broader investigation of the story of land politics in Southern African literature. The selected novels (*A Sin of Omission*, *The Theory of Flight*, and *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*) each represent a unique historical phase in colonisation, resistance, and democracy. Through their respective narratives, the texts clearly explain the contested terrain of land, identity, and belonging by providing a literary cartography of Southern Africa's socio-political evolution with a particular emphasis on developments reflected in South African society.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the conceptual theoretical frameworks of the study. The chapter draws on key theoretical terms from genre theory, postcolonial studies, Genette's structural narratology, and character theory approached from a narratological perspective. Each of these theories are elucidated in the subsequent sections. The specified theoretical frameworks are deployed individually and jointly to explain the embedded story of land politics with its entanglement discourses that include expropriation, ownership, belonging, and identity as portrayed in the investigated texts. These includes *A Sin of Omission* (2019) by Marguerite Poland, *The Theory of Flight* (2018) by Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu, and *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) by Harry Kalmer.

Genre theory sets out the foundational perspectives for examining the conventions of farm and city novels, as these serve as mirrored spaces in which socio-political norms unfold and become contested. This theory facilitates an understanding of how genre-specific features shape the representation of land and its ownership by the positioned dominating people, and sets the standard to determine belonging and identity within a given context. To explain the operations of the conventions, the study draws on the contributions of theorists such as Miller (1984), Thwaites, Lloyd, and Warwick (1994), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), Chandler (1997), and Buchanan (2018), alongside genre-specific insights from Devarenne (2009), Coetzee (1986), and Akande (2016). This is further unpacked in Section 2.2.

Postcolonial theory in this study proves indispensable for investigating the persistent ideological legacies of colonialism and the cultural negotiations that emerge in post-independence society, as depicted in the selected texts. The theory also enables a critical investigation of how land is imagined, claimed, and contested by the colonisers as well as the colonised, including the dynamics that shape identity and belonging in the process. It is here that this study engages with works of leading voices in this discourse, such as Fanon (1968 [2008]), Thiong'o (1986; 1993), Bhabha (1994), Said (1995), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000; 2002), Mbembe (2001; 2019), Young (2001; 2016), and Gandhi (2019), whose contributions are explored in Section 2.3. Postcolonial theory is particularly relevant for

analysing the treatment of land and people in Southern Africa, particularly during colonial and post-independence periods in South Africa.

Genette's structural narratology (1980;1988) provides a systematic approach to analysing narrative structure through conceptual theoretical frameworks such as order, duration, and frequency. These frameworks allow for the abstraction and uncovering of the story of land by revealing the way in which it is temporally constructed and mediated from a specific perspective. In addition to Genette's seminal work (1980), the study engages with critical refinements of his work by scholars such as Chatman (1980), Prince (1982), Rimmon-Kenan (2002), Herman, Jahn, and Ryan (2005), Culler (2007), and Herman (2007; 2009; 2017), in section 2.4. While Genette's structural narratology does not explicitly address character construction, this study incorporates what it terms 'narratological' character theory to examine how characters are developed in relation to land as narrative objective and existential anchor because land functions as a foundational source of meaning, identity, and belonging for characters within the narrative.

Drawing on theorists such as Forster (1927), Greimas (1971), Rimmon-Kenan (1983), Margolin (1983; 1989), Mieke Bal (1985), Pickerel (1988), and Fishelov (1990), the study explores how characterisation reflects the socio-political contexts of land expropriation and ownership by the dominating people, as well as identity formation that creates a sense of belonging as per the given context. These insights are fully explained in Section 2.5.

Together, the specified frameworks serve to provide a robust analytical foundation for this study. In addition, they ensure methodological coherence and interpretive depth. The combined usage of these frameworks enables a systematic and flexible reading of the texts as this helps to provide a space for the integration of narrative form, historical context, and ideological meaning. As a result, this study is positioned to produce a sustained theoretical interpretation of how land politics are narratively constructed, contested, and reimagined across differing fictional and historical contexts.

2.2 Conceptual Theoretical Terms from Genre Theory

From the perspective of a literary studies, genre is understood as a category of texts following specific conventions. They emerging by responding to prevailing social conditions. There is a consensus among scholars in this field that entails Miller (1984), Thwaites, Lloyd, and Warwick (1994), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), Chandler (1997), and Buchanan (2018) that genres are not static categories but evolve in response to changing social, cultural, and

historical conditions. Buchanan (2018:207) specifies that texts within a genre often share commonalities in “composition, structure, or subject matter” as this serve as signs of genre identity that facilitate interpretive coherence. Genres are not static, but evolve, merge, and sometimes dissolve in response to shifting cultural and historical contexts. This dynamic is evident in texts that were scrutinised in this study, which exhibit characteristics of farm novels and city novels as dominating genres that have historically served as literary means for exploring the socio-political realities of Southern African societies such as South Africa. Also, these genres reflect the lived experiences of individuals and communities navigating the complexities of colonial rule, resistance, and post-independence society, where land often functions as a central motif.

The genre-based approach adopted in this study is informed by the contributions made by Coetzee (1986), Devarenne (2009), and Akande (2016), who have investigated the evolution and the thematic significance of farm and city novels in the Southern African literary canon. These genres provide a framework for understanding how narrative form and thematic content intersect to produce generated meaning that emerges from the story of land with its interrelated concerns of expropriation, ownership, belonging, and identity.

In this study, genre theory serves a dual function: it provides a methodological approach for classifying and analysing the selected texts, as well as a framework for interpreting how literary conventions shape and reflect the socio-political discourse surrounding land. Also, by situating the texts within their respective genre traditions, the study could trace the strategies through which the texts engage with historical processes and cultural tensions, while revealing the embedded story of land politics that underpin the fictional representations.

2.2.1 Farm novel

The farm novel as a literary genre within Southern African fiction, particularly in the South African context, serves as a way to see into colonial social conditions. As Devarenne (2009:627) observes, the farm novel genre depicts “South Africa’s experience of colonial conflict, white supremacy, gender struggle, and nationalism”. This observation foregrounds the genre’s dominant conventions, which are mired in the socio-politics of colonial-era narratives. The core feature of the farm novel during colonisation is the portrayal of white settlers as custodians of land and authority at the expense of the colonised, most commonly represented by the indigenous black majority. This dynamic is encountered in the texts in this study, where

the settings and character interactions reflect the entrenched racial hierarchies and land politics of the time.

In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), the narrative reveals South Africa's Eastern Cape during the colonial era, orchestrated by white people, as this exemplifies characteristics of farm novel's preoccupations such as "white supremacy" (Devarenne, 2009:627). White colonists exercise control over land and governance by instituting laws and policies that marginalise non-white populations. This is poignantly illustrated through the character of Stephen Mzamane, whose marginalisation by fellow white missionaries highlights the racialised structures of exclusion that was dominant at the time. Similarly, *The Theory of Flight* (2018) portrays a pre-independence society in which white colonists dominate land ownership, such as the Beaufort Farm and Estate. Like the other black locals, the protagonist's family are relegated to subordinate roles and work under exploitative conditions, as this reflects the structure of colonial economy. Elsewhere, in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017), the colonial legacies from respective British and Afrikaner rulers are traced through the experiences of characters, such as Zweig and his family. The policies of these governments institutionalise racial discrimination through the dispossession of land and spatial segregation. The narrative recounts events such as the internment of Zweig's grandparents in concentration camps in South Africa and the prohibition of interracial relationships, therein illustrating the pervasive reach of racialised governance, which becomes xenophobic attacks in democratic society.

However, genre theory has undergone significant evolution. This is noticeable in later developments, prompted by deconstructive critiques, as well as shifting socio-political realities that becomes a means by which to challenge traditional conventions of the farm novel. Coetzee (1986:19), for example, critiques the genre's exclusionary tendencies by arguing that farm space is not the exclusive domain of white settlers, but it is shared with the colonised despite ongoing inequality practices. He highlights the presence of black individuals within white-dominated spaces, such as townships and labour compounds, whose existence is often relegated to the periphery. This critique is reflected in *A Sin of Omission*, where Stephen Mzamane is granted a parcel of land that includes a church to oversee, as this symbolises separate development and it becomes instrumental in the development of segregating policy. His role as a religious leader within a segregated community illustrates the complex interplay between colonial authority and indigenous agency. While Stephen operates within the structures imposed by white missionaries, he is given a permit to exercise a degree of autonomy as this complicates the binary of coloniser and colonised.

In this study, the farm novel serves to establish a thematic framework that reveals motifs such as land ownership, racial discrimination, and white supremacy during colonisation. When the texts are approached within the conventions of the genre, it is possible to trace the literary articulation of the story of land politics and its impact on character development and narrative structure.

2.2.2 City novel

The Southern African city novel emerges as a distinct narrative form that reflects the complex and contradictory realities of urban life. Akande (2016:2) observes that this genre is highlighted by its portrayal of the city as “a place of noise, worldliness, and ambition”, which is a characterisation that foregrounds its negative dimensions more prominently than its positive ones. Here, the city novel becomes a literary space in which the tensions of modernity, inequality, and socio-political fragmentation are explored. Also, Akande’s (2016) analysis identifies various features that typify the South African city novel in the context, such as racial discrimination, abuse of power by state institutions (notably the police), violence, xenophobia, poverty, epidemics, unemployment, and gender inequality. These thematic elements reflect the harsh realities of urban life and functions as a narrative mechanism that provides societal critique. In this genre, the city is not only a setting, but also a contested terrain in which identity, belonging, and power are negotiated.

The city genre framework is applicable to *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017). This text is set in the title city, where events traverse multiple historical contexts from colonisation to democracy. The version of Johannesburg is presented as a space mired in racial tension as well as socio-political unrest, where the politics of land and its interrelated discourses such as land expropriation, ownership, and questions of belonging and identity, constitute underlying sources of conflict. The city is also portrayed as a site of exclusion and contestation shaped by successive regimes favouring the ruling class at the expense of the dominated Other. Like the farm novel, the city novel establishes a set of expectations regarding its thematic content. These include lack of peaceful stay in the city, civil unrest, xenophobic violence, and systemic marginalisation. Such themes underscore the genre’s significance in explaining the politics of land and identity within urban spaces. The city novel also provides a critical perspective through which the dynamics of belonging, exclusion, and racialised governance

are investigated by providing insight into the lived experiences of the dominating and marginalised racial groups as they navigate the socio-political landscape of the city.

The city novel is instrumental in framing the analysis of *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* by enabling a flexible exploration of how an urban space like Johannesburg functions as a site of historical memory, ideological struggle, and identity formation. The genre's conventions serve to structure the narrative and foreground the lasting legacies of colonial and postcolonial land politics in Southern Africa, especially in South Africa.

2.3 Conceptual Theoretical terms from Postcolonial Theorists

In their influential work entitled *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin provide comprehensive theoretical terms that underpin the field of postcolonial studies while other conceptual theoretical terms discussed in this section are drawn from various scholars. Burney (2012) notes that theoretical terms used in postcolonial studies are drawn from multiple disciplines that include literature, anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology. These terms are employed in specialised ways to critique colonial legacies. Their contributions are invaluable in enhancing the understanding of colonial and postcolonial literature discourse, including the provision of critical tools for approaching the cultural, political, and ideological legacies of colonial imperialism and its dismantling. In their later work, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002) see postcolonial studies as a way to reclaim identity, considering it a tool for reclaiming lost heritage and its practices, where language is instrumental in carrying out this function. It is here that this study draws selectively from their conceptual theoretical framework of the year 2000 by applying key insights relevant to the investigation of land politics in Southern African fiction, particularly in the context of South Africa. As elaborated in the sections to follow, the selected terms explain the ways in which the investigated texts engage with the historical processes of colonisation, resistance, and post-independence society, especially as these pertain to the interrelated issues of land expropriation, ownership, belonging, and identity.

By deploying these postcolonial theoretical terms, the study situates its analysis within a broader postcolonial discourse, making it open to a complex and flexible interpretation of how fictional narratives reflect and critique the socio-political realities of South Africa. The theoretical terms drawn from writings by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000) provide a

critical foundation for understanding the ideological structures as well as cultural negotiations that shape the representation of land and identity in the selected texts.

2.3.1 Territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari develop a conceptual framework known as the triad. It includes territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation to explain how social, political, and cultural formations emerge, dissolve, and reform, especially when it comes to acquisition of land. The triad informs the processes of colonisation, resistance, and democracy in the investigated texts.

Territorialisation refers to the processes through which spaces, identities, and social relations become organised, stabilised, and regulated. It involves the marking of space, the establishment of boundaries, and the imposition of control (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 314–350; 508). The manifestation of territorialisation can be physical through land occupation, ideological through the introduction of laws and categorisation, or symbolic through established cultural norms.

Deterritorialisation refers to forces or events that serve to disrupt, displace, or dissolve established territorial arrangements such as those established during territorialisation. These movements open “lines of flight” through which subjects –including ruling classes, institutions, or spaces – break away from previously imposed structures (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 508). The deterritorialisation does not imply complete liberation but functions to simply highlight a shift away from existing forms of power and organisation that does not have justice. Lastly, reterritorialisation occurs when new forms of organisation emerge to replace those that have been destabilised through the deterritorialisation process. Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari insist that reterritorialisation is never a return to an original state, but a reconfiguration driven by new interests, institutions, or ideological forces (1987: 175; 508).

Reterritorialisation may be explicit or covert by operating through economic systems, political alliances, or cultural practices that reinstate control in different forms.

In the investigated texts, the dynamics of land appropriation is framed through Deleuze and Guattari’s triad of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation as articulated in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). For these scholars, territorialisation refers to the processes through which space is organised, claimed, and stabilised through structures of power (1987:419).

In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), the territorialisation is evident in the way white colonisers occupy and control invaded land. Their territorialisation is enforced through biopolitical instruments such as warfare, legislative dispossession, and institutionalised exclusion, which is a mechanism that serves to consolidate colonial authority and regulate access to space. Through these practices, conquered land becomes structured into hierarchies and boundaries that naturalise the coloniser's dominance.

In contrast, deterritorialisation highlights the disruption or loosening of these established territorial regimes. It highlights the breaking open of fixed structures, what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a "line of flight", that destabilises dominant power arrangements (1987:508). Within the context of this study, deterritorialisation appears in the reclamation of land by formerly colonised communities. This reclamation is more than physical repossession because it signifies a process of reconstructing identity, sovereignty, and cultural continuity.

The Theory of Flight (2018) dramatises the process of deterritorialisation by portraying the resistance against colonial rule and the struggle for independence. The text highlights how the colonised seize the moment of rupture to reimagine their social and political position by appropriating land not only for habitation but also for the restoration of dignity and collective agency. However, the departure of colonial forces is seldom absolute because even after independence, colonial influence persists in reconfigured forms.

The process aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of reterritorialisation – the emergence of new structures that reassert control following a deterritorialising event. Most importantly, reterritorialisation is not a return to precolonial order but a re-inscription of authority through new mechanisms. Deleuze and Guattari (1987:175) caution that reterritorialisation may operate through "artifices" that include institutions, systems, cultural objects, or ideological apparatuses. It is here that "anything can serve as a reterritorialisation", whether a policy, an economic system, or even a text (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:508). In the context of post-independence, reterritorialisation manifests through economic manipulation, political interference, administrative siloing, covert sabotage, or ideological infiltration. The specified strategies help former colonial powers with local elites aligned with them to reassert influence under the guise of democratic processes or economic development. Such transformations reveal how colonial logic survives by adapting to new conditions, embedding itself within financial institutions, state structures, and geopolitical partnerships.

A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg (2017) reflects the effects of this reterritorialisation in its portrayal of the city's transition from colonisation to democracy. While political liberation promises a peaceful and inclusive urban space, the text exposes persistent instability, racial

tensions, xenophobic violence, and economic inequality. These conditions demonstrate that colonial legacies remain operative not only as overt political domination but also as reconfigured forms of spatial, economic, and ideological control. The city's turmoil suggests that the hoped-for peaceful coexistence becomes elusive when colonial structures are reorganised rather than dismantled. This hostile environment moves the former colonised to begin to question the legitimacy or efficacy of postcolonial leadership. The uncertainty creates opportunities for former colonial powers or global actors to re-enter the political landscape through elections, economic partnerships, cultural diplomacy, or developmental aid. Although framed as democratic collaboration, such interventions often carry the same territorial imperatives that shaped earlier colonial projects. This marks a contemporary form of recolonisation that operates through institutional, economic, and symbolic pathways rather than direct conquest. Nevertheless, it remains driven by a desire to shape and influence the territorial order.

2.3.2 Apartheid

In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain apartheid as a system that “designate[s] a variety of situations in which racial discrimination was institutionalised by law” (2000:14). This explanation aligns with the historical implementation of apartheid in South Africa, where legal frameworks were explicitly designed to enforce racial segregation and inequality between invading white colonisers and the colonised, who were dominantly local black people. The theoretical term is central to postcolonial discourse, particularly in the Southern African context, where land politics and racial hierarchies were codified through legislation such as those found in South Africa. It is here that Mbembe's (2019:46) reflection on the postcolony becomes relevant, emphasising that contexts such as apartheid was structured to promote separate development: separated racial groups were divided by “specific territorial spaces”. This spatial segregation was not incidental, but foundational to the apartheid regime's logic of control and exclusion. As Ashcroft et al. (2000:14) further note, policies such as the discriminatory Land Acts restricted land ownership for the non-white populations to a mere 13 percent of South Africa's land, institutionalising dispossession and inequality. This injustice aligns with what Young (2001:49) calls “devastating impact”, as it emerged from apartheid policies such as the so-called Native Land Act and resulted in the loss of “homes and means of subsistence” for black South Africans. He

characterises this condition as landlessness, which is a theoretical term that reveals the material deprivation and symbolic alienation experienced by those forcibly removed from their ancestral land. The apartheid system did not only relocate non-white populations to marginal and resource-scarce areas, but also imposed cultural and linguistic assimilation, therein compelling the colonised to adopt the practices of the colonisers as a means of survival and social navigation.

Some of the texts investigated in this study mirror the functioning of apartheid as a legal and ideological construct. In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), set during the colonial period when structures of colonisation foreshadowed apartheid, this is mirrored and manifested in the marginalisation of non-whites, such as Stephen Mzamane. The narrative reflects the early implementation of laws and policies that prohibited interracial socialisation and cohabitation, thereby entrenching practices of unequal treatment and spatial segregation. This allowed white colonists to assert their dominance, not only through land ownership, but also by cultivating a culture of exclusionary practices among non-whites, who are made to feel alien in their ancestral land. Stephen's experience exemplifies the apartheid logic of separate development when he is granted a small parcel of land and a church to oversee, which is symbolic of the well-known Bantustan model later formalised under the apartheid regime. This position affords Stephen a degree of authority to rule his own people as part of the separate development plan and reinforces the racial hierarchies and spatial divisions characteristic of the British and apartheid regimes. Stephen's way of life within the missionary structures of colonisation reveals the complex interplay between collaboration and subjugation.

2.3.3 Otherness

Otherness as an operational concept of postcolonial theory constitutes a foundational pillar that elucidates the ideological and psychological mechanisms through which colonial power is exercised and maintained. Otherness emerges from the broader discourse on colonialism and its aftermath to refer to the process by which colonisers construct the identity of the colonised as different, inferior, and alien. This conceptualisation enhances the understanding of the dynamics of domination, exclusion, and identity formation found in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Leading scholars in the discourse of otherness have extensively engaged with the explanation of the theoretical term otherness, and each provided insight into the term's

functioning (Fanon, 1968 [2008]:57; Said, 1995:5; Bhabha, 1994:15). These scholars share the view that the coloniser's objective is to instil a sense of inferiority into the colonised, thereby undermining their confidence and reinforcing their subordination. Fanon (1968 [2008]:57) empathetically acknowledges that the native does not experience the colonial space as shared or inclusive; it becomes a site of alienation where the coloniser's presence is highlighted by technological superiority, racialised hierarchies, and cultural imposition as this reveals a form of othering. Said (1995:5) also emphasises that the coloniser's perception of the colonised is shaped by power relations based in conquest and racial difference, which is what "others" the colonised. It is here that the colonised are not defined by their own subjectivity, but through the perspective of the coloniser – also known as the coloniser's gaze – as this positions them as subordinate and dispossessed. This process of othering is intimately linked to the expropriation of land, because the coloniser assumes authority over territorial and cultural domains, and is positioned to determine who is entitled to ownership and belonging in the conquered land. This shows the profound implications of otherness: it does not only facilitate the material dispossession of the colonised, but also enforces a transformation of identity. It is here that the colonised are stripped of their original roles and redefined into labourers or dependants within a colonial system that privileges the settler's authority. In this way, othering becomes a mechanism of control, legitimising the transfer of land and power from indigenous populations to the colonial ruling class.

Here, otherness serves as a critical analytical tool for investigating how racial differentiation informs land politics in Southern African fiction, especially in South Africa, where it functions to reveal how the colonised are excluded from land ownership, and thereby excluded from belonging to it through legal, spatial, and cultural means implemented by the coloniser. All three texts under investigation – *A Sin of Omission* (2019), *The Theory of Flight* (2018), and *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) – engage with this dynamic of the Other by portraying characters whose identities and access to land are shaped by the colonial logic of othering. Moreover, the theoretical term of otherness enables an understanding of how identity is constructed and contested in postcolonial narratives. This manifests whenever the coloniser and the colonised are positioned in relation to one another, such as the way in which these positions influence the treatment of racialised subjects within the conquered spaces. Through textual analysis, this study uncovers the painful lasting impact of othering the colonised in terms of land ownership, social inclusion, and the formation of postcolonial identities.

2.3.4 Identity

The construction of identity is treated as a process that is historically mediated and, in some cases, to be continuously negotiated. It is here that identity is not only conceived as fixed or essential but also to be produced through uneven histories of domination, displacement, and resistance. As a past dominating force, colonial rule restructures subjectivity by imposing racial, cultural, and spatial hierarchies, while postcolonial contexts reveal identity as an ongoing negotiation rather than a resolution. What emerges is that identity is a product of a dynamic, hybrid, and contested construct that is influenced by the long and lasting legacies that include colonial power. Seminal works by Edward Said (1978), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), and Homi K. Bhabha (1994) concur that identity emerges from unequal power relations established during colonisation. Said's work on *Orientalism* (1978) reveals how colonial discourse functions to construct the colonised locals as the "other", shaping not only external representations but also internal self-understandings. Bhabha's (1994) theoretical terms of hybridity and the third space show that identity is produced through cultural negotiation, where colonised subjects continuously reinterpret and resist imposed colonial meanings. The work by Spivak (1988) enhances the understanding of identity by highlighting the silencing of subaltern identities when arguing that identity formation must be read through structures of representation and epistemic dominance.

Scholars of the 21st century reinforce earlier ideas from the identified seminal works by demonstrating how identity formation in postcolonial contexts remains influenced by colonial hegemony, displacement, and race. Abu Jweid and Fakhrulddin (2025) reveal that identity reflects the complex interplay between indigenous cultural frameworks and colonial ideological imprints whereby postcolonial identities continue to evolve long after formal decolonisation. It is here that identity emerges as fractured, negotiated, and reimagined, especially when postcolonial writers reclaim suppressed histories and articulate new cultural possibilities. Mukherjee (2025) and Hossain (2024) reveal how issues of hybridity, memory, and cultural resistance shape identity in 21st century postcolonial literature. The explanation of identity provided by these scholars help to unpack the meaning generated by the texts in this study, which is land and its issues of ownership, identity, and belonging.

Marguerite Poland's *A Sin of Omission* (2019), explores the early stages of identity during colonisation. It is in this context where fractured identity between the locals and the invading white colonists is revealed, caused by the systematic dismantling and supplanting of

indigenous cultural practices. Sipiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018) engages with issues of colonial resistance and the reclamation of stolen land. It reveals the process of negotiating an identity by resisting the previously imposed identity of the Other and the practices of the colonisers. Harry Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) uncovers the reimagined identity of Johannesburg that go through many phases during the abuse of political power across colonial and democratic regimes, to serve as a metaphor for South Africa's creation of a new identity of the populace.

Overall, within postcolonial theory, identity is not fixed but emerges as a historically mediated process of negotiation, resistance, and cultural re-articulation. It is shaped by the psychological effects of colonial domination but also through the ongoing struggle to reclaim agency and epistemic autonomy in postcolonial societies.

2.3.5 Belonging

Belonging refers to the political and affective processes that govern inclusion and exclusion. In the context of postcolonial studies, belonging is produced through historical uneven systems that function to determine who may inhabit space, claim land, speak with authority, or be recognised as legitimate by the ruling, dominating racial groups. These processes operate simultaneously at institutional and experiential levels while informing legal inclusion as well as lived experience.

In postcolonial studies, this belonging becomes a process of ongoing negotiation of cultural rootedness, social recognition, and political inclusion within societies still shaped by the long-lasting legacies of colonialism. It is a deeply political and epistemic process that determines who is accepted as part of the collective and who is positioned as an outsider. Frantz Fanon (1961) writes that colonial domination produces psychological alienation by disrupting the local's sense of home and community while creating fractured identities and lasting experiences of non-belonging that persist across generations. Elsewhere, Powell (2018; 2024) argues that the structural dimensions of belonging are highlighted by an understanding of the mechanisms of othering that classify and exclude populations based on race, culture, and historically inherited colonial hierarchies. Similarly, Nuraan Davids (2025) emphasises that belonging is tied to the politics of knowledge by arguing that the imposition of the colonisers' epistemologies on the locals continues to shape who is recognized as a legitimate knower, citizen, or cultural subject. The interpretation is that meaningful belonging requires decolonisation of knowledge systems while re-introducing marginalised epistemic identities.

This possible interpretation aligns with Nira Yuval-Davis's (2011) contribution to the theorisation of belonging. Her influential work, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (2011), argues that belonging operates through multi-layered as well as intersectional processes that involve emotional, political, and sociocultural attachments. Yuval-Davis (2011) distinguishes between belonging, which refers to emotional attachment and identity, and the politics of belonging, which refers to the boundary-making processes that occur when institutions (including governments and communities) decide who qualifies as a member and under what conditions. This distinction demonstrates how nationalist, religious, cosmopolitan, and gendered projects of belonging shape individuals differently based on their social positioning in various contexts of the society. Elsewhere, Lee (2025) reveals that belonging in postcolonial societies involves not only navigating hybrid identities, but also reclaiming indigenous cultural values that were marginalised under colonial authority.

The texts in this study portray belonging in various ways. During the initial stages of colonisation, as depicted in Marguerite Poland's *A Sin of Omission* (2019), the text shows neglect of locals because of their skin colour, religion, and language which, to the ruling class of invading white colonists, function as markers of belonging. Sipiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018) reveals instances of resistance against the impossible requirements of belonging imposed by the ruling class as well as the neglect suffered by the colonised while leading to fractured and piecemeal lives. The resistance movement is intended to show colonial masters that locals are humans who can make meaningful contributions to the needs of society and belong to the ruling class that was undermined during the invasion phase. Harry Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) uncovers the struggle for belonging .

In summary, belonging in postcolonial studies is a complex, contested, and continually reconstructed process that is shaped by various factors that includes historical dispossession, power relations, the struggle for recognition, justice, and epistemic inclusion.

2.3.6 Biopower

Biopower refers to governmental control over life, spatial access, and population management in colonial and postcolonial contexts; biopower operates in many ways that include legal, military, religious, and administrative mechanisms. The results are to determine who may live where, under what conditions, and with what protection or exposure. Control over land, mobility, labour, and reproduction becomes central to the management of populations. Mbembe

(2019:76) repurposes the conceptual theoretical term ‘biopower’ within the African context, extending Foucault’s (1977) explanation of biopower, which is later interpreted by Taylor (2014:41) as the sovereign capacity to exercise control over life itself. Mbembe (2001) reconfigures earlier ideas of biopower to help explain the colonial state’s given right to assume the metaphorical position of God: this enables them to determine who may live and who must die, while exposing the underlying logic of domination that animates colonial governance. In this reframing, biopower becomes synonymous with a “state of exception” and a “state of siege”, where racialised mechanisms of regulation and management culminate in the preservation and annihilation of life (Mbembe, 2019:76). He also posits that the colonial deployment of biopower functions as a laboratory for mass extinction, which is seen as a “testing ground” for technologies of death (Mbembe, 2019:76). These technologies include not only weaponry employed to conquer and subjugate, but also juridic-political instruments such as land appropriation laws, which institutionalise siege-like conditions that shape racial hierarchies. Such laws do not only regulate land but also delineate the form of existence itself by determining access to resources, mobility, and survival of the colonised.

This dynamic biopower is exemplified in *A Sin of Omission* (2019), where the colonised, represented by black people, are rendered the racialised Other and subjected to systemic neglect, and compelled to conform to an imposed social order. This order, which is supported by developing discriminatory legislations, weaponises race, skin colour, and language as instruments of exclusion to dictate who may partake in economic life and who is consigned to precarity and, eventually, to death. This is where the relevance of biopower in this study is revealed: it has a dual application, as both the invading white colonisers and the resisting colonised wield instruments such as law or war to assert control over life. White colonial agents seize indigenous lands through interconnected instruments of biopower that includes military force, the church, and developed discriminatory legal laws. These help shapes a regime based on spatial and existential control. Mbembe (2019:76) interprets such actions as part of the colonists’ objective, namely the unprecedented destruction of indigenous rulers and their powers used for resistance.

Conversely, *The Theory of Flight* portrays a moment of reversal, where formerly colonised people reclaim agency through the strategic appropriation of colonial biopowers, such as armed resistance and legal negotiation. The enactment of land restitution policies signals a paradigmatic shift, where the colonised are no longer passive recipients of control, but active agents in the reconfiguration of life. In choosing to integrate, rather than to exclude white citizens, the liberated populace not only reclaims control of their land, but also redefines

the terms of coexistence, thereby subverting the colonial logic of separation and domination, despite lurking colonial legacies.

2.3.7 Necropower

Necropower extends governance into the management of disposability and death. Within the contexts of colonial and postcolonial societies, necropower operates when governments determine which ethnic groups within the population are rendered expendable, exposed to death, or abandoned to conditions of slow violence. Governance is exercised not only through regulation and discipline but also from deliberate acts of neglect, militarised destruction, and the normalisation of mortal vulnerability. Mbembe's (2019) explanation of necropower builds upon as well as extends the theoretical conceptual term of biopower, by providing a critical perspective through which the exercise of sovereign power over death is foregrounded. This process reveals Mbembe's (2019) focus on how political authority serves to determine who may live and who must die. It is here that necropower reveals the emphasis on the ways which states and regimes assert control by exposing certain populations to death, precarity, or conditions that lead to death. This perspective shifts analyses from governance aimed at sustaining life to forms of power designed around violence, disposability, and the management of mortality in contexts that include colonialism, occupation, and racialised inequality. While Foucault's biopower (1977) concerns itself with the regulation of life through technologies of control (something Taylor (2014:41) describes as "power over life"), necropower shifts its focus to concentrate on the deliberate exposure of populations to death, abandonment, and systemic violence by governments. With this, Mbembe (2019:92) distinguishes necropower as a modality of governance under which the state not only controls life, but actively determines the conditions under which life may be extinguished.

In this framework, human existence is rendered disposable, as if a mere cog in the machinery of domination. What emerges here is that necropower is not only an extension of biopower, but also a radical intensification of its logic. It manifests through various death-dealing mechanisms, ranging from overt instruments such as weapons, terrorism, and militarised violence, to more insidious forms like structural neglect, unemployment, exclusion, financial manipulation, xenophobic attacks, political populism, pandemics, empty promises, and exploitative labour. The identified technologies of death are not only applicable to colonial regimes, but also operate in contemporary democratic contexts, as this reveals the lasting

colonial legacy of governance and its capacity to evolve across temporal and political boundaries.

With this, the study draws upon the fictional works of Poland (2019), Ndlovu (2018), and Kalmer (2017), where the texts mirror the operation of necropower across varied socio-political contexts, dating back from colonial subjugation to post-independence democracies. In these texts, necropower emerges as a critical heuristic for investigating the treatment of characters by their respective leaders, while revealing the criteria by which inclusion, exclusion, and disposability become determined. In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), non-whites are subjected to mistreatment by colonial administration in ways that show systemic neglect and exploitative labour, where they are relegated to servitude or forced labour akin to slavery in state projects such as railway construction and mining. This treatment highlights the colonial perception of the life of non-whites as expendable, which is a view rooted in racialised hierarchies that deem black identity as incompatible with the dominant white settler ethos. It is here that the colonised are stripped of their natural agency and reduced to instruments of imperial utility.

Elsewhere, Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018) offers a postcolonial iteration of necropower, where the newly independent leaders replicate colonial modes of domination. Here, violence, civil wars, and pandemics such as the HIV/AIDS crisis are weaponised to consolidate authority and dispossess citizens of their land and autonomy. The deliberate exclusion of certain populations from national imaginaries and development agendas signals their symbolic and material erasure, where they are treated not as constituents, but as waste to be discarded. Similarly, Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) portrays the racialised and xenophobic violence that permeates democratic South Africa. Black foreign nationals are subjected to routine attacks, their marginalisation justified by language exclusion due to their inability to speak language of the elite class, which in this context is dominated by one of the indigenous language(s), such as isiZulu. This linguistic criterion becomes a proxy for identity verification and belonging by reinforcing necropolitical hierarchies that determine who may live with dignity and who ought to suffer invisibility, or death.

Therefore, Mbembe's (2019) conceptualisation of necropower provides an approach for understanding how regimes in the form of colonial and postcolonial alike deploy death technologies as a means of governance. This is depicted in the investigated texts, revealing the enduring structures of exclusion, violence, and disposability that are laid bare, while also considering the mutable yet persistent nature of necropolitical control.

2.3.8 Dismembering and re-membering

In his critical engagement with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Moving the Centre* (1993), Osaaji (2012) observes that the theoretical constructs of “dismemberment” and “re-membering”, first articulated in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), provide a framework for investigating the historical processes of colonisation, as well as the multifaceted forms of resistance that follow. These theoretical terms, which are rich in metaphorical and political resonance, are relevant to this study's exploration of cultural and land dispossession, as well as to the subsequent efforts at reclamation and identity reconstruction. The idea of dismemberment clearly expresses the violent severance of the colonised people from their land, languages, and indigenous cultural practices.

In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), this dismemberment is exemplified in the character of Stephen, who converts to Christianity and becomes fluent in English at the expense of his native isiXhosa (including its cultural practices). This reveals the symbolic internalisation of colonial epistemologies installed upon the colonised. On this note, Burney (2012) notes how the colonisers use language as a tool to separate people and create a gap in cultural and ideological practices. The loss of land is paralleled by the erosion of cultural identity, because the colonised are forced to adopt the coloniser's beliefs and worldview, as this becomes a means to estrange the colonised from their ancestral heritage. Conversely, re-membering signifies the restorative process through which colonised peoples seek to reclaim land and cultural memory. Thiong'o (1986:28) calls this action a return to one's natural habitat; not only in a geographical sense, but also as a reconstitution of self through the revival of marginalised traditions, including their epistemologies that were lost to the colonisers' ways. This process is not only sentimental but also generative by enabling the emergence of new hybrid identities that honour the painful past, while navigating the complexities of the present.

In the investigated texts, a dialogic process of dismemberment and re-membering emerges in the fictional works of Ndlovu (2019) and Kalmer (2017) in their depiction of colonial invasion and its resistance. In *The Theory of Flight* (2019), the attainment of independence from colonisation marks a moment of re-membering which is articulated through the reclamation of ancestral land with its lost heritage. At this point, formerly colonised people reject identities imposed by colonial powers and begin to forge inclusive hybrid identities as a means of belonging within a democratic society. Despite the persistence of colonial legacies, these texts provide a glimpse into a future where they project possible cultural plurality as well as shared sovereignty.

Similarly, *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) recounts the resurgence of non-white South Africans in a postcolonial urban city of Johannesburg, while at once dealing with the residual effects of colonial and racial hierarchies known as ‘the colonial legacy’. The transition from colonialism to democracy offers a space for re-membering, yet this space is mired with tensions – such as racial discrimination – which is transformed into xenophobic violence against black foreign nationals. This further reveals the lasting power of exclusionary logics rooted in colonialism. The inability of these individuals to speak dominant indigenous languages such as isiZulu becomes a mechanism of othering, as it highlights the fragility of postcolonial identity and the unfinished project of decolonisation.

Thiong'o's (1986) theoretical terms provide a means by which to examine the interplay between loss and recovery, as well as alienation and belonging. Through literary representation, these theoretical terms of dismemberment and re-membering explain the ongoing struggle to reclaim cultural sovereignty and reconfigure identity in the aftermath of colonial domination.

2.3.9 Entanglement

In the context of postcolonial society, the theoretical term *entanglement* provides a complex and flexible framework for understanding the re-ordering of socio-political and cultural structures amidst colonial legacies. In her book *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-apartheid*, Sarah Nuttall (2009) conceptualises entanglement as the state of being in postcolonial contexts. This includes South Africa as the main focus because it is where histories, identities, cultures, and spatial realities become intertwined in a condition of entwinement. As Mbembe (2001:66) articulates, entanglement has an essential feature in its capacious and accommodating disposition that allows for the embrace of contradictions, ruptures, reversals, inertias, and oscillations. These refer to the overlapping and interpenetrating dynamics and form the fabric of postcolonial life, where the past and present are not neatly separated, but exist together in a complex manner. In this sense, entanglement becomes a mechanism that facilitates the reconfiguration of societal elements not limited to identity, culture, governance, but most importantly to land, into a new order that seeks to accommodate all constituents of the postcolonial polity. This re-ordering does not only administrative but also become ontological where it involves the reconstitution of self and space through the lived experiences of colonial dispossession and postcolonial aspiration. This conceptual framework is intimately linked to the theoretical terms previously discussed, such

as dismembering and re-membering (section 2.3.8). This is the case particularly in the way in which democratic authority attempts to restore land and cultural identity to those historically marginalised.

Mbembe's (2001) theoretical term of entanglement is positioned as a critical tool for analysing the accommodation and reordering of land, which is a focal concern of this study as it is mirrored in the fictional works of Ndlovu (2018) and Kalmer (2017). In *The Theory of Flight* (2018), the narrative centres on the resistance to colonisation and the subsequent attainment of independence, where land restitution emerges as an unavoidable imperative. The colonised, who were long denied access to their ancestral land(s), are now afforded the opportunity to reclaim their ancestral stolen land, as this positions them to redefine belonging. Post-independence leaders are confronted with the task of redressing the spatial injustices of the colonial past by enabling formerly excluded individuals to inhabit affluent areas once reserved for white settlers. Similarly, *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) captures the spatial and cultural entanglements of a postcolonial urban landscape. Under colonial regimes such as British imperialism and apartheid, non-white populations were systematically excluded from residing in Johannesburg, a city emblematic of industrial modernity and economic opportunity. In the democratic era, this exclusion is formally destroyed, and access becomes ostensibly universal. However, the transition is mired with tensions due to an inherited colonial legacy manifesting in the form of racial discrimination as well as the xenophobic violence that continues to haunt the city. The entanglement of past and present reveals that the democratic promise of inclusion is complicated by the persistence of exclusionary inherited practices that are now refracted through new forms of identity politics, including the socio-economic stratification.

Entanglement serves as a theoretical perspective through which the complexities of postcolonial re-ordering, especially in relation to land and identity, can be critically investigated. This functions to highlight the impossibility of a clean break from the colonial past, while also explaining the generative possibilities of accommodation, hybridity, and reconstitution in the ongoing project of decolonisation.

2.3.10 Fiscality and land appropriation

The theoretical conceptual term of fiscality, as articulated by Mbembe (2001:46), transcends conventional political and economic frameworks to encompass the distribution, provision, and

appropriation of goods and services as instruments of power. It functions as a mechanism on the part of governments to exert control, not only through policy, but also through the material reorganisation of society. With this, fiscality aligns conceptually with entanglement (as discussed in section 2.3.9), as both terms engage with the complex reordering of postcolonial life. Specifically, fiscality pertains to the appropriation of resources, chief amongst which is land, which operates under the guise of legal and economic rationality. Also, Mbembe's (2001:46) explanations reveal that land as property becomes subject to fiscal appropriation, where government mechanisms redistribute it to favour its preferred people at the expense of the disregarded others that are intentionally excluded.

In the Southern African context, as represented by South Africa, legal experts such as De Villiers and Stiftung (2003:2) highlight the political and economic dimensions of land reform, noting its expansive scope in the form of "land claims, acquisition and distribution of land, access to land for certain purposes, land use planning, infrastructure development, farming and commercial support, resettlement programmes, tenure security, and training". These components resonate with Mbembe's (2001) criteria for fiscal governance, which illustrates the way in which land reform functions as a tool of inclusion and exclusion. Within this framework, a socialist approach to land expropriation emerges as a corrective mechanism aimed at equitable redistribution and the restoration of cultural identity, which was historically suppressed under colonial rule informed by a capitalist approach (Ashcroft et al., 2000:15).

To further strengthen the discussion, fiscality and land appropriation may be situated within the theoretical triad of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation; theoretical terms developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). As these philosophers explain it, the theoretical term territorialisation refers to the granting and structuring of conquered land through diverse forms of occupation and its control (1987:419). This is exemplified in *A Sin of Omission* (2019), where invading white colonisers seize indigenous land through instruments of biopower, such as wars and legal dispossession, as this positions them to enact territorial practices of exclusion in various forms. Conversely, deterritorialisation signifies the disruption of established territorial regimes. It is the moment of departure, the "line of flight", where colonial powers relinquish control and start to exit the colony (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:508). In the context of this study, deterritorialisation is manifested in the action of land reclamation by the formerly colonised, who now appropriate the territory for habitation, the reconstruction of their identity and independence, and cultural restoration. *The Theory of Flight* (2018) is the text that dramatises the specified process of disruption in the form of resistance to colonisation, portraying the struggle for independence

from colonisation, including the subsequent empowerment of the colonised to reclaim land and redefine their place within a newly democratic society.

However, the departure of the coloniser is rarely absolute: where colonial legacy lingers, it finds new ways to manifest. Reterritorialisation describes the strategic reassertion of control through covert or symbolic means. Deleuze and Guattari (1987:175) caution that reterritorialisation ought not be mistaken for a return to precolonial territoriality; it should be understood to involve a set of artifices such as objects, systems, and institutions through which former colonial powers seek to re-establish influence. It is here that “anything can serve as a reterritorialisation”, as they explain, “a being, an object, a book, an apparatus or system” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:508). In post-independence contexts, reterritorialisation manifests through actions such as manipulating financial institutions, political interference, working in silos, strategic sabotage, and ideological infiltration.

A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg (2017) mirrors the consequences of reterritorialisation by revealing the transition from colonisation to democracy in the city of Johannesburg, while highlighting persistent instability and racial tensions that undermine the promise of peaceful stay in the area. Xenophobic violence, economic disparity, and political fragmentation suggest that the colonial legacy has not been eradicated, but instead has become reconfigured in the city, undermining any hope of a peaceful stay there. In such conditions, the colonised may begin to question the efficacy of postcolonial leadership by opening the door for former colonial powers to reassert influence, whether through elections, economic partnerships, or cultural diplomacy. This constitutes a modern form of recolonisation that is strategically based in democratic principles but driven by the same territorial imperatives underpinning colonisation.

Fiscality, when examined through the perspective of the theoretical term *territorialisation*, reveals the complex interplay between land, identity, and power in postcolonial societies. It also highlights the lasting struggle over land that is not only operating as geographical space, but also as a site of cultural memory, political agency, and historical reckoning.

2.3.11 Landlessness

Through the interplay of land loss and land lost, Young (2001:52) offers a poignant articulation of landlessness by describing it as the condition of exile from one’s ancestral territory. This

explanation resonates with Mbembe's (2001:183) account of the "African experience", where colonial conquest is highlighted in a systematic overriding of indigenous rights and practices, as well as the unrestrained assertion of colonial pride. In this context, land is not only seized but also transformed into a site of domination, where its appropriation serves the purposes of ruling over its inhabitants, as well as enriching the coloniser. The result is unprecedented dispossession that plunges the colonised into poverty, as exemplified by the historical relegation of black South Africans to a mere 13% of the land.

It is here that Mbembe (2001:183) identifies this act of land seizure as a capitalist manoeuvre, where land allocation is structured to benefit the coloniser as well as the ruling class in later stages, by exclusively rendering the dispossessed invisible within the economic order. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986:16) further highlights the psychological violence of this dispossession where he notes that the coloniser's control over land extends to the symbolic realm, where language and culture as tools of self-definition are forcibly replaced. The colonised are forced to adopt the coloniser's language and cultural practices that result in the erosion of indigenous identity and the internalisation of colonial epistemologies.

Dynamics of landlessness are mirrored in *A Sin of Omission* (2019), where indigenous people lose their land to invading white colonisers and are also relocated to impoverished sites. Additionally, the colonised are rendered dependent on colonial systems to provide labour under conditions akin to servitude, especially in state-driven industrial projects, such as road construction and mining. It is here that the imposition of western values such as industrialisation disrupts the natural way of life enjoyed by the predominantly black colonised, as this is replaced with mechanised routines that alienate them from their heritage and cultural practices.

However, the departure of the coloniser does not automatically restore what was lost by the colonised in the process. When colonial rule ends, the legacies of imposed cultural systems such as language, beliefs, and values are not entirely preserved, nor are they easily discarded. In the new era, the former coloniser – now known as a residual presence within the post-colony – must adapt to a transformed socio-political landscape. This transition is mirrored in *The Theory of Flight* (2018), where land redistribution enables formerly colonised families such as the Masukus to access previously restricted spaces. This is highlighted in their children's enrolment in elite private schools once reserved for white settlers, as this signals a gradual alleviation of poverty and a reconfiguration of social mobility. Similarly, *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) reveals how the postcolonial land reclamation of urban space in Johannesburg is occupied and treated. Under apartheid, non-whites were barred from residing

in Johannesburg and its surrounding areas, while access in the democratic era is ostensibly universal and formerly excluded individuals now participate in the city's commercial life. This equitable redistribution of land and opportunity fosters a sense of belonging, which facilitates the emergence of a hybrid identity in the city, while acknowledging scars of colonisation that remain palpable in possibilities of a shared future.

In summary, the condition of landlessness as explained by Young (2001), Mbembe (2001), and Thiong'o (1986) is not only a material deprivation, but a profound existential rupture. The texts in this study reveal the multifaceted consequences of colonial land dispossession, as well as the complex processes of restitution and identity reconstruction that follow. Also, the texts reveal that land is not only a physical asset but a symbolic locus of power, memory, and belonging.

2.3.12 Colonial period

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2007), colonialism is the establishment of a new community in a foreign land with the support of a parent state. With this, the explanation aligns with Said's (1995:8) conception of colonialism as the "implanting of settlements on distant territory", a formulation that highlights the spatial and political dimensions of imperial expansion. The explanation reveals the hidden idea of colonialism as a trans-historical and trans-geographical phenomenon that manifests across various times and places by adapting to local contexts, while maintaining its structural logic of domination as required by the parent state.

The selected texts traverse distinct temporal and spatial settings by portraying the evolving dynamics between the dominating racial group and the dispossessed in various contexts that take place across colonisation, resistance, and democracy. These narratives can be seen to question not only the material consequences of land ownership, but also the interpersonal and ideological relations that emerge within contested spaces. The colonial period portrayed in *A Sin of Omission* (2019) is roughly between 1860 and 1880 in Grahamstown (now known as Makhanda) in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. During this era, white colonial agents dominated by the British implemented policies of territorial acquisition and cultural imposition that systematically marginalised the local amaXhosa population. The text foregrounds the psychological and cultural dislocation experienced by indigenous people whose land and identity are simultaneously appropriated.

Resistance to colonisation is foregrounded in *The Theory of Flight* (2018), which is set in an unnamed fictional Southern African country (tipped to be Zimbabwe) in the years between approximately 1944 and 2000. The narrative outlines the struggle for independence. It culminates in the celebration of Independence Day, signifying the end of colonisation as well as the ushering of a new socio-political order rooted in democratic principles. Additionally, the text explores the complexities of post-independence life, including the challenges of reclaiming land and reconstructing identity amidst inherited colonial legacies.

A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg (2017) offers a multi-layered temporal perspective that encompasses colonial and postcolonial epochs. The colonial era is bifurcated into two distinct phases in the British reign, characterised by the internment of Afrikaners in concentration camps during the late 18th century (roughly around 1899), and the Afrikaner-dominated apartheid regime from 1940 to 1990 marked by institutionalised racial discrimination and the militarisation of state institutions. The post-1994 democratic period introduces a new paradigm of freedom and inclusivity, despite lurking colonial legacies, which transform racial discrimination into xenophobic violence against black foreign nationals in Johannesburg. This shows that the city of Johannesburg, once a symbol of exclusion, is still a contested space, where the promise of democracy is undermined by the colonial legacy in the form of lasting structures of inequality.

Collectively, the investigated texts reveal the cohesive multifaceted nature of colonialism, not only as a historical event, but also as a lived experience that continues to shape identities, relationships, and spatial configurations in postcolonial Southern Africa, especially in South Africa. They also highlight the necessity of interrogating colonialism, not only through its formal institutions, but also through its lingering effects on land, culture, and belonging.

2.4 Theoretical terms by Gerard Genette

Structural narratology, such as the seminal contributions made by Genette (1980, 1988), provides a theoretical framework that holds the analytical structure of this study, as it functions as the organising framework that informs and stabilises the analysis. These works remain indispensable for the systematic investigation of narrative structure for the way in which it uncovers generated meaning, by proliferating theoretical terms that continue to inform contemporary readings of complex fiction, such as those investigated by this study. The lasting relevance of Genette's narratological terms in the twenty-first century is evidenced by their

continued application and expansion by influential theorists, including Chatman (1980), Prince (1982), Bal (1985), Rimmon-Kenan (2002), Herman, Jahn, and Ryan (2005), Culler (2007), and Herman (2017).

The deployment of Genette's (1980) theoretical terms in this study is not only historical, but methodological, enabling a complex as well as flexible engagement. His categories such as those concerning time in the form of order, duration, and frequency – including their subordinate elements and the section of voice dealing with narrative perspective and focalisation – serve as analytical instruments for uncovering the structural logic of these texts. The section on voice is also pivotal as it marks the point of narrative enunciation, where the story (*fabula*) is mediated through the narrator's perspective, and is subsequently shaped into a plot (*sjuzet*). This transformation is not neutral, but strategically arranged to foreground thematic concerns such as the story of land politics with its interrelated discourses, such as land expropriation and contested ownership, as issues central to the postcolonial condition and its representations in literature.

The texts investigated in this study employ narrative structures that reflect and refract the socio-political realities of colonisation and its aftermath. Through Genette's perspective on narrative (1980, 1988), these structures reveal how narrative temporality and perspective are mobilised to articulate the tensions between colonial imposition and indigenous resistance, between dispossession and reclamation, and between imposed identity and self-fashioning. The narratological terms drawn from Genette's (1980) corpus alongside those refined by subsequent scholars are not only descriptive, but also diagnostic, allowing for a critical investigation of the way in which fiction encodes historical trauma and cultural transformation as explored by this study.

In what follows, the study outlines and applies key structural narratological theoretical terms derived from Genette's work (1980) and demonstrates their utility in analysing the strategies employed in the selected texts. These theoretical terms serve as the scaffolding for a theoretically complex and flexibly informed reading of postcolonial fiction by hinting at the ways in which narrative form intersects with thematic substance (such as land).

2.4.1 *Fabula* and *Sjuzet*

Drawing on the foundational insights of Russian Formalism such as the distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet*, Genette (1980) introduced structural narratological equivalent theoretical

terms in *histoire* and *recit*, which became a *lingua franca* within the discipline. This study engages with these theoretical terms, while recognising the Russian Formalists' emphasis on the literariness of literature and the analytical utility of Genette's (1980) refinements. As acknowledged by Scheffel (2014), the difference between *sjuzet* and *fabula* is important because it helps to elucidate the structure of narrative texts with its generated meanings. This is achieved through narrative dynamics that includes how space shapes identity, power relations, memory, and belonging compared to only providing a backdrop to events. Similarly, Barry (2002:145) renders these terms into more accessible English equivalents in story and plot, where story refers to "the actual sequence of events as they occur", privileging chronological order, while plot denotes the structured and mediated presentation of those events within a narrative framework.

In the context of this study, the selected texts exemplify plot in Barry's sense (2002), which is the "ordered, packaged, and presented" arrangement of events that constitutes the narrative artefact. These narratives do not only recount events, but also strategically regulate the flow of information by foregrounding specific events to provide moments to serve as a mnemonic and anticipatory functions. In this study, the distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet* become analytically productive, enabling a complex and flexible unpacking of how stories of land politics with their interrelated discourses of expropriation, ownership, and identity formation are strategically structured in the investigated texts.

By deploying the identified theoretical terms, the study is able to trace the way in which narrative forms mediate thematic substance in the form of foregrounded discourses, such as the revelation of the ways in which land becomes not only a contested physical space, but also a symbolic locus of belonging, resistance, and self-definition. The interplay between *fabula* and *sjuzet* operate as a critical perspective through which the texts' engagement with identity, belonging, and spatial politics can be investigated.

2.4.1.1 *Fabula*

As Buchanan (2018:177) explains in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, the term *fabula* refers to the story and how it unfolds in its natural and chronological sequence. This explanation aligns closely with the Russian Formalist tradition, which emphasises distinguishing between *fabula* and *sjuzet* as a means of understanding the literariness in narratives. Herman, Jahn, and Ryan (2005:239) express this view by explaining *fabula* as "the chronological sequence of situations and events that can be reconstructed on the basis of cues provided in a narrative text". In this

sense, *fabula* represents the underlying story that is abstracted from the narrative surface and reconstructed through possible interpretive engagement.

In the context of this study, the *fabula* of the selected texts such as those found in *A Sin of Omission* (2019), as an example, serves as a starting point for interpreting the socio-political dynamics of land expropriation and ownership during the colonial period. However, rather than confining the analysis to overt or explicitly narrated events, this study considers the subtle and overlooked narrative cues that, when reassembled chronologically, reveal a hidden story of land politics in South/ern Africa. These reconstructed events explain the evolving relationships between the ruling class and the dispossessed, and it is instrumental in shaping identity and cultivating a sense of belonging in each context.

By foregrounding *fabula* as a critical narratological tool, the study can trace how narrative structure presents historical and ideological tensions triggered by land politics. The chronological reconstruction of events not only clarifies the socio-political trajectory of land ownership but also reveals the affective and cultural dimensions of dispossession and reclamation. These insights are central to the study's analytical chapters that follow, where the interplay between narrative form and thematic substance is explored.

2.4.1.2 *Sjuzet*

As Buchanan (2018:177) elucidates, *sjuzet* refers to the way in which a story is narrated orally, or in written form. In the context of this study, focus is placed on written narratives represented by the published literary texts, such as those selected for investigation. Herman, Jahn, and Ryan (2005:693) further clarify that *sjuzet* denotes “the way in which a narrative text presents (or provides cues hinting that texts should be considered for reconstruction) a chronological sequence of situations and events”. With this, *sjuzet* not only represents the surface narrative, but also the structured presentation of events in its presented form, which is often arranged in a non-linear way (also known as the fragmented style) that invites possible interpretive reconstruction.

In this study, *sjuzet* is embodied in the textual artefacts themselves, in the form of the physical book, such as *A Sin of Omission* (2019), which presents events in a deliberately crafted sequence. These narratives frequently employ complex temporal structures that necessitates narratological analytical engagement to reconstruct the underlying *fabula*. It is within this possible interpretive space that *sjuzet* becomes indispensable, because it enables the identification of how land-related events and interrelated discourses such as expropriation,

ownership, and identity are embedded within the narrative structure and dispersed across the textual structure.

By attending to *sjuzet*, the study reveals how narrative form mediates foregrounded discourses. The strategic arrangement of such events not only shape the views but also foreground the socio-political dimensions of land politics in South/ern Africa. Through the abstraction and reconstruction of the foregrounded events across the texts, the *fabula* emerges as it cohesively accounts how land functions as a material and symbolic site of contestation, belonging, and identity formation.

2.4.2 Narrating Person: extradiegetic-heterodiegetic and intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrators

2.4.2.1 Narration

In this section, the study draws from Genette's (1980) explanation of narration. It provides a theoretical framework suitable for identifying and analysing narrating agents within the investigated texts. These narrators function as the discursive authorities through which narratives of land discourse are articulated. In addition, Genette's model (1980) allows for a distinction between narration and focalisation. The model ensures that the perspective through which events are perceived is not conflated with the voice that recounts them and this allows for a clearer distinction between focalisation and narration in this study. Genette (1980:186) explains that focalisation deals with who sees, while narration is all about who speaks" – a distinction that is particularly relevant where character perspectives are mediated by an external narrator. Genette (1980:248) further classifies narrators according to their relationship to story events by distinguishing between homodiegetic narrators, who appear as characters within the narrative, and heterodiegetic narrators, who remain absent from the events they recount. In many instances, a heterodiegetic narrator manifests when an extradiegetic narrator mediates the perceptions, memories, or consciousness of characters, thereby employing internal focalisation without relinquishing narrative authority. Recognising this distinction allows for a more precise analysis of how land narratives are structured and whose perceptions are foregrounded without assuming narratorial presence.

From the intersection of these two positions, Genette (1980:248) identifies four types of narrators:

1. Extradiegetic-heterodiegetic: the narrator is external to the narrated story events and does not participate in them.
2. Extradiegetic-homodiegetic: the narrator is external to the story but recounts their own experiences.
3. Intradiegetic-heterodiegetic: the narrator is a character within the story who narrates an embedded or secondary narrative as if they are anonymous.
4. Intradiegetic-homodiegetic: a character is within the narrated story events and reveals their own experiences.

The outlined classifications are useful in this study's analysis of narrative voice. It enables a better understanding of how authority, perspective, and subjectivity are constructed within the texts. Genette's (1980) typology provides the principal framework for distinguishing narrators according to their relationship to the story events they recount their stories. Tamir (1976) extends this discussion by highlighting how a narrator's position as well as a degree of involvement may influence narrative reliability including perspective. As per Genette's typology, this study is able to reveal how narrative agency is deployed to mediate historical memory, cultural identity, and the politics of land as mirrored in Southern African fiction. In the selected texts, narratological positions shape the representation of colonial dispossession, resistance, belonging, and identity across different historical contexts.

2.4.2.1.1 Extradiegetic-Heterodiegetic Narrator

Drawing from Genette's (1980) typology of narrative voice, this study identifies the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator as the dominant narrating agent across the selected texts. This narrator is commonly referred to as the third-person or anonymous narrator, which is a distant voice that recounts events from an external position without participation. According to Herman (2007:288), such a narrator "does not inhabit the storyworld" and hence maintains a degree of narrative detachment. Rimmon-Kenan (2002:97–98) further characterises the voice of the narrating agent as omniscient because of its vantage point "above or superior to the story" and its ability to furnish a panoramic and seemingly authoritative account of events. Pier

(2014:806) corroborates this by situating the narrator at the first narrative level as an agent that provides an overarching and seemingly objective perspective.

In the investigated texts, the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator is the primary narrating agent providing a comprehensive view of the characters' experiences and struggles in relation to land politics across colonial, resistance, and democratic periods in Southern Africa. This narrative voice allows the texts to articulate complex socio-political discourses and their histories of the socio-political discourses, while maintaining a structural coherence that facilitates the uncovering of the possible communicated meanings. Additionally, the deployment of this narrator allows for a structured as well as complex and flexible representation of identity and belonging in each context presented by the text. By recounting events from an anonymous and exterior position of narrative, the texts construct an invocative reflective distance when engaging with discourses mired with ideological and historical forces shaping the lives of the dominating racial group and the dispossessed in each context. This position allows the narrator to furnish a broader scope of events characterised by a panoramic view, while remaining neutral when presenting land seen not only as a material asset, but also a symbolic locus of power, memory, and cultural identity.

2.4.2.1.2 Intradiegetic-Homodiegetic Narrator

While the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator dominates the texts of this study, a complementary narrative strategy emerges. It is through the incorporation of intradiegetic-homodiegetic narration in which characters recount their own experiences. However, the presence of character perspectives does not imply a transfer of narratorial authority in all instances because the anonymous external narrator may continue to mediate character perceptions through focalisation. In this case, the anonymous third-person narrator remains the primary narrating agent even where the narrative is focalised through specific characters. When narrating rights are explicitly handed over to characters, they start to function as intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrators articulating embedded personal accounts that serve to enrich the socio-political narrative of land from colonisation to democracy. As Herman (2007:289) explains, the intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator is "more or less centrally" involved in the narrated events by providing a subjective as well as situated account. Pier's (2014:806) discussion of narrative hierarchy further clarifies that such instances produce metadiegetic narratives that are subordinate to the primary narrative level. In the investigated texts, these embedded narratives often emerge through dialogue and introspection, and foreground lived

experiences of colonisation, land dispossession, colonial resistance, and reconstitution in the post-independence. This structured narrational structure produces a polyphonic effect that aligns with Bakhtin's (1981) explanations by allowing multiple voices to coexist while maintaining a clear distinction between narration and focalisation.

2.4.3 Temporal Relations

Genette's (1980; 1988) insights on temporal relations provide a structural narratological framework that informs this study's analysis. Through this framework, the selected texts are investigated for the meanings generated when characters relate to, move through, and contest particular spaces, thereby investing those spaces with symbolic, ideological, and historical significance. Genette's categories of order, duration, and frequency, together with their subordinate terms, are used as analytical tools to explain the organisation of narrative time and the presentation of events. These analytical tools are deployed to investigate the selected texts in *A Sin of Omission* (2019), *The Theory of Flight* (2018), and *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017). The texts strategically manipulate narrative aspects of temporal relations to foreground the story of land politics and related issues of expropriation, contestation, and reclamation. While cultivating a sense of belonging across the historical periods of colonisation, resistance, and democracy, the texts also examine how identity is shaped.

This approach aligns with Prince's (1982:181) explanation of structural narratology as the study of the "form and functioning of narrative", which seeks to account for narrative competence through systematic analysis. It also echoes Chatman's (1980:63) call for "elegant analysis", which is seen as a methodological imperative that remains salient in contemporary literary criticism. As Prince (1982:187) further notes, structural narratology operates within a "well-defined set of operations", aiming to assign possible meaning to narrative texts in a structured, but not mechanistic, fashion. This is an ethos that guides without constraining the possible interpretive process in this study. This is succinctly called for by Sternberg (2001), who sees the need for clear boundaries that can assist narratologists to make meaningful analyses and arrive at possible interpretations of narrative texts.

Genette's (1980) temporal relations categories are strategically repurposed here to reconstruct the chronological sequence of events (*fabula*) from their narrative presentation (*sjuzet*), and to uncover latent meanings embedded within the texts. This reconstruction facilitates an understanding of how land politics are foregrounded by being narrated, and how

they inform the characters' evolving identities and sense of belonging in the context they exist in. In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), for example, land expropriation by invading white colonists is depicted as an external force that indirectly reshapes the identity of the colonised, who are marginalised based on their skin colour. In *The Theory of Flight* (2018), the narrative centres on the death of Genie, while unfolding retrospectively to reveal the socio-political forces that shaped her life as this dates back from her grandparents' experiences. Elsewhere, *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) traces the life of Zweig across multiple temporal contexts. This includes his grandparents' experiences under British colonial rule, through his parents' lives during apartheid, and to his own trajectory in democratic Johannesburg. The narrative alternates between past and present, as this necessitates a cohesive reconstruction of the timeline to explain the evolution of identity in relation to shifting regimes of land ownership and belonging.

Through these analytical perspectives, the deployment of temporal relations elements in the selected texts is not only stylistic, but functions as a strategic technique. It foregrounds the complexities of historical memory and the political management of land access and control, while simultaneously shaping personal transformation in the form of identity and belonging. By examining how events are ordered, repeated, or extended in the texts, the study demonstrates how the novels generate new meanings and perspectives on the legacy of land politics in Southern African literature.

2.4.3.1 Order

This study deploys Genette's (1980; 1988) explanation of the theoretical term "order", which is a key component of temporal relations by which to construct a framework for analysing how events are selected, arranged, and presented within the texts. The emphasis made by Genette (1980) on the sequencing of events as a mechanism for narrative progression is supported by Chatman's (1980:63) idea of a "discernible" story, where coherence ought to be maintained despite potential disruptions in the chronological flow of events. In the context of this study, the functioning of the theoretical term of order facilitates the abstraction and reconstruction of a previously obscured narrative of the evolution of the story of land.

With this, the analytical approach is positioned to move beyond the surface-level presentation of events which is commonly found in dominant narratives which is positioned to uncover the underlying story of land politics in South Africa. Genette's (1980) theoretical conceptual framework of temporal relations, particularly the discrepancy between the actual

sequence of events (*fabula*) and their narrative arrangement (*sjuzet*), is instrumental in uncovering this hidden narrative. As Herman (2007:280) observes, narrative comprises “a sequence of events that can be assumed to have unfolded in the storyworld” as well as “the unfolding of the discourse used to recount that sequence”. Similarly, Chatman (1980:63) affirms that the narrative may rearrange events “as much as it pleases, provided the story sequence remains discernible”. Such re-arrangements result in anachronisms, where there are deviations between story-order and text-order, as explained by Scheffel, Weixler, and Werner (2014:1265). Rimmon-Kenan (2002:48) describes this as a “discrepancy between story-order and text-order”, while Genette (1980) categorises these deviations as analepsis (flashbacks) and prolepsis (flashforwards).

In the study’s three texts, analepsis functions to recover distorted or suppressed memories of colonisation, resistance, and the struggle for democracy, with land politics placed at the centre. Conversely, prolepsis anticipates events by providing glimpses of future consequences, such as land-related decisions, as this invites a reflection on post-independence trajectories. It is here that the dual temporal movement is evident (Section 2.4.3), which contains examples of events that transcend surface-level character experiences to reveal embedded narratives of land politics as these unfold across diverse South/ern African contexts. Through these perspectives, the deployment of temporal relations aspects is not only a stylistic consideration, but also a strategic technique. It foregrounds the complexities of historical memory and the political management of land access and control, while simultaneously shaping personal transformation in the form of identity and belonging. By analysing how events are ordered, repeated, or extended, the study demonstrates how the texts generate new meanings and perspectives on the prolonged legacy of land politics in Southern African literature.

2.4.3.2 Duration

Building upon Genette’s (1980) insights into the theoretical framework of order, this study turns to the element of duration to further explain how narrative time functions within the selected texts. As Genette (1980; 1988) explains, duration is concerned with the relationship between the temporal unfolding of events in the storyworld and the textual space allocated to their narration. Additionally, Herman (2007:276) explains this as the “ratio between the length

of time it takes for situations and events to unfold in the storyworld and the amount of text devoted to their narration”. While order foregrounds the sequencing and distortion of memory across colonisation, resistance, and democracy, duration reveals how long these memories persist, how they are remembered, and how they are narratively sustained across historical timelines as mirrored in the investigated texts.

In this study, duration is investigated within the context of land politics as portrayed across various Southern African contexts, such as that of South Africa. These narratives trace how land expropriation and ownership shape identities and cultivate a sense of belonging amongst the elite class and the dispossessed. These texts commonly employ the narratological theoretical aspect of summary, which traditionally compresses “insignificant” events (Bal, 2017:96). In this study, summary is repurposed to draw attention to seemingly minor narrative events that carry significant implications for land politics. A brief reference to a character’s forced relocation, for example, may serve to condense years of dispossession. This signals the long-term effects of colonial land laws without extended narration. Also, a short description of abandoned farmland or renamed streets may function to summarise a historical process of erasure and reconfiguration of space by the new landowners. These understated events serve as narrative condensations that quietly disclose structural inequalities, resistance, and loss. By treating such events as analytically significant summaries, this study is able to uncover how land politics is depicted in the narratives while shaping meaning that is given beyond open plot developments. This possible interpretive shift aligns with Herman’s (2007:293) idea of “compressed accounts of storyworld occurrences”, and Chatman’s (1980:68) observation is that “the discourse is briefer than the events depicted”, allowing brief textual moments to encapsulate extensive story time.

To further deepen this analysis, the study draws on Genette’s (1980) subordinate categories of duration in summary, ellipsis, scene, and pause to uncover and enable possible interpretations of key events related to land politics. These categories function as possible interpretive viewpoints by providing multiple angles through which the narrative’s temporal structure can be understood.

- Summary: *A Sin of Omission* (2019) covertly recounts land wars and the transformation of the colonised into labourers, as this redefines their identity in relation to colonial power structures.
- Ellipsis: serves to uncover omitted or skipped events that are later referenced. This is the case

in *The Theory of Flight* (2018), where the events depicting the destruction of Beaufort Farm and Estate and the death of Golide Gumede are initially elided, but later alluded to. These omissions function to uncover the trauma as well as the political tension surrounding land ownership in post-independence Southern African societies. As Bal (2017:91) acknowledges, some events are “so painful” or “so difficult to put into words” that silence becomes preferable, while in other cases, ellipsis presumes that there is existence and shared historical knowledge, as this renders explicit narration unnecessary. All these instances apply in *The Theory of Flight*.

- Scene dominates *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017), where characters recount personal experiences in Johannesburg. These scenic presentations dramatise the shifting dynamics of land ownership from colonisation to democracy as this aligns with Chatman’s (1980:36) idea of the “incorporation of the dramatic principle into narrative”. Through metadiegetic narration, characters become narrators of their own stories, while producing a polyphonic and dialogic structure in line with Bakhtin’s (1981) explanation of multiple coexisting voices, working together to uncover the foregrounded story.
- Pause allows for a commentary that is insightful and reveals characterisation by providing events with moments of stillness that enhance the discernibility of the underlying land discourse. Additionally, these pauses provide spaces for possible interpretive purposes to engage with the socio-political implications of land access and control.

Like a multifaceted diamond that simultaneously reflects light from multiple angles, the theoretical term of duration serves to refract a narrative meaning through its various forms that complement as well as confirm the significance of foregrounded events. By analysing how time is compressed, omitted, dramatised, or suspended, this study demonstrates how the investigated texts present structured ways to facilitate the understandings of land politics and its legacy in Southern African literature.

2.4.3.4 Frequency

In certain sections of the selected texts, there are recurring and often subtle references to events related to land politics, which are indicated through the depiction of wars, negotiations, and socio-political transitions. These repetitions are not only stylistic attractions, but rather serve a

critical narratological function by demonstrating the operation of frequency that aligns with Genette's (1980) key temporal categories, where it is referred to as the relationship between the number of times an event occurs in the storyworld and the number of times it is narrated in the text. By applying this theoretical conceptual term, the study uncovers how repeated references to land-related events foreground and render visible a previously obscured story of land politics that is subject to possible interpretive engagement. In this context, frequency becomes a diagnostic tool for tracing the strategic recurrence of land events across the texts thereby highlighting their historical and thematic significance.

In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), for example, the frequent mention of wars between resisting indigenous communities and invading white colonists forms a narrative thread that spans the protagonist Stephen's life from childhood to adulthood. The repetition of these events across his developmental stages highlights the effects and impact of land struggles on personal and collective identity. Stephen's eventual death may be interpreted symbolically as the collapse of indigenous authority under colonial domination. Similarly, *The Theory of Flight* (2018) repeatedly invokes the life and legacy of Golide Gumede, emerging from his role in the struggle for land, resulting in the attainment of independence. His story is interwoven with that of his daughter Genie, whose death serves as a narrative means for recalling Golide's contributions. These recurrent references reinforce Golide's symbolic role in the reclamation of land and the resistance against colonial rule, while also explaining the intergenerational transmission of trauma and memory tied to land.

Elsewhere, in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017), the discourse of land politics recurs and manifests through depictions of racial discrimination, political violence, and negotiation. These repetitions highlight the City of Johannesburg's transition from colonial rule to democracy, while simultaneously revealing the unresolved tensions surrounding land ownership. Also, the recurrence of such events across various parts of the texts function to foreground the centrality of land as a contested and lasting socio-political issue in post-independent South Africa.

The application of the theoretical term frequency in this study reveals how the repetition of land-related events across the texts function to foreground the embedded story of land politics. These repetitions serve not only to enhance thematic coherence, but also to make visible the latent story of land, identity, and belonging. They constitute a deliberate approach to the texts that emphasises the persistence of land struggles and their role in shaping historical consciousness and personal transformation from the colonial period through to the democratic era.

2.5 Conceptual theoretical terms from character theory (Narratological approach)

While Genette's (1980; 1988) narratological framework offers a robust account of narrative structure, it notably omits a sustained treatment of character, as a dimension that this study incorporates through the insights of influential theorists who have approached character from a narratological perspective. Foundational contributions by Forster (1927), Greimas (1971), Rimmon-Kenan (1983), Margolin (1983; 1989), Bal (1985), Pickerel (1988), and Fishelov (1990) have significantly shaped the theoretical discourse on characterisation. These scholars agree that a character exists within a narrative text by virtue of being endowed with individualised traits which may be embodied by an actor in the form of a human or otherwise, and this process is termed characterisation. This study draws upon these insights to investigate how characters are constructed, including how they function within the narrative to resemble real individuals that can be identified with based on their actions, development, and narrative roles. These roles are referred to as actantial functions (Greimas, 1971) as this includes the subject, object, helper, opponent, sender, and receiver, with each representing a structural position within the narrative's syntagmatic organisation. By analysing characters through this actantial perspective, the study reveals how they contribute to the unfolding of the story of land politics. This manifests because the characters do not only appear as general figures, but also as agents whose identities and trajectories are shaped by and, in turn, shape the socio-political dynamics of colonisation, resistance, and democracy. This approach allows for a complex and flexible understanding of character as a narrative construct and a means of expression of identity formation as well as the quest for belonging mirrored in the Southern African fiction.

2.5.1 Characterisation

The conduct of characters across diverse Southern African contexts represented in the selected texts necessitates the integration of character theory within the broader framework of structural narratology. This approach enables a complex as well as flexible unpacking of the meanings embedded in characters' actions and identities as this is shaped by markers such as language and skin colour, which fall within the realm of characterisation. Drawing on the contributions by Forster (1927), Greimas (1971), Rimmon-Kenan (1983; 2002), Bal (1985), Pickerel (1988), and Fishelov (1990), this study investigates how narrators reveal character traits either directly

or indirectly. As Rimmon-Kenan (1983; 2002) and Bal (1985) explain, direct characterisation occurs when narrators explicitly assert traits with authorial authority, whereas indirect characterisation emerges through a character's actions, speech, appearance, and environment, as these are elements foregrounded in the texts and requiring possible interpretive engagement.

A recurring motif across the texts is the characters' habitual engagement in land-related wars spanning from the colonial period to the democratic era. This becomes a persistent struggle for land ownership, which is tied to the construction of identity and the pursuit of belonging in the claimed land by the governing class. In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), invading white colonists wage war to seize foreign land; in *The Theory of Flight* (2018), local resistance movements mobilise to reclaim their dispossessed land; and in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017), land politics are shaped by racial discrimination and political negotiation while highlighting life experiences after post-independence. In some instances, these characters' conduct often align with Fishelov's (1990) conception of flat characters driven by a singular and unyielding motivation, such as the conquest or defence of the contested land. Their static behavioural patterns reflect what Rimmon-Kenan (2002:61) describes as characters who "cling to old habits", reinforcing Forster's (1927) and Pickerel's (1988) distinctions between flat and round characters.

Language as a marker of identity and social status, further reinforces the characters' positioning within the story of land politics. As Rimmon-Kenan (2002:14) clarifies, speech can signal a character's origin, class, or profession. In *A Sin of Omission*, the authoritative speech of the white bishop secretly tasked with overseeing colonial operations determines the fate of Stephen, who is a colonised subject, thereby symbolising the institutionalised separation between coloniser and colonised. In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, language functions as a tool of exclusion, where the inability to speak dominant languages of the ruling class increases vulnerability to violence such as xenophobia, as this reveals how linguistic identity intersects with spatial belonging in various contexts of Johannesburg.

Physical appearance, such as skin colour, becomes instrumental by playing a pivotal role in shaping identity and access to land in a given context. As Rimmon-Kenan (2002:65) and Docherty (1983: xiv) argue, physical traits often serve as markers of social positioning. In some contexts, as depicted by the selected texts, whiteness is associated with privilege and land ownership while blackness is linked to marginalisation, dispossession, and systemic mistreatment. *A Sin of Omission* illustrates this through Stephen's isolation, which is rooted in his racial identity of being black amongst white missionaries as this necessitates mistreatment during colonisation. *The Theory of Flight* explores post-independence efforts to redistribute

land to the formerly colonised, while *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* demonstrates how racial and linguistic identity continue to mediate access to land in a democratic society.

The physical and social environments in which characters are situated further reflect their identity and belonging, which is commonly determined by the structures of power held by the governing class. As Rimmon-Kenan (2002:66) explains, a character's surroundings frequently function as metonymic indicators of their social status. In *A Sin of Omission*, Stephen's remote ecclesiastical posting symbolises racial exclusion. In *The Theory of Flight*, the destruction of Beaufort Farm and Estate foregrounds the rejection of multiracial coexistence, which forms the backbone for hybrid identity in post-independence society. In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, the lingering colonial legacy that haunts spatial segregation continues to shape patterns of residence and land ownership in a metaphorical representative city of Johannesburg.

These theoretical insights serve to demonstrate how character theory, when approached from a narratological framework, reveals the complex interplay between land, identity, and belonging in each context. The characters' actions, speech, appearance, and environments collectively construct a narrative of contested space and evolving identities tracing the lasting impact of land politics from colonisation through to democracy in Southern African fiction.

2.5.2 Actantial roles

Across the selected texts, a recurring narrative goal emerges in the pursuit of land ownership and functions not only as a material objective, but also as a symbolic means of establishing identity and cultivating a sense of belonging. This pursuit is shaped by socio-political markers such as skin colour and language, while mired with challenges that characters must overcome in the process, aided by allies or obstructed by adversaries. These narrative dynamics align with the actantial model developed by Greimas (1971), whose structuralist framework draws on the foundational insights of Levi-Strauss (1955(1973)), Propp (1958), Todorov (1971), and Genette (1980). Here, Greimas (1971) conceptualises characters as actants, or agents, who perform specific narrative functions. As elaborated by scholars such as Perron (2010), actants need not be human, because any entity capable of fulfilling a narrative role may be considered an actant. Hebert (2011:71) succinctly elaborates on the six core actantial roles. The subject (the protagonist or agent of the quest, such as colonised and coloniser), the object (the goal or desired entity, such as land), the sender (the initiator of the quest, such as the colonial powers or resistance movements), the receiver (the beneficiary of the quest, often the racially

privileged elite class at various contexts), the helper (agents or forces aiding the subject – including biopower instruments – such as biopolitical play, war, policy, and negotiation), and the opponent (forces obstructing the subject such as colonial resistance and democratic failures).

The specified roles explain the motivations and actions of characters in relation to the embedded story of land politics. In *A Sin of Omission* (2019), invading white colonists function as subjects with the sole intention of acquiring land, while the local resistance movements emerge as opponents, in turn becoming subjects in their own quest to reclaim their ancestral stolen land. This is the case revealed in *The Theory of Flight* (2018), where the struggle for independence and democracy is foregrounded. It is here that the colonists and resistance movements rely on various forms of biopower such as wars, racial policies, civil unrest, and negotiation as helpers in their respective quests. In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017), the narrative shifts to foreground the democratic context to show that land remains a contested space for reimagining identity and belonging. With diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, characters inhabit the city of Johannesburg and seek a peaceful stay in an area mired by colonial legacies. Here, actantial roles become fluid by reflecting the complexities of postcolonial urban life, and the tensions between historical memory and contemporary aspirations.

2.5.2 Conclusion

The investigated texts – *A Sin of Omission* (2019), *The Theory of Flight* (2018), and *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) – collectively reveal an embedded story of land politics that shapes identity and belonging across the historical continuum from colonisation to democracy in South/ern Africa. These narratives subtly engage with the region's historical and cultural tensions surrounding land by providing a space for possible interpretive analysis. This study draws on theoretical insights from genre studies, Genette's structural narratology, postcolonial theory, and character theory approached through a narratological perspective to provide a multifaceted framework for investigating the selected texts. With this, genre theory facilitates the identification of conventions within farm and city novels found within the investigated texts. Genette's structural narratology provides tools for abstracting and reconstructing the story of land politics foregrounded in the texts. Postcolonial theory uncovers the enduring effects of colonisation manifesting in ideologies and practices surrounding land and are also persistent in the democratic society. From a narratological perspective, character theory

provides a systematic as well as a complex and flexible approach to analysing characters' roles within contested spaces, while revealing how identity and belonging are shaped by land ownership and socio-political positioning. Together, these theoretical strands form a coherent and rigorous framework that supports the study's analytical objectives and explain the complex interplay between narrative form, historical context, and thematic substance.

CHAPTER THREE

A SIN OF OMISSION

3.1 Introduction

Set in 18th-century colonial South Africa, Marguerite Poland's *A Sin of Omission* (2019) presents a narrative embedded in the territorial and ideological dynamics of settler colonialism. The text depicts events that mirror systematic dispossession of indigenous people in their land by invading white colonists – a process referred to as territorialisation. This term reveals a process that denotes not only the physical appropriation of land by white colonists, but also the imposition of a colonial spatial order, with an emphasis that redefines land expropriation and its ownership as well as the newly established sense of belonging and shaped identity through imperial authority. This chapter takes as its point of departure the initial phase of South African colonial history as represented in the novel, by focusing specifically on the loss of land by indigenous communities. This loss is not only material, but also epistemological and ontological, severing ancestral ties, dislocating cultural identity, and reconfiguring the native subject in relation to the land now controlled by white colonists.

The story of land as it emerges from the text reveals broader implications of colonial domination. The analysis is guided by an interrogation of the evolving mechanisms of colonisation based on religious, ideological, and legal structures as elements through which land expropriation is enacted and justified. These mechanisms are not openly stated in the narrative but discovered through a close reading of the text. This chapter considers the hidden meanings that may not be immediately apparent but are nonetheless integral to the novel's critique of colonial powers that not only destroyed but also shaped indigenous way of life. To structure this investigation, the chapter summons theories such as Genettian structural narratology to help provide a methodological framework for balancing theoretical abstraction, known as criticism, with textual analysis. Insights gained from this conceptual theoretical framework in the form of duration enable a nuanced investigation of how the text allocates narrative time to events of historical and political significance, while foregrounding the land in the colonial encounter. In addition, the analysis is enriched by insights from postcolonial theory and genre studies that emphasise the conventions of the farm novel, functioning to reveal a literary site for negotiating issues of land, labour, and lineage during colonisation. It is here that these theoretical approaches demonstrate how the text constructs land and people as objects

of colonial control. It also demonstrates how it resists such constructions through a narrative form and characterisation because in this context, the text serves to resist colonial constructions. This is not only at the level of theme or content, but also through the very way the text tells its story and how it shapes its characters. In this way, narrative structure as well as character development become tools that unsettle colonial ideologies of dominance, ownership, and control. Furthermore, the chapter employs narratological approaches to characterisation to explore how power relations are inscribed in characters' roles and trajectories. Through this approach, the novel reveals unequal dynamics of the relationship between white colonisers and the colonised locals, including how these dynamics are internalised, contested, or subverted by the characters themselves.

With this, the chapter argues that *A Sin of Omission* offers a complex narrative structure foregrounding the politics of story of land, not only as a backdrop, but as a constitutive force. It is here that the analysis considers how the novel reveals the legacies of colonial dispossession haunting the locals as this manifests when focusing on the interplay between the narrative structure, characterisation, and historical context.

3.2 Background to *A Sin of Omission* (2019)

A Sin of Omission (2019) operates as a thematic guide as well as a conceptual approach through which the novel's critique of colonial complicity is rendered. It presents deliberate sins and the strategic silences of white missionaries during the colonial period in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province, where the narrative is set. These missionaries, while seeming to be committed to the spiritual journey of guiding the locals, are portrayed as hidden agents advancing the colonial project due to their inaction and selective engagement. These actions function to reinforce the strategic injustices of land dispossession and racial subjugation of colonisation.

The process in the text is revealed through the foregrounding of the events of Stephen Mzamane. He is a black deacon whose spiritual journey is mired in rejection as well as marginalisation at the hands of his white missionary colleagues. His experiences function as a metaphorical microcosm of the broader treatment of black South Africans during colonisation. Stephen is educated and raised within the Christian tradition provided by white missionaries, alongside other children of local nobility and leadership. This allows Stephen to embody the paradox of colonial teachings that are strategically positioned to enable him to lead his people, while denied full recognition and dignity within the very institution that shaped him. This

dynamic reveals a concealed strategy of social engineering, where the church acts as a vehicle for colonial control. What transpires here is that the education and ordination of black children like Stephen are not acts of empowerment, but weaponised instruments of governance designed to create intermediaries who would serve colonial interests under the guise of spiritual leadership. The illusion of equality through Christian conversion is exposed and shows itself to be a calculated form of deception, which hides the continued expropriation of land and elimination of indigenous identity.

The text's critical reception included its recognition through the Sunday Times CNA Literary Award in 2021, which attests not only to its literary but also to the thematic depth in dealing with South Africa's complex historical legacies. Critics such as Judith McKinnon (2020) and Angela Robson (n.d.) have engaged with the text's theme, but their investigations overlook the story of land politics. It reveals land disposessions suffered by the locals at the hands of white colonists and includes contested ownership, as well as disrupted belonging and altered identities. This gap serves to highlight the necessity for a strategic and theoretically informed reading that foregrounds land politics within the text.

The reading provided by this study is informed by a multi-theoretical framework that can help situate Stephen's experiences within the broader historical and political context of colonial land expropriation. This chapter addresses this lacuna by employing various theories. Genettian structural narratology is employed to examine how narrative form and duration reflect the temporal and ideological dimensions of colonial history. In tandem, postcolonial theory and genre studies, particularly the conventions of the farm novel, are mobilised to interrogate the representation of land and identity during colonisation. Finally, narratological approaches to characterisation show the power relations inscribed in the interactions between colonisers and the colonised, revealing how narrative choices construct and critique the colonial gaze. These theories help demonstrate that *A Sin of Omission* is not only a story of religious injustice, but also a profound meditation on the politics of land, identity, and historical memory. Through a rigorous and layered analysis, this chapter aims to recover the submerged story of land and situate it at the centre of the novel's revealed ethical and political discourse.

3.3 The organisation of story events as presented in *A Sin of Omission* (2019)

The narrative structure of *A Sin of Omission* (2019) includes deliberation on its non-linear presentation of events. It eschews chronological progression in favour of a thematic and

psychological unfolding of events centred on the protagonist, Stephen Mzamane. At the centre of the novel's complex structure, there is a golden thread of series of emotionally charged events that foreground Stephen's internal conflict. It is here that there is a disruption of linear temporality as discussed by Richardson (2000) functioning to reflect on the instability as well as the multiplicity in the generation of meaning. This entails an existential and cultural crisis arising from the pressures of colonial society, including the expectations imposed by white missionaries functioning as religious mentors and agents of colonial control.

Stephen's limits are tested when he is faced with the moral and spiritual dilemma of choosing between adhering to Christian doctrine or honouring the indigenous customs of his Xhosa culture. This cognitive tension emerges from Stephen's struggle to reconcile his Christian doctrine with Xhosa cultural practices. When approached from a narratological terms, the conflict aligns with the three-part universal narrative structure. It is discussed by Boyd, Blackburn, and Pennebaker (2020) to highlight that tension functions as a catalyst for narrative development. This conflict emerges in the present moment when Stephen is obliged to decide how to bury his brother Mzamo in accordance with traditional rites, as expected by his mother and maternal uncle, who are still practicing the Xhosa way of life despite imposed colonial church traditions presented by Stephen. His decision to reject the Christian burial protocol in favour of indigenous practice is not a personal act of defiance, but a symbolic gesture of colonial resistance. This is presented in the metaphor of the smashed church bells, as a way of presenting the action of dismantling the colonial system that regulates and redefines African life (Poland, 2019:7).

To understand the importance of Stephen's decision, it is necessary to reconstruct key events that shape his life. Born in a period of protracted land wars between the Xhosa people and invading white colonial forces, Stephen's early years are shaped by political instability and cultural dislocation. In their efforts to suppress indigenous resistance, colonial authorities find a way to systematically imprison local leaders and to sever the traditional lines of guidance and governance fuelling colonial resistance. Amidst this turmoil, Stephen's father, as the right-hand man to the king, entrusts his sons to the care of white missionaries at a tender age, hoping to save them from starvation and ensure their survival. However, this act of surrender coincides with the broader colonial strategy of social engineering, manifesting in the deliberate education provided to indigenous elites to serve as intermediaries between the colonisers and the colonised. Missionary education, conducted in English and accompanied by the direct elimination of indigenous languages as shown in the names (Stephen's isiXhosa name is Malusi), functions as a tool of identity reformation.

The prohibition of mother-tongue use and the imposition of English cultural norms are emblematic of a broader project of epistemic domination aimed to supplant the indigenous one. Stephen excels within this system and is selected over his more politically radical brother Mzamo to advance his studies in Canterbury, England. Upon his return, Stephen is confronted with the harsh realities of racial segregation and institutionalised discrimination instituted to control the wise, who understand the English ways of life that enable them to resist injustice and colonisation. The doctrine that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities experienced in England is replaced by a rigid hierarchy of racial discrimination in South Africa. Here, he is denied equal status and is increasingly marginalised by the very missionaries who once nurtured him. His alienation is compounded by the expectation that he continues to serve the missionary cause, despite systematic exclusion from its inner circles.

When Stephen's life is viewed in its entirety, it reveals a narrative entangled with the politics of land, identity, and power struggles. His journey from child to deacon is not only a spiritual journey, but also a political allegory. The novel subtly embeds a story of land that reveals dispossession of locals of their land, contested belonging, and the reconfiguration of identity under colonial rule. The discriminatory laws enforced through death technologies and social engineering instruments that prohibit interracial socialisation and the forced relocation of indigenous peoples are manifestations of what Mbembe (2019:76) terms biopowers. In this context, these biopowers enable the coloniser to regulate not only space and labour, but the life of the colonised. This idea is rooted in Foucault's (1977) work, which is later developed by scholars such as Taylor (2014:41), as this provides a way for the idea to be deployed to explain events such as how colonial projects aim to dismantle indigenous authority and reconstitute social order by forceful means.

The text's engagement with the specified issues positions *A Sin of Omission* within the South African farm novel tradition. It is a genre that occupies a central position in South African literary studies because of its sustained preoccupation with land, power, and racialised ownership. The farm novel has historically functioned as a critical literary form through which colonial settlement, agrarian domination, and the legitimisation of white land possession are narratively produced and normalised. As Coetzee (1986) and Devarenne (2009) have demonstrated, the genre emerged alongside colonial expansion. In the process, the genre became instrumental in imagining the farm as an economic unit as well as an ideological space where structures of race, labour, and belonging are reproduced and fixed.

Within this tradition, land is never a neutral setting but a structuring principle that organises social relations, spatial boundaries, and narrative authority. Devarenne (2009:627)

observes that the South African farm novel persistently interrogates racialised dynamics of land ownership and labour by staging the farm as a site where white sovereignty is asserted through control of territory, labour discipline, and symbolic exclusion. Read in this context, *A Sin of Omission* engages with the farm novel's core concerns. They include the consolidation of colonial power through spatial organisation and the systematic marginalisation of black presence on land that is claimed by the dominating white colonisers. However, rather than reproducing the ideological certainties of the traditional farm novel, *A Sin of Omission* performs a critical reconfiguration of the genre. The text displaces the white farmer as the primary narrative authority. However, the text centres its narrative authority in Stephen Mzamane who is a black deacon and his life unfolds within spaces shaped by missionary occupation as well as colonial land control. Stephen's posting to the remote outpost of Nodyoba, which is geographically distant from white missionary settlements and ecclesiastical centres, exemplifies the spatial logic of colonial segregation that underpins the farm novel tradition. His removal from central and socially visible spaces mirrors the broader relegation of the colonised to the margins of land ownership, political agency, and institutional authority.

With this, at the same time, *A Sin of Omission* complicates the farm novel's spatial binaries by acknowledging the shared, though profoundly unequal, occupation of colonial land. Stephen's knowledge of theological matters positions him within the structures of colonial Christianity by being granted conditional presence in spaces reserved for the white ruling class. However, Stephen's presence remains circumscribed and precarious. He is permitted to inhabit colonial space only insofar as he does not threaten its implemented racial structures or claim full institutional belonging. This paradox of Stephen's simultaneous inclusion and exclusion renders visible the contradictions of the structure that holds colonial land management because proximity to land does not simply translate into ownership, agency, or recognition.

This strategy aligns with Coetzee's (1986:19) revisiting the discourse of the farm novel. The strategy insists that the genre must account for the presence of the colonised within white-dominated spaces rather than imagining the farm as an exclusively white domain. In *A Sin of Omission*, black characters like Stephen do not function only as a background people or labouring silhouettes. They occupy strategic but systematically subordinated positions within the colonial land order. Their constrained presence exposes the ideological fiction underlying the farm novel's historical alignment with white settlement while revealing land as a contested and inhabited space rather than an empty terrain awaiting ownership.

In this study, the farm novel is therefore not treated as a peripheral genre but as a foundational literary form through which the politics of land, belonging, and exclusion are

narratively organised in South African fiction. *A Sin of Omission* critically engages with the farm novel tradition. It achieves this by reworking the genre's conventions to foreground colonial land dispossession as a lived and embodied experience rather than a stabilising backdrop. Through the reconfiguration of farm novel spatiality, the text is able to reveal how land functions. Land is used as a mechanism of control that regulates who may belong, who must serve, and who is rendered marginal within colonial society. In doing so, the text is not only participating in the farm novel tradition but also exposes its limits. They are visible through the racialised structures that the genre has historically represented and obscured.

In summary, the reconstructed narrative of Stephen Mzamane's life reveals a complex interplay of land, identity, and power struggle during colonisation. Also, his story is not merely a personal tragedy, but also a microcosm of broader colonial conditions. Through the combined theories of structural narratology, postcolonial theory, genre analysis, and narratological characterisation, this chapter considers the structured story embedded in the text, revealing the enduring legacies of dispossession and the contested land of belonging in South African literary history.

3.4 The dawn of colonisation in *A Sin of Omission* (2019)

The narrative of land with its issues of expropriation, ownership, belonging, and identity emerges as a notable key concern that is underexplored in *A Sin of Omission*. This study seeks to recover and reframe that narrative through a tripartite analytical structure, drawing on Genette's (1980) temporal categories of order, duration, and frequency, as recontextualised in Chapter 2. These categories serve not only as a theoretical scaffolding, but also as an interpretive approach through which the story of land is reconstructed with greater nuance and historical depth. With this, order is employed to help trace the sequencing of events by explaining the origins of land dispossession during the colonial encounter, and the ideological frameworks that sustained it. Duration foregrounds the relative emphasis placed on these events within the narrative, by revealing how certain moments are extended or compressed to reflect their perceived significance. Frequency helps to investigate the repetition of land-related motifs forming a holistic story of land. This is possible because it suggests a deliberate strategy to draw sustained attention to them for discussion. Taken together, these temporal dimensions form a coherent and compelling rearticulation of the story of land. It is this that restores its centrality and

complexity within the broader discourse of identity, belonging, and historical justice. The following subsections elaborate this reconstruction in detail.

3.4.1 Colonial life experiences as ordered by white colonists

The narrative foregrounds Stephen's life that becomes a focal point through which the story of land is revealed as it coincides with his situatedness within the ongoing colonial war, symbolised by the smashing of the bells (Poland, 2019:7). This moment not only illustrates an isolated event, but also the culmination of a series of historical and personal developments. The omission of earlier events, while being revealed later through narrative retrospection, signals a deliberate deviation from linear chronological order of presenting events. This narrative technique manifests as a flashback, and aligns with Genette's (1980) theoretical conceptual framework of an internal heterodiegetic analepsis, providing an indication of Stephen's transformation as exemplified by the passage below, showcasing operation of this narrative strategy:

They have smashed the bells. All over kaffraria the sound has ceased. ... once, for Stephen Mzaname, every hour of everyday had been marked by the ringing of the bell. In over twenty years, it had proclaimed the time for waking, washing, matins, breakfast, lessons, dinner, handwork, supper, prayers, bed. He had long forgotten how to allot his day by the rising or the setting of the sun, to sense the hour when the seed-eaters gather or the anvil bird marks meridian at noon. He knew nothing of the swifts and swallows following the herds: this is dusk; this the time when we beg the last sweet drop of milk. All that been exchanged, when he was nine, for the bell, its gong quartering the hours, hitching men to labour or prayer (Poland, 2019:7).

Chronologically, this passage evokes the early stages of colonial imposition where white colonists, through sustained warfare and cultural displacement, entrenched their value systems and norms spanning more than two decades. This period is enough to supplant indigenous epistemologies, with Western norms rendered as a default worldview for the colonised. Stephen exemplifies this transformation, shown through his Xhosa identity. Once rooted in overserving natural phenomena, rhythms, and communal wisdom, this is overwritten by Christian doctrine and English cultural practices. A potent symbol of Christian authority, the bell becomes the metronome of his existence by replacing indigenous way of allocating time with regimented Christian routines. The destruction of the bells thus signifies more than the stopping of the sound, because it highlights a disruption in the colonial apparatus that governed Stephen's life. Without the bell's guidance, Stephen finds himself caught between two epistemic worlds of the Christian-English paradigm that shaped his adulthood, as well as the Xhosa tradition whose wisdom he lost in childhood. This highlights the tension of identity and belonging.

Stephen's loss of indigenous identity and its wisdom is narrated through a mixed analepsis, which is consistent with Genette's (1980) structural narratology. This form of a flashback not only recounts past events, but continues them in detail, thereby explaining the present moment with historical depth (Genette, 1980:61). The flashback detailing Stephen's conversion to Christianity is emblematic of this technique, where it offers insight into the mechanisms at work function towards indigenous cultural erasure.

In *A Sin of Omission*, these notable events begin with a conversation between Stephen's father, Mzamane – a trusted advisor to the king – and Rutherford, a white missionary (Poland, 2019: 17-18). Their dialogue reveals the aftermath of a land war wherein indigenous leaders are dispossessed of their land and imprisoned for resistance, and communities are left destitute. Mzamane, who is unable to sustain his large family due to aggravating largescale livestock killing as well as crop burning, entrusts his sons Stephen and Mzamo to Rutherford. Ostensibly, this arrangement promises education and leadership training, but in reality, it functions as a hidden mechanism for Christian indoctrination and colonial control. Stephen's subsequent schooling in Grahamstown (now Makhanda) marks a decisive shift in his identity. Unlike his brother Mzamo, whose resistance precludes further advancement, it paves the way for Stephen to be selected for his intellectual aptitude and resilience. These qualities secure him scholarship in Canterbury, where he receives mentorship from a white bishop aboard the ship. This journey symbolises Stephen's assimilation into English society, with language instruction and cultural orientation reinforcing the notion of a shared human identity, albeit one predicated on Western norms as this hints at the acceptance of Stephen. The bishop's remark that they would "get on very well in Canterbury" reveals the conditional acceptance Stephen receives through cultural conformity (Poland, 2019: 81). His social integration aboard the ship foreshadows his reception in England, yet it also underscores the performative nature of this acceptance, based not only on mutual recognition, but also on the mastery of colonial codes.

Upon Stephen's departure to Canterbury, the situation in the colony begins to deteriorate. The colonial leaders once invested in the project of educating select black students abroad reverse their stance. The rationale for this shift is based in growing evidence that fuels anxiety among colonial leaders, where the education provided is no longer reinforcing subjugation as intended; instead, it empowers black students to challenge colonial structures and practices. In the text it is encapsulated as the action of the authorities to abandon the initiative of sending black "students to England", arguing that such education renders them "crafty" and prone to "aspire beyond their proper station" (Poland, 2019: 88- 89). This perspective and the resulting decision reveal an entrenched fear that educated natives – once

fully equipped with intellectual tools at the highest level, coupled with moral clarity – will resist colonial domination.

Indeed, the black educated elite begin to mobilise politically by advocating for the release of imprisoned indigenous leaders on Robben Island and encouraging broader political consciousness among their people. These efforts are seen as obstructive to colonial land acquisition schemes and policies, designed to dispossess local communities and strengthen control of the colony (Poland, 2019: 88–89). A notable culprit of this resistance is Julius Coventry Naka, who was an earlier student sent to Canterbury. Naka, influenced by favourable treatment abroad and encouraged by the education he gained there, petitions for the release of incarcerated chiefs and engages in provocative debates with colonial authorities on matters of land and leadership (Poland, 2019: 135). Naka's defiance, fuelled by his intellect, is met with punitive measures when colonial officials exile him "as far away as they could bring him down to size" (Poland, 2019: 153). These events clearly show the colonial logic of education for the indigenous, where it must be limited when it leads to a sense of equality that sparks dissent. Consequently, the decision is made to terminate the education of the colonised abroad, including Stephen, whose return is hastened and who faces the bleak prospect of being denied further access to quality education (Poland, 2019:89)

Stephen's return to colonial South Africa is characterised by a subtle but profound shift in his social reception. Onboard the ship returning from Canterbury, Stephen encounters white missionaries who are familiar, while others are new and start to withdraw from him socially. Unlike the friendly treatment Stephen experienced en route to England, he now witnesses "the slow withdrawal of his shipboard companions" (Poland, 2019:118). This distancing is not incidental but serves to foreshadow the racialised exclusion he will face upon his return. This will manifest when the missionaries refuse to invite him "to their tables", as this signals a broader societal transformation (Poland, 2019:116). It is here that racial boundaries are set and strengthened, and the colonised is denied social integration. The rationale is that "one did not wish to have him [Stephen to] suddenly appear among one's colonial friends at luncheon" (Poland, 2019:118). This anticipates the institutionalised segregation that will define Stephen's experience on his return to the colony, including the denial of invitations to missions, parishes, and schools (Poland, 2019:118).

Upon arrival in the colony, Stephen visits his brother Mzamo. This provides him with a moment of family reconnection that also serves as a narrative pivot for a new colonial stance. Mzamo and his friend Vuyo Tontsi inform Stephen of the socio-political developments that transpired during his absence, as this complements earlier foreshadowing aboard the ship.

Vuyo's remarks when saying "regulations have been brought in here. Who may own a house, who may not... And so it goes", reveals the emergence of racial discriminatory policies aimed at controlling the colonised and becomes a means of appropriating land at aggravating scale. These regulations institutionalise racial separation and economic disenfranchisement by laying the foundation for spatial and social apartheid between the colonised and the coloniser.

From these events, a story of politics emerges and highlights dispossession, racialised belonging, and capitalist exploitation. Stephen's life is situated within the broader context of land wars between the Xhosa people and white colonists, driven by capitalist expansion. Drawing on Mbembe's (2019:92) explanation of necropower, the text illustrates how white colonisers install control over native populations. They also treat the colonised as expendable, stripping them of land, and subjecting them to systemic violence. It is here that the colonists function as slave drivers, by subjecting indigenous people to forced labour through the destruction of subsistence means, not limited to livestock, crops, and communal structures. This forced labour fuels colonial infrastructure projects not limited to railways, mines, and roads. In Mbembe's (2001:183) perspective, such exploitation is not incidental, but constitutive of colonial capitalism, where the coloniser grows rich at the expense of the colonised. This dynamic is portrayed in *A Sin of Omission* to foreground the economic logic underpinning colonisation. The narrative thus transcends Stephen's individual biography to offer a trenchant critique of imperial systems, revealing the way in which education, land, and labour are weaponised to strengthen domination.

3.4.2 Life experiences and treatment under white colonists

In accordance with the events outlined in Section 3.4.2, Stephen's experiences – especially those of the recurring rejections by white missionary colleagues – are recounted throughout the various parts of the text. These experiences serve as a painful allegory for the broader condition of the colonised as this indicates that Stephen's personal experiences function symbolically by pointing beyond his individual story to represent a wider historical and political condition. Unlike the acceptance Stephen experienced in Canterbury, England, his marginalisation back in the colony highlights that he is neither integrated into the lives of the colonisers – especially those of the white missionaries – nor welcomed within the newly demarcated colonial spaces acquired through war. These events of rejection are not incidental but are foregrounded to reveal the embedded politics of the story of land and the created sense of belonging devised by the colonisers.

Stephen's black skin becomes emblematic of the labouring class in land now appropriated by white colonists, where whiteness constitutes the criterion for inclusion reserved for the controlling racial group. In contrast, other events not related to the already specified story of land receive less textual attention, reinforcing the sense of Stephen's alienation. It is here that this disproportionate narrative emphasis aligns with Genette's (1980) conceptual framework of duration, which facilitates an analysis of the relationship between story time and text time. Rimmon-Kenan (2002:54), Landa (2005:8), and Herman (2007:276) note the manipulation of narrative duration that reveals underlying ideological structures like those found in the text. Stephen's rejection extends over multiple chapters in the form of detailed passages that function as a metaphor for the protracted historical neglect of the colonised. These events are not momentary references, but are furnished with greater details to reinforce the description of Stephen's confusion at his exclusion despite his English fluency and his theological education.

Stephen's marginalisation becomes more pronounced upon his return to the colony when he meets with the archbishop to discuss his posting following his studies in Canterbury. Despite possessing the requisite virtues of "piety and faith" essential to clerical life, Stephen is assigned to the remote and undesirable area of Nodyoba, rather than the Native College he had requested (Poland, 2019:121). This decision, orchestrated by the Archbishop and Canon Rutherford long ago, is presented with bureaucratic politeness, but constitutes a deliberate act of exclusion. It also reflects the colonial hierarchy where decisions are imposed unilaterally upon the colonised without negotiations or reciprocity. This strategic placement mirrors the refined treatment given to Julius Naka, whose aspirations to engage in land reform and political advocacy were similarly thwarted (Poland, 2019:153). The implication is clear: Stephen is considered a potential agitator ready to follow in the steps of his brother Mzamo and those of Naka. For this reason, he is relegated far away in the hope of limiting his influence.

Such spatial marginalisation is further weaponised to facilitate the broader colonial project of restructuring the colony through local mass relocations and the imposition of land policies that are based on racial hierarchies that favour preferred and loyal groups to live closer to the colonisers. These policies seem to promote parallel development, but in practice ensure that the colonisers profit from land acquisition while the colonised endure dispossession and subjugation. The archbishop's words, "I am sorry that you will be on your own, but Warden Bailey feels that any student in your year will manage", is revealed to be the euphemism for institutional abandonment (Poland, 2019:121). Despite Stephen's need for continued academic support in "Greek and Latin" to qualify for ordination, he is left to navigate the colonial

ecclesiastical system in isolation, as this becomes a metaphor for the broader neglect of the development of the colonised during colonisation.

When at Nodyoba, Stephen's exclusion intensifies. He is conspicuously omitted from social gatherings among white missionaries, including the events organised for former Canterbury students. His absence from the "conversatione" reunion is not an oversight, but a calculated act of social ostracism (Poland, 2019:222). Rutherford's correspondence, which mentions only the postponement of the ordination dinner in Grahamstown, offers Stephen false hope by hiding a deliberate and systematic rejection. In his quest for clarity, Stephen appeals to his former mentor in *Mfundisi* Turvey, by expressing his desire to be ordained "in the Cathedral like the others" – his white peers and his friend, Albert Newham (Poland, 2019:200). This conversation reveals the reality of Stephen's exclusion because he is deemed unworthy of ordination alongside white missionaries. What unfolds here is the consequence of the newly enacted laws that prohibit interracial ecclesiastical integration. These laws stand in direct contrast to the egalitarian treatment he experienced in Canterbury (Poland, 2019:199).

Stephen's attendance at the dinner and subsequent conversatione for Canterbury alumni, despite the absence of a formal invitation, highlights a pivotal moment in his journey of disillusionment. Still clinging to the belief that his exclusion is a spiritual trial, he enters the venue only to be immediately identified by a "man in livery" as a black man, and denied entry (Poland, 2019:239). In addition, this event is further intensified and becomes clear when Stephen is avoided by Canon Beazer – a person of ecclesiastical authority – who knows him personally yet chooses not to intervene. Beazer's silence and withdrawal communicate a tacit consensus among white missionaries that Stephen's presence is unwelcome. Stephen's failure to figure out this exclusion can be interpreted as a breach of a social decorum "he should have had the foresight ... to keep away", which demonstrates that, in simple terms, he should have gotten the memorandum not to attend (Poland, 2019:239).

Upon eventually gaining access to the venue, Stephen is not received as a fellow alumnus but is instead mistaken for a servant. An elderly woman who is familiar with Stephen through a friend arrogantly instructs him to "fetch a jug of punch and some glasses" for guests "waiting to be served" (Poland, 2019:242). This moment is not only a social *faux pas*, but also a deliberate act of humiliation serving to reinforce the colonial logic, namely that locals exist primarily to serve. Stephen's identity, which is shaped by education and religious vocation, is forcibly reduced to that of a labourer, where his presence is tolerated only within the confines of servitude.

This event becomes a catalyst in Stephen's growing awareness of his systematic rejection. The realisation deepens when Mfundisi Turvey sends him church notifications that include a notice of upcoming priestly ordinations—events that occur long after Stephen's own ordination as a deacon (Poland, 2019:324). Stephen is clearly excluded from this progression while candidates "far junior to him" are elevated on the presumption that they are untainted by associations with rebels, such as Julius Naka and Mzamo Mzamane. The implications are clear, namely that Stephen is not overlooked, but is deliberately neglected. His isolation at Nodyoba becomes emblematic of this exclusion, where months pass without contact from fellow clergymen. Also, he is denied access to study materials and mentorship, which is critical for his priesthood preparation, while others encounter "no bar to their progress" (Poland, 2019:324). The disparity revealed highlights a pattern of colonial institutional neglect. This manifests when local clergy represented by blacks are expected to demonstrate unwavering Christian vocation, while systematically denied the support structures provided to their white counterparts.

These events are drawn from various parts of the novel, but form a cohesive narrative of rejection and isolation of the locals from the spaces and lives of white colonisers. They illuminate the racialised boundaries of colonial life, where land and identity are linked. Stephen's exclusion from white spaces – social and ecclesiastical – serves as a metaphor for the broader dispossession of the locals in colonial territories. His journey from Canterbury to Nodyoba traces a trajectory of increasing marginalisation, which culminates in a series of rejections that span the ecclesiastical hierarchy from the Archbishop in Grahamstown to the wife of a clergyman at a social gathering.

The focus of this study on land and its contestation is subtly reinforced through these specified events. While the text occasionally references land wars and expropriation, these events are narrated in a summary form, which lacks the detailed action and dialogue that characterises Stephen's personal rejections. In narratological terms, this technique aligns with Genette's (1980:96) conceptual framework of summary, where events are compressed into brief narrative units that cover extensive story time with minimal text time. Scholars not limited to Chatman (1980:68), Landa (2005:10), Herman (2007:293), and Bal (2017:96) elaborate on this strategy by agreeing on its capacity to signal thematic subordination. In the text, land war events are often provided in the form of ellipsis, which is also a narratological strategy defined by Genette (1980:103) and further refined by Landa (2005:10), Herman (2007:287), and Bal (2009:101; 2017:91). With this, ellipsis involves the omission of events that are implied but not explicitly narrated. In this text, the land wars are alluded to rather than described, suggesting

a deliberate narrative choice, which is the function of ellipsis. The omission of such events may reflect the painful historical reality of the defeat of the locals, as this is attributed to the spiritual disintegration, ineffective war strategies, and technological inferiority in the face of colonial aggression. The text's reluctance to narrate these land-war events in detail may also stem from their familiarity within the historical record, particularly the well-documented colonial and ecclesiastical histories of Grahamstown on which Poland draws in *A Sin of Omission* (2019).

The novel's structural choices of foregrounding Stephen's personal rejections, while relegating land wars to the narrative periphery, serve to highlight the embedded story of land politics and the created sense of belonging. Stephen's exclusion is not personal but also shows a broader colonial system functioning to define access to land, power, and identity through racialised hierarchies. His journey also becomes a way to show how the colonality of power is enacted and critiqued for its structures, land dispossession, and racial hierarchy.

3.4.3 Iterative representation of indigenous experiences in the colonial narrative

The recurrence of war events throughout *A Sin of Omission* (2019) reveals a contest between the locals and invading white colonisers for land as well as its ownership during colonisation. These events are often presented in a summary and an elliptical form, strategically presented across the text to highlight their thematic centrality. The repeated war victories enjoyed by white colonists affirm their dominance, while revealing the broader story of land politics that exposes land expropriation, dispossession, and the resetting of indigenous identity at the hands of white colonisers. This narrative strategy echoes the narratological conceptual framework of frequency developed by Genette (1980:35) and later elaborated on by Rimmon-Kenan (2002:59), Landa (2005:11), Herman (2007:289), and Bal (2017:100). These scholars describe frequency to refer to the relationship between the number of times an event occurs at the story level, and the number of times it is recounted in the text. Despite being presented in a compressed narrative form, the land war events dominate the text's presentation of the fictional world, spanning Stephen's life from childhood to adulthood. The recurrence of land wars reveals their formative role in shaping Stephen's identity as a Christian convert estranged from his Xhosa heritage, and later as a conflicted adult, navigating the moral and cultural demands of colonial Christianity.

To recount the events of wars in the text, the anonymous narrator employs various methods of frequency, not limited to iterative narration that functions to recount a single event that represents multiple occurrences. In the novel, the concept of iterative frequency (Genette,

1980:119; Landa, 2005:11; Herman, 2007:289) allows the text to evoke the enduring nature of colonial conflict without narrating each instance in detail. This technique is evident in Section 3.4.1, where a singular land war involving Stephen's father is presented as emblematic of repeated colonial incursions occurring in various areas, where white colonists are dispossessing local people of their land. His account to Canon Rutherford of the arrest of chiefs and the metaphorical exile of his people encapsulates the broader trajectory of indigenous defeat and displacement (Poland, 2019:17-18). The consequences are shocking due to the destruction of subsistence systems, the erosion of cultural practices, and the imposition of colonial norms.

This loss of land and identity resonates with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986:28) concept of dis-remembering, which argues that the dispossession of land entails the erasure of both language and cultural memory. The colonists' acquisition of indigenous land becomes a pretext for cultural domination, where the colonised are forced to abandon their traditions and languages to embrace change brought by white colonists. The forced participation of the colonised in colonial infrastructure projects not limited to road and rail construction in exchange for little to no payment, is akin to slavery. In addition, food and alcohol is used as a means of payment and constitutes a form of exploitative labour that Mbembe (2001:92) characterises as necropower: the subjugation of life to the logic of colonial control.

In contrast to iterative narration, the text also deploys a singulative frequency – developed by Genette (1980:114) and later refined by Landa (2005:11) – which is the recounting of a singular event that occurred once and is narrated once. This strategy is employed to foreground specific land war events that coincide with pivotal moments in Stephen's life. These events are often presented in a non-linear manner but emerge at key moments of the story, which become critical junctures to clearly explain Stephen's internal conflict between allegiance to his indigenous heritage and loyalty to the colonial church. One such a moment arises when Mzamo urges Stephen to join the rebels fighting for land restitution by arguing that this cause is more just than the silent complicity of white missionaries (Poland, 2019:14). Mzamo's appeal of "fighting for our lands" and "for our father's people" frames the land war as a moral imperative, contrasting it with the indifference the missionaries show Stephen. This conversation evokes earlier land wars events, especially those involving Stephen's father, which is later reinforced when Stephen is denied permission to visit his mother before departing for Canterbury. Her recollection of "scarlet-coated soldiers on their horses" offers a personal account of colonial violence, which is narrated from a maternal perspective that foregrounds the psychological trauma she suffered that arose from what the colonisers did to the communities at scale (Poland, 2019:79). As a representative of the

colonised, she and her husband were forcibly relocated from “their ancestral lands”, an experience that complements earlier accounts and highlights the gendered dimensions of displacement (Poland, 2019:79). In Canterbury, Stephen tells Albert that “they were chased away from our land”, which confirms the continuity of these wars (Poland, 2019:115). Mzamo’s subsequent letter reveals that he has located their family’s new settlement, which further substantiates the systematic relocation of the colonised communities for colonial advantage. These relocations are not incidental, but strategic, while enabling the colonists to repurpose indigenous land for their own economic and political gains.

The conversation between Stephen and his brother Mzamo also introduces a new wave of land wars continuing after the generations of their grandparents and parents, where Mzamo is actively participating alongside the children of prominent figures because “Gonya Sandile. The Duke. Julius Naka. They know where their duty lies” (Poland, 2019:14). This declaration is not a familial appeal, but a clear call to resist colonial encroachment. The intensification of this new war compels colonial authorities to demand the return of weaponry previously used by allied Xhosa factions such as the Mfengu in earlier campaigns against the Ngqika (Poland, 2019:24-25). The involvement of white missionaries in overseeing the disarmament of the locals at the command of the magistrate reveals that their role is not limited to religion, but includes colonial governance and ensuring the functioning and advancement of colonisation. Stephen’s role in facilitating the handover of “fifteen guns ... all belonging to the Mfengu” highlights his continued allegiance to the colonial order despite his neglect (Poland, 2019:24-25). Stephen’s decision to return the weapons rather than support the rebels reflects his enduring hope that fidelity to Christian principles might earn him recognition and equality among white missionaries, as this remains unfulfilled. This moment exemplifies the colonial strategy of divide and rule. It manifests when certain South African groups become complicit, such as the Mfengu group that co-opted to suppress others who had become colonised, such as the Ngqika. This is done to reap the benefits promised as an incentive by the coloniser, in the form of a preferential treatment, not limited to live in a proximity to white settlements, employment opportunities, and symbolic inclusion only when they collaborate with the coloniser, while the colonists retain ultimate control.

The recurrence of land wars presented through summary and ellipsis forms a narrative continuum dating from Stephen’s grandparents and his father’s generation to Stephen’s own present. These techniques, described by Genette (1980), allows the narrator to compress historically significant events without diminishing their thematic weight. The wars are not only

narrated in detail but are strategically positioned to highlight their enduring impact on identity, belonging, and cultural memory.

The text also employs the narratological strategy of telling in time what happened once, which Genette (1980:116) explains as a singular narration of a singular event not linked to any recurrence. In the text, this strategy foregrounds the socio-economic consequences of colonial war. Stephen's father articulates the post-war reality when saying "now, any man who can lift a pick must leave his home and work on the governor's roads" (Poland, 2019:17-18). This statement encapsulates the transformation of the colonised into forced labourers only functioning to serve. Further insight is provided through Mzamo's account of their father's pursuit of "a second gun" earned through labour on roads, railways, or in diamond mines (Poland, 2019:125). The transactional nature of this exchange, labour for weaponry, reveals the colonists' manipulation of economic desperation to prepare for future wars. Mzamo's remark, "you have been away too long, Malusi. There are things you do not understand", reveals Stephen's estrangement from the lived realities of his people and the evolving dynamics of resistance taking place (Poland, 2019:125). These events complement earlier revelations such as Stephen's admission to Albert that he does not know where his family was relocated to after a war that occurred during his absence (Poland, 2019:115). Mzamo's subsequent letter confirming their resettlement affirms the systematic displacement of the colonised for colonial gain. The strategic relocation of the colonised serves economic and military purposes that enable the colonists to strengthen control of the colony, while neutralising resistance by the rebels.

The narrator's frequent alternating recount of events between Stephen's childhood and his present as a deacon at Nodyoba reinforces the continuity of land wars. This is demonstrated in the passage that juxtaposes the remnants of war with Stephen's earliest memories:

The road from Stephen's mission at Nodyoba led along a hillside between clusters of huts. Many had been burned in the fighting the year before... He could just recall – an earliest memory – the bellow of their dying, the vultures and the crows, the sky black with wingbeats, his fear of their beaks and venom eyes (Poland, 2019:31).

This evocative passage bridges the temporal gap between past and present by linking the destruction of homesteads and livestock to the broader narrative of dispossession. The reference to the "great hunger" and the slaughter of cattle alludes to the millenarian belief and hope in the spontaneous regeneration of herds and crops, and the expulsion of white colonists that disadvantage the locals against the invaders.

Through these structured narrative techniques in the form of frequency, summary, ellipsis, and telling in time what happened once, the novel constructs a comprehensive story of

land politics. The story traces the transfer of land ownership from the locals to white colonists with the imposition of colonial value systems and norms that override local ones, as well as the racialised determination of the shaped identity and the created sense of belonging through the perspective of the coloniser. Stephen's life, which is highlighted by displacement, rejection, and moral conflict, becomes a microcosm of the colonial condition. His journey reveals not only the personal cost of colonialism, but also the structural mechanisms through which land, labour, and identity are reconfigured by white colonisers.

3.5 The voices that narrate life experiences dictated by the white colonists

In the narrative of *A Sin of Omission* (2019) there are two narrating agents around whom the narrative is structured. This includes an anonymous third person narrator as well as a group of first-person narrators that includes Stephen, Mzamane, Mzamo, and Vuyo Tontsi. While the events are often presented through the perspectives of these characters, there is a noticeable distinction between narration and focalisation in the process of the recounted events. Much of the narrative remains mediated by an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator who does not participate in the events but filters character perceptions without relinquishing narratorial authority. Only when characters are explicitly given a chance to recount their own experiences do they assume the role of performing a narrating function.

In Genettian (1980) terms, the primary narrative operates at an extradiegetic level through a heterodiegetic narrator, while character-driven first person accounts function as intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrations producing metadiegetic narratives situated at a secondary level. This structured narrational structure, as elucidated by Rimmon Kenan (2002:97–98), Pier (2014:806), and Martens (2017:183), enables a panoramic reconstruction of colonial land politics. The external narrator's mediation of Stephen's experiences – often through internal focalisation – provides analytical distance that foregrounds his entrapment within a developing colonial landscape while maintaining narrative coherence and objectivity.

This narrator's identity and function are demonstrated in the opening passage of section 3.4.1, where Stephen's background is introduced amidst the turmoil of land wars and where “they have smashed the bells” (Poland, 2019:7). This act of bell-smashing is emblematic of the local's resistance to the church's role in colonial imposition, including its role in reshaping cultural norms. The bells, as symbols of religious order as well as weaponised instruments of oppression, serve as a reminder of imposed doctrines that preach neighbourly love while hiding

systemic neglect and racialised exclusion. Stephen is caught between the colonial church and his Xhosa heritage, and he is required to navigate this symbolic terrain by choosing between assimilation and ancestral allegiance. A further passage deepens the narrator's portrayal of Stephen's internal conflict:

A warrior of Christ.

He no longer felt like a warrior – nor armoured by his faith. And in three years of [land] war that had just passed, he was neither soldier nor, it seemed, priest. He was just a frightened young man, forgotten by his fellow clergy and – if Mzamo's words were true – a traitor to his own Ngqika people (Poland, 2019: 8-9).

This excerpt complements the earlier depictions by revealing the elimination of Stephen's spiritual identity. His disillusionment stems from the prolonged neglect by fellow white missionaries, who intentionally fail to support him in times of need, not limited to his theological studies and the ongoing land wars. The death of his brother Mzamo, which necessitates Xhosa funerary rituals, further alienates Stephen, who has been estranged from his indigenous culture since childhood when he became a Christian convert. The passage also implies the outcome of the land war, with the colonists emerging victorious and Stephen, as a representative of the colonised, is excluded from the socio-political order that now governs the land.

In contrast to the extradiegetic narrator, some characters assume the role of homodiegetic narrators at the metadiegetic level by recounting personal experiences that serve not only to enrich but also to complicate the primary narrative. However, there is a need to distinguish between moments where characters function as narrators and those where their perspectives are only focalised by an external narrating voice. In many instances, the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator continues to mediate these accounts by filtering character perceptions without ceding narratorial authority. Only when characters are explicitly given a chance to recount past events in extended first-person discourse is when they start to operate as homodiegetic narrators. These metadiegetic narrations fill narrative gaps and provide explanatory details concerning land expropriation, ownership, belonging, and identity formation in the colony. For example, Mzamane's conversation with Rutherford recounts the forced relocation of his people following colonial conquest while Mzamo's dialogue with Stephen in Section 3.4.3 narrates the war that occurred during Stephen's absence because of his travels to England. These embedded narratives do not only corroborate the primary narrative but also foreground the lived experiences of the colonised by adding depth to the representation of colonial land dispossession while maintaining a clear distinction between narration and focalisation.

Together, the interplay between the anonymous narrator and character-narrators' narration construct a multifaceted narrative that interrogates colonial power, cultural dislocation, and the politics of the story of land. The heterodiegetic strategy allows for both panoramic and intimate perspectives while the metadiegetic voices reclaim narrative agency for the colonised. Through this narratologically complex structure, *A Sin of Omission* provides profound meditation on the entanglements of history, identity, and resistance.

3.6 The characters and their life experiences under control of white colonists

In *A Sin of Omission* (Poland, 2019), the narrators employ the theoretical insights of characterisation approached from a narratological perspective, with the notable aim to illuminate the complex interplay between identity, belonging, and land ownership in a colonial context. This approach becomes a vehicle through which land dispossession of indigenous people and the domination of white colonisers, who are constantly gaining land through war, is rendered with thematic precision. When integrated with postcolonial and genre theories, characterisation becomes a powerful interpretive tool, functioning to reveal latent meanings embedded within the text's treatment of land and power struggle during colonisation.

Characterisation in the novel operates on multiple levels, aligning with classical and structuralist theoretical frameworks. Notably, the text engages with structures that fits Greimas's actantial model (1971:793-806) that categorises characters according to their functional roles within the narrative structure, not limited to subject, object, helper, and opponent. This model is useful in uncovering the ideological tensions between colonisers and the colonised, where characters such as Stephen oscillate between roles. In addition to Greimas's structuralist approach, the novel also utilises more traditional methods of characterisation such as direct and indirect definitions, as detailed by Mieke Bal (1985) and Rimmon-Kenan (2002). Direct characterisation occurs when narrators explicitly describe a character's traits while indirect characterisation emerges in forms not limited to speech from the dialogues, action, and focalisation of the environment. These techniques are employed to construct the story of land politics that also reveals the psychological and ideological experiences that shape characters.

As a representative of the colonised, Stephen is one of those characters whose internal conflict of choosing between Christian duty and Xhosa cultural practices is rendered with poignant complexity through characterisation. Further theoretical insights on characterisation

are drawn from character theory developed by Forster (1927), Pickerel (1988), and Fishelov (1990). Forster's (1927) clarification between "flat" and "round" characters is relevant in this study. It helps illuminate the generated meanings emerging from colonial figures who are portrayed as flat, by embodying rigid ideological positions of colonisation, while Stephen is a paradigmatic round character shown by his internal contradictions, growth, and moral ambiguity. Pickerel's (1988) theoretical emphasis on character as a site of ideological negotiation, as well as Fishelov's (1990) typological analysis of character help contribute to a deeper understanding of how characterisation reveals the lived effects of racial hierarchy, dispossession, and constrained agency in colonial society. This contribution is noticeable in *A Sin of Omission* where it serves to dramatise the colonial condition that shapes the postcolonial characterisation by embodying the lived effects of racial hierarchy, dispossession, and constrained agency. In addition, it also reveals how these colonial structures persist, transform, and continue to regulate identity, belonging, and power in the postcolonial present.

Through this multi-theoretical approach, characterisation emerges not only as a narrative device, but as a mode of historical and cultural critique. This is manifested when characterisation functions to foreground experiences of the locals whose identities are shaped by the loss of land, the imposition of foreign value systems, and the ambivalent promises of religious conversion. In this way, the employed characterisation strategies uncover subtle elements that add to the presented story, while articulating the consequences of epistemic violence of colonialism and the enduring struggle for self-definition in its aftermath.

3.6.1 Emerging and assumed roles of characters in the context of white colonist society

In this context, the actantial roles of white colonists and indigenous characters reveal a stratum that adds to the narrative's engagement with land politics as its part of generated meaning. These roles do not only enrich the earlier thematic concerns outlined in sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3, but also clearly explain the structural dynamics through which colonial power is exercised, particularly in relation to practices of land acquisition and control in South Africa. To achieve the colonial enterprise, the colonisers rely on the biopowers as auxiliaries not limited to wars and religion in the form of a church. Conversely, education provided to the colonised emerges as an opposition force, because it positions them as ideological, where they become opponents of the colonial regime. This is something that Stephen is suspected to be doing. This suspicion of Stephen stems from his perceived alignment with his brother Mzamo and most notably Julius Naka, who weaponises education to resist colonial injustice.

Additionally, this suspicion highlights a broader colonial anxiety, where educated natives are not only a social anomaly, but a rising insurgency. Despite Stephen's commitment to his Christian vocation, he is met with disdain, which becomes emblematic of the broader marginalisation of the colonised, who are also educated, especially black individuals. Stephen unusually chooses to faithfully follow a missionary path in a context where white missionaries systematically exclude black counterparts, which does little to mitigate the structural prejudice he experiences. The rebellion caused by earlier educated black students catalyses a significant shift in colonial policy that prompts a retreat from educational initiatives for the locals.

These events mark a pivotal moment in the narrative by reflecting on South Africa's historical struggle for liberation. In response, colonial authorities sought alternative mechanisms of control by introducing racially discriminatory legislation that functioned as biopower tools of marginalisation and dispossession. These laws facilitated the retention and expansion of colonial land holdings, with an aggravating decrease on the side of the colonised. Through these laws, the white colonisers are enabled to impose restrictions on movement, property ownership, and residential rights of the colonised. Vuyo Tontsi, for example, is forced to lease his second home to Mzamo, while also being prohibited from owning property near areas designated for white people due to the newly enacted legislation limiting black ownership to a single house. These laws extended their reach to spatial regulation by requiring pass documents for black people to enter areas reserved for white people, a practice that profoundly unsettles Stephen upon his return from Canterbury.

In this context, racially discriminatory laws become instrumental in dispossessing natives of their land as a source of livelihood. Drawing on Young's (2001: 45 - 49) explanation of landlessness, the text portrays how Xhosa people – as representatives of the colonised – are impoverished through the systematic denial to access their ancestral lands that once sustained generations in the form of agriculture. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000:14) further elucidate that colonial South Africa institutionalised racial discrimination by allocating a mere 13 percent of land to the colonised after formalising apartheid as a legal framework for spatial and economic segregation. This allocation of land exemplifies Mbembe's (2001:46) notion of fiscality, where colonial governments appropriate native land for economic and political gain. In the South African case, which is mirrored in the text, the colonised are relegated to barren lands, while the colonists retain fertile lands as a metaphor for commodity-rich areas. The imbalance created benefits the colonisers in large-scale agricultural exploitation and resource extraction. When the natives are in a land deemed valuable by the colonists, a forced relocation

ensues, as illustrated by Stephen's father in Mzamane's account to Rutherford in earlier events (Section 3.4.1). Such practices reflect territorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) as exemplified when colonial powers reconfigure spatial boundaries to consolidate control. The result is not only physical displacement, but also a form of cultural erasure. The dispossessed lose not only land, but also language and tradition, as shown by Stephen's transformation into a missionary and his abandonment of the Xhosa language. Thiong'o (1986:28) characterises this phenomenon as "dis-remembering": the discursive loss of land and identity.

3.6.2 Characterisation: Distinguishing features of characters in a white colonist society

The renaming of the main character in *A Sin of Omission* is emblematic of Stephen's complex negotiation of identity under colonisation. This approach aligns Rimmon-Kenan (2002) and Bal (1985), who emphasises that names function not only as labels but also as narrative signifiers foregrounding ideological insights. Stephen was originally named Malusi Mzamane and receives his Christian name from English missionaries, as a symbolic act of erasure and replacement of native cultural practices. The indigenous name Malusi, which means shepherd in isiXhosa, connotes leadership, guidance, and proximity to royal counsel, suggesting a preordained role within his community, just like his father – who is the king's right-hand man.

This cultural significance is supplanted by the name Stephen, inspired by the biblical deacon and martyr, Saint Stephen. The renaming is not benign, but also a deliberate imposition of colonial ideology. It is designed to assimilate Malusi into the Christian doctrine of the white elite, while the intention is to strip him of his indigenous identity by aligning him with the colonisers' belief and value systems. This act of nominal substitution is further compounded by linguistic distortion, because white missionaries anglicise his surname to Mana; a mispronunciation that highlights their authority to define and categorise the colonised subject. Such practices occur against the backdrop of a colonial worldview that deems Xhosa culture barbaric and heathen, necessitating salvation through Christian conversion. The white missionaries' intention is not only spiritual, but also socio-political, serving colonial interest by rendering the colonised intelligible and governable within the colonial order.

Stephen's name thus becomes a metaphorical locus of his internal and external conflict. It is both a jewel and a burden, which is a symbol of spiritual aspiration and colonial subjugation. The archbishop's affirmation that Stephen is "a pioneer as St. Stephen was himself" invokes the biblical narrative of martyrdom (Poland, 2019:122). Saint Stephen was stoned to death for his faith, and this becomes a tragic parallel for Stephen Mzamane, whose

rejection by white missionaries mirrors the fate of his biblical namesake. Stephen's fluency in English as well as his belief in racial equality nurtured during his time in England are met with suspicion and disdain upon his return. His education becomes a liability, because it aligns him with the resistance movements seeking to reclaim stolen lands and liberate incarcerated leaders. Stephen's punishment is multifaceted and consists of social exclusion, spiritual alienation, and eventual death. These experiences are not isolated, but emblematic of the broader colonial condition, where educated natives are perceived as threats to the imperial mission. The narrative arc of Stephen's rejection (Section 3.4.1) is intertwined with themes of land expropriation and ownership, along with the shaped identity that allows a belonging of the individual to the reigning class. Stephen's life, like that of his biblical counterpart, is marked by a gradual erosion of dignity, culminating in a symbolic stoning in the new form, not limited to rejection upon rejection, until his demise and eventual death.

The spatial dynamics of Stephen's journey further illuminates his existential displacement. His formative years in Grahamstown and Canterbury, which are centres of Christian education, facilitate his assimilation into colonial religious structures, albeit at the cost of his Xhosa identity. In Canterbury, Stephen experiences a semblance of acceptance exemplified by his friendship with Albert Newham. However, his posting to Nodyoba becomes not only a shock, but also exposes the entrenched racial discrimination emerging from land ownership monopolised by white colonists. Stephen's blackness becomes a visible marker of exclusion, rendering him an outsider in the very faith community he seeks to serve. Unlike Grahamstown and Canterbury, Nodyoba offers no sanctuary. It is a site of alienation, rather than spiritual fulfilment. The environment reflects the broader colonial logic of land, identity, and faith that are all mediated through racial hierarchies. Stephen's presence in Nodyoba is tolerated, but never embraced, while his Christian vocation is overshadowed by the colour of his skin and the legacy of dispossession.

The spatial dynamics found in *A Sin of Omission* are constitutive of Stephen's identity and trajectory as a representative of the colonised. The contrast between Grahamstown and Nodyoba is emblematic of the colonial system to shape, suppress, and ultimately fracture indigenous subjectivity. Grahamstown is a bastion of white colonial power and ecclesiastical authority and is rendered inaccessible to the colonised without a pass permit (of entry/exit), which is a bureaucratic mechanism of exclusion that highlights the racialised geography of colonial South Africa. Stephen's awareness of this restriction, learnt from Vuyo Tontsi, marks his symbolic and literal alienation from spaces of influence and decision-making. Within this context, Rutherford, who is now the Director of Missions, emerges as a pivotal person, because

his authority extends beyond ecclesiastical matters into the realm of colonial governance. His influence over Stephen's education – denying him Greek and Latin studies, essential for priesthood – as well as his role in determining Stephen's placement, reflect the entanglement of religious and colonial power. The archbishop, acting as Rutherford's mouthpiece, announces Stephen's posting to Nodyoba, a remote and marginalised location. This moment has ideological significance, where the archbishop's speech reveals his complicity in the colonial project under the guise of spiritual stewardship:

In consultation with your Warden in Canterbury and most particularly with Canon Rutherford, who is lately appointed Director of Missions, I have a special commission for you... It will be a hard posting... at a place called Nodyoba... The church, I fear, is rudimentary and the Director of Missions will only manage to visit once, perhaps twice, a year. But you be a pioneer as St Stephen was himself (Poland, 2019:121–122).

The archbishop's speech is mere rhetoric; while invoking martyrdom and pioneering spirit, it hides a deeper colonial logic where Stephen is strategically removed from areas that are considered centres of power and influence. His posting to Nodyoba is not a gesture of ecclesiastical trust, but a calculated act of marginalisation. When the archbishop is examined through Fishelov's (1990) theory of character, he embodies the archetype of the colonial agent cloaked in religious authority. His actions, when interpreted through Forster's (1927) typology of flat and round characters, reveal a singular motive of preserving colonial hierarchies by relegating the colonised to peripheral spaces. Pickerel's (1988) distinction between existentialist and essentialist character development further illuminates the archbishop's role, because he remains impervious to the moral contradictions of his position and unshaped by the suffering he perpetuates. As an essentialist person, the archbishop exemplifies the colonial missionary, whose vocation is subordinated to colonial interests. The archbishop's decision to post Stephen to Nodyoba, an isolated and mountainous region, serves not the gospel, but the colonial imperative to silence and sequester educated natives.

The symbolism of Nodyoba is indeed profound in the text, because of its geographical isolation described in terms of mountains and forests, as this evokes an imagery of concealment as well as exile. Mountains are often associated with caves and secrecy, and this becomes a metaphor for hiding undesirable black missionaries. Stephen, whose education and English fluency rival those of his white counterparts, is rendered invisible due to his presence in Nodyoba, which is a strategic act of containment. The archbishop's invocation of Saint Stephen's martyrdom is thus ironic because, rather than honouring his namesake, he orchestrates a modern-day stoning through institutional neglect and racial exclusion. Unlike Grahamstown and Canterbury, which offered Stephen moments of intellectual and social

engagement exemplified by his friendship with Albert Newham and his participation in chess, Nodyoba is a site of isolation and seclusion for Stephen. It is designed to sever his ties with white missionaries and to undermine his Christian vocation. Stephen is left to navigate his faith alone, while his spiritual resilience is tested by the very institution that once nurtured it in the process. He is thereby deprived of collegial support and ecclesiastical community.

The spatial politics as depicted in *A Sin of Omission* reveal the insidious mechanisms through which colonial power operates by manifesting not only in the form of overt dispossession of the locals, but also through subtle acts of exclusion, misrecognition, and displacement. Stephen's journey from Grahamstown to Nodyoba shows his downfall from his faith which is weaponised, where his identity is fractured, and the promise of belonging is perpetually deferred.

3.7 Conclusion

A multidimensional theoretical approach is indispensable in unpacking the structured meanings presented in *A Sin of Omission*. This complex story of land politics also helps to shape identities used as a vehicle for belonging in a colonial South Africa. By synthesising Genettian structural narratology, genre theory, postcolonial theory, and character theory from a narratological perspective, the analysis reveals the complexity of Stephen Mzamane's deaconship journey in the colony. These theoretical frameworks reveal the trajectory of the main characters as well as the narrative strategies performed by the narrators through an anonymous third-person voice, and various secondary characters alternating between extradiegetic-heterodiegetic and intradiegetic-homodiegetic functions to convey the specified meanings from complementing multiple voices.

With this, Genette's (1980) structural narratology, especially his explanation of temporal relations in order, duration, and frequency, offers a methodological approach through which the sequencing and emphasis of events can be critically examined. This enables the detection of the primary and an embedded narrative, such as the story of land politics marred by dispossession and cultural erasure on the side of the colonised. Also, the deployment of genre theory reveals how the narrative structure foregrounds colonial ideologies. This is in the form of value systems of white colonists that becomes normative and authoritative in the colony at the expense of indigenous epistemologies. Postcolonial theory provides a critical

approach for interrogating the socio-political implications that emerge when it exposes how colonial discourse marginalises the colonised, including their voices.

However, postcolonial theory also helps to recognise moments of resistance against colonisation and shows agency, which is demonstrated through characters like Stephen, whose theological acumen and moral integrity challenge the colonial monopoly on religious authority. Genre theory, through its later developments, complicates the binary representation of colonial space. While the farm genre depicted white settlers in isolation, the text also shows signs of overturning this trajectory by foregrounding the presence and intellectual contributions of the colonised in the form of black characters within the spaces reserved for white colonists. This is demonstrated through Stephen's theological competence, and is a disruption, because he is presented as a person of acute spiritual and intellectual parity, despite the systemic efforts to marginalise him.

Character theory approached from a narratological perspective plays a pivotal role in revealing the ideological undercurrents of the narrative. This is displayed in the form of actantial roles. These roles are assigned to characters such as the white colonists, and reveals their strategic deployment of biopowers and necropowers not limited to war(s), racially discriminatory laws, and the reduction of indigenous people to mere instruments of labour. Such mechanisms are not only tools of domination, but also narrative devices that reinforce the presentation of the thematic concerns of land expropriation and its ownership with the shaped identity marred by fragmentation and cultural suppression in the process, resulting in a created sense of belonging during colonisation.

In summary, the convergence of the deployed theoretical approaches enables an understanding of how narrative form, character construction, and ideological framing help articulate a complex story of colonial subjugation and indigenous resilience. Through this approach, *A Sin of Omission* emerges, not merely as a historical novel, but also as a profound meditation on the politics of land politics, faith, and identity during colonisation.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THEORY OF FLIGHT

4.1 Introduction

Simphiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018) explores colonial resistance in an unidentified Southern African country. In addition, the narrative highlights the struggle for independence mired by leadership challenges that results in civil war, which Stobie (2020:32) describes as "civil wars massacres", involving mass bloodshed and destruction. In the text, the natives are portrayed fighting for independence, freedom, democracy, and land reclamation from colonial forces that had long dominated them. This resistance is revealed when the stories of complex characters are recounted, such as that of Imogen 'Genie' Zula Nyoni, the daughter of Golide Gumede, a colonial freedom war hero who was born Livingstone Stanley Tikiti. In addition to this, the text situates the story in a liminal¹ space, which Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000:117) describe as "an 'in-between' space in which cultural change may occur". This is referred to as a transitional zone highlighted by transitioning from coloniality to postcolonial contexts. It is conceptualised in this study as deterritorialisation to signify colonial resistance when following Deleuze and Guattari's (1987:508) framework, and it is a second stage of the provided history in this study demonstrating the dismantling of colonial powers and their structures.

These events occur when the natives, with the help of white liberalist allies, collaborate in the fight for democracy and independence, signifying the withdrawal of colonial powers. As is demonstrated by the actantial theory, the goal is for the locals to reclaim their lost land, enabling them to own land, belong, and realise their identity in a free and democratic society. This chapter builds on the previous by applying the same conceptual tools drawn from Genettian structural narratology, postcolonial studies, genre theory (that includes farm and city novel structures), and narratological characterisation. These frameworks are deployed to investigate the struggle for independence and land ownership as revealed by analysing selected events drawn from various parts of the text. Also, in some cases, the same selected event carries

¹ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000:117) describe liminality from its etymology. This term derives from the word 'limen', meaning threshold, a word particularly used in psychology to indicate the threshold between the sensate and the subliminal, the limit below which a certain sensation ceases to be perceptible. The sense of the liminal as an interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area, distinguishes the term from the more definite word 'limit' to which it is related.

importance that applies to many situations, emphasising that the meaning of a text can change, depending on the context. What is important is fluidity of textual interpretation. In this process, what comes into view is the widespread land expropriation method during colonial and postcolonial periods, highlighting challenges of land ownership, creating a sense of belonging that shapes indemnity and results in civil war.

4.2 Background to *The Theory of Flight* (2018)

The Theory of Flight (2018) is set in a transitioning period which shows the functioning of liminal space suggestive of Zimbabwe's shift from colonial rule to a democracy (Oumar, 2022: 3). While the text's setting is not explicitly stated, Jaji (2021:293) argues that the author deploys a parochial approach to discussing Bulawayo novels by referring to Zimbabwean women's debut novels set in Bulawayo as confirmation of where the novel is set. The text recounts horrific civil wars resulting from political leadership crises during and after colonial resistance by foregrounding events of the life and death of the innocent young girl, Imogen 'Genie' Zula Nyoni. Her father, Golide Gumede-born Livingstone Stanley Tikiti, is depicted as a well-known guerrilla fighter, whose role in securing independence earns him political support and widespread admiration. Golide's leadership skills and character, shaped by his mother during his upbringing, earns him followers described metaphorically as "a race of angels", which makes him a target in the ensuing civil conflict (Ndlovu, 2018:9). It is here that the novel's title, *The Theory of Flight*, symbolically reflects Golide's political philosophy of ethical freedom and a sense of self-determination that enables a person to accomplish anything. The metaphor of freedom in flight is further elaborated on by Oumar (2022:6) in his exploration of the meanings generated during the interactions between characters and their spatial environments.

Again, Genie's story becomes a focal point for exploring generational experiences of freedom and oppression, dating from her grandparents during colonisation, her parents during resistance, and her foster parents in post-independence Zimbabwe. These events highlight the interconnectedness of people arising from their personal destinies and historical forces. Through these stories, the narrative not only traces Genie's lineage, but also reveals a broader embedded story of land politics, including expropriation and ownership, which creates a sense of belonging that shapes identities across different historical contexts in Southern Africa.

The novel's narrative complexity and richness in themes and metaphors is what earned it South Africa's Sunday Times CNA Literary Awards in 2019. This garnered the attention of scholars keen on investigating leading motifs depicted in the story. Stobie (2020) foregrounds precarity and conviviality, perhaps inspired by Butler's (2009: i) explanation of precarity as those conditions that threaten life beyond individual control so aptly illustrated by the civil unrest depicted in the text. Butler (2009: ii) further asserts that "anything living can be expunged at will or by accident", a sentiment echoed in Genie's tragic fate. Wise and Noble (2016: 423) define conviviality as the capacity to "live together", a theme presented by the characters' resilience and communal survival post-colonisation. Elsewhere, Oumar (2022) explores the text's metaphors of flight through the conceptual framework of spiritual realism and postcolonial theory. Jaji (2021) employs a parochial approach, situating it within a broader tradition of Zimbabwean women's literature. Gagliano (2020) highlights the intricacy of the text's structure in its presentation of character development, including lifestyle(s). Despite this growing body of scholarship, the novel's engagement with land and identity politics has yet to be thoroughly examined. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing how *The Theory of Flight* articulates the embedded story of land and its implications for ownership, its ability to create a sense of belonging, and how this shapes an identity that contributes to historical memory in Southern African history.

4.3 Reconstruction of strategically arranged story events in *The Theory of Flight* (2018)

The *The Theory of Flight* (2018) presents a narrative dominated by nonlinear events, often functioning as metaphors to foreground the circumstances surrounding Genie's causes of death through the disruption of linear temporality (Richardson, 2000). This elicits reflection on the instability and multiplicity of the generation of meaning. These circumstances include politically motivated civil war, violence, rape, pandemics, and the legacy of her father. Golide Gumede's popularity as an independence war hero is what ultimately leads to his mysterious death during the attacks on Beaufort Farm and Estate. Beyond this, the text places an emphasis on the events leading up to Genie's death. It does this by tracing Genie's lineage dating from colonisation to independence. It is here where resistance is foregrounded and the embedded story of land politics emerges; the method of expropriation includes ownership, which creates a sense of belonging to the ruling class and the dispossessed, all the while constructing identities. Genie's grandparents and parents play pivotal roles in shaping her life. Her

grandparents instilled a spirit of resistance, while her father, Golide Gumede, actively joined the liberation struggle, using his knowledge of resistance against colonisation. This resistance – particularly Golide’s metaphorical use of “flight” and “aerodynamics” to represent freedom and political strategy – becomes key in the unfolding of the events of the novel (Ndlovu, 2018: 22).

Genie’s grandfather, Baines Tikiti, represents the generation of her grandparents. Educated by white liberals, he emerges as a politically moderate, educated Black figure in the colonial context. He felt intellectually aligned with colonial ideologies, yet symbolises the political complexities of the time, further highlighted by his own colonised state. His transformation into a metaphorical embodiment of “aerodynamics” reflects the nuanced interplay between education, resistance, and colonial politics. Later, he develops insight into the system and recognises what colonisation is doing to the society he lives in.

Genie is born in a period highlighted by intense colonial resistance, where the struggle for land reclamation and identity formation is inevitable, and a sense of belonging is being forged to accommodate everyone in the newly formed democratic society. As civil war erupts, her father Golide’s growing popularity leads to his assumption of a leadership role where his “theory of flight” places a target on his back. The attack on Beaufort Farm and Estate results in the death of Golide. His wife, Elizabeth Nyoni, becomes negatively affected by political unrest, sexual violence, and the spread of disease such as HIV and AIDS, which ultimately compromises Genie’s health.

Following these traumatic events, Genie is adopted by the Masuku family, who she stays with for roughly a decade. Later, she finds companionship and inspiration in Vida de Velliers, a coloured vagrant whose post-independence interracial relationship with Genie defies colonial taboos. Vida’s inherited wealth and artistic success not only surprises but also motivates Genie. She plays a critical role in Vida’s life and contributes to his career by helping to sell his artworks, which are inspired by the street life of orphaned street kids, and includes her own experiences. The art pieces inspired by Genie’s way of life are titled *The Theory of Flight*, and symbolise freedom and the liberated existence of previously colonised people in a democratic society. However, colonial legacies of racial discrimination are inherited post-independence. The new government authorities challenge Vida’s legitimacy as a representative of black identity in art by citing his race as a coloured person. The possible interpretation for this is that Vida benefitted from the advantages of colonisation and cannot represent the voice of the colonised people. Later, Genie’s death from HIV and AIDS complications serves as a

tragic culmination of the socio-political turmoil she endured. This becomes a profound representation of the dispossessed in a democratic society.

These reconstructed events continue with the story of land politics established in Chapter 3. Unlike the colonial dominance depicted in that chapter, the tables are turned in *The Theory of Flight*. A reversal is portrayed, where locals' resistance movements, known as terrorist or guerrilla factions, rise to challenge and dismantle colonial structures. The specified actions align with what Allan, Keulertz, Sojamo, and Warner (2012) term "historical continuities", where parallels are drawn between colonial land expropriations and democratic contemporary land expropriation (also known as 'land grabs'). Colonial legacies in the form of injustices reign supreme to benefit the landowners who hold power through land ownership. It is here where Bennett's (1996) observations resonate, with land ownership serving as legal or economic construct as well as a manifestation of power. In the Southern African context, this dynamic is demonstrated by the historical distribution of property, with the colonised population holding less than 13 percent of the land. The remaining overwhelming majority was appropriated by colonial authorities.

Bennett's (1996) assertion that owned property such as land functions as a direct index of power and wealth highlights the structural inequalities embedded within the colonial land regime, which becomes an inherited legacy. In this framework, land is not only a resource, but also a symbol and instrument of domination. It is here that Golide's metaphorical act of shooting down an aeroplane carrying passengers, who happen to be white colonists, serves as a metaphor for the luxurious life lived in the colony and symbolises the end of the high life of colonial rule while asserting indigenous agency to power (Ndlovu, 2018: 9–10). Freedom fighters, like the colonists before them, wield tools of biopower (after Mbembe, 2019: 76) to reshape society. Despite the human cost, the reclamation of land and identity marks a shift toward justice, equality, and self-determination for the locals. However, the race for political dominance leads to post-independence internal conflicts, civil wars, and instability. Golide's disappearance and assumed death exemplifies the tragic consequences of these power struggles, as his brilliant ideas posed a threat to leaders desperate to cling to political power.

More, the reconstructed events in *The Theory of Flight* exemplify the farm-to-city novel, which is a genre that is also central to South African literary studies. The genre is important because it tracks the historical and spatial consequences of land dispossession from the contexts of colonial, resistance, and postcolonial societies. The farm-to-city novel does more than register movement from rural to urban spaces. The genre provides an opportunity to narrate the reorganisation of land, power, and belonging, as this is visible when societies

transition from colonial agrarian domination to postcolonial urban modernity. With this, the genre becomes significant in a study concerned with land discourse, because it foregrounds how spatial shifts reorganise installed social structures, political agency, and identity formation.

In *The Theory of Flight*, this transition highlights a decisive historical phase in Southern Africa's trajectory that includes the movement from colonial territorial control towards a liberation and post-independence reconfiguration. The process of deterritorialisation is foregrounded through this shift as articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and it is a process where colonial spatial orders are disrupted. This is achieved through resistance, population movement, and the reimagining of land ownership and re-construction of identity by the new ruling class. The text stages this process and its transformation through the experiences of Genie's grandparents. Their lives during the colonial period are rooted in a farm setting that exemplifies the classical concerns of the farm novel. It is in this context where white colonists assert authority and control. They are positioned to manage land, labour, and social organisation. In addition, the colonists are offered an opportunity to reinforce structures of white supremacy, racialised land control, and the marginalisation of the colonised. These narrative dynamics align closely with Devarenne's (2009: 627) explanation of the farm novel as a genre that consistently engages colonial conflict, racial hierarchy, and the regulation of black labour within agrarian economies.

At the same time, the text introduces a critical complication through characters that include Mr Beaufort. He is a white liberal landowner who permits limited cohabitation between white and black residents on Beaufort Farm and Estate. This conditional inclusion serves to expose the ideological limits of liberal benevolence in the farm novel tradition. Although such gestures appear to soften colonial domination, they ultimately reinforce the colonial system by confining the colonised to subordinate roles. The colonised function as background characters who are treated as sources of labour rather than humans with political and economic rights.

The text aligns with Coetzee's (1986: 8) critique of the farm novel's historical "silence about the place of black labour" and his insistence that black presence be brought back into narrative focus. As Coetzee (1986: 17) argues, such silences now "speak more loudly to us" than they did in earlier periods because they paradoxically testify to the undeniable presence and humanity of black people that colonial fiction sought to marginalise or erase. This critical engagement with the farm novel is further developed in the text through characters like Mr Chalmers.

As another representative of white liberalism, Chalmer teaches Baines Tikiti, formerly Bafana Ndlelaphi, and equips him with sufficient intellectual tools to recognise and interrogate

the colonial project. While this education initially appears as an extension of liberal paternalism, it ultimately becomes a resource for resistance. The knowledge Chalmers imparts enables Tikiti to understand the mechanics of colonial domination and, later, to mobilise efforts against it. Similarly, Mr Beaufort's daughter, Beatrice, disrupts the expectations of liberal complicity by materially supporting anti-colonial rebels and being labelled a "terrorist" by the colonial regime (Ndlovu, 2018: 33). These narrative developments serve to deepen the text's engagement with Coetzee's (1986) revision of the farm novel. It functions to reveal how the benevolent characters remain enmeshed in colonial land systems while simultaneously producing unintended conditions for resistance.

In contrast, the postcolonial setting represented by Guqhuka – renamed Beaufort Farm and Estate through colonial appropriation – emerges as a hybrid space. It serves to anticipate urban transformation while retaining the imprint of colonial land relations. It is here that transitional space portrays the movement and characteristics of the farm-to-city novel. It is a process where rural land becomes increasingly entangled with urban political consciousness and economic mobility. Beaufort Farm and Estate functions as a site of colonial inheritance as well as a terrain of resistance and reclamation. Baines Tikiti's earlier education under Mr Chalmers becomes instrumental in influencing his political awareness and his later use of aerodynamics as a metaphor for political freedom and mobility. His journeys to urban centres that include those associated with anti-colonial struggle and apartheid resistance in South Africa serve to expose him to broader revolutionary networks while deepening his understanding of systemic oppression.

This movement into the city aligns with Akande's (2016: 2) characterisation of the city novel as a form that foregrounds the harsh realities of urban life such as violence, political unrest, and social instability. In the city, political ideas are tested, alliances formed, and resistance intensified. In *The Theory of Flight*, the metaphor of flight operates simultaneously at literal and ideological levels by symbolising physical escape from colonial constraint and the imaginative reordering of political possibility. Tikiti's political consciousness and the mindset of resistance strategies are subsequently imparted to his son Golide. This knowledge is transmitted intergenerationally to his son Golide, who also happens to inherit leadership qualities and ethical grounding from his mother, Prudence Ngoma. Upon their return from South Africa to Beaufort Farm and Estate, Prudence's teachings and Golide's urban influenced political awareness converge. These position Golide as a central figure in colonial resistance.

Through this farm-to-city trajectory, what is made visible by the text is the intergenerational transmission of resistance shaped by colonial land dispossession and

postcolonial instability. Golide's leadership while contributing to liberation efforts foreshadows the civil unrest and the internal fractures that follow independence. In this way, *The Theory of Flight* demonstrates how the farm-to-city novel functions as a critical literary form for tracing the transformation of land from colonial property to contested postcolonial space by revealing how historical land injustices continue to structure political conflict, urban unrest, and the fragile negotiations of belonging in post-independence Southern African societies.

The reconstructed events uncover the underlying causes of Genie's death, which are rooted in colonial resistance. These events foreground critical issues related to story of land politics while creating a sense of belonging that shapes identity, especially in terms of restoring an indigenous identity. To unpack the layered meanings embedded in these developments, the analysis draws on the conceptual theoretical frameworks from structural narratology, postcolonial theory, the farm novel genre, and narratological characterisation. These approaches collectively inform the investigation, as detailed in the sections that follow.

4.4 The dawn of colonial resistance in *The Theory of Flight* (2018)

Due to the strategic positioning of events in the text, *The Theory of Flight* (2018) foregrounds events of Genie's life and death that are central to a narrative structure that conveys the text's main ideas and messages. These events simultaneously uncover a deeper embedded story of land, tied to intergenerational narrative rooted in the experiences of Genie's grandparents and parents during colonisation and the resistance, as well as her own upbringing in a post-independence society. In addition, this new narrative foregrounds expropriation and ownership by those in power who create a sense of belonging in various contexts, and the restoration of marginalised indigenous identity in the post-independence era.

This section explores this embedded narrative through the lens of temporal relations as theorised by Genette (1980), especially the elements of order, duration, and frequency, as previously discussed. Applying these narratological insights enables a detailed abstraction and articulation of the story of land politics, as previously outlined in the distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet*. These dynamics are examined in greater depth in the subsections that follow, while incorporating conceptual frameworks of genre, postcolonial studies, and narratological character for enhanced understanding.

4.4.1 Sequence of events leading up to colonial resistance

The prologue provided by an anonymous narrator announcing Genie's death in the first chapter of *The Theory of Flight* (2018) signals the importance of this event within the narrative structure. Its early placement in the narrative suggests that the remaining events are not only meaningful but are also deliberately foregrounded to explain the first event, mentioned in the prologue. This becomes possible because many details surrounding Genie's death are withheld in this prologue, only to be revealed later. This shows her father's popularity as an independence war hero tipped for a leadership role, making him a target. It is here that this narrative strategy reveals a key aspect of the text's temporal structure, which is that the textual order deviates from the chronological order of the story. The foregrounding of Genie's death and its causes demonstrate the central theme of the text. Symbolically, the destruction of Beaufort Farm and Estate mirrors Genie's demise and, by extension, the collapse of the fictional nation who succumbs *inter alia* to violence, spread of disease, rape, and civil wars. This revelation is provided through flashback, which in Genette's (1980) structural narratology is termed an internal heterodiegetic analepsis. Its function is to furnish background information. Through these flashbacks, the narrative not only reconstructs Genie's life, but also reveals the lives of those whose experiences indirectly shape her fate. These retrospective moments become clear and serve to foreground the text's hidden central concerns: the story of land politics embedded within the broader historical and societal contexts of colonisation and post-independence. The presentation of these events, especially those concerning the histories of the people and their relationship to land, reflects the narrative's commitment to exploring themes of land ownership, created sense of belonging, and shaping identity as portrayed in the passage below:

At the moment of her death, Imogen Zula Nyoni – Genie – was seen to fly away on a giant pair of silver wings, and, at the very same moment her heart calcified into the most precious and beautiful something the onlookers had ever seen. ... it is because most of you will have doubt, and those of you who do not have doubt will be curious, that this story is choosing to be told. ... In other words, the story of what happened to Genie on the Beaufort Farm and Estate on the third of September is also the story of Baines Tikiti, in a bit to quench his wanderlust, walked into the Indian Ocean; of how Prudence Ngoma learned how to build character; of how Golide Gumede shot down an aeroplane and in doing so created a race of angels; of how Elizabeth Nyoni sealed her fate with the turn of her ankle; of how Dingani Masuku came to be haunted by the blue-violet flowers on his mother's dress; of how Thandi Hadebe looked into the distance as though it held a future in which she was not particularly interested; of how Krystal Masuku, at puberty, welcomed guilt as her constant companion; of how, for Marcus Masuku, love happened under jacaranda tree while listening to a story about swimming elephants; of how Valentine Tanaka became a hunchback with a heart of gold; of how Jesus came to be saved; and how the Beaufort Farm and Estate knew exactly what to do with its sacrificed darlings. (Ndlovu, 2018:9-10)

Through the anonymous narrator, the passage recounts Genie's death, while simultaneously providing historical background on people whose lives shaped her own. This narrative

approach suggests that Genie's life and death are the result of complex intergenerational interactions. From the very first page, the anonymous narrator hints at Genie's death and assumes the duty of narrating her story. This is achieved through the deployment of flashbacks in the form of mixed analepsis, which, according to Genette (1980:61), refers to a narrative technique that interweaves past events with the present to provide explanatory information.

The use of mixed analepsis allows the narrator to revisit significant moments from the lives of Genie's grandparents during colonisation, from her parents in the post-independence era, and to trace Genie's own upbringing in a democratic society. These flashbacks reveal the traumatic events that Genie suffered, especially the rape that left her infected with HIV during civil unrest at Beaufort Farm and Estate. Following this, Genie is adopted by the Masuku family, later choosing to live on the streets with Vida, and ultimately returning to Beaufort Farm and Estate as the place of her death. The characters' individual histories reveal a linked intergenerational experience, which provides rich fodder for exploration.

The life of Genie's grandfather, Bafana Ndlelaphi (later known as Baines Tikiti), is recounted by means of mixed analepsis. Educated by Mr. Chalmers, a white liberal, Bafana learns to read and write and becomes an "enterprising young [black] man who was a rare thing for his time" (Ndlovu, 2018:15). Influenced by Western literature, he changes his name to Baines Tikiti in the hopes of assimilating into colonial culture and pursuing elite status, despite being treated as a colonised person (Ndlovu, 2018:16). His fascination with aeroplanes function as a metaphor for political understanding while in South Africa, where his son, Livingstone Stanley Tikiti (later Golide Gumede), demonstrates early intellectual and political awareness disguised in his drawings and reflections on flight (Ndlovu, 2018:19–22). Despite his affection for his son, Tikiti struggles and fails to accept his child's albinism, and eventually sends him and his wife Prudence Ngoma back to Guqhuka – now Beaufort Farm and Estate – which has been appropriated under colonisation. The child returns with memories of a distant father and a symbolic understanding of flight and freedom.

The narrative continues with the life of Genie's father, Livingstone Stanley Tikiti, whose mother instills in him resilience and pride, reminding him to "never feel or look defeated by whatever life dealt" (Ndlovu, 2018: 21–22). These teachings shape him to become a natural leader, admired for his vision and ability to inspire others (Ndlovu, 2018:21–22). Colonial oppression tests Livingstone's life as a colonised person. After considering the issue and developing insight into their cause, he joins the freedom fighters in their war against colonialism (Ndlovu, 2018:21–22). He is motivated by a "burning desire to fight injustice, the cravings of a half-full stomach, the beginnings of an unquenchable thirst" caused by the

inhumanity faced by colonised black people under white colonisers (Ndlovu, 2018:21–22). Livingstone’s joining the war shows his leadership and vision, as he “envisioned for his people after the war lives of plenty, lives of comfort, lives of value, lives of substance, lives that mattered”, and people are “eager to follow him” to correct his people’s injustice experienced at the hands of the white colonists (Ndlovu, 2018:21–22). Livingstone Stanley Tikiti changes his name to Golide Gumede (meaning ‘fields of gold’) as a *nom de guerre*, to represent his vision for his people as a leader (Ndlovu, 2018:21–22). As a leader, Golide also knows that “after the war, when independence arrived, people would need to know that they were capable of flight” to live free from white colonisers and the imposition of their colonial beliefs (Ndlovu, 2018:21–22). Golide’s revolutionary thinking culminates in a plan to shoot down a passenger aircraft as a symbolic end to colonisation, with the backup strategy to use the passengers as leverage for peace negotiations (Ndlovu, 2018:24–25). His teachings on aerodynamics become metaphors that become part of a political education in the emerging democracy.

During the final stages of colonial resistance, Golide falls in love with Elizabeth Nyoni, and together they conceive Imogen ‘Genie’ Zula Nyoni. They settle at Beaufort Farm and Estate, where Golide launches his missile attack on the Vickers Viscount, securing his legacy as a hero and controversial figure (Ndlovu, 2018:26, 29). Later, as ministers resell state-issued vehicles and corruption plagues the new government, Golide’s popularity grows when people believe that Golide can solve the new problem as he did with colonisation (Ndlovu, 2018:68). His symbolic act of building an aeroplane to represent a political movement inspires hope for a better society. According to Dingani, this act alone has the potential to destabilise the new government, especially after Golide’s identity and location are inadvertently revealed to the regime’s leader, the Man Himself (Ndlovu, 2018:303). This leads to the attack on Beaufort Farm and Estate, where Golide and his followers are targeted and survivors become fearful:

For weeks nothing happened and Dingani told himself that his conversation with The Man Himself had not amounted to anything, but then the news came from Beaufort Farm and Estate, informing him that Thandi’s parents, along with many of the compound’s residents, had been killed (Ndlovu, 2018:304).

So it is just as Jestina has long suspected: on the nightmarish day, the *sojas* with the red berets brought more with them than just their hatred and AK-47s. She has never told anyone what happened to her and what happened to Mrs Hadebe, what Mr Hadebe was forced to watch ... And now to find out that Genie too ... But no. ... Genie had only been nine years old at the time. The *sojas* could not have ... but what if they had ... and Genie had chosen to remain silent ... to the grave (Ndlovu, 2018:314).

Golide withdraws from political life after becoming a target during the civil war that includes the attacks on Beaufort Farm and Estate and leads to his death. What is noticeable in the attacks is assault with aggravating brutality in the form of widespread sexual violence against women and children. Among the victims is Genie, who is raped during the attacks and subsequently

infected with HIV. After mistakenly revealing Golide's true identity and whereabouts, Dingani Masuku seeks to atone for his mistakes by doing everything in his power to adopt Golide's daughter, Imogen Zula Nyoni (Ndlovu, 2018:304). Genie remains with the Masuku family until the afternoon of her eighteenth birthday, when she abruptly leaves to join Jesus, a street vagrant (Ndlovu, 2018:145). Genie's later decision to return to Beaufort Farm and Estate as the place of her death is deeply symbolic because the site represents the origin of her trauma, loss, and violated identity. By deliberately choosing this location, Genie transforms a space of violence into one of final agency by suggesting that the psychological and emotional scars of Beaufort Farm remains inescapable and, ultimately, shapes the trajectory of her life and death.

The use of mixed analepsis continues to structure the narrative, recounting Genie's life after her birth and upbringing, beginning with her grandparents and parents, and extending beyond their deaths. According to the reconstructed events, what are the intergenerational struggles of various characters in various contexts in relation to experiences of the story of land politics? Genie's grandparents embody the era of colonisation, her parents represent the resistance movement, and Genie herself reflects on the complexities of post-independence life. The narrative also foregrounds the land question, illustrating how land reclamation evolved from armed resistance against white colonists to peaceful negotiation, eventually followed by civil wars; not only to target Golide, but also to take land by force in a post-independence society.

The land narrative is further complicated by differing perspectives on ownership. While some former colonised locals forcibly seize land as a form of post-war resettlement and self-reward, others, like Goliath, advocate for lawful acquisition, which is the standard. Goliath asserts to Chief Register Valentine Tanaka that he purchased Beaufort Farm and Estate "fair and square. We buy property from Miss Beatrice, we don't land grab" (Ndlovu, 2018:311). This contrasts with the actions of many war veterans who appropriate land by force, reflecting the persistence of colonial legacies in postcolonial governance (Ndlovu, 2018:312).

Later, Beatrice, a white liberal landowner, confirms to government delegate Valentine that she sold the land to the survivors represented by Goliath, and no longer holds the title deeds, stating they "bought [it] fair and square for a dollar, not a penny more, not a penny less" (Ndlovu, 2018:96). This transfer of ownership from coloniser to colonised exemplifies Mbembe's (2001:66) idea of entanglement, where postcolonial societies reorder colonial structures, including property, especially those in the form of land. Beatrice's willingness to sell land to formerly colonised landless citizens, including street children, is a symbolic gesture of land restitution, and – by extension – of the social reintegration of racial groups. Valentine's

inquiry into the title deeds also reveals that Beaufort Farm and Estate is subject to fiscal policy, aligning with Mbembe's (2001:46) discussion of how postcolonial states use bureaucratic mechanisms to reassert control over land. As a government official, Valentine is positioned to appropriate the land under the guise of legality. However, his true motives and those of his superiors are exposed when Valentine seeks to exploit the land's hidden natural resources, believed to be diamonds and gold. In their ignorance, the current owners do not realise that they stand to lose the "precious and beautiful something[s]" that "glimmer like a beacon" due to systemic corruption emerging from the superiors (Ndlovu, 2018:89).

These events mirror real-world debates on land reform in Southern Africa (De Villiers and Stiftung, 2003:2) and suggest that *The Theory of Flight* (2018) draws inspiration from such historical and political contexts. Valentine's appropriation of Beaufort Farm and Estate under the pretext of the government expropriation of land to benefit the dispossessed hides a political and economic agenda of exploitation. His actions reflect a continuity of colonial dispossession, now repurposed by postcolonial leaders; an outcome that Golide Gumede, had he survived, would likely have opposed. The death of Golide reveals another reason why people like him in Southern Africa are killed; they have no intention to steal from the public, but to help it prosper.

The reconstructed and strategically organised events reveal that *The Theory of Flight* (2018) foregrounds Genie's death, which also becomes a structure that holds the narrative. The delayed revelation of key details, such as the post-independence civil wars that contributed to her death, also foregrounds the importance of this event. The text uses Genie's death as an approach to broader thematic concerns, particularly the embedded political story of land. These themes ultimately affirm the colonised population's enduring struggle to reclaim lost land and assert their right to live freely and with dignity.

4.4.2 The hidden cause of Genie's death in the politics of land, identity, and belonging

The Theory of Flight (2018) is a text of roughly 330 pages, which devotes nearly 80 percent of its textual space to recounting the life experiences of Imogen "Genie" Zula Nyoni. Her story is not narrated in passing but is often rendered with sustained details across multiple chapters, pages, paragraphs, and scenes. This durational emphasis enables a detailed depiction of Genie's personal journey, while simultaneously embedding a deeper and politically charged narrative on land, identity, and sense of belonging. It is here that the circumstances surrounding Genie's death emerge. These are not isolated events linked to the more complex historical and political

landscape. These events form part of the text's themes and are subtly intertwined with the narrative through what is theoretically termed 'summary'. This narrative strategy allows the story of land to emerge latently though persistently. Genie's life becomes emblematic of a postcolonial generation striving for justice, dignity, and full participation in the socio-economic life. This aspiration is subject to contrast with the lived experiences of her grandparents, who were relegated to the status of labourers during colonisation. Their identities were shaped by subjugation and working like slaves.

This narrative structure invokes duration as an operational concept of structural narratology. It was introduced by Genette (1980) and further developed by Rimmon-Kenan (2002:54), Landa (2005:8), and Herman (2007:276) to refer to the relationship between story time (the time events take to occur) and text time (the time devoted to narrating those events). *The Theory of Flight* exemplifies this through its extensive treatment of Genie's early life, which is narrated with details that signal its thematic centrality, as explored below.

Genie's story begins during the colonial resistance wars when her parents, Golide Gumede and Elizabeth Nyoni, first meet. This is a foundational event that provides the historical and emotional background for Genie's existence. Charismatic, and with revolutionary credentials and popularity, Golide promises to help Elizabeth become "a bona fide country-and-western singer", a dream that symbolically gestures toward the aspirations of transcendence, mobility, and recognition (Ndlovu, 2018:24). In this context, Elizabeth's desire to reach "Nashville, Tennessee" is not a personal ambition, but a metaphor for the possibility of self-actualisation through love, partnership, and political change. Their relationship is marked by simplicity and mutual respect because "they did not ask much of each other" (Ndlovu, 2018:24). Golide's intention to settle at Beaufort Farm and Estate after the war and Elizabeth's commitment to preparing a home for him, establish the emotional and spatial foundation for their relationship. The metaphor of flight recurs, as Golide "launched his anti-aircraft missile", a euphemism for impregnating Elizabeth, who later arrives at Beaufort "carrying a golden egg" (Ndlovu, 2018:26). This process is followed by the birth of Genie described as resembling her father.

Genie's upbringing in a post-independence society is characterised by love, care, and a sense of possibility. Her mother treats her as a "golden egg", which is a symbol of hope and value in a newly liberated nation (Ndlovu, 2018:40). Her childhood is filled with events and experiences of joy and freedom highlighted by playing in the sunflower fields with Marcus Masuku, the son of the man who would later adopt her. They play by "laughing and zigzagging through the stalks, not really sure who was trying to catch whom" (Ndlovu, 2018:46). These

events reveal the innocence and cheerfulness of a generation no longer under colonial oppression compared to those of their grandparents and parents during colonisation.

Genie's relationship with her father is critical, because it provides a window for her to see the respect he commands as a war hero. This manifests when she follows journalist Bhekithemba Nyathi to hear her father speak about the brilliant ideas that shaped the liberation movement to free the colonised country. This event and moment helps Genie understand her country's history and her own heritage that contributes to the formation of a postcolonial identity grounded in memory, resistance, and belonging:

The man told Bhekithemba how he had come up with his theory of flight on September 3 1978, as he watched elephants swim across the Zambezi River. What had made the first elephant cross was that it could see the other bank of the river – the elephant would not have swum into the ocean, of this the man was certain. What made the other elephants follow was the successful passage of the first. The man wanted people to know that they were capable of flight, and at first he had erroneously thought that they would realise this if he taught them how to build aeroplanes. After watching elephants, he understood that what was needed was merely his own belief in flight. If people saw him build a giant pair of silver wings, then they too would believe that they could fly. (Ndlovu, 2018: 73)

The passage presents Golide Gumede as a character of profound historical and symbolic significance. He is portrayed as an independence war hero, visionary leader, revolutionary, and humanitarian committed to the reclamation of land from colonial powers. Golide's leadership is not only political but also philosophical – a quality encapsulated in his metaphor of flight through his visionary articulation of liberation, dignity, and restored humanity for his people. It is at this narrative juncture that Bhekithemba enters as the connective figure between Golide's visionary symbolism and the material world. As a journalist who inadvertently assumes the role of a spy, Bhekithemba becomes responsible for translating Golide's near-mythical presence into verifiable reality by proving his existence. This task extends to documenting the construction of Golide's aeroplane, an object that symbolises the political party he is forming and grounds his revolutionary ideals in concrete and observable form.

This aeroplane is emblematic of flight and becomes a rallying point for mass support, positioning Golide as transformative figure whose ideas threaten his leaders who are desperate to cling to power. His growing influence makes him a target of political violence that extends to his daughter Genie. Additionally, the text's depiction of the destruction of Beaufort Farm and Estate, where Genie fell victim to the atrocities, highlights the tragic intersection of personal and political sacrifice. It is in this context that the metaphor of flight transcends its symbolic function, offering a perspective to help understand the cost of a visionary leadership in a postcolonial society:

'What happened here?' the torchbearer demanded. Jestina was about to answer truthfully but Genie rushed to say, 'It was the *sojas* ... They killed Mr and Mrs Hadebe with rat poison.' ...

‘None of this would have happened were it not for Golide. They were looking for him. They did this because of him (Ndlovu, 2018:78).

So it is just as Jestina has long suspected: on that nightmarish day, the *sojas* with red berets brought more with them than just their hatred and AK-47s. she had not told anyone what happened to her and what happened to Mrs Hadebe ... As they Gang-raped, shot and pillaged their way through the compound, they had also, probably unbeknownst to themselves, found another way to decimate the compound. It did not have to be all of them who carried the disease. Just one – the result would have been the same. ... And now to find out that Genie too ... But no. This is a thought that Jestina cannot reconcile herself to. Genie had only been nine years old at the time. The *Sojas* could not have ... but what if they had ... and Genie had chosen to remain silent ... to the grave (Ndlovu, 2018:314).

The passage provides an essential narrative in *The Theory of Flight* and it does more than recount the attack on Beaufort Farm and Estate. The narrative is complex and foregrounds civil unrest that portrays a post-independence society caught up in internal contestations over leadership and land ownership. This turmoil is described as “destruction for a destruction’s sake” to highlight the senseless violence that accompanies the struggle for leadership and control (Ndlovu, 2018:82). The elimination of Golide and his leadership is a demonstration of his exclusion from the emergence of the post-independence elite, a symbolic act that denies him legitimacy within the new landowning class. This reveals that he is no longer needed in the society after his immense contribution to liberation. The narrative further hints at the brutalities perpetrated by the *sojas*, including the rape of Genie (a fate shared by many women), and her subsequent infection with HIV. This traumatic event marks a turning point in Genie’s life, along with the death of her parents. She is adopted by Dingani Masuku, who is trying to compensate for revealing the identity and location of Golide, who, despite the objections of his mother, Eunice Masuku, had long been the authority in the household by dictating how things should be (Ndlovu, 2018:104). Dingani’s unwavering commitment to adopting Genie resulted in strain on a family bond (Ndlovu, 2018:304).

Genie’s upbringing in Dingani’s opulent mansion, purchased from Emil Coetzee “for a song”, reflects a changed societal norm. The paradox of postcolonial affluence determines that the formerly dispossessed now inhabit areas once reserved for white colonisers (Ndlovu, 2018:299). Genie is also enrolled in a private “all-girls school”, which had only recently begun admitting black children like herself and Krystal Masuku (Ndlovu, 2018:108). The school’s legacy of producing “successful wives of politicians, businessmen, and farmers”, including one who married a prime minister, illustrates how the disadvantaged are now advantaged when following Genie’s own trajectory, one that is uncovered later (Ndlovu, 2018:108).

Upon reaching adulthood, Genie exercises agency by leaving the Masuku household immediately after her eighteenth birthday. She chooses to live on the streets with Vida (Ndlovu,

2018:147). Her decision is framed as an act of reciprocity, where she states, “you saved my life... now I’m here to save yours” (Ndlovu, 2018:151). Vida’s homelessness is not circumstantial but a symbolic expression of grief and resistance following the suicide of his lover, Everleigh Coetzee, who refused to participate in colonial wars aimed to defend colonisation. Vida sees no reason to continue living without the love of his life (Ndlovu, 2018:125). Their interracial relationship challenges colonial binaries of belonging, offering a vision of post-independence intimacy and solidarity. Genie’s entrepreneurial skill that shapes her identity and spirit emerges as she helps Vida gain recognition as “a well-known artist” for his sculptures, inspired by their shared experiences of living on the streets (Ndlovu, 2018:178). The purchase of Vida’s work by Beatrice Beit-Beauford “for a ridiculously exorbitant sum” testifies to Genie’s elite education and entrepreneurial sense, as this positions her as a cultural broker and economic agent in her society (Ndlovu, 2018:178). Later, Genie’s death from HIV becomes a poetic expression when she returns to Beaufort Farm and Estate to die, choosing “this particular moment, with the survivors as her witnesses, to fly away on a giant pair of silver wings”, a metaphor for transcendence and spiritual release (Ndlovu, 2018:318). Her heart, left behind, “calcifies into the most precious and beautiful something that the world has ever seen” (Ndlovu, 2018:318).

With this, the narrative emphasises the chronological order of events by tracing Genie’s evolution within a post-independence society, which is characterised by freedom and choice – the very conditions her grandparents were denied during colonisation. Her adoption by the Masuku family, her education, her life with Vida, and her chosen death all reflect Genie’s profound agency. She emerges as a person of influence, entrepreneurial spirit, and resilience, shaped by the socio-political currents of her time.

The text also embeds a story of land politics, albeit briefly, through the biopowers of colonial resistance and reclamation of land. The expropriation of land from white colonisers and its redistribution to victorious insurgents is presented not through detailed exposition, but in a conceptual theoretical framework in the form of a summary. This can be interpreted as a deliberate strategy that compresses significant historical events into brief textual moments. The technique aligns with narratological insights from Genette (1980:96), Chatman (1980:68), Landa (2005:10), Herman (2007:293), and Bal (2017:96), who describe summary as a mode that condenses the occurrences of events into a few sentences.

However, *The Theory of Flight* challenges traditional narratological views, particularly Bal’s (2017:96) claim that summary pertains to “insignificant” events “that do not greatly influence the course of the *fabula*”. Here, summary is employed to encapsulate pivotal

developments, such as land expropriation, ownership, and identity formation, thus challenging established narrative conventions when the summary device functions to provide significant events that influence the course of the story of land politics. Herman's (2007:293) notion of "compressed accounts", along with Chatman's (1980:68) observation that "discourse is briefer than the events depicted", aptly describe this narrative strategy. Through Genie's journey from Beaufort to the Masuku household, to the life in the streets with Vida, and finally to her death, the text constructs a subtle yet powerful story of land politics. This story, embedded within subordinate narrative elements, articulates themes of expropriation, creates a sense of belonging and identity, and reveals the enduring legacies of colonialism and the transformative possibilities of post-independence life experiences.

4.4.3 Routine of struggle for freedom and resistance from colonisation

According to Gerard Genette's structural narratology (1980:35), frequency refers to the relationship between the number of times an event occurs in the story, and how many times it is narrated in the text. This conceptual explanation has been widely acknowledged and expanded upon by subsequent scholars. Rimmon-Kenan (2002:59), Landa (2005:11), Herman (2007:289), and Bal (2017:100) all agree with the analytical utility of frequency in narrative theory. In the context of *The Theory of Flight* (2018), the text's sustained focus on Genie's personal journey makes the full recounting of the story of land politics structurally complex.

Instead of presenting the story of land not only in a direct but also in a sustained manner, the text embeds it within the lived experiences of its characters across various generational political dispensations. This employed narrative strategy helps to foreground personal experiences. Also, it allows for a broader historical and political concerns to emerge indirectly through character interactions, memory, and recollection. The end result is that the story of land surfaces through implication than explicit narration.

To achieve this effect, the anonymous narrator employs structural narrative techniques of frequency, particularly iterative as well as singulative narration. These techniques help to foreground not only the recurrence but also the significance of key historical events. Also, it links individual experiences to wider patterns of colonial resistance, dispossession, and post-independence transformation. As Genette (1980:119), Landa (2005:11), and Herman (2007:289) observe, iterative frequency enables a single narrated event to stand in for multiple

occurrences, thereby suggesting a pattern or enduring condition. In this text, the iterative recounting of the independence wars, particularly those involving Golide as a symbolic figure of resistance, serves to convey the protracted and unresolved nature of these struggles. The implication is clear, because such events are not confined to a singular historical moment, but represent a continuum of resistance that defies temporal closure:

To the war he [Golide] took only the clothes he was wearing, his burning desire to fight injustice, the cravings of a half-full stomach, the beginnings of an unquenchable thirst. ... He [Golide] fought with purpose and determination, and his war was good (Ndlovu, 2018:21-22).

As a narrative vehicle for the story of land politics and its complexities, the events in *The Theory of Flight* mirror historical land wars in Southern Africa. These wars have pitted indigenous populations against white colonial settlers in the struggle for independence. The text suggests that the reclamation of land by the indigenous population is not only a political victory, but a profound act of restorative justice that comes with the benefits realised when one reclaims identity and dignity. As Ndlovu (2018:22) asserts, the cessation of “injustice” against the colonised is contingent upon the restoration of land, which in turn reconstitutes the selfhood of the dispossessed. The dispossession of land as a central mechanism of colonial domination rendered the locals landless. Young (2001:52) argues that the coloniser appropriates not only territory in the form of land, but the very means of sustenance. This becomes a systemic deprivation, affecting the locals and leading them to hunger and dependency on the coloniser, resulting in a condition that Golide, who is a symbolic figure of resistance, seeks to overturn. His struggle is depicted as a fight against “the cravings of a half-full stomach”, a metaphor for the material and existential deprivation imposed by the colonisers (Ndlovu, 2018:22). The phrase “after the war – when independence arrived” highlights a shift that signifies the locals’ ability – in self-determination – to reclaim land and the right to define their identity, values, and future without taking instructions from the coloniser (Ndlovu, 2018:22). It is within this context that Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (1986:28) idea of “re-remembering” becomes salient. Its meaning is illustrated in the saying that the reclamation of land is inseparable from the reclamation of language and cultural memory. Freed from colonial impositions, the locals can now articulate their identities in indigenous languages that reflect their beliefs and norms, demonstrating their created sense of belonging in their territory. The name of Golide is in a native language, and it exemplifies the starting point of the reconstitution of identity through language and land.

Moreover, the narrative’s use of singulative frequency to depict the war between colonisers and guerrillas, aligns with the theoretical explanations of Genette (1980:114) and

Landa (2005:11), who note that the singularity of the narrative utterance corresponds with the singularity of the event itself. In *The Theory of Flight*, such events occur when the rebels are either preparing for or are engaged in war with the coloniser. In the text, these events are presented in summary form. They function to reinforce the enduring nature of the struggle for independence, which aligns with the broader narrative of land expropriation and ownership, along with created sense of belonging and shaped identity:

It just so happened that one of his camp commanders saw the ledger full of aeroplane drawings and sent him to the Soviet Union to study aeronautical engineering. Golide happily endured the cold bitterness of the Soviet climate because he understood that after the war – when independence arrived (Ndlovu, 2018: 22).

The passage functions as a summary, as well as giving narrative closure to Golide's war experiences. Also, it illustrates how the land wars are strategically compressed within the text to cover a broader temporal scope than their narrative presentation might initially suggest. These recurring events of war date from the era of Golide's father through to his own generation and signifies a sustained and ultimately successful resistance against white colonial domination. The metaphor of Golide's "aeroplane drawings" serves as a powerful emblem of visionary political and military strategy, which demonstrate an imaginative projection of liberation that transcends tactical engagement (Ndlovu, 2018:22). This helps the colonised towards a sophisticated and forward-looking campaign, aimed at reclaiming dispossessed land, restoring autonomy, and establishing democratic governance. In doing so, it contributes to the broader thematic concern of the text, which focuses on the reconstitution of indigenous identity through the reclamation of lost land to provide a space of their existence. The recovery of lost land enables the emergence of new postcolonial identities, rooted in freedom, self-determination, and cultural continuity benefitting all the people in the new era. The locals, as formerly dispossessed people, now inhabit the land as newly rightful owners and reassert their created sense of belonging. Golide's transformation is highlighted by his name in the indigenous language and exemplifies this process of identity reformation through spatial and symbolic repossession.

4.5 Identifying narrating voices recounting the events leading to colonial resistance as well as Genie's death

The Theory of Flight (2018) employs a multi-layered narrative structure in which an anonymous third person narrator is complemented by selective first-person character narrators that includes Golide Gumede as well as Genie. While the text foregrounds multiple

perspectives in revealing the story of land events, it makes a crucial distinction between narratorial agency and focalisation. Much of the narrative remains controlled by an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator, who exists outside the story events. Also, this narrator mediates the perceptions, memories, and voices of characters without relinquishing narratorial authority. In Genette's (1980) terms, this narrative approach is seen to be primarily heterodiegetic even when events are focalised through individual characters.

However, the anonymous narrator frequently functions as a focaliser, particularly when recounting the events of Genie's life and death by adopting an ostensibly omniscient vantage point that reveals not only the independence war but also the subsequent civil wars. Although filtered through character consciousness, these events remain narratively framed by the external narrator. At key moments, the text strategically delegates narrating authority to characters by allowing them to perform the role of intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrators who function to generate metadiegetic insertions. Golide's allegorical explanation to Bhekithemba about his political aeroplane as the formation of his political party, for example, exemplifies such narration. Without conflating perspective (focalisation) with narratorial voice (narration), the text is positioned to articulate land dispossession, political transformation, and identity.

4.6 People in colonial resistance as well as in Genie's life and death

The Theory of Flight (2018) also foregrounds conceptual theoretical dimensions of characterisation, functioning to inform the experiential depth of its characters, particularly as their personal narratives intersect with the embedded story of land politics in relation to land expropriation and ownership, along with a cultivated sense of belonging that shapes identity. Through a range of characterisation techniques, the text reveals how the reclamation of land by the formerly colonised becomes a site of narrative and ideological transformation. These characterisation strategies exist in the form of direct and indirect methods as articulated by narratologists such as Mieke Bal (1985) and Rimmon-Kenan (2002). Direct characterisation involves explicit narrative commentary, while indirect characterisation emerges dominantly in the text through dialogue in the form of character speeches, action, and the environment they exist in. The text's deployment of these techniques enables the story of land politics to emerge based on characters' experience, rather than through overt exposition.

Further theoretical perspectives on characterisation help to enrich this analysis. This includes Forster's (1927) distinction between "flat" and "round" characters. Also included is Pickerel's (1988) emphasis on psychological realism, as well as Fishelov's (1990) typological approach to character function. All these theoretical approaches contribute towards an understanding of how characters operate within the text. Additionally, Greimas' (1971) actantial model provides a structural framework for interpreting character roles in relation to narrative function, as this occurs in the context of resistance, transformation, and symbolic flight presented in the text.

In *The Theory of Flight*, characterisation is not only a vehicle for individual development, but also a way to articulate collective histories and political imaginaries involving land expropriation and ownership. The characters' personal trajectories, particularly those of Golide and Genie, become emblematic of broader postcolonial struggles, with their identities shaped by the contested terrain of land and memory.

4.6.1 The roles of people in colonial resistance as well as in Genie's life and death

Applying Greimas' (1971:793–806) actantial model to *The Theory of Flight* (2018) reveals a narratological structure where the unnamed narrator explains thematic events by recounting Genie's experiences and challenges that culminate in her death, all of which are tied to the embedded story of land. Central to these events is Golide, Genie's father and a war hero, whose instrumental role in colonial resistance aimed at reclaiming dispossessed land ultimately makes him a target, resulting in civil wars. The juxtaposition of colonial resistance and post-independence civil wars influences Genie's life and is exemplified when she inherits the freedoms secured by her father's generation, yet witnesses the violent unravelling of those gains through the attack of Beaufort Farm and Estate. These events foreground the methods of land expropriation employed by the colonists and locals, as this reveals competition over contested land where ownership, belonging, and identity are continuously negotiated and often mired by civil war. What is revealed here is the narrative strength of character portrayal – particularly through Genie's life – caught within the historical struggle for land. Through the character's lived experiences, this section examines how character roles reflect and refract the story of land, especially those connected to Genie's life and death.

Within this framework, the colonised seek not only the restitution of their land, but also the freedom and dignity denied during colonisation. Independence is thus framed as a political and existential reclamation, which is key to democracy for the natives in the new society.

However, the promise of freedom is undermined by internal divisions, not limited to the defence of colonial interests by white settlers, and the civil wars among indigenous factions that emerge as main opponent to peaceful transition and political stability. Golide's popularity and his vision of liberation render him a threat to the new regime. His assassination, along with the destruction of Beaufort Farm and Estate, is a calculated effort to suppress opposition and dissenters, and this becomes a way for the newly established corrupt government to cling to control and political power. His death extinguishes a brilliant vision of postcolonial renewal grounded in "lives of plenty, lives of comfort, lives of value, lives of substance, lives that mattered", leaving his followers in a state of disillusionment (Ndlovu, 2018:21 – 22).

The guerrillas' strategic use of white liberal education and funding to acquire death technologies in the form of weapons and peaceful negotiations for tactical knowledge illustrates a paradoxical reliance on colonial tools to dismantle colonial structures. Educated black characters begin to resist land dispossession by leveraging tools of biopower not limited to education, armed resistance, and negotiation in reclaiming stolen land. This is where *The Theory of Flight* is positioned as a meditation on the biopowers of liberation, where death technologies and intellect become a means of resistance to colonisation, and a reconstruction of democratic society with a new identity.

These biopowers – particularly the deployment of death technologies – enable the colonised to match the colonisers in military capability. This action puts locals in the position to alter the balance of control and political power, as this helps them to reclaim and govern their land. The metaphor of shooting down the coloniser's aeroplane with a gun – which can be interpreted as an emblem of elite lifestyle and colonial dominance – encapsulates this reversal. Historically, the natives lacked the armaments to defend their land, as illustrated in Chapter 3 of *A Sin of Omission* (2019). In addition to death technologies, the generation presented in *The Theory of Flight* employs education to negotiate peaceful resolutions, redefine identity, and reimagine sovereignty. Golide's collaboration with white liberals at Beaufort Farm and Estate, especially those who resisted colonial relocation policies and supported indigenous education, exemplifies a shared vision of a postcolonial created sense of belonging. Golide's teachings encourage locals to reject colonial ideologies, values, and norms, to start promoting their own, including the perception of white settlers as sole providers of employment and opportunity. This ideological shift facilitates the restoration of indigenous culture and language, and enables the reconstitution of African identity through the reclamation of land and the revival of native languages and lost traditions that remain in fractured memory.

The restitution of land to locals in a postcolonial context as depicted in *The Theory of Flight* reflects Achille Mbembe's (2001:46–66) ideas of fiscality and entanglement. Fiscality manifests in the transfer of land from colonial elites to indigenous populations for purposes of economic and political empowerment. The increase in land ownership beyond the historical threshold of 13 percent signals a significant reordering of territorial rights and cultural belonging. This reclamation aligns with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986:28) idea of re-remembering, which fulfils the role of advocating for the revitalisation of indigenous cultural practices after the recovery of stolen land. In this vein, Mbembe (2001:66) explains that entanglement complements fiscality by describing the reconfiguration of land and power in postcolonial society. The departure of colonisers and the sale of their assets in the form of land to native buyers, such as Beatrice's sale of land to Goliath and the survivors, highlights the process of deterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:508). This act of economic and spatial reordering enables formerly dispossessed communities to occupy and redefine areas once reserved for the colonial ruling class. The acquisition of these properties marks a symbolic and material shift in the social structure by allowing the natives to reclaim their heritage and assert their presence within the national landscape.

Ultimately, the narrative calls for a return to indigenous roots, signified by the restoration of native names and cultural practices. This reclamation is not only symbolic, but foundational to the construction of a postcolonial identity, rooted in autonomy, memory, and belonging.

4.6.2 Characterising features of people in the struggle for freedom and life in democratic society

In *The Theory of Flight* (2018), the names of the notable characters serve as a tool of characterisation. It helps to reveal not only individual features, but also broader socio-political identities shaped by the post-independence context. Genie's name alone reveals her multifaceted role as an influencer, manager, entrepreneur, negotiator, and motivator within a society undergoing just transition from colonisation to independence. This method of characterisation aligns with structural narratological approaches provided by Rimmon-Kenan (2002) and Bal (1985), who emphasise the interpretive potential of names in generating meaning and situating characters within ideological frameworks shaped by the contexts they find themselves in.

The ordering and composition of names in the text are far from arbitrary. The juxtaposition of English and indigenous elements in Genie's full name, Imogen "Genie" Zula Nyoni, symbolises a transitional identity caught between the colonial past ("Imogen Genie") and the postcolonial present ("Zula Nyoni"). Although Nyoni operates as a surname, its indigenous resonance contributes to the restoration of African language and cultural heritage, which echoes Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986:28) idea of re-membering. The restoration of African roots is further exemplified through the chronological evolution of names in the text.

During the colonial period, name changes reflect a shift from indigenous to those of the coloniser through colonial linguistic registers in the language of the coloniser. Golide's father, whose original name is Bafana Ndlelaphi, adopts the new name Baines Tikiti to align himself with colonial authority. Through his new name, he has positioned himself as a rare, moderately educated black man seeking legitimacy during colonisation. His surname, Tikiti, metaphorically enables him "to go on a journey", signifying his departure from indigenous identity and his desire to associate himself with the colonial intellectuals. This he does through his reading list, which features works by David Livingstone, Thomas Baines, and Henry Morton Stanley, whose works he encounters in the library of Mr. Chalmer, who also provides him with education (Ndlovu, 2018:16).

In contrast, the post-independence era witnesses a deliberate reversal of this naming practice. Golide Gumede, born Livingstone Stanley Tikiti, renames himself intentionally as an act of Africanisation. This ought to be interpreted as an attempt to restore balance in the cultural gap and ideological practices created by the colonisers. This transformation is not in name(s) alone, but also in ideology, and serves to reflect his commitment to dismantling colonial structures and reclaiming stolen land. Renaming, which includes renaming the renaming of Beaufort Farm and Estate to the original Guqhuka, invokes reclamation. In the postcolonial world, survival no longer necessitates the erasure of indigenous ways of life, but reclaims it as the norm in an act of affirmation. Golide emerges as a leader who envisions a society where all individuals belong and share in the responsibilities of freedom informed by African ways of life: to add to the growing world knowledge, rather than succumbing to suppression.

Character names in the text also carry symbolic meaning; Imogen "Genie" Zula Nyoni's name reveals her soul's journey. As Oumar (2022:4) observes, many of Ndlovu's (2018) characters bear bird-related names, which symbolises liberation derived from the boundless nature of the birds' flight. Golide is likened to a woodpecker, having become innovative and optimistic. He deploys the aeronautical engineering training he received in the Soviet Union to metaphorically drill through the colonial structures, likened to mahogany wood, to forge a path

toward independence (Ndlovu, 2018:22). His vision is summarised in his aspiration for “lives of plenty, lives of comfort, lives of value, lives of substance, lives that mattered” (Ndlovu, 2018:21–22). His daughter Genie benefits from this metaphorical freedom. While Oumar (2022) does not specify which bird Zula represents, the surname Nyoni, which means “bird” in some Southern African languages, serves to reinforce Genie’s symbolic association with flight and liberation. The term *zula*, commonly used in the townships as a form of street vernacular, denotes a certain hustle, or seeking out something of worth, as this further characterises Genie’s journey. This fully manifests in Genie’s efforts when helping Vida sell his artwork to Beatrice, and reflects her entrepreneurial skill and her pursuit of a meaningful life. Genie’s movements from adoption by the Masuku family to life on the streets with Vida demonstrates the free, migratory nature of birds, as this highlights her quest for freedom and belonging in a post-independence society.

The symbolic importance of character names is also found in the spatial setting of Beaufort Farm and Estate, the site of Genie’s life and death. This foregrounded space necessitates a close narratological investigation. In this study, the environment is approached through structural narratology informed by indirect characterisation. In addition, this study also draws on characters’ actions and speech to infer generated meaning. As Rimmon-Kenan (2002:60–66) argues, indirect methods of characterisation provide implicit insights into the fictional world, with *The Theory of Flight* exemplifying this approach.

The actions and utterances of characters, especially those surrounding Genie, reveal the conditions that shape her identity and experiences. Rimmon-Kenan (2002:61–63) further notes that characters’ actions are unique and can significantly impact the narrative, while their speech offers a glimpse into their perspectives on the text’s thematic concerns. In *The Theory of Flight*, these narratological techniques converge to construct a richly layered narrative in which names, actions, and spaces serve to articulate the enduring struggle for land, identity, and postcolonial self-definition.

In the text, the pivotal forces shaping Genie’s life and death are tied to the actions of Bennington Beaufort, a white liberal landowner whose acquisition and governance of Beaufort Farm and Estate during colonisation reveals a disguised operation of settler capitalism. This manifests through Beaufort’s ambition for “great success” with his plan to procure land “with very little effort and at no great expense to himself”, highlighting the exploitative logic of colonial land appropriation in Southern Africa (Ndlovu, 2018:30). However, his liberalism is characterised by kindness, where he is described as a “fair-minded man” who did not relocate the locals, because he had plans for them to function as a “readily available labour force”

(Ndlovu, 2018:30). This decision shows a strategic reinforcement of colonial dominance, where African identity is reduced to labour, an identity imposed and sustained by the colonial economy to benefit the colonisers (Ndlovu, 2018:30). It is here that Beaufort Farm and Estate shows its microcosm of a colonial story of land politics, where land ownership is racially codified and where whiteness signifies proprietorship, while blackness equals servitude. The very possibility of interracial cohabitation is illegal under colonial law, yet Beaufort's liberalism permits a conditional coexistence, which is deeply based on inequality and exploitative attitudes. This spatial and ideological arrangement helps shape Golide's worldview and revolutionary praxis, manifesting in his plan to "strategically shoot down the passenger aeroplane so that it would land virtually undamaged in the Guerilla camp", revealing not only a tactical manoeuvre, but also a symbolic act (Ndlovu, 2018:25). It envisions a postcolonial society where the artificial boundaries of race and class formed during colonisation are dismantled to create an area that was once a site of exclusion, but becomes a shared space of liberation.

Golide's superiors support his brilliant vision, which is seen to have the potential to "use the civilians on board as prisoners of war and hopefully broker an end to hostilities and finally realise the country that they had long been fighting for" (Ndlovu, 2018:25). The lived experience of coexistence on Beaufort Farm and Estate is fraught and becomes a prototype for imagining a postcolonial society built on the foundations of equality, inclusivity, and the dismantling of racialised land ownership. This vision culminates in the aspiration for "an equal, discrimination-free, all-inclusive society", where identity is no longer based on colonial ideologies, but rather reclaimed through equitable access to land and dignity (Ndlovu, 2018:67). This is realised in Golide's mother, a single parent who laboured under the employ of white colonists in Beaufort Farm and Estate to sustain her family. This detail, subtle yet significant, situates Golide within the socio-economic margins, demonstrating that he is neither fully integrated into the white elite, nor entirely outside. Drawing on Coetzee's (1986) insights into the farm novel genre, Golide can be considered a person existing in the background to provide labour, and who is shaped by the contradictions of colonial life. His transformation from a marginalised farmworker into a guerrilla combatant becomes a symbol of a broader resistance to colonial injustice, demonstrating that locals do exist. In embracing the struggle for liberation, Golide transcends his imposed identity and emerges as a revolutionary, a visionary, and a symbol of postcolonial identity within the newly created society, emblematic of transcendence and self-determination.

The narrative voice manifesting in the form of speeches, especially through indirect speech, further shows Golide's ideological stance. It is provided by the anonymous narrator who channels Golide's reflections as though addressing a collective audience, thereby constructing him as a charismatic leader and moral compass. His speech, though mediated, articulates the existential plight of a marginalised local living a life under colonial rule, as this aims to galvanise his followers to reclaim their humanity through resistance. In doing so, the text not only reveals Golide's personal evolution, but also inscribes his legacy within the broader historical arc of decolonisation and national self-realisation:

He chose as his nom de guerre 'Golide Gumedé', which meant 'fields of gold', because that is what he envisioned for his people after the war – lives of plenty, lives of comfort, lives of value, lives of substance, lives that mattered. When he shared his vision of the future with others, they were eager to follow him (Ndlovu, 2018:21-22).

Golide emerges as an influential person because his actions and ideas galvanise a collective awakening among the colonised and guide them toward self-realisation and liberation from installed colonial ideas and ways of doing things. His leadership is not only tactical, but transformative, demonstrating qualities of a revolutionary whose vision transcends the immediate need for resistance to encompass the future construction of a postcolonial society rooted in dignity, equity, and shared humanity. Fishelov's (1990:425) input on characterisation foregrounds the lifelike qualities of fictional characters. This is particularly striking in Golide, who has the capacity to think and articulate a future beyond colonisation. This situates him as a person who not only contests the colonial order of the day, but also reimagines the possibilities for life after independence. Unlike the white colonists, whose characterisation is firmly defined by their commitment to maintaining hierarchies of race and labour, Golide embodies a dynamic and multifaceted subjectivity, where he not only resists but also reconstructs.

This complexity is further illustrated when applying Forster's (1927) distinction between flat and round characters. Golide is a rounded character, representing a constellation of ideas that include colonial resistance, land reclamation, and reconciliation serving as a socio-responsive mechanism to address historical and personal contingencies brought about by colonisation. In contrast, white colonists are depicted as flat characters, driven by the idea of perpetuated colonial control. Golide's intellectual and moral elasticity allow him to envision a society in which the remaining white settlers – the last trace of colonial presence – become integrated as ordinary citizens, no longer defined by outgoing privilege installed by colonisation. but through a shared civic belonging. The motif of deprivation during

colonisation is presented through the metaphor of the “half-full stomach” imposed upon natives and serving as an experience that accelerates Golide’s transformation (Ndlovu, 2018:23).

This aligns with Pickerel’s (1988:182) theory of character development, which builds upon Forster’s framework by introducing the existential dimension of characterisation. Pickerel distinguishes between essentialist characters driven by static identities and existentialist characters whose identities are forged through experience. Golide exemplifies the latter, who grows from marginalised farmworker to guerrilla combatant through lived encounters with injustice, hunger, and dispossession under colonial rule. Golide joins the guerrilla movement not for personal emancipation, but as a means for collective liberation of his people. His evolution into a humanitarian, visionary, and revolutionary leader demonstrates a broader shift from objectified labourer to agentic subject. This transformation is central to the narrative’s thematic structure, because it reveals the causal structures behind Genie’s death. Her demise is not an isolated tragedy, but a condition that Golide seeks to dismantle through his theory of flight.

The narrative voice emerging through the deployment of indirect speech further emphasises Golide’s ideological position in the public space. This happens when the anonymous narrator presents Golide’s reflections as though addressing an audience, as this depicts him as a charismatic leader whose speech serves to mobilise. This narrative strategy deepens Golide’s characterisation and situates him in a tradition of revolutionary discourse where speech acts serve as instruments of political awakening and social transformation.

4.7 Conclusion

When investigated through structural narratology, Genie’s life and death in *The Theory of Flight* reveal a broader socio-political and historical matrix that includes the story of land. The story of land tells of the expropriation and ownership of land, how it creates a sense of belonging, and how this shapes identity in the process from colonisation to post-independence. The method used by this theory emphasises a combination of a theory and criticism, revealing the interplay between narrative form and the generated meaning that enables a nuanced unpacking of how Genie’s individual experience is shaped, while becoming a reflection of a collective of historical forces.

Additionally, the theory’s inherent flexibility manifests in its capacity to integrate genre theory, postcolonial theory, and character theory, approached from structural narratology, and

allowing for a holistic interpretive framework of the text. Within this framework, Genie's existence in a postcolonial society involves the promise of freedom and democracy, subject to contestation. It is here that her life represents a generation that coincides with the aftermath of colonial violence while showing self-determination and change from colonial ways of life. This aspiration is made possible, in part, by the revolutionary legacy of her father, Golide Gumedé, whose resistance against colonial injustice was not personal, but generational. His struggle is highlighted by the desire to ensure that his child and his people do not remain under the oppression of white colonists.

However, civil wars persist as instruments of political consolidation, marring the results of hard-won freedom and democracy. These internal conflicts complicate the postcolonial dream, and reveal that liberation is prone to fragility and can be lost when it is not accompanied by ethical governance and inclusive leadership for the benefit of the people. Consequently, Genie's death is not simply a narrative endpoint but becomes a symbol of the unfinished process of decolonisation. Her demise reflects the tensions between inherited trauma and the aspirational future that remains precarious in the face of post-liberation violence.

In this context, Genie's story becomes a site where narrative converges with personal identity, historical memory, and political critique. By attending to the structure of the text and its generated meanings, structural narratology demonstrates the novel's construction of an embedded story of land politics, belonging, identity, and resistance. Genie's life, which is shaped by her father's revolutionary ideas, becomes mired in the challenges of postcolonial leadership, demonstrating the enduring struggle for a society in which freedom is not declared, but lived.

CHAPTER FIVE

A THOUSAND TALES OF JOHANNESBURG

5.1 Introduction

The novel recounts inspired historical events and presents a complex personal and collective memory that reveals a persistent thread of racial discrimination that mutates into xenophobic violence. As the text suggests, this thread is the root cause of Johannesburg's enduring instability and the impossibility of peaceful habitation from colonisation to democracy. The colonial epoch depicted in the novel reveals two distinct phases: the British imperial presence in the 18th century, and the subsequent Afrikaner ascendancy in the 19th century. It is in these epochs where land dispossession, violence, and racial stratification emerge, and they form the historical substratum upon which the narrative unfolds. While Kalmer (2017) occasionally refers to Afrikaners as Boers or Voortrekkers, this study uses the word Afrikaner(s) to maintain consistency with contemporary nomenclature.

It is at this point that a scholarship that focuses on Johannesburg informs an analysis of the investigated text. The city is not only functioning as a setting but also as a dynamic urban space. This space is shaped by historical structuring, mobility, and contradiction. Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) describe Johannesburg as an African metropolis constituted through simultaneity where colonial and postcolonial temporalities coexist rather than replace one another. Nuttall's (2009) idea of entanglement further frames Johannesburg as a space in which past and present, violence and belonging, intimacy and exclusion remain interwoven. Read through this approach, Kalmer's (2017) Johannesburg emerges as a palimpsestic city in which land, memory, and identity are repeatedly reconfigured rather than resolved.

The novel's temporal scope aligns with key historical junctures found in South African history. These are the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), the institutionalisation of apartheid (1948–1994), and the emergence of democratic governance post-1994. Kalmer's (2017) narrative suggests that the black-majority government reigns from 1994 to 2008 as part of the reach and depth of the presented story events. This period highlights the fulfilment of democratic ideals, but also the intensification of social fragmentation.

The Johannesburg portrayed in the text remains a contested and inhospitable space throughout these epochs, with its social life mired by racial hierarchies privileging the

dominant group of each era. Land expropriation and its ownership emerge as a central theme reflecting the ideological underpinnings of successive regimes known as the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) under Afrikaner control, British colonial administration, and the democratic state.

These regimes, predicated on racialised notions of identity not limited to language, skin colour, and cultural affiliation, function to determine access to land and its economic benefits. The British colonisers, for example, employed scorched-earth tactics, razing farms and homes, incarcerating Afrikaners in concentration camps, and deploying arson as a tool of terror. Under Afrikaner rule, legislative frameworks institutionalised racial segregation, disenfranchising black South Africans and denying them access to justice, equality, and basic human rights. In the democratic era, the narrative reveals a troubling continuity, known as inherited colonial legacy, that leads to xenophobic violence against black foreign nationals, as this replicates the exclusionary logic of earlier regimes.

Thus, the novel posits that the racialised violence initiated by British imperialism finds its echo in the democratic dispensation, albeit in altered form. The lived experiences of Johannesburg's inhabitants, such as Zweig van Niekerk, his lineage, and the people he meets – including Richard Ho, Marceline, and Hippolyte – serve as narrative conduits through which the city's lack of peace reveals its fractured history.

Kalmer's (2017) Johannesburg is a liminal space aligning with a theoretical conceptual framework elucidated by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000:117) as "an 'in-between' space in which cultural change" may or may not occur. This liminality is not only spatial, but also temporal, by encompassing the city's transformation across colonial, apartheid, and post-independence phases. As representative of South Africa, Johannesburg reveals three historically distinct phases. The first of these phases is territorialisation, revealing the imposition of colonial rule that coincides with the 1886 Witwatersrand gold rush, mired by racial hierarchies and economic disparities. This is followed by deterritorialisation, where a struggle for liberation culminates in the dismantling of British rule and that of apartheid and the promise of renewal around 1952, and later in 1994. The latter is a reterritorialisation phase of the post-1994 era, where former colonisers and elites seek new modalities of control and influence not limited to economic and ideological means.

The chapter focuses on this reterritorialisation phase, because it encapsulates the paradox of postcolonial Johannesburg; a city ostensibly liberated, yet still ensnared in the legacies of its colonial past. Also, this Chapter complements Chapters 3 and 4, which respectively examine the onset of colonisation and the resistance it engendered. Together, these

chapters form a tripartite analysis of Johannesburg's historical and narrative arc presented by *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*. To interrogate Kalmer's (2017) text, this study employs Genette's structural narrative theory, which facilitates an examination of temporal structures and character development. Supplementary theoretical frameworks include postcolonial studies, farm novel genre theory, and narratological character theory. These multidimensional approaches help explain the ways in which land expropriation across colonial and democratic periods shape identity, incite civil unrest, and perpetuate inequality. What the novel is at pains to reveal is that the promise of democracy remains unfulfilled because the city's inhabitants continue to grapple with the colonial legacies that become spectres of exclusion, displacement, and violence.

5.2 Backdrop of *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017)

The narrative structure of *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) by Harry Kalmer is layered and complex, evoking dramaturgical sensibilities of South African political theatre. Kalmer's background in playwriting inspires the texts with a performative intensity that mirrors Johannesburg's contested histories and identities. The city is depicted in three temporal phases that include the colonial era under British reign, the apartheid regime dominated by Afrikaners, and the post-1994 democratic dispensation, led by the black majority. These epochs are not historical backdrops, but constitute a dynamic and liminal space where belonging, ownership, and identity are perpetually renegotiated. What transpires here is a mirrored Johannesburg in a state of flux, where its terrain becomes redefined by successive waves of land expropriation and sociopolitical reconfiguration. The emergence of new landowners, whose legitimacy is based on race as well as language, foregrounds the city's enduring tensions around inclusion and exclusion. This process of territorial redefinition is not neutral but is implicated in the politics of recognition and erasure based on the political power demonstrated in the way in which land ownership becomes a proxy for social legitimacy and access to privilege; something that the text critiques.

The outlined historical backdrop corresponds with Mbembe and Nuttall's (2004) argument that Johannesburg is shaped by extractive economies, migratory flows, and racialised spatial ordering as these are processes that continue to inform the city's postcolonial configuration. Viewed through this framework, Johannesburg emerges not merely as a setting

in Kalmer's narrative but as a spatial formation that structures experience, memory, and belonging.

The texts' temporal shifts in various contexts in Johannesburg serve as narrative device to expose the city's traumatic continuities. Zweig's recollection of his Afrikaner grandparents during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) places the text in the historical period of colonisation, and highlights the violence of colonial conquest, where indigenous land was deemed *terra nullius*, or empty land, ripe for the white coloniser to exploit. The invocation of "Bambata" and his people, who resisted colonial encroachment, points toward a suppressed counter-history of indigenous resistance and resilience (Kalmer, 2017:274). This historical thread is extended through the lives of Zweig's parents in Joseph and Ursula, who navigate the apartheid era's brutal racial hierarchies, including Zweig himself, whose romantic relationship with the Indian woman, Serenita, is thwarted by segregationist policies. The post-apartheid narrative arc, set in democratic Johannesburg from 1994 onwards, fails to offer resolution, but rather reveals the persistence of structural inequalities.

This apartheid spatial logic corresponds with Mbembe's (2001) argument that urban space in the postcolony functions as a mechanism for regulating mobility, visibility, and access, producing a city organised through controlled proximity and institutionalised exclusion. Zweig's return to the city around 2008 and his interactions with cosmopolitan people, such as Richard Ho (of Chinese descent) and Marceline and Hippolyte (from Congo), foregrounds the city's evolving demographic complexity. However, this diversity is overshadowed by colonial legacies in terms of approach to land, belonging, and violence, which is something that haunted earlier eras. The text suggests that Johannesburg's promise of peaceful coexistence remains elusive, because it is undermined by the unresolved legacies of dispossession and racialised preferences.

Kalmer's (2017) work was honoured with the Sunday Times CNA Literary Award in 2018, which serves to affirm its contribution to South African literary discourse. As highlighted in the literature review provided in Chapter 1, the novel has attracted critical attention, especially for its evocative sense of place. Van Marle (2018) argues that Johannesburg emerges as a site of multiple conflicting perspectives, which reflects the complexities of forging a democratic and shared civic identity. However, while existing scholarship acknowledges the novel's thematic richness, it tends to overlook the centrality of land as a narrative and symbolic axis. Kalmer's (2017) fiction reveals that the city's inability to foster peaceful habitation is linked to its land histories that continue to shape social life in postcolonial Johannesburg. As

Nuttall (2009) suggests, postcolonial Johannesburg is best understood as an entangled city where historical violence and contemporary aspirations coexist.

5.3. A detailed analysis of the three historical phases of the South African story and its presentation in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017)

Harry Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) presents recounted events in a non-linear chronology, as this enables reflection on the instability and multiplicity in the generation of meaning through the disruption of linear temporality (Richardson, 2000). While doing so, the text opts for a temporally disjointed narrative structure that mirrors the fractured and palimpsestic history of Johannesburg. The novel's setting spans three pivotal historical epochs in South Africa's evolution in the form of the British colonial period (notably the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902), the apartheid regime (1948–1994), and the post-apartheid democratic dispensation (1994 onwards). These periods are not historical backdrops, but are constitutive of the novel's thematic structure, each representing a distinct phase in the city's ongoing struggle over land, identity, and power.

The colonial period, dominated by British interests, is highlighted by the aggressive territorialisation of Johannesburg. The English colonisers are drawn by the city's mineral wealth, and they impose infrastructural and economic systems that facilitate extraction and control. As Kalmer (2017:13, 17) reveals, Afrikaner families such as Zweig's grandparents were dispossessed of their land under the pretext of industrial development, such as the expansion of railway lines to support mining operations. This dispossession catalyses Afrikaner resistance, which culminates in the Anglo-Boer War, as well as the internment of civilians in concentration camps such as those in Turffontein. The survivors of this war transitioned into the apartheid era, where racial discrimination was institutionalised to establish white supremacy and marginalise non-whites dominated by the black majority.

Zweig's father, Joseph, emerges as a quiet subversive within this oppressive regime, and secretly distributes banned books to anti-apartheid figures such as Bram Fischer and Nelson Mandela (Kalmer, 2017:72). Zweig himself is alienated by the prohibition of interracial relationships, and he relocates to London with his Indian partner, Serenita. His return visit to Johannesburg in 2008 under democratic governance is framed by his professional engagement with architecture society and his reflections on his past contributions to the city's buildings, notably "House Miles" (Kalmer, 2017:25). His encounter with Marceline, a Congolese

immigrant, introduces a new layer of complexity, revealing the persistence of xenophobia and the failure of democratic ideals to ensure inclusive safety and belonging.

The novel reconstructs Johannesburg as a metaphor for South Africa's broader historical trajectory. It becomes a site of cyclical territorial contestation where democratic regimes enact successive forms of biopower as technologies of control that regulate people's lives and death, identities, and access to space. Drawing on Mbembe's (2019:76) idea of postcolonial power, Kalmer's (2017) narrative illustrates how each regime – including the democratic state – inherits and reconfigures the mechanisms of domination. Although colonialism and apartheid has been dismantled, the black majority paradoxically mirrors its logic by engaging in exclusionary practices against black foreign nationals. This includes condemning foreign nationals as linguistically or culturally nonconforming, as in the cases of Marceline and Samson Dube. This shift in dynamics is best explained through the theoretical conceptual terms of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation.

Here, territorialisation refers to the initial colonial seizure of land and the implementation of a new order at the expense of the locals. Deterritorialisation highlights the resistance and the eventual overthrowing of colonial regimes. In the context of this analysis, reterritorialisation refers to the most complex phase, where formerly oppressed people assume power, replicating the very structures they sought to dismantle. In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, reterritorialisation is not a moment of liberation, but one of ambivalence, where the post-apartheid state struggles to transcend the legacies of its colonial past.

This chapter thereby completes a triadic movement that started in Chapter 3, with Marguerite Poland's *A Sin of Omission* (2019), which interrogates the logic of colonial imposition (territorialisation). Chapter 4 analysed Gloria Simphiwe Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018), which examines resistance and upheaval (deterritorialisation), and Kalmer's (2017) novel, in this chapter, that explores the uneasy aftermath of postcolonial societies' struggles with inherited structures of violence, exclusion, and identity politics (reterritorialisation). Kalmer's (2017) reliance on South Africa's historical record assumes a degree of national familiarity that leaves interpretive gaps for literary scholars to bridge. The novel's depiction of biopower through death technologies during colonisation or xenophobic violence in the democratic society highlights the enduring struggle over who belongs in Johannesburg. The adoption of exclusionary practices under a democratic government, such as the treatment given to non-Zulu-speaking black foreigners, reveals the functioning as well as the persistence of colonial legacies. As Mbembe (2019:76) observes, the postcolonial subject often inherits the coloniser's tools of domination and deploys them in the service of new and

eerily familiar hierarchies. It is here that the narrative structure of *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* culminates in a portrayal of unrest and instability that persists even under democratic governance, which in principle requires it to be inclusive, not divisive. These fictionalised events, marred by turbulence, reflect the broader socio-political crises that continue to afflict post-apartheid South Africa.

Kalmer's novel, with its reconstruction of Johannesburg's historical trajectory, engages with the literary tradition of farm-to-city fiction as a genre that traces the transformation of agrarian life into urban modernity. The Afrikaners' pastoral existence alongside the indigenous black communities' symbiotic relationship with nature is violently disrupted by the British industrialisation of Johannesburg. This thematic lineage aligns with Michael Chapman's assertion that Southern African narrative texts reflect "the uncertainties and aspirations of their time" (2003: xiv), inspiring its fiction with the socio-historical contexts. This forms part of the chapter's objective, which is to illuminate the lived experiences across Johannesburg's historical phases, especially the democratic era. This involves a process of reterritorialisation, where colonial powers relinquish control by ostensibly allowing the colonised to govern themselves. However, this transfer of power is fraught with latent expectations of failure, predicated on the enduring legacies of colonial disenfranchisement, which prove notable from the systemic denial of education and opportunity to the colonised, especially black South Africans. As explored in the analysis of *A Sin of Omission* (2019) in Chapter 3, such structural impediments are designed to curtail aspiration and agency.

Kalmer's Johannesburg is situated in the socio-economic conditions of the South African Republic (ZAR), later known as (part of) the Union of South Africa prior to the Anglo-Boer War. This period is distinct from the apartheid regime and is highlighted by the English colonisers' transformation of the area into an industrial hub. Zweig's grandparents are dispossessed to make way for mining operations, railway infrastructure, and administrative buildings, as this becomes a hallmark of the imperial industrial revolution (Kalmer, 2017:13, 17).

Ironically, Zweig's architectural expertise later contributes to the Afrikaner reconstruction of Johannesburg, as this symbolises a continuity of colonial aesthetics under nationalist rule. Following the democratic transition, the deterioration of these colonial-era buildings becomes emblematic of a broader socio-political decay. Dubcek, a character with intimate knowledge of Johannesburg's geography, observes this dilapidation when informing Zweig about how black people let the fall "houses into pieces", "a house without windows or door frames", and people warming themselves around braziers (Kalmer, 2017:50). Zweig

himself notes how profoundly the city has changed since his departure (Kalmer, 2017:231). The urban decay depicted may be interpreted as a symbolic rejection of a colonial legacy, demonstrating a paradox where the democratic state continues to reproduce colonial modes of exclusion, made manifest through xenophobic violence. The mistreatment of black foreign nationals by black South Africans reflects a disturbing continuity of racialised biopower. Just as the English subjugated the Afrikaners, and the Afrikaners marginalised black natives, the post-apartheid state enacts its own exclusions. Mbecke (2015:74) explains the term Afrophobia as “the dislike or fear of Africans by [black] South Africans”. Addae and Quan-Baffour (2022:2) describe Afrophobia as “black-on-black violence and supposed racism”. Elsewhere, Dube (2018:1006) identifies Afrophobia as hostility directed at African immigrants. All of these dynamics reveal the internalisation and redeployment of colonial violence within the democratic society.

The narrative thus charts a cyclical pattern of land contestation. The process is central to the South African farm-to-city novel, with its long-standing preoccupation with dispossession (colonisation), movement (resistance), and the reconfiguration (democracy) of spatial power. In Kalmer’s (2017) text, land changes hands repeatedly. This includes transition from the English colonisers who seize Johannesburg from Afrikaners, to Afrikaners who consolidate urban control through the exclusion of black natives, and finally to a democratic order in which previously dispossessed black citizens reclaim the city while reproducing new forms of exclusion against black foreigners. Also, the cyclical movement portrays the long-standing concern in South African literary studies over how land is never simply inherited but violently acquired, defended, and reinscribed with meaning. In the text, Zweig’s grandfather – once a mine labourer under English rule – exemplifies the depth of colonial exploitation and the transformation of agrarian dispossession into urban labour extraction (Kalmer, 2017:54). As Devarenne (2009:627) argues, farm novel conventions frequently foreground “colonial conflict” and land expropriation, which is a concern that persists even as the narrative shifts from rural farmland to metropolitan Johannesburg. In this regard, Kalmer’s novel extends rather than abandons the farm novel by translating its land anxieties into the urban sphere.

The spatial segregation of Johannesburg into spaces reserved for whites in the suburbs, blacks dispatched to townships, and intermediary zones for Indians and Coloureds, further foregrounds the racialised geography inherited from colonial land policies, especially from the apartheid era. This configuration serves to reinforce the farm novel’s logic of bounded spaces and exclusionary ownership, now achieved through urban planning instead of agricultural enclosure on farms. Coetzee’s (1986:19) reflections on the farm genre’s perspective –

acknowledging the presence of non-white subjects while relegating them to narrative and spatial margins – remains relevant in this study. This is significant because the text's cityscape reproduces space structures through zoning, mobility restrictions, and differential access to land. The farm-to-city transition in the text exposes how urbanisation fails to resolve land injustice but rearticulates it by embedding agrarian dispossession into the very structure of metropolitan life.

The transformation of Johannesburg's farmlands into an industrialised city by English colonial powers, by Afrikaner architectural interventions, and later by democratic neglect serves to foreground a history of competing land claims. Each historical era adds a new logic of ownership while none dismantle the foundational violence of dispossession. Legislation from the colonial apartheid era prohibited interracial relationships and enforced pass permits for black citizens; the same perspective extends the farm novel's preoccupation with controlled movement and territorial surveillance into the city, as this reveals how land governance becomes a tool of social discipline. Despite the promise of liberation, the democratic era reveals the resurgence of exclusionary practices in xenophobic attacks, political instability, and social fragmentation. These developments suggest a continuation of the farm novel's unresolved land issues into postcolonial urban life.

Kalmer's (2017) depiction of Johannesburg across colonial and democratic epochs resonates with Akande's (2016:2) characterisation of the city novel as a "symbolic cacophony", highlighted by violence, racial prejudice, crime, and social decay. This cacophony is inseparable from the unresolved politics of land as the city becomes a contested terrain where belonging is constantly policed. The domination of xenophobic violence not only in its literal, but also its metaphorical form serves to foreground the persistence of land anxiety as well as identity insecurity in a postcolonial society. In this sense, Kalmer's (2017) urban narrative remains firmly anchored within South Africa's literary farm-to-city tradition, where it demonstrates how the struggle over land does not end with migration to the city but intensifies as space becomes scarcer and more fiercely contested.

This study is supported by Genettian structural narratology, which enables a nuanced analysis of embedded postcolonial perspectives while embedding narratological characterisation, farm-to-city genre conventions, and postcolonial theory. Together, these theoretical frameworks unravel the complex meanings generated by Kalmer's narrative in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) that reveal a profound meditation on the afterlives of colonialism, the fragility of democratic ideals, and the enduring entanglements of race, space, and power.

5.4 A depiction of two centuries of life experiences in Johannesburg's history in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*

Kalmer's (2017) depiction of Johannesburg from colonisation to post-independence spanning two centuries aligns with Mbembe and Nuttall's (2004) theorisation of the city as a space of simultaneity rather than linear historical progression. These scholars argue that Johannesburg operates as an African metropolis in which colonial as well as post-apartheid temporalities coexist and overlap each other. This structured temporality is mirrored in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, where historical regimes do not disappear but continue to structure lived experience, spatial access, and belonging.

In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, the anonymous narrator performs the complex task of recounting Zweig's familial experiences, including his encounters with diverse people across various contexts of Johannesburg. This manifests when the narrative spans a broad temporal arc from the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) to the democratic era post-1994, with events presented in a non-linear fashion that aligns with Genette's (1980) seminal framework on umbrella terms of order, duration, and frequency. These categories explain the complex relationship between the narrative discourse and the story's internal chronology, which helps detect the way in which Kalmer foregrounds certain events, while relegating others to the margins.

Within this temporal structure, a secondary but profoundly significant narrative begins to surface. The story of land politics is not explicitly prioritised in the narrative's surface structure. What transpires here is a narrative that resists direct exposition, which necessitates a strategy such as a mode of interpretive abstraction used to discern its outline and implicated meanings that emerge through the interaction between characters and their spatial environments, instead of remaining fixed or intrinsic.

This section of the study focuses on this latent narrative, guided by Genette's theory of temporal relations and enriched by subsequent narratological and postcolonial developments as outlined in the theoretical chapter. The story of land politics is embedded and obscured; nonetheless, it constitutes a critical axis around which the novel's historical and ideological tensions revolve. It is through the interplay of narrative time, character mobility, and spatial transformation that Kalmer's text reveals the enduring complexities of land and identity in postcolonial South Africa, which is a theme to be unpacked in the following subsections.

5.4.1 The order of abstracted life experiences within the diverse contexts of Johannesburg

As outlined in Section 5.3, *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* does not follow a chronological order; events are recounted in favour of a fluid and episodic narrative structure. The deviation enables a strategic foregrounding of the multifaceted lived experiences of the inhabitants of Johannesburg across different socio-political contexts. The protagonist, Zweig, inhabits the city during eras of distinct governing regimes. They are respectively known as the British imperialism, Afrikaner nationalism, and post-apartheid democratic administration under black majority. These regimes are metaphorically referred to as landlords because they own the land Zweig resides on. This establishes a symbolic continuity that links personal habitation with broader political dominion.

The narrative sparingly recounts Zweig and other characters' experiences by strategically deploying a flashback strategy to explain their fragmented and disrupted engagement with Johannesburg. These retrospective events in Johannesburg span from the Anglo-Boer War (circa 1899–1902) to the twilight of Zweig's life in 2008. In narratological terms, this technique aligns with Genette's theoretical conceptual term of internal heterodiegetic analepsis (1980), where the narrator revisits events that precede the primary narrative timeline by offering critical contextual information. This entails the portrayal of Zweig's family life in Johannesburg, which is characterised by unease and displacement shaped by the prevailing landownership paradigms of each era. Land provides a literal and figurative axis around which power and identity revolve, while reflecting ideologies of the respective governments. The narrative's non-linear arrangement mirrors the city's structured and contested history, where the present administration is always haunted by the unresolved legacies of its predecessors. It is here that this study intentionally refrains from adhering to the superficial chronological unfolding of events presented in the text. Instead, it favours the latent narrative of the story of land politics with its ownership, dispossession, and symbolic resonance as experienced by characters such as Zweig. His life is an emblematic of Johannesburg's fractured socio-political landscape:

Inside the passport was a worn black-and-white picture of five people. A young blond boy and girl were in the foreground. The boy was laughing. The girl stared at the ground. Behind them was an old woman in a long black dress wearing a black eye patch. Her left hand rested on the boy's left shoulder, her other one on the right shoulder of the little girl. To the woman's left was a man in the robe of a dominee; on her right was an older man with a long grey beard like a Boer on commando. The five of them were standing in front of a corrugated-iron wall. ... Bosman wondered if he could be able to write a poem about the picture (Kalmer, 2017:283).

He is standing next to her. Her son the dominee. Born ten years after the camp, when she was thirty-three years old already. Everyone was surprised he survived, but after him there was also Benjamin. Her Abraham was not a man who accepted no for an answer. She entered the camp with four children, and left it with four. Luckier than so many others. There were five thousand of them in the camp. Seven hundred remained behind in the graves on Piet Meyer's farm (Kalmer, 2017: 283).

These passages unveil the identity of an anonymous narrator, who describes a family portrait through various metaphors. The image serves as a genealogical anchor, tracing Zweig's lineage across Johannesburg's variegated historical phases. The first passage evokes Zweig's childhood during the apartheid era (1948-1994), while the second offers a poignant glimpse into his ancestral past, shaped by the brutalities of English colonial rule and the trauma of the concentration camps.

The narrative reveals that Zweig's grandparents endured the horrors of British internment, where starvation was wielded as a biopower and a political instrument of domination (see Mbembe, 2019:76). The English colonisers, in their quest to industrialise Johannesburg, weaponise deprivation to subjugate the Afrikaners, indigenous populations, and other racial groups constituting the South African population at the time, thereby leaving a colonial legacy of dispossession and linguistic hegemony. Sara's survival strategy is to teach her children to beg in English – the language of the ruling class rather than Afrikaans – which highlights the coloniality of language and its role in negotiating access to basic sustenance (Kalmer, 2017:18). This historical trauma traverses to subsequent generations and renders Johannesburg a site of perpetual unrest and contested belonging. The transformation of the city into an industrial hub by the British landowners reifies their status as landlords and also imposes a normative identity, predicated on their language and their culture. The long-term consequences of the colonial practices of arson, forced relocation, and systemic violence, continues to shape the city's socio-political livelihood, as evidenced by the experiences of Zweig and his contemporaries. Van Marle's notion of the "proverbial spirit of the place" (2018), as discussed in section 1.7 of the literature review, resonates here. Johannesburg emerges not only as a geographical locale, but also as a palimpsest of memory, struggle, and contested identity, which becomes a space that can be shared, but never fully possessed.

The excerpts presented show Zweig's final years of his life while in Johannesburg. The anonymous narrator reconstructs Zweig's life by invoking the past to inform the present. The text's concluding chapter features photographs accompanied by explanatory commentary, functioning as a mnemonic tool by offering genealogical insight into Zweig's family history. These visual and textual fragments serve not only as a narrative embellishment, but also as portals into the socio-political evolution of Johannesburg across multiple regimes. The way in

which these events unfold resonates with what Hume (2005) terms narrative speed, due to the rapid progression of events. To present these events, the narrator employs a complex temporal strategy called mixed analepsis (Genette, 1980:61), to present alternating past and present events in a manner that enhances an understanding of the contemporary realities of Johannesburg. This strategy of mixed analepsis revisits previous events and extends them into the present moment, thereby establishing a continuum of historical occurrences (Genette, 1980). In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, this strategy is instrumental in revealing the enduring legacies of colonial violence and systemic dispossession from colonisation to democracy.

The narrative opens with a photograph of Sara, Zweig's grandmother, and her four children in a British concentration camp, where they endured fifteen months of deprivation and trauma (Kalmer, 2017:9). This image reveals the story during the Anglo-Boer War period (1899-1902), which can be interpreted as a foundational moment in Johannesburg's colonial history. From this point, the narrative unfolds across successive regimes in English colonial, Afrikaner nationalist, and post-apartheid democracy, as each is highlighted by its own modes of governance and exclusion.

In the British colonial period, Sara and her husband Abraham's migration to Johannesburg during the English territorialisation phase is depicted as a descent into hardship. The construction of a railway line between Port Natal and Johannesburg disrupts their livelihood as ox-wagon transporters and plunges them into poverty (Kalmer, 2017:17). Their domestic conditions of "worn-out feather mattresses" and children sleeping on mielie bags and cow hides evoke the material precarity imposed by colonial economic restructuring (Kalmer, 2017:17).

Abraham's enlistment in the Boer commando reflects a broader Afrikaner resistance to the treatment they receive at the hands of British imperialism. His imprisonment in Ceylon and subsequent description of torture, which is likened to a "sugar bush, which must first be scorched by fire before it can flower", becomes a metaphor for the cyclical nature of suffering and resilience (Kalmer, 2017:18). The English response to rebellion included the internment of families in camps such as Turffontein and the incineration of dwellings under the guise of eradicating the bubonic plague. The use of racial slurs in derogatory words such as "coolies, kaffirs, and hotnots" foregrounds the racialised logic of colonial biopower (Kalmer, 2017:45). It aligns with Mbembe's (2019:76) explanation, where starvation, arson, and forced relocation function as instruments of domination. In addition, this narrative repetition reflects what

Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) describe as the city's palimpsestic character, where historical violence remains inscribed within contemporary urban life.

Following the decline of British rule, the Afrikaners emerged as the new custodians of Johannesburg, initiating a phase of reconstruction and cultural consolidation. Sara, now aged seventy, is depicted in a photograph with her husband, son, and twin grandchildren (one of them Zweig) (Kalmer, 2017:20–21). This image shows a transition to the apartheid era (1948–1994) as a period during which Zweig comes of age. The narrative charts a transition from English colonialism to Afrikaner nationalism, with each regime perpetuating its own form of exclusion and control. Zweig's adulthood coincides with the implementation of apartheid legislation that imposes rigid racial boundaries and prohibits interracial relationships to be explored in subsequent sections. The ushering in of democracy and its symbolic significance does not resolve colonial legacies such as those playing out in 2008, when Johannesburg witnesses xenophobic violence perpetrated by black South Africans against black foreign nationals. This reveals the persistence of exclusionary practices under a nominally inclusive regime.

With the dissolution of apartheid, which is followed by the ascension of a black-majority government, Zweig makes a return visit to Johannesburg – a city now emblematic of what may be termed the mainstream phase of coloniser decolonisation. From the time of his grandparents' arrival in 1899 to his own visit in 2008, Johannesburg has undergone profound transformations that are notable across its political, spatial, and social landscape. Yet, despite the promise of democratic benefits like human rights and equality, Zweig is confronted with a city that has not turned away from violence, exclusion, and unresolved historical trauma. Among the most shocking revelations that Zweig is confronted with is the outbreak of xenophobic violence against black foreign nationals. Richard Ho, a Chinese journalist and Zweig's colleague at the guest house, documents these attacks disrupting the fragile peace of the residents and visitors. In one harrowing scene, Richard witnesses six men armed with knives, axes, and pickaxe handles cornering a woman and her infant against a corrugated-iron wall in an informal settlement, also known as a squatter camp. One of the men begins to douse the victims with petrol when a voice says, "let her go!" It is here that Richard drops his camera and runs towards the men (Kalmer, 2017:36).

This moment captures the brutal irony of post-apartheid Johannesburg, where black South Africans – once the victims of systemic violence – now enacting similar forms of brutality against vulnerable black foreigners. When one of the attackers raises a panga and calls Richard '*umlungu*' (white person), Richard's life is imperilled. His response of "I am not

umlungu. I am *Ishayina*”, spoken in Zulu, saves him (Kalmer, 2017:37). The attacker, sobered by Richard’s fluent Zulu, lowers his weapon and embraces him, declaring that “you speak our language. You are one of us. It’s part of Mandela’s rainbow nation” (Kalmer, 2017:37). This event shows the symbolic power of language, which is used as a token of belonging in Johannesburg. It is here that Richard’s survival hinges not on his race or nationality, but on his ability to speak the local language. It is understood as a gesture of respect and a willingness to integrate into the society that distinguishes him from the historical colonisers.

In stark contrast, Samson Dube – South African by birth – is murdered for being unable to count to ten in isiZulu. One of the assailants, wielding an assegai, shouts “*Viva Ningizimu Afrika!*” (South Africa) before stabbing Samson in the throat (Kalmer, 2017:98). The tragic irony lies in the fact that Samson, a native South African raised abroad, is mistaken for a foreigner and pays with his life. His death illustrates the dangerous conflation of language with identity, as well as the absence of mechanisms to distinguish between citizens and foreigners in a postcolonial context. It is here that the attackers, once victims of historical disenfranchisement, fail to recognise the colonial roots of their own ignorance. Their actions reflect a misdirected rage that arose from systemic deprivation and a lack of civic education, some of the legacies of apartheid’s deliberate underdevelopment of black South Africans. They mistake lack of linguistic fluency for cultural imposition, thereby replicating the exclusionary logic of the colonisers they ostensibly oppose.

The novel further illustrates this theme through characters such as Dubcek, a refugee who learned Afrikaans in Primrose during apartheid, and Marceline, a Congolese woman saved by Richard Ho (Kalmer, 2017:41). Marceline’s inability to speak isiZulu nearly costs her her life. Her story, recounted in French and translated by Zweig, details her escape from Laurent Kabila’s soldiers in Bakuvu, only to face renewed violence in Johannesburg (Kalmer, 2017:113). Her language difference renders her vulnerable, despite her resilience and potential contributions to the city.

Under apartheid, Zweig’s mother had helped World War II German refugees integrate into Johannesburg society. The absence of similar structures in the democratic era exacerbates xenophobic tensions. Foreign nationals – many of whom possess critical skills and professional training, such as the doctor who assists Marceline during childbirth – are scapegoated rather than welcomed (Kalmer, 2017:115). The presence of black foreign nationals in sectors that includes healthcare, beauty, and hospitality, are perceived as a threat rather than an asset. These foreigners fill an economical gap once inaccessible to black South Africans due to colonial

restrictions on education and employment, reserved for white people. It is here that Kalmer's (2017) invocation of Constantine P. Cavafy's poem, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1904), is particularly poignant. The poem's final lines, "And now, what will happen to us without barbarians? They were, those people, a kind of solution", suggest that foreigners are seen as a threat, as this provides a mirror through which society confronts its own failures (Kalmer, 2017:81). In the novel, black foreigners become scapegoats for unresolved socio-economic grievances, even as they fill critical gaps left by a history of exclusion endured by locals.

The text's broader historical arc traces the city's unrest to its colonial foundations. The English colonisers' ambition to mine and industrialise Johannesburg necessitated the displacement of Afrikaners, Indians, coloureds, Khoisan, and black natives. The expropriation of land, often through violence or dubious transactions, establishes a precedent of dispossession that continues to reverberate (Kalmer, 2017:13).

Once again, the narrative foregrounds war in its varied manifestations as a dominant mechanism for land expropriation in Johannesburg, as this perpetuates a persistent absence of peaceful settlement. This pattern is exemplified by the Afrikaners' ascension as landowners during the apartheid era when state institutions were repurposed to facilitate forced relocations and systemic control. These practices were inherited from the English colonisers, demonstrating a continuity of dispossession through legal and bureaucratic violence. Like its colonial predecessor, the racial legislation of the apartheid regime inflicts profound harm on the city's inhabitants. Legislation against mixed marriages force Zweig and Serenita to flee Johannesburg and seek refuge in London to formalise their union.

Later, the narrative reveals that Johannesburg is once again at war, this time as a dominating instrument deployed by black South Africans to reclaim Johannesburg. However, this reclamation is not without contradiction. During negotiations for the restitution of ancestral land to black communities, the colonial legacy of racial discrimination mutates into xenophobic violence against black foreign nationals. The earlier case of Samson Dube, murdered for his inability to count in isiZulu, demonstrates how language becomes a proxy for belonging, as it illustrates how exclusionary practices persist under the pretext of cultural authenticity (Kalmer, 2017:98). Such events reveal the city's ongoing struggle with peaceful stay for its citizens across various contexts.

The story of Zweig and his family, which spans several historical periods, foregrounds displacement and lack of peace in Johannesburg. The narrative's structure of the events, which is both non-linear and episodic, mirrors the fragmented nature of the city's history. The narrators employ this disjointed order so as to foreground issues such as contested land

ownership and the sense of belonging created in the process, which is based on meeting specific identity requirements in each context. Through flashbacks and reconstructed events, the text reveals the way in which Johannesburg has been shaped by successive waves of land expropriation, each facilitated by a different ruling group – the English colonisers, the Afrikaner nationalists, and the post-apartheid black majority. Each regime, while distinct in its operation, perpetuates a politics of exclusion rooted in land control. The English colonisers initiated this process through industrialisation and mining by displacing indigenous populations and Afrikaners, and asserting dominion over natural resources. Afrikaners inherited this colonial infrastructure and its institutionalised racial discrimination through various forms of apartheid legislation. In the democratic era, the black majority sought to reclaim ancestral land, while unresolved legacies of colonialism, such as the lack of an inclusive civic education and economic opportunities, led to new forms of violence like xenophobic attacks.

The novel presents Johannesburg as a physical space, but also a palimpsest of historical events marred by trauma, where land ownership is a sign of power. The city's inability to sustain peaceful settlement across generations reflects the enduring impact of colonality, particularly apartheid-era policies, as well as the failures of democracy. The structured narrative and complex character arcs in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* offers a profound meditation on the cyclical nature of land dispossession, the fragility of belonging, and the unfinished project of decolonisation.

5.4.2 A thorough account of life experiences within Johannesburg's various contexts

Kalmer's *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) offers a highly complex structured narrative that questions the socio-political and historical complexities of urban life in South Africa, as represented by the mirrored life experiences lived in the city of Johannesburg. The novel's structure, spanning roughly 284 pages, foregrounds the life of Zweig and his family. Approximately 86 percent of the narrative furnished by the anonymous narrator is devoted to the family's experiences in Johannesburg. This disproportionate narrative focus, as opposed to the more episodic contributions provided by character-narrators, highlights the centrality of Zweig's lineage, while exposing the city's contested identities, land ownership, and social stratification. The text's temporal and structural design aligns with Genette's (1980) narrative strategy of durational aspect, which is further refined by Rimmon-Kenan (2002), Landa (2005), and Herman (2007). These scholars explain duration as the relationship between story time and

text time, based on how long an event takes to occur versus how much narrative space it occupies. Kalmer's text exemplifies this through its detailed treatment of key events, especially those revealing lack of peaceful stay in Johannesburg across various contexts. The narrative's durational aspect emphasis allows for a nuanced exploration of the city's transformation processes, which takes place under successive regimes of British colonisers, Afrikaner nationalists, and a black majority democratic government.

Language and landownership emerge as central motifs in the novel's revelation of belonging and exclusion. The English colonisers started to use language as a tool of social stratification by marginalising Afrikaners, who did not conform to the use of the English language and its norms. This is a clear sign of language as a tool of colonisation. Burney (2012) critiques colonial legacies that leave an imbalance in cultural and ideological practices. This language hegemony, as illustrated through the experiences of Sara and Abraham, becomes a metaphor for broader colonial practices of domination and dispossession (Kalmer, 2017:17). Upon assuming control of Johannesburg, Afrikaners replicate these exclusionary mechanisms, backed by racial legislation that targets non-whites, mostly black South Africans. The democratic era continues this inherited colonial legacy, which manifests through xenophobic practices that use language as a proxy for identity and belonging, by targeting black foreign nationals.

The narrative in the text also engages with issues not limited to justice, identity, and resistance. Zweig's father, Josef van Niekerk, demonstrates a moral opposition to apartheid by supporting communist efforts to dismantle the regime when selling banned books to controversial people such as Bram Fischer (Kalmer, 2017:72). This act of defiance shapes Zweig's ethical compass and situates the family within a broader tradition of intellectual resistance, started by the grandfather Abraham. Zweig's own journey from a reticent child to a socially conscious adult is exemplified by his relationship with his Indian partner, Serenita: their relationship challenges apartheid's prohibitions on interracial unions. Their eventual arrest under the Mixed Reading Act which is known as Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and subsequent flight to London symbolise the enduring violence of state institutions and the necessity of exile as a form of liberation (Kalmer, 2017:209). This occurs when Zweig "leaves two weeks ahead of her to find accommodation" in London (Kalmer, 2017: 204). It is here that the text's treatment of interpersonal relationships, such as those that transgress racial and cultural boundaries set by discriminatory apartheid laws, reveals Johannesburg's fractured social fabric as a microcosm of South Africa. Serenita's father's threat to disown her for loving Zweig positions him as a metaphorical extension of the apartheid government, where patriarchal

authority and racial regulation are enacted within the domestic sphere of the home. The arrest of Zweig and Serenita by a policeman named Humphrey Bogart further blurs the line between public and private oppression, as this reveals how state power permeates even the most intimate aspects of life (Kalmer, 2017:207).

Following the death of Serenita in exile, Zweig's return visit to Johannesburg in the post-1994 democratic era marks a pivotal narrative shift in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*. The city that he re-enters is no longer a site of historical memory, but a volatile landscape of social fragmentation, with escalating crime and the emergence of xenophobic violence that evolves into a more insidious form of Afrophobia. These events are not only peripheral but dominate the narrative in thematic weight and textual space that begs closer inspection.

Zweig's personal encounter with urban crime when two assailants rob him of his clothes, shoes, and money, serves as a microcosm of broader societal decay (Kalmer, 2017:145). More disturbing to Zweig is his growing awareness of intra-racial violence in the form of attacks on black foreign nationals. Beyond this, Zweig's rhetorical question of "how long have people been attacking foreigners?" signals disbelief as well as the dawning recognition of the city's moral rupture (Kalmer, 2017:94). By translating Marceline's testimony from French into English and Afrikaans for fellow guests at May Villa Guest House, Zweig becomes a conduit for bearing witness to the suffering of displaced African migrants (Kalmer, 2017:113).

The narrative's depiction of xenophobic violence is painful. Newspaper reports and radio broadcasts recount the immolation of women and children from Mozambique, where the attackers lock the victims inside their dwellings to prevent escape (Kalmer, 2017:104). These events are not isolated, but recur in various parts of the text, while forming a grim catalogue of Afrophobic aggression. The contrast between Zweig's horror and his mother's earlier role as ambassador for the Johannesburg League for the Refugees, highlights the shifting moral landscape of the city (Kalmer, 2017:118). Where once Johannesburg offered sanctuary to white foreigners, it has changed to become a site of hostility toward black migrants, revealing a troubling continuity of exclusion under the pretext of democratic governance.

When following structural narratology, these events are presented in a summary strategy that aligns with Genette's (1980) theoretical framework, later expanded by Chatman (1980), Landa (2005), Herman (2007), and Bal (2017). In this context, summary technique refers to the compression of events into brief textual representations. The narrative function of summary is traditionally deployed to convey minor or transitional events, but Kalmer (2017) repurposes summarised events to reveal foregrounded significant events, such as those related

to land expropriation and ownership hidden in the story events. As Bal (2017:96) notes, summary as a narrative can encompass events that “do not greatly influence the course of the *fabula*”, yet in Kalmer’s (2017) narrative, these compressed events serve to reveal the underlying structures of power and dispossession. For example, the brief mention of Zweig’s grandfather reporting for “commando duty as soon as the first call went out” gestures toward a larger history of land conflict and biopolitical control in Johannesburg (Kalmer, 2017:17). These summarised events, though sparse in detail, are rich in implication, revealing the city’s contested land ownership across the three historical phases outlined by this study. Each regime has a unique way of operating, while perpetuating a similar politics of exclusion rooted in land control and identity regulation.

The novel’s use of summary narrative strategy functions not as a narrative shortcut, but as a new way to foreground the enduring legacies of land expropriation, racialised belonging, and the absence of peaceful stay in Johannesburg. Through the juxtaposition of detailed personal narratives and compressed historical accounts, *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* constructs a complex portrait of a city perpetually negotiating its past and present for its various citizens through promises and betrayal.

5.4.3 Reiterating war events that fuel racial discrimination in the lived experiences in Johannesburg’s varying contexts

In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, Kalmer (2017) foregrounds repetition by revisiting the same lived experiences of Johannesburg residents: displacement, poverty, and social exclusion across various contexts in multiple narratives. This becomes a means of reinforcing the cyclical nature of dispossession, identity formation, and contested belonging in Johannesburg. Through the repeated depiction of Zweig’s family across various politically charged contexts, the novel exposes the enduring patterns of exclusion and violence enacted by successive administrations. These repetitions are stylistic, while foregrounding a persistent struggle over land, identity, and legitimacy in a city that is in a constant state of change. In narratological terms, this technique aligns with Genette’s (1980:35) conceptual framework of frequency, which refers to the number of times an event is narrated in relation to the number of times it occurs in the story presented in the text. Critics that includes Rimmon-Kenan (2002:59), Landa (2005:11), Herman (2007:289), and Bal (2017:100) have expanded on Genette’s (1980) theoretical framework. They affirm the analytical value of frequency in understanding how narrative

repetition foregrounds significant events and thematic concerns. In the selected texts, repeated references to particular key spaces reveal their importance to questions of land, identity, belonging, and power. As a results, these spaces acquire symbolic, ideological, and historical significance. In Kalmer's (2017) novel, the repetition of issues of land surfacing through warfare or negotiated transfer functions as a narrative strategy to reveal an underlying logic of land ownership and exclusion. The text's focus on Zweig's familial experiences of land wars subtly embeds a history of land expropriation, contested belonging, and questions of identity within Johannesburg.

The novel further employs subordinate aspects of frequency, such as iterative narration, which is known as telling once what happened many times, and repetitive narration, which is known as telling multiple times what happened once. These strategies are used to convey the enduring impact of foundational events, such as the English colonisers' initial land conquest, which laid the groundwork for centuries of unrest in Johannesburg as broader metaphor for South Africa. This is revealed in the exchange between Zweig and Bambata Tshabalala, caretaker in the block of flats where Zweig lived as a teenager:

Zweig shrugs. ... 'What is Oom's name?' 'Bambata. Bambata Tshabalala. My grandfather fought the English with Bambata.' 'Bambata?' 'A great warrior ... The English chopped off his head. My name is Bambata Tshabalala. But white people call me Big Boy' (Kalmer, 2017:274).

This brief yet potent dialogue encapsulates the legacy of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 and its lasting symbolic resonance in the collective experiences and memory reflecting shared histories of dispossession, resistance, and colonial violence across the Southern African region. The English colonisers' violent assertion of control over the land is presented not as a singular historical event, but as a recurring motif that reverberates through generations. The conversation, situated within an apartheid context, also gestures toward the subsequent conflict between the English and the Afrikaner, culminating in the latter's temporary ascendancy and the institutionalisation of apartheid. What emerges here is that Kalmer's (2017) narrative does not provide exhaustive detail of these events, but summarises them (Genette, 1980:96; Chatman, 1980:68; Landa, 2005:10; Herman, 2007:293; and Bal, 2017:96). In this context, the functioning of summary as a theoretical term compresses complex historical events into brief narrative segments, as this allows the text to allude to the broader socio-political dynamics without becoming mired in exposition. As Herman (2007:293) notes, such "compressed accounts of storyworld occurrences" are particularly effective in conveying the weight of historical continuity. In Kalmer's (2017) novel, summary is deployed as a narrative strategy

not only to trivialise these events, but also to signal their omnipresence for better understanding of their implications.

The novel's treatment of land expropriation, identity, and belonging is further enriched by Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986:28) operational concept of re-membering, which refers to the act of reclaiming suppressed histories and therein asserting cultural agency. In the post-apartheid context, the democratic black majority assumes control of Johannesburg, with the inherited colonial legacy of exclusion that persists. Language becomes a renewed site of contestation where, under English rule, Afrikaners were linguistically marginalised. Later, this practice finds its way under Afrikaner rule, where Afrikaans became the gatekeeping language of power. The same happens in democratic Johannesburg, where black foreign nationals are judged by their ability to speak isiZulu. This is poignantly illustrated in the case of Samson Dube, who is murdered for failing to count in isiZulu, as a tragic echo of earlier linguistic exclusions (Kalmer, 2017:98).

With this, the novel constructs a genealogy of linguistic and territorial exclusion, where each regime reconfigures the criteria for belonging, while perpetuating the same underlying logic of domination. The requirement to speak the language of the governing class, whether English, Afrikaans, or isiZulu, as a representative of South Africa's indigenous languages, becomes a proxy for access to resources, protection, and dignity. This is mirrored in the earlier scene, where, during the English occupation, Sara's children are compelled to beg for food in English to survive (Kalmer, 2017:18). It is here that language not only functions as a communicative tool but is used as marker of political legitimacy and social inclusion.

In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, Kalmer (2017) constructs a structured narrative that repeatedly invokes the motif of land war, either historically or contemporaneously, as a means of uncovering the city's fractured identity and contested land ownership. The novel references the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 as recounted by Bambata Tshabalala to Zweig (Kalmer, 2017:274). In addition, it also recounts intra-colonial wars, such as Boer resistance against British imperialism, exemplified by Zweig's grandfather's enlistment in the commando forces (Kalmer, 2017:17). These events are not isolated historical anecdotes but are embedded within a broader narrative strategy that align with that of Genette (1980:114) and Landa (2005:11), or in narratological terms, singulative and repetitive frequency respectively known as "telling once what happened once" and "telling in times what happened once". It is here that the novel's treatment of these land wars – between colonisers and indigenous populations, as well as among colonisers themselves – serves as a narrative scaffold for exploring the enduring consequences of conquest and dispossession. This transpires when the ZAR (Zuid-

Afrikaansche Republiek) or the Republic of the Orange Free State government is portrayed as actively preparing for armed resistance against British encroachment, with Abraham's early enlistment symbolising the Afrikaner struggle for territorial sovereignty (Kalmer, 2017:17). These events are recounted in a compressed summary form, while their recurrence throughout the text imbues them with thematic weight. As Genette (1980) and his critics argue, the repetition of singular events across various parts of the text becomes a means to show narrative moments that function to reinforce structural significance.

The novel extends this logic of land war into the democratic era, where the violence of land contestation is transmuted into xenophobic and Afrophobic attacks. The looting and burning of homes belonging to Zimbabwean, Mozambican, and Malawian nationals are framed as a continuation of Johannesburg's long history of exclusionary violence (Kalmer, 2017:168). These attacks, as represented by those of Marceline (Kalmer, 2017:113) and Samson Dube (Kalmer, 2017:98), are not incidental, but become symptomatic of a deeper unresolved crisis of belonging and entitlement. The recurrence of such events in the narrative aligns with Genette's (1980) explanation of repetitive frequency, where the same event is narrated multiple times to foreground emphasised relevance of events.

The earlier passages also encapsulate the intergenerational transmission of trauma and resistance, manifesting through various means such as wars, rebellion, and negotiations. For example, Zweig's father supports the anti-apartheid struggle by distributing banned political literatures to communist activists, thereby positioning himself within a lineage of dissent that stretches from colonial resistance to democratic disillusionment. Zweig's own return to Johannesburg in the post-apartheid period reveals the persistence of spatial and symbolic land wars, which are now refracted through intra-African hostility over urban space and economic opportunity. It is here that the novel's frequent allusions to land wars spanning over two centuries serve not only as historical reference points, but also as narrative strategy that frames the city's ongoing instability. The fragile nature of peaceful coexistence in Johannesburg is portrayed as a structural condition that emerges from the failure of earlier governments to establish not only inclusive but also equitable systems of land ownership. As Young (2001:52) observes, landlessness constitutes the inevitable consequence of defeat, where the vanquished are dispossessed of their means of subsistence and cultural practices, and excluded from the economic benefits of territorial control. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986:28) idea of re-membering is foregrounded in the text, because the novel foregrounds the ways in which memory and identity are reconstructed through the reclamation of land. In the post-apartheid context, the black majority assumes administrative control of Johannesburg, while mechanisms of

exclusion persist by being mediated through language and cultural affiliation. The novel underscores the symbolic power of language as a marker of belonging, as earlier revealed when the administrators of Johannesburg weaponises language to mistreat each other.

A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg (2017) employs a complex narrative structure. The text weaves together the historical repetition of systems that become inheritable – linguistic politics and spatial contestation – to reveal Johannesburg’s crisis of identity and land ownership. Through the deployment of narratological strategy, such as frequency and summary, the novel constructs a genealogy of land wars from British colonial conquest to postcolonial disillusionment. This becomes a powerful meditation on the cyclical nature of violence, the fragility of belonging, and the unfinished project of decolonisation.

5.5 The narrating agents that recount lived experiences in Johannesburg from 1899–1994 onwards

A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg (2017) is dominated by an anonymous third-person narrator, whose extradiegetic-heterodiegetic position provides panoramic as well as a distanced recounting of events. As conceptualised by Genette (1980), this narrator exists outside the diegesis and does not participate in the recounted events as this helps to retain narratorial authority throughout the text. While the narrative frequently presents events from the perspectives of characters such as Zweig, who presents others such as Marceline, these moments in the events should be understood as instances of focalisation, not narration. This is possible, since the external narrator continues to mediate character perceptions and experiences. It is here that the distinction between “who sees” and “who speaks” becomes important to maintain analytical clarity. The text’s structural complexity is further enriched through the selective inclusion of first-person character narrators who provide metadiegetic accounts of lived experiences. These embedded narratives serve to complement and elaborate on the primary narration by supplying culturally situated interpretations of Johannesburg’s fractured history, including its persistent lack of peaceful events. The interplay between the extradiegetic narrator and these metadiegetic voices produces a polyphonic effect consistent with Bakhtin’s (1981) explanations by allowing multiple perspectives to converge without displacing the primary narrating agent. In doing so, the text foregrounds land politics, identity, and belonging, while preserving a clear distinction between perspectives of narration and focalisation for added depth in presenting encountered events.

5.6 Identifying various characters and their roles in Johannesburg's life experiences

In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, characterisation emerges as one of the dominant narrative strategies. It enables the text to engage with complex dynamics of land expropriation, ownership, created senses of belonging, and created identities, as these inform this study. The portrayal of individual and familial experiences within Johannesburg's shifting socio-political landscape across various contexts serves not only as a vehicle for storytelling, but also illuminates tensions surrounding land. In addition, the lived experiences of characters in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* are understood through Nuttall's (2009) conceptualisation of entanglement. It describes postcolonial urban life as a condition where intimacy, violence, inclusion, and exclusion coexist. Rather than resolving established colonial spatial and racial structures, the democratic city reworks them through new modes of differentiation. Kalmer's (2017) characters inhabit this entangled urban space where belonging is continually negotiated and often violently contested.

The characterisation in this novel is direct and indirect, which aligns with classical and contemporary narratological theoretical frameworks. Traditional approaches as articulated by Mieke Bal (1985) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (2002) provide a foundational understanding of how characters are constructed through explicit description and implicit inferences. These are complemented by earlier perspectives from Forster (1927), who distinguishes between "flat" and "round" characters, and by later contributions from Pickerel (1988) and Fishelov (1990), who explore the functional and relational dimensions of character within narrative systems. With this, Kalmer's (2017) characterisation strategy is particularly effective in foregrounding the historical transitions of land ownership in Johannesburg.

To further enrich the analysis, this study draws on Greimas' (1971) actantial model, which remains an invaluable tool for interpreting character roles in contemporary fiction. His theoretical framework allows for the identification of structural positions in the investigated text: subject, object, helper, and opponent clarify the function of characters within the narrative's thematic economy. In the context of *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, characters such as Zweig, his parents, and others such as Marceline and Bambata can be read as occupying distinct actantial roles that illuminate the tensions between dispossession and reclamation, exclusion and belonging.

The characterisation thus operates on multiple levels, providing psychological depth, historical resonance, and apparent government structural clarity. Through the depiction of individual lives, Kalmer constructs a narrative that is intimate and expansive, and reveals how the politics of land and identity are inscribed in the everyday struggles of Johannesburg's inhabitants. The characters' experiences are informed by displacement, resistance, and negotiation, and serve as microcosms of the city's broader socio-political transformations. In this novel, characterisation is not only a narrative device, but also a critical interpretive framework to help detect clues of the embedded story of land.

5.6.1 The various roles of characters in Johannesburg's varying contexts

Greimas' (1971:793–806) actantial model provides a compelling theoretical framework for analysing the thematic structures emerging from the characters' movements, such as those found in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*. The text outlines land expropriation, contested land ownership, sense of belonging, and the shaping of identities when the characters navigate various contexts of Johannesburg. The narrative presents these issues retracing of Zweig's family history and his encounters with various individuals across the three distinct socio-political eras. Each context reveals the city's persistent instability and the lack of peace, shaped by successive regimes emerging from their competing claims to territorial legitimacy.

The text also foregrounds tensions through the movements of characters and their experiences. This includes tensions between indigenous populations and the white colonial powers, such as Bambata's ancestral resistance against English colonisers (Kalmer, 2017:274). Later, the tensions involve Zweig's grandparents as Afrikaner representatives, themselves victims of British imperial aggression during the Anglo-Boer War, only to later become agents of exclusion through the institutionalisation of apartheid (Kalmer, 2017:17). This cyclical dynamic of tensions through victimhood and dominance is further complicated in the democratic era, where black South Africans perpetrate xenophobic violence against black foreign nationals, revealing a troubling continuity of exclusionary practices. These character-driven events help explain the mechanisms through which land is contested and reappropriated, while highlighting broader patterns of racialised entitlement to land as well as socio-political stratification. The narrative suggests that land ownership in Johannesburg is not only a matter of legal possession, but a marker of identity and belonging. The transfer of land from English colonisers to Afrikaners and back to the black majority in a democratic society serves as a

narrative strategy to uncover the evolving criteria for inclusion and the persistent misuse of democratic ideals in a highly industrialised urban context.

Greimas' (1971) actantial model proves particularly useful in mapping the roles of characters within these contexts. Characters such as Zweig, his grandparents, and Bambata and Marceline, occupy distinct actantial positions not limited to subject, opponent, helper, and object, through which the narrative's presented tensions are articulated. The struggle for land becomes a quest in the narrative where the subjects seek to reclaim or defend territory, while encountering various forms of resistance and assistance along the way.

he novel also engages with the idea of biopower, as originally explained by Foucault, and later expanded in postcolonial discourse by Mbembe (2001). The use of death technologies – concentration camps, advanced weaponry, apartheid legislation, guerrilla warfare, and xenophobic violence – is a common denominator across regimes to exert control over populations and assume control over life and death. These instruments of domination are employed to secure territorial claims and eliminate perceived threats as this serves to reinforce the city's status as a contested space. It is here that Mbembe's (2001:66) idea of entanglement is deployed to strengthen the analysis. With this, than viewing post-independent Johannesburg which is separated from its colonial past, entanglement comes in to highlight how the historical structures continue to shape contemporary experiences. In the text, old systems of exclusion reappear in new forms that includes xenophobic violence, contested claims to belonging, and continuing inequalities when it comes to accessing urban space. The theoretical idea is positioned to help explain why postcolonial reordering remains incomplete and contradictory. In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*, reterritorialisation emerges as a key motif whereby each new administration restructures access to land and resources to benefit its racial constituency. This process aligns with what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call reterritorialisation and is observed when there is an imposition of a new socio-political order after the advent of colonial disruption. It manifests in the democratic era and is not limited to forms such as electoral political system where the majority vote confers administrative control. It is here that all the citizens are ostensibly granted a renewed sense of belonging and identity. The text problematises this ideal by revealing how former colonisers and marginalised groups continue to devise strategies for reclaiming influence not limited to exclusionary, violent means, and financial control. The result of this action is that the promise of democratic inclusion is undermined by the persistence of racialised hierarchies and the instrumentalisation of identity for political gain.

A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg employs characterisation strategy to reveal the city's complex history of land contestation and identity formation. Through the guidance of Greimas' (1971) actantial model and postcolonial theory, the novel reveals how characters embody the ideological struggles of their time and reveals how land remains a central axis around which narratives of belonging, exclusion, and resistance become constructed.

5.6.2 Characteristics of depicted characters in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017)

The narrative of *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* traces the life of its protagonist, Zweig, his family, and the people he encounters across various socio-political contexts of Johannesburg. The name Zweig reveals a sense of human resemblance and cultural specificity, which highlights his Afrikaner identity and its rich history entangled in cycles of land loss, reclamation, and dispossession in Johannesburg. This structured portrayal of characters aligns with structuralist approaches to characterisation such as those developed by Rimmon-Kenan (2002) and Bal (1985), who emphasise the interplay between narrative function and character construction.

The name Zweig is a nod to Austrian writer Stefan Zweig (1881–1942), renowned for his psychological portraits and historical fiction. As noted in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2024), Stefan Zweig excelled in crafting “interpretations of imaginary and historical characters”, a quality that resonates with Kalmer's (2017) protagonist, whose life becomes a narrative vehicle for exploring Johannesburg's turbulent history. In Kalmer's (2017) rendering, Zweig becomes what is known as the jewel of his soul, which is the metaphor that enables him to be a metaphorical person whose journey through Johannesburg's shifting political regimes from 1899 to 2008 provides a recurring cohesive narrative of land contestation, racial discrimination, belonging, identity, exile, and return. With this, Zweig's life unfolds within liminal spaces (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2000:117) that highlight transitional zones characterised by ambiguity and transformation. As depicted in the novel, Johannesburg is one such space, shaped by successive regimes in the British colonial administration, during the Union of South Africa, the apartheid state (1948–1994), and the post-1994 democratic dispensation. Each regime imposes its own logic of inclusion and exclusion, contributing to the city's persistent lack of peace. Zweig's movement through these contexts mirrors the city's own transitions as this positions him as a liminal figure whose identity is constantly negotiated through language, race, and political affiliation.

The text also foregrounds the embedded story of land politics by tracing the trajectory of Zweig's family from the British colonial period (1899–1902) to the democratic era. This narrative arc is conveyed through indirect characterisation elements, not limited to the setting that represents the environment, action, and dialogue which stands in for the speech (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002:60–66). The environment of Johannesburg, the actions of its inhabitants, and their speech acts collectively construct a portrait of a city in constant flux.

Zweig is born in the twilight of British rule and raised during apartheid. He inhabits a contradictory society where identity is both imposed and resisted. His liminal status of belonging and not belonging depends on the prevailing regime and its racialised criteria for inclusion. The struggle for land ownership is mediated through language and skin colour, which also serve as gatekeeping mechanisms to Johannesburg, with its economic and social benefits. The legacy of colonialism continues to shape the city's lifestyle, characterised by xenophobia, nepotism, corruption, and socio-economic inequality. These conditions can be interpreted to hinder the development of a cohesive civic identity which is based on shared citizenship compared to racial, linguistic, or ethnic classifications as this obstructs the realisation of a true democratic inclusion.

Fishelov's (1990:425) contributions to character theory becomes apt in this context, with its emphasis on the lifelike qualities of fictional characters, such as the successive administrators of Johannesburg, who are portrayed as capitalists. They are driven by financial gains at the expense of human dignity and justice. This is demonstrated by their pursuit of land and power, which mirrors the historical realities of Johannesburg, where control over land has long been a source of conflict and exclusion. Elsewhere, Forster's (1927) distinction between "flat" and "round" characters becomes instrumental in uncovering secrets of the novel's characterisation. During the colonial periods of imperialism and apartheid, landowners are depicted as flat characters. They are motivated by a singular idea of prosperity for their own racial group at the expense of others. In contrast, characters like Zweig and Serenita are rendered with greater depth that embodies the elements of psychology as well as complexities of identity, resistance, and moral ambiguity, as this demonstrates their flexibility in the face of the twin adversities of apartheid and life in exile. The democratic era introduces the possibility of transformation despite the persistence of colonial legacies, and Hiemstra's May Villa Guesthouse serves as a metaphor for this potential. It becomes a microcosm of Johannesburg's diversity as well as the country at large by hosting a variety of guests from foreign aid workers and human rights researchers to tourists, all seeking the "real" South Africa (Kalmer, 2017:56). Despite their differences in race and language, the interactions among the guests suggest a

fragile but meaningful form of coexistence that hints at the ideal Johannesburg. Zweig's reflection that their conversations make him "feel as if they were all part of an ancient tribe" suggests a shared humanity that transcends historical divisions (Kalmer, 2017:180).

Pickereel's (1988:182) distinction between essentialist and existentialist character development offers a useful approach for interpreting the text's portrayal of the elite class as landowners. Those shaped by historical experience adapt and evolve in response to shifting political conditions, and are considered existentialist figures. Their use of biopower and death technologies to secure or defend territory reflects the brutal pragmatism of survival in a contested land. Characters resort to capitalism, violence, and socialism to negotiate their belonging or exclusion in Johannesburg, as did administrators of the British, apartheid, and democratic regimes.

Another pivotal dimension of indirect characterisation in *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* is the deployment of speech, mediated through institutional platforms such as mass media. In the novel, Zweig listens to radio broadcasts, which serve as a narrative device that raises awareness and condemns societal injustice. These mediated voices function as indirect characterising agents that reveal the behaviour of Johannesburg's citizens in a democratic society. One such instance occurs when Zweig hears a radio report detailing the horrific xenophobic attacks, including immolation, on black foreign nationals (Kalmer, 2017:104). This act of violence is not presented as an isolated incident, but as a manifestation of colonial legacy, following the logic of installed systematic dehumanisation and the exclusion of those deemed outsiders. The radio broadcast serves a dual function of denouncing contemporary atrocities, while simultaneously echoing the historical mistreatment of marginalised groups under previous regimes.

These experiences exemplify Nuttall's (2009) paradox of postcolonial entanglement where proximity intensifies hostility rather than solidarity. Hagedorn and Bloom (2003) suggest that media technologies come to shape cultural narratives and responses to emergencies that reflect broader societal dynamics of democracy. This resonates with Olson's (2011) argument that media and its platforms, such as radio, are used to tell stories in a context mired with xenophobia. The novel further reinforces this thematic continuity by referencing an incident in 1904 when Johannesburg's municipal authorities, including the fire department, used fire as a tool of racial cleansing under the guise of the protection of public health. Justified as a legitimate response to the bubonic plague, officials deliberately set ablaze the homes of those living near the city, targeting "the coolies, kaffirs, and hotnots" (Kalmer, 2017:45). This

historical event recounted in summary demonstrates how state institutions are deployed to enforce racial hierarchies and spatial segregation. Such instances of indirect speech, whether through radio or historical recollection, contribute to the novel's broader critique of Johannesburg's socio-political landscape. They reveal how language, when institutionalised, becomes a tool of power and exclusion, as this shapes public perception and legitimises violence. In narratological terms, these mediated speeches function as instances of indirect characterisation that provides insight into the values, prejudices, and anxieties of Johannesburg societies.

5.7 Conclusion

Accompanied by Mbembe and Nuttall's (2004) explanation of Johannesburg as an entangled African metropolis, *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* demonstrates that land, memory, and identity remain unresolved in the democratic city. Kalmer's (2017) narrative confirms that political transition does not dissolve spatial inequality but also reconfigures it by reinforcing this study's argument that land functions as a persistent narrative and an ideological force rather than a historically settled issue.

The narrative of *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* presents the complex, lived experiences of Zweig and his family across various historical and political periods in Johannesburg, revealing the embedded story of land politics. It uncovers the issues of land expropriation, ownership, belonging, and identity. These concerns become apparent when analysed through the conceptual theoretical framework of Genette's (1980) structural narratology, which holds the structure of this study. This approach provides a methodological framework for decoding the narrative's temporal and perspectival structure to uncover the generated meanings as a constructed outcome of narrative relations and contexts in how space shapes identity, power relations, memory, and belonging. In addition to this, when Genette's approach is integrated with genre theory, postcolonial studies, and narratological character theory, it enables a robust approach to the text's interpretation of the generated meanings and their socio-political implications.

These theories manifest when they help to outline the novel's depiction of land expropriation across three distinct governments. This includes British reign, apartheid, and democratic administrations that successively govern Johannesburg – as representation of South Africa – which all highlight the depicted continuity of dispossession as well as the

weaponisation of identity determined through race and language. These are also some of the means each regime employs as its own mechanisms of control, which result in the destabilisation of a peaceful existence in the mirrored Johannesburg. Also, these mechanisms are not administrative, but ideological, where categorising people according to race, language, and perceived belonging become an installed routine of mistreating those that have been disregarded. It is here that the narrative reveals how these classifications are historically contingent, yet structurally persistent in shaping access to land, resources, and recognition of the preferred people as this renders the promise of democratic inclusion aspirational and precarious.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This study has investigated a constellation of themes emerging from literary representations of land, including its expropriation, ownership, identity formation, memory, and created sense of belonging as articulated in three contemporary Southern African texts. These texts are *A Sin of Omission* (2019) by Marguerite Poland, *The Theory of Flight* (2018) by Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu, and *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017) by Harry Kalmer. Rather than treating these chosen texts as artefacts that illustrate a predetermined historical argument, the study approached them as distinct, yet dialogically related, fictional interventions that engage in different ways with long-standing questions about land and political power in Southern Africa, particularly within the context of South Africa as a representative of the region in this study.

Drawing on the theoretical concepts of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation, the study adopted a flexible interpretive framework believed to be capable of tracing shifts in spatial authority, identity formation, and created sense of belonging across different historical events from colonisation to democracy. These concepts were not imposed as fixed interpretive endpoints, but used heuristically by allowing the texts themselves to shape how processes of colonial conquest, colonial resistance, and post-independence reconfiguration became intelligible. Territorialisation, in this sense, refers to the ways in which invading colonial power was established and normalised through land seizure, racial classification, and institutional control. Deterritorialisation is employed to clearly explain events of rupture, negotiation, and contestation, as this often includes armed resistance to hasten the process of decolonisation. Reterritorialisation, finally, marks neither resolution nor closure, but the uneven and often contradictory attempts to reimagine space, citizenship, and belonging in postcolonial and democratic contexts.

Across the investigated texts, colonial and postcolonial power is shown to operate through intersecting mechanisms such as warfare, religion, language, law, and racialised embodiment that shaped access to land and civic participation. These mechanisms are not presented as monolithic or uniform; the texts foreground the ambivalence, moral contradiction, and human cost embedded in such systems. In *A Sin of Omission*, for example, the character of

Mzamane emerges not only as a representative type but also as a complex person whose experiences function to expose the tensions and exclusions embedded in colonial Christianity. His struggle foregrounds how established racial structures circumscribed not only land ownership but also claims to dignity, spiritual authority, and social recognition.

Importantly, the study also demonstrates that resistance narratives in Southern African fiction reveals a wide range of practices that includes a strategic settlement, ethical negotiation, cultural reclamation, and everyday survival alongside overt political struggle. Similarly, post-independence representations do not only provide a singular trajectory towards justice but also reveal unresolved tensions between historical redress and contemporary inequality with regard to accessing land. In the chosen texts, land restitution emerges as a material concern and a symbolic site because questions of memory, justice, and national cohesion are contested.

In engaging with chosen literary texts, the study does not position these fictions as a transparent reflection of history. It positions the texts as imaginative but critical media with the capacity to refract historical experience in ways that make way for ethical inquiry and interpretive plurality. In a region mired by historical fracture and ongoing struggles over land, such literary engagements highlight the continuing significance of narrative as a site where past, present, and future are negotiated rather than resolved.

6.2 Findings

The analysis of *A Sin of Omission* (2019) reveals how Marguerite Poland traces the development of colonial authority through intersecting institutions of military conquest and religious governance by foregrounding the structural conditions that shaped dispossession and inequality rather than presenting colonialism as a uniform or inevitable process. The text reveals how identity is produced and regulated through racial and linguistic structures where being white-skinned and fluent in colonial languages function as markers of legitimacy, authority, and belonging. However, rather than providing a singular moral judgment, the text exposes the contradictions within colonial Christianity itself, particularly through the character of Mzamane, whose marginalisation reveals the disjunction between professed spiritual ideals and practiced exclusion. Mzamane's neglected and thwarted aspiration to ecclesiastical authority is not presented as a personal failure only, but also as symptomatic of a broader ideological framework that limits the colonised subject's access to institutional power. At the

same time, the narrative resists reducing Mzamane to a passive victim because his intellectual, ethical, and spiritual capacities complicate reductive readings of colonial domination. In this way, *A Sin of Omission* invites reflection on how land dispossession, racial identity, and moral authority are mutually constitutive without foreclosing alternative interpretations of agency, belief, or complicity.

The investigation of *The Theory of Flight* (2018) reveals a shift in attention. The text focuses on the dynamics of resistance and liberation instead of colonisation. This shift is notable when the text foregrounds the ambiguities inherent in anti-colonial struggle as well as post-independence governance. Through the character of Golide Gumede, the fiction explores resistance not only as a heroic rupture with colonial power but also as a fraught process shaped by sacrifice, internal conflict, and the persistence of historical trauma. In addition, the text also highlights the vulnerability of a newly established independent society, as the ideals of liberation coexist uneasily with the emergence of new forms of exclusion and political instability. Rather than providing a celebratory account of resistance, the text raises critical questions about continuity and rupture as this can be seen to challenge linear narratives of progress.

In *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* (2017), Harry Kalmer employs a polyphonic approach which can be seen as a multi-generational structure. It functions to outline the revealed layered histories of land, migration, and belonging within an urban space that continue to be shaped by successive regimes from colonisation to democracy and beyond. In addition, the text also resists teleological readings of history by juxtaposing experiences of colonial conquest, apartheid government dispossession, and contemporary xenophobia. In the text, land emerges not as a settled possession but as an ongoing site of negotiation shaped by legal frameworks, market forces, and social anxieties. Also, the text's multiplicity of voices function to highlight how belonging remains contingent and contested in democratic South Africa, particularly for those situated at the margins of citizenship.

Taken together, these texts clearly explain land not only as a material resource but also a symbolic terrain through which power, memory, and identity are continuously negotiated. The study reveals how biopolitical mechanisms that include war, religion, language, race, and law have served to shape spatial inequality while also revealing spaces of resistance, reimagining, and resilience. What is also crucial in this study is that it does not suggest that the selected texts serve to articulate a single or unified Southern African narrative. Instead, the significance of the texts are found in their differences, tensions, and partial perspectives which collectively complicate reductive historical accounts. The study identifies recurring patterns

found across the three selected novels. This entails the representation of land as a site of dispossession, contestation, identity formation, and belonging. Also, these patterns emerged through the comparative analysis of the texts compared to the assumptions imposed on them in advance. By investigating these convergences as well as the divergences, the study contributes new insights into how contemporary Southern African fiction deals with land politics as an unresolved and evolving concern. These texts do not confirm fixed assumptions about history or identity, but generate critical friction that invites a reading to confront the ethical demands of justice, remembrance, and democratic responsibility.

6.3 Conclusions, Limitations and Directions for Further Research

While this study provides a new interpretive framework for reading land and identity in Southern African fiction, it is necessarily limited by its focus on three novels situated primarily within the South African literary landscape. Although these texts engage regional concerns, they cannot be taken as exhaustive representations of Southern African experiences. Future research could extend this analysis by incorporating various national contexts, languages, and genres that include oral narratives, poetry, drama, and speculative fiction, which often articulate alternative spatial imaginaries.

A notable contribution made by this study was the application of the three theoretical concepts termed the triad. They are known as territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation and were deployed as a methodological approach rather than a deterministic model. Future studies could test the adaptability of this triad framework across different historical events and literary traditions by investigating where the triad can help clarify textual dynamics but also where it may require revision or supplementation.

In the region of Southern Africa, comparative studies could serve to explain shared patterns with distinct national trajectories in regard to struggles for land and post-independence negotiation. This can include literatures in countries known for their long resistance to colonisation, such as Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, and Angola. In addition, further research could help to explore how contemporary global forces that include neoliberal capital, climate change, and transnational migration reshape processes of reterritorialisation in Southern African narratives. Such investigations would contribute to a detailed understanding of how reclaimed or reconfigured spaces may function to reproduce new forms of exclusion, even as they promise inclusion.

In this sense, the significance of this study extends beyond its chosen texts. The study provides a space for ongoing scholarly dialogue by foregrounding land as a site of trauma, struggle, and possibility, but also by adopting an interpretive approach attentive to contradiction and plurality. Rather than providing closure, this study affirms Southern African literature as a dynamic field through which questions of justice, belonging, and spatial meaning continue to be critically reimagined in the democratic era and beyond.

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