"There Are Other Kinds of Exile": Exploring the Stance of Detachment in Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (2015)

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Disappointment, Impasse, and Detachment in Galgut's novel

At the end of Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (2015), Patrick Winter, accompanied by his mother Ellen and her newly met companion Dirk Blauuw, travels back to his native South Africa, having visited Namibia to witness the country's first free elections held from 7-11 November 1989. The mood of hopefulness, shaped by the democratic changes in the former South West Africa, is not reflected in the attitudes of Patrick and Ellen, who are returning to a country still torn by apartheid. Even though they share the same destination, there is the sense of a growing alienation between the mother and the son, which stems from Ellen's new relationship with Blauuw and Patrick's decision to move out of the family home. The bleak atmosphere in the car is strengthened by the surrounding darkness. As they leave Namibia and travel back to South Africa, they are greeted with the following sight: "In front of us, empty and cold, the road travelled on towards home" (p. 142).

The emptiness described by Patrick in the last sentence of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* can be viewed as an expression of his own negative emotions, such as sadness and despondency, but, on a more general level, it constitutes a symbolic representation of political uncertainty connected with the turbulent socio-political events in his country. This latter comment resonates with Boehmer's reflection on late-apartheid literature. Boehmer argues that South African fiction of the 1980s projected the sense of an unknowable future. As she observes, the novels published in this decade convey "a refusal even to go as far as anticipating any ultimate end and therefore any possibility of a new beginning" (p. 50). She adds that such anticipation would have called for "a confidence, even a hubris, that few writers were prepared to risk" (p. 50). Damon Galgut, in the 1980s, was, no doubt, part of the group of writers who would not have made the bold gesture of imagining a new social and political order.

Taking Boehmer's 1998 comment as a starting point, this article will explore the state of suspension connected with political uncertainty. At the same time, I will argue that Boehmer's comment does not capture the complexity of Galgut's 2015 novel, whose ending, with its description of the empty road lying ahead of Patrick and his mother, need not be seen solely in terms of "suspension" and "a closing down of options" (Boehmer, 1998, p. 50). As I will show, by the end of his novel, Damon

Galgut gestures towards the possibility of a new beginning, however remote it may appear to his protagonist. The prospect of a new beginning will be explored in the context of Patrick's evolving political stance, specifically his detachment from his family's regressive values and beliefs. This article will shed light on the empowering aspect of Patrick's detachment in the analysis of the impasse that he experiences throughout the novel.

In its attempt to find agency in the atmosphere of impasse, this reading of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* can be viewed as part of a larger project emerging in postcolonial affect theory. In a recent contribution to this field of study, *The Productivity of Negative Emotions in Postcolonial Literature*, Donald R. Wehrs, Isabelle Wentworth, and Jean-François Vernay consider "productive aspects of so-called negative emotions elicited by the experience and legacies of European colonialism" (2025, p. 1). One of the book chapters included in Wehrs, Wentworth, and Vernay's collection is Andrew van der Vlies's contribution, "On Postcolonial Disappointment: Affect's Formal Politics in Post-Transition Narrative from South Africa." In this critical intervention, van der Vlies's goal is to explore disappointment as an "archive for hope that might yet be reactivated" (p. 147). His argument is that hope and disappointment are closely connected and mutually dependent. To support this claim, he refers to the German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch and his comment that "hope holds *eo ipso* the condition of defeat precariously within itself" (1998, p. 341). In South African fiction of the post-apartheid era – van der Vlies observes – negative affect can be read "hopefully, against the grain" (p. 158) by showing that it can become the motivating force for change.

While van der Vlies concentrates on disappointment, my interest is in the more dysphoric feeling of impasse, understood as a protracted feeling of disappointment, which in Galgut's 2015 novel is closely connected with confusion and apprehension regarding one's future. Another departure from van der Vlies's 2025 study is that this article focuses on South African fiction in the late-apartheid era, specifically *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, first published three years before the fall of apartheid in 1994. Nevertheless, the goal of this article is similar to that of van der Vlies' insofar as it explores South African fiction as an "archive for hope that might yet be reactivated" (p. 147). I will argue that both impasse and hope in Galgut's novel can be found in the stance of its narrator and protagonist, Patrick Winter, specifically in his alienation from his surroundings, which stems from his gradual rejection of the white, patriarchal, and racist culture that he observes in his family and the army. While this sense of alienation is often the source of negative emotions, it also becomes the basis for his stance of detachment, which is potentially productive insofar as it offers Patrick a way of distancing himself from his social and racial origins. This distancing can, in turn, evolve into a political stance, giving Patrick a longed-for sense of agency.

This article is divided into two parts. The first one will provide a historical and socio-political background to the times in which the novel

was published, namely the last decade of apartheid – a period also known as the South African interregnum. This part will also shed light on what Gordimer has called the "morbid symptoms" (p. 263) of the interregnum, including widespread violence and the atmosphere of political instability. Referring to the works by Quayson and Scott , I will argue that *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* creates the "affective quality" (Scott, p. 11) of uncanniness, which, at times, emerges in the narrator's description of his surroundings. The second part of the article will discuss Galgut's novel, concentrating on the detachment of its narrator and main protagonist. This stance of detachment will be explored both in his relationship with other people and, equally importantly, in his attitude to his surroundings, specifically the South African landscape.

The analysis of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* will follow the cyclical structure of the novel, beginning with Patrick and Ellen's stay on their family farm in South Africa, followed by their departure for Namibia, which they visit to meet Ellen's new boyfriend, her former student and South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) activist called Godfrey, and concluding with their sudden departure from Namibia on the first days of the democratic elections, after Ellen's parting with Godfrey. At the end of the article, I will return to the concluding scene of the novel, in which Patrick describes their journey back to South Africa.

The Interregnum, Trauma, and the Uncanny

The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs was published in 1991, in the period of the late interregnum. The term "interregnum" was first used by Nadine Gordimer in her 1982[1] lecture "Living in the Interregnum," which she opened with the following words: "I live at 6,000 feet in a society whirling, stamping, swaying with the force of revolutionary change. […]. The city is Johannesburg, the country South Africa, and the time the last years of the colonial era in Africa" (p. 262). Gordimer was right to predict profound, "revolutionary change" in her country. Within a year of delivering this lecture, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was founded in August 1983, creating a common platform for democratic opposition against apartheid. A key role in the independence movements was also played by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Council of Unions of South Africa-Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (CUSA-AZACTU), which had a joint membership of over a million (Thompson, 2014, p. 334). In 1984, the government recognized the need for reform by bringing into force a new constitution, which nevertheless continued to privilege the white population by ensuring that it had a disproportionately large parliamentary representation.

By 1986, it was already clear that the apartheid government was making concessions to meet some of the demands of the opposition. Those concessions included eliminating certain segregation laws. For example, the government lifted the bans on multiracial political parties and the

prohibition of interracial sex and marriage. At the same time, a state of emergency was proclaimed between 20 July 1985, and 7 March 1986, and then from 12 June 1986, indefinitely and throughout South Africa. Hundreds of apartheid activists were arrested by the South African police, which was given extensive powers to detain and interrogate people suspected of political activity. Emergency regulations, introduced by the apartheid government, prohibited the reporting of social and political unrest. This combination of "revolutionary change" (Gordimer, 1989, p. 262) and "legalized tyranny" (Thompson, 2014, p. 347) shaped the South African interregnum throughout the 1980s, showing the relevance of Antonio Gramsci's words, quoted by Gordimer in the afore mentioned lecture: "The old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms" (1989, p. 263). The most visible and dramatic of those "morbid symptoms" – widespread violence – would continue into the late 1980s and early 1990s. To give just one example, on 26 March 1990, a little over a month after the lifting of the ban on the major opposition parties, namely the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and the South African Communist Party (SACP), the police killed eleven demonstrators in the township of Sebokeng, thirty miles from Johannesburg (Thompson, 2014, p. 361). This shows that the interregnum pointed towards a future that held promise of freedom, but was at the same time undefined and unknowable.

The tension between the promise of the future and the reality of the present was registered in the South African literature of the interregnum. As Clingman argues, "[t]he sense of an absent future, invoked largely through its looming pressure yet essential unknowability, began to transform in the South African imagination, emerging into a domain of the practical and the real" (p. 647). Clingman's comment on the sense of suspension and apprehension in the course of the initial transition period is especially pertinent in the discussion of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, whose narrator and main protagonist, Patrick Winter, finds himself unable to conceive of a future that would be integrated with the political changes in southern Africa. This sense of temporal disconnection is thrown into sharp relief by the structure of Patrick's narrative. As it was mentioned, the novel begins with Patrick's and his mother's journey to Namibia to witness the first democratic elections, continues with Patrick's account of their short stay in Namibia, and ends with their sudden departure from the country on the first day of the elections. The image of the empty road, which concludes the novel, does not seem to convey any anticipation of the future. On the contrary, there is a mood of disappointment, depression, and perhaps uncertainty about what is to come.

The ending of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* is not the only part which can be discussed in terms of the characteristic mood that it creates. It can be argued that the entire novel evokes a certain mood that affects its readers. In his study of emotions in colonial and postcolonial literature, Scott argues that the aesthetic object, not unlike a person, has the ability to

"radiate a particular affective quality, a 'world atmosphere,' that gives it both substance and unity" (p. 11). Scott further argues that literature is capable of registering the emotions connected with socio-political changes, including dysphoric emotions. He refers to Quayson, who, in his study *Calibrations,* makes the following point about the affective qualities of some postcolonial literatures: "In the face of persistent physical or social violence brought on by either acute political chaos or the general collapse of the social order, there is an internalization of these perceived disorders in terms of either guilt, an inexplicable terror, or a general sense of disquiet that does not seem to have a clear source" (p. 80). Quayson's observation is relevant in this discussion for at least two reasons. Galgut's 2015 novel can be viewed in terms of internalized disorders connected with the turbulent period of the interregnum, manifesting itself in the atmosphere of disappointment, uncertainty, and apprehension, characterized by Quayson as "a general sense of disquiet" (p. 80).

When discussing Quayson's insights into the affective dimension of postcolonial literature, it is worth mentioning the notion of the uncanny, which he uses to describe colonial and postcolonial literatures in the times of political transition. Quayson adopts Freud's understanding of the uncanny, defining it as "the unsettling recognition of the strange within something that is normally perceived as *heimlich* or ordinary" (p. 80). The notion of the uncanny is also used by Clingman in his discussion of South African literature during the interregnum. Clingman defines the interregnum as "an era in which the nature, dynamic and future of South African reality became intrinsically problematic – in some sense invisible, present only as the shadowed and uncanny" (p. 635). Both points mentioned above will be relevant to the reading of Galgut's novel, whose affective quality can be analyzed in terms of the "general sense of disquiet" (Quayson, 2012, p. 80), sometimes manifesting itself as a sudden and overwhelming experience of the uncanny. In *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, the effect of the uncanny can be attributed to its narrative perspective, more specifically, to the combination of the familiar and the strange that can be detected in some of Patrick's descriptions of his surroundings. As I will show, Patrick's tendency to view the reality as simultaneously familiar and strange is the result of his detachment from his surroundings, which, in turn, has its origin in his sense of alienation from his social and racial group.

Nostalgia, Shame, and the South African farm

The close interplay between the familiar and the strange is visible in the title of Galgut's novel. "The beautiful screaming of pigs" conveys both the nostalgia and the repulsion that Patrick experiences as he recollects his childhood visits to the farm, when – together with the children of farm labourers – he watched the brutal slaughter of pigs. The oxymoronic logic

of the title points to a conflict between a lost sense of belonging and his silent rejection of the farm that has belonged to his family for generations. The body of the slaughtered pig comes to symbolize the violence underlying the patriarchal and racist system of privilege that regulates the lives of the masters and the servants. Patrick's rejection of this system and his realization that he is part of this order is conveyed by his intense feeling of discomfort, as he reports feeling "suddenly queasy" (p. 32) at the thought of the butchered pig.

The tension between identification and detachment which is visible in the description of Patrick's visits to the farm can be explored on the level of his emotions. Reminiscing about his childhood and early youth, he reports feeling shame at the recollection of dissecting a living frog and, more importantly, at the memory of threatening his female companion, a black girl named Margaret, not to reveal the intimate relationship between them. The shame that Patrick describes is, as he adds, a retrospective emotion felt only in the moment of recalling those episodes: "The shame of that day, which I hadn't felt at the time, only touched me now. The memories, that had been flowing and falling with such ease into the present, suddenly stopped" (p. 35). This retrospective shame, clearly stronger than the vague nostalgia he feels with respect to his childhood days, short-circuits his process of recollection and distances himself from his past. The fact that Patrick reads shame into those two memories can be interpreted as an attempt to recompense for his failure to experience this emotion at the time of committing the two transgressions. At the same time, the admission about his failure to feel shame comes across as an indirect confession about his complicity in the racist world of his grandparents. This sense of complicity, felt retrospectively by Patrick, comes from the awareness of having been co-opted into the racist and nationalist ideology of apartheid. Patrick's shame also testifies to the intertwining of the personal and the political, as he experiences his transgression in the wider context of the racist and patriarchal nature of relationships on his family's farm. Certainly, the tension between nostalgia and shame, both triggered by the memories of his time on the farm, is indicative of the deep conflict manifesting itself in his identity as a white South African. While nostalgia points to the need for identification with his origins, shame distances Patrick from his past, strengthening his stance of detachment. This detachment is conveyed in a passing reference to his grandmother:

> *Ouma* was made of a different material than us city people. I looked at her now: a small, dried-up old woman, with a heart like a dark clod of earth. Since her husband had died, she had taken over the running of the farm. All the lines of power radiated outwards from her. The servants were afraid of her. The neighbour respected her. She couldn't be separated from the land that she lived on. (p. 37)

Patrick's perception of his grandmother is shaped by the conception of the Afrikaner farmer as "natuurmens," who is "part of the natural world" and thus an "organic creation" (Beningfield, 2006, p. 85). As Beningfield notes, this representation of the farmer played a significant part in Afrikaner nationalism, as created by politicians and intellectuals in the early twentieth century. An important part in this ideological construct was played by religion: "The presence of God, as both the creator of the landscape and the protector of the volk, was important to the legitimising of the occupation of the land" (pp. 85-86), which was represented as the promised land of Israel, symbolizing "the peace and oneness with God" (p. 86). As the quoted passage shows, this ideologically created organic link with the land is inextricably connected with the power and authority that the grandmother exerts on the servants. In the absence of her husband, the grandmother acts as the guardian of the patriarchal system, which is inherited from the previous generation and closely connected with land ownership.

Patrick's highly ambiguous attitude towards the farm, characterized by nostalgia and shame, can be considered in the wider context of the late-apartheid South Africa. Especially pertinent in this respect is the issue of land ownership, which was central to Afrikaner nationalism. It is important to add that throughout the 1980s, South Africa's black population continued to be excluded from buying and possessing land, and it was only on 30 June 1991, with the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act, that this discriminatory law was lifted. In the years of the interregnum, despite revolutionary socio-political changes, Africans were not only excluded from land ownership but also forcibly removed from their homes, as the government continued its policy of destroying squatter camps, for example on the outskirts of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth (Thompson, 2014). While Galgut's 2015 novel makes no mention of those historical events, Patrick's shame can be viewed against this historical background. The shame that he feels in connection with his family's farm shows that he is aware of the highly problematic nature of this socio-economic privilege, built on the dispossession and exploitation of black South Africans.

In marked contrast with the earlier generations of their family, neither Patrick nor Ellen displays any kind of permanent attachment to the farm. This severed link is symbolically represented by their departure for the recently liberated Namibia. As Patrick looks back from the window of their car, his grandmother becomes "the old peasant woman" and the farm simply "the wilderness" (p. 38). Nonetheless, it is important to add that the topic of the farm recurs at the end of the novel, when Patrick and Ellen accept Dirk Blauuw's invitation to visit him on his pig farm. I will return to this important topic at the end of this discussion.

Patrick's detachment, which, as I have argued, often shapes his perception of the world, is closely connected with his alienation. Writing more generally about Damon Galgut's protagonists, Jacobs has rightly pointed to Patrick as "a prototype of Galgut's fictional South African subjects who are alienated from society and acutely aware of their condition" (p. 92). In Patrick's case, alienation stems from his acute sense of distance from the patriarchal and heterosexual culture represented by his father and his older brother Malcolm. As Heyns argues, "[t]he bond between Malcolm and their father becomes to Patrick representative of that whole world of male camaraderie from which he is excluded" (p. 113). Heyns goes on to quote from an interview with Damon Galgut, in which he points out that "the values that made apartheid possible are extremely male values […]. I see apartheid in its entirety as a male mythology" (1998, p. 113). On the basis of this comment, it can be argued that Patrick's alienation from his family, specifically from his father and his brother, represents his more general separation from the culture of hegemonic masculinity that Galgut sees as complicit in the atrocities of apartheid. This sense of distance and rejection from "the brotherhood of men" (p. 63) is primarily felt by Patrick as an impossibility: "I would never hunt animals in the bush, or stand around a fire with them, beer in hand, tugging at my moustache. I was pale, I was weak, my jokes made them blanch. I would never be part of their club" (p. 63). Patrick's suppressed homosexuality is closely connected with his negative self-perception as weak and inferior. His sense of exclusion from hegemonic masculinity contributes to his feeling of alienation, made more acute by the awareness that it puts him outside of the circle of his own family.

Patrick's alienation manifests itself most acutely in the course of his military service during the South African Border War. As we learn from his first-person narrative, he served as a soldier of the South African Defence Force (SADF) for almost a year in 1988 and 1989, shortly before the end of the conflict in 1990. Throughout his military service, he and other soldiers are indoctrinated by Commandant Schutte, whose goal is to instil fear of the enemy as radically different: "The enemy was everything that the commandant – and by extension, we – were not: he was communist, atheist, black" (Galgut, 2015, p. 61). Despite this indoctrination, Patrick reports feeling more afraid of Schutte than his enemies. His fear of the commandant is connected with his apprehension that he will one day expose what he believes to be his weakness: "It became my neurotic terror that he would find me out – find the secret weakness in me" (p. 61). Although he does not comment at more length on his sense of "weakness," this feeling of vulnerability can be related to his departure from the model of hegemonic masculinity cultivated by the army. This awareness of alienation, in turn, leads to a paradoxical position in which his fear of having his "weakness" exposed overrides – at least

initially – the fear of being attacked by the enemy. Living at a remove from the masculinist, heteronormative culture of the army, Patrick observes that "it was the commandant I was really afraid of" (p. 61).

Patrick's fear of Commandant Schutte causes a profound sense of insecurity, which becomes part of his traumatic experience. To shed light on this connection, it is worthwhile to refer to Quayson's comment on the impact of protracted physical and social violence on people living in countries that undergo political chaos. Referring to the psychoanalytic work of Gampel, Quayson observes that "people feel safe when they exist in a constant social context, the feeling of uncanniness overwhelming them when they are thrust into 'a fragmented, violent social context, one without any continuity and that transmits extremely paradoxical messages'" (pp. 80-81). What is paradoxical in Patrick's situation is that his alienation from his allies – the masculine world of the army – is no less considerable than his fear of the enemy. This profound insecurity, contributing to his trauma, manifests itself in the form of his detachment from his surroundings, which Quayson discusses in terms of the uncanny. Viewed from a psychiatric perspective, this feeling of uncanniness takes the form of derealization, understood as a dissociative reaction to trauma, as a result of which the world is perceived as distant and unreal.[2] This sense of detachment from the reality is visible in Patrick's reaction to his surroundings: "None of it was real; the thorn trees and grass and termite hills and jackals and barbed wire and boredom and huge, vacant sky were just a set, loaded with dangerous props and hostile extras. All of it to stage my downfall" (Galgut, 2015, p. 58). As the quoted passage shows, derealization is connected with the omnipresent threat of physical and mental decline, which he represents as his "downfall" (p. 58).

Patrick's trauma manifests itself in his detachment not only from his surroundings, but also with regard to his own self. As Jacobs (2011) observes, Patrick has "two disjunct selves, one that experienced, and one that recorded the experience" (p. 93). This inner division can be attributed to a dissociative reaction, which has an extreme experience of existential fear at its source. The most dramatic example of this dissociation can be found in the description of Patrick's panic attack, which leads to his hospitalization and subsequent discharge from the army: "A light went out in my mind. Around a kernel of quietness, the very core of me, I felt frenzy and motion: my limbs thrashing, my teeth grinding, my head bashing in the dust. But I was safe inside, buried out of reach" (Galgut, 2015, pp. 103-104). This dissociative reaction, also known as depersonalization,[3] consists in an overwhelming feeling of detachment from one's mental or bodily processes. Its role is to act as a defensive mechanism, triggered to create a sense of safety ("quietness") in an extreme situation of loss of control. Trauma leads to "the breaking down of the integrated ego and the forming in its place of a new ego structure of an ambiguous nature" (Quayson, 2003, p. 81). In Patrick's case, the ambiguity of this ego, in other words, its internal division into the "two

disjunct selves" (Jacobs, 2011, p. 93), is closely connected with his wartime trauma.

The Desert and its Complex Symbolism

When considered on a more general level, Patrick's experience of the South African Border War has the characteristics of trauma insofar as it "involves disruption – of meaning, order, identity, and control" (Kurtz, 2021, p. 18). This loss of meaning, which happens as a direct response to the dramatic events that he witnesses, is often presented by him in terms of absence and emptiness. In Patrick's perception, emptiness conveys both his fear of mental disintegration and physical annihilation. To give one example, early in the novel, Patrick notes that the tragic death of his brother Malcolm left in its wake a palpable sense of absence in his family, described as a "void" (Galgut, 2015, p. 19). Significantly, he also uses this imagery to describe his mental breakdown in the army: "I was losing all sense of who I was by then, but I didn't know how to give voice to the gathering absence" (p. 24). The loss of a stable sense of self, which Patrick describes in the quoted passage, is also felt by him later in the novel, when he visits Namibia in the days preceding the country's first democratic elections. During this short stay, Patrick's confusion and apprehension are evoked in his contemplation of the Namib desert. Offering no stable points of reference, the desert exerts a curious fascination on him through the intuition – never overtly expressed in his narrative – that the contemplation of those inhospitable surroundings can help him better understand his state of mind.[4]

If the desert is presented in terms of emptiness, it is an emptiness that rules out the possibility of permanent habitation and, by doing so, shows the futility of human action, including political activities. It is also the site of death, understood not in terms of suddenness and violence but of gradual erasure. As Patrick notices the change of landscape from stone to sand, he formulates the following reflection: "If you lay still it would form itself around you, take you into itself" (p. 74). In this fantasy of calm and painless annihilation, the desert is viewed as the ultimate end to human action, but it is also an end that shows its futility. This association is evident in a later passage, in which Patrick describes the houses in the distance as "a pathetic imposition of order on something beyond rules or chaos" (p. 77). Presented as "beyond chaos," the desert defies not only habitation but also understanding, thereby questioning the goal of human endeavors. Viewed by Patrick as beyond signification, the desert conveys his recurrent feeling of impasse, manifesting itself in his thoughts about the ultimate futility of actions undertaken by all people.

The image of the desert as ahistorical emptiness, which Patrick builds in his narrative, is contested in the central event in the novel, namely the political rally following the burial of Andrew Lovell's ashes. Lovell, who is murdered in the days preceding the elections, was a lawyer and anti-

apartheid activist. Before joining SWAPO, he had been imprisoned by the South African authorities during the State of Emergency. The decision to bury part of his ashes in the desert – instead of scattering them there, as was Lovell's wish – belongs to Godfrey, whose intention is to inter his remains there as a "symbolic gesture" (p. 123). The action of digging the grave is presented in terms of a reversal of roles, as a result of which Patrick becomes a worker who toils under the supervision of Godfrey, described as a "feudal overlord," "watching me, hands on hips" (p. 123). Despite this striking comparison, which presents Patrick in the position of subjection to Godfrey, their relationship is not based on force and coercion but rather on friendship and cooperation.

Patrick does not fully understand the symbolic dimension of Lovell's memorial service, as intended by Godfrey, describing their joint effort to dig a grave for Lovell's ashes as "our bizarre activity in the sand" (p. 123). Nevertheless, this confusion regarding the ultimate purpose of their actions does not decrease his involvement. On the contrary, he is committed to the task because he feels drawn to Godfrey in what seems a combination of physical attraction and fascination with his politically focused life. It can be argued that Patrick's detachment from his family background and from his identity as a white South African allows him to be drawn into Godfrey's orbit and become – to use his earlier words – "a background detail to his life" (p. 118). Remaining in the background, he is nevertheless not passive; instead, he takes initiative by showing involvement in the political actions organized by Godfrey, such as distributing pamphlets about Lovell's life and helping to organize Lovell's memorial service. Describing the action of digging Lovell's grave as "some kind of perverse political lesson he was teaching" (p. 124), Patrick allows himself to be involved in an activity that he fails to fully grasp. There is a vague sense that this unusual activity may be a preparation for what is to come. This idea is conveyed in Godfrey's grim prophecy that Patrick will "dig a lot more [graves] in [his] life" (p. 123).

In Patrick's description of the political rally following Lovell's memorial service, Galgut evokes and problematizes the context of mourning and remembrance connected with both religious and secular forms of burial. Andrew Lovell is commemorated as his ashes are interred in the desert, but it is unlikely that this place will ever constitute a focal point around which any future ceremonies will be held. Consequently, the event in which Patrick and his mother participate at a distance is singular both in the sense of being out of context and of happening once, never to be repeated. This 'out-of-context' quality of the event is emphasized in the description of the place, as observed by Patrick and his mother from a dune. The colours of the desert, following the setting of the sun, are described as "perfect": "The sky was a molten mess of reds and blues and pinks. Down at the bottom of the dune the shadows were complete. But a generator roared somewhere, and floodlights stuttered into life; in a moment we were looking down into a bowl of blue light" (p. 125). The detached and self-absorbed contemplation of the environment is disrupted

as the attention of the onlookers is directed at the ceremony that is about to unfold. This disruption can also be explored in the context of the symbolically ambivalent act of interring Lovell's ashes. As we saw, Patrick's perception of the desert is that of nullity and erasure. The burial of Lovell's ashes plays into this conception in the sense that the ashes do indeed point to the end of his life and his political activities, but the ceremony is described in terms that can be associated not with the stillness of the desert but with its vitality. Patrick writes about the atmosphere: "It was angry and vital and fervent at the same time" (p. 126). The desert becomes a site for an event that cannot be accommodated in the symbolic context of this entropic landscape[5] insofar as it points to different meanings, created spontaneously and in a communal way. This becomes visible during the speech of an unnamed cleric, in which all references to the desert are erased, and what remains is the event of the memorial ceremony and political rally. Patrick's reaction is to seek entrance into this crowd and, in this way, overcome the conflict between his guilt, entrenching him in his identity as a white South African, and his desire for self-renewal through political actions.

Patrick's life is shaped by a tension between the two distinct selves, one of which is a residue of his upbringing and social conditioning, while the other embodies a vehement rejection of his past. This profound inner tension is powerfully represented in a passage that follows Lovell's memorial service. Torn between his close identification with Lovell and the guilt connected with his time in the army, Patrick writes: "It was as if there were two selves at war in me, two different people with a past and a mind that had nothing to do with mine" (p. 127). This internal division manifests itself in an episode that follows, in which Patrick, accompanied by Ellen and Godfrey, watches the political rally from a nearby dune. Freedom songs performed by the crowd and hummed by Godfrey evoke a sense of solidarity and purposefulness, making Patrick reflect on what he never fully experienced in his life: "For a second I saw how things could be: part of a mass, of a singing congregation, the family to which I'd never belonged" (pp. 127-128). The acute and painful sense of detachment, which follows Patrick's short-lived fantasy of belonging, first triggers a flashback to his traumatic breakdown in the army and is then translated into existential terms as he reflects on the futility of all human action: "Years of war and ideology, all the laws and guns and blood: the whole huge tumult of history converged on a single point, and this was what it was for – for sand. Rocks and sand and air. Barren, omnipotent emptiness" (p. 128). Situated in strong contrast to the passage in which Patrick described the desert in terms of a powerful but gentle taker of life, this passage conveys not awe but despondency. In Patrick's formulation, the desert is an end because it constitutes the goal of violent political struggle, represented here as "the whole huge tumult of history" (p. 128). It is an end also because it can be seen as the inevitable conclusion of human endeavors, namely "emptiness," which Patrick associates with death and the lack of meaning.

As Patrick returns to his conception of the desert as emptiness, the earlier image of the desert as the unexpected site of political action is erased. Indeed, there is the sense that Patrick's aim is to dismiss the possibility of meaningful change by dissolving it in the wider, existential context. Rather than a token of his indifference and political passivity, this tendency to see the world in terms of decline and entropy is a testimony to his feeling of political impasse, which is experienced by Patrick in the context of his wartime trauma. After he evokes the image of the desert as emptiness, he experiences a sudden flashback to his time in the army, which, in turn, triggers a physical reaction, as he tries to escape from a non-existent threat to his life. Patrick's description of his escape shows the split between the acting and the observing self, which is characteristic of the dissociative reaction that can accompany trauma: "When I got to the bottom [of the dune] I was *somehow* on my feet again and running, running without aim or destination, on a trajectory into the night" (pp. 128-129; emphasis added). Implying that his body functions "somehow" independently of his mind, Patrick conveys his sense of entrapment in potentially endless cycles of repetition. As Kurtz writes, trauma "entails repetition, including the reliving of the traumatising event through flashbacks and nightmares" (p. 18). This point was also made by Caruth in her definition of trauma: "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (p. 11). The delayed and overwhelming nature of Patrick's traumatic recall is visible in the episode of his panic attack, which is brought to an end only after Godfrey's intervention, as he brings Patrick to the ground, thus putting an end to his improvised escape.

Alienation and "other kinds of exile"

Patrick's sense of political impasse, made more acute by his wartime trauma, manifests itself in his conversation with Ellen. Following the episode of his breakdown in the desert, he once again reflects on his alienation, remembering an earlier conversation with Godfrey, in which he accused white people of being egoistic and "neurotic" (Galgut, 2015, p. 117). Godfrey's diagnosis is, in Patrick's view, also accurate in the context of his mother, who, like him, is unable to establish a meaningful connection with others. This pessimistic reflection is a reaction to Ellen's decision to part ways with Godfrey, which Patrick considers a mistake. Reflecting on Ellen's enthusiastic but vacuous attempts at creating a sense of belonging through political action and personal relationships, Patrick refers to her "strivings" as "glamorous" but "hollow" (p. 133). He then adds: "We were a perfect pair, and we belonged, really, to each other" (p. 133). It is at this point that the following exchange takes place between Patrick and Ellen:

> I said, 'I don't want him to be right about us.'
> 'What are you talking about?'
> 'There's no future for us,' I said. 'We're the past.
> We're finished.' (p. 133)

When considered in the context of his earlier reflection on their failed attempts to connect with others, Patrick's blunt statement about being "finished" (p. 133) can be read as a pessimistic prognosis about his own and Ellen's inability to meaningfully connect with others. Another, more positive interpretation is to view Patrick's assertion as a decisive parting of ways with his mother. Having imagined them as "a perfect pair" (p. 133), Patrick decisively distances himself from his mother and communicates this decision to her. When interpreted in this way, the episode is crucial insofar as it shows Patrick breaking out of his personal impasse and finding in his negative emotions of frustration and dependency a sense of agency that enables him to imagine a life away from his family. This interpretation is partly confirmed in a later scene, in which Godfrey, in a one-to-one conversation with Patrick, tells him: "I'll be seeing you" (Galgut, 2015, p. 137). He then adds in a tone that straddles the border between speculation and affirmation: "You'll come up here to live, maybe. You'll live here in exile, till South Africa is also free" (p. 137). Patrick's cryptic response to Godfrey's speculation about his future is that "there are other kinds of exile" (p. 137).

Patrick's comment on "other kinds of exile" has been interpreted by Michiel Heyns as a token of his inner conflict, resulting from his rejection of masculinist culture on the one hand and the forced suppression of his sexual identity on the other.[6] Heyns's interpretation is justified considering what Galgut describes earlier in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, specifically the confluence of masculinism, homophobia, and racism in the passages that concentrate on Patrick's service in the army. Nonetheless, a different understanding of exile is also possible, which puts more emphasis on the enabling dimension of Patrick's detached stance. This approach is best described in the context of the novel's last chapter, when – after the parting with Godfrey – Patrick joins his mother and her new companion, Dirk Blaauw, in their journey back to South Africa. As Blaauw praises Ellen's decision to give up her recently adopted vegetarianism, he argues that eating meat is true to the nature of man as a "hunter" and "killer" (p. 140). This is followed by Blaauw's suggestion that Ellen and Patrick visit him on his farm – an invitation that is accepted enthusiastically by Ellen and reluctantly by Patrick. Blaauw's mention of pigs as one of the animals that he keeps on his farm triggers associations with his grandparents' farm. The important difference here is that while in the passage discussed at the beginning of this article, Patrick's stance of detachment, however emotionally intense, is not translated into action, at the end of the novel, he reiterates his decision to move out of the family home. His assertiveness may well be rooted in the realization that Ellen's

attraction to Blaauw is a regression to an attitude which, despite its putative tolerance and non-racialism,[7] has been built on the patriarchal and racist values embodied by his grandparents. Patrick's insistence that he can manage on his own and without the help of his mother can be viewed as an expression of his determination, which may seem surprising in the light of his previous submissiveness and passivity, but it is, in fact, a logical consequence of his detached stance, consistent throughout the novel. The reference to the "strangulated gaiety" (p. 141) with which Ellen responds to Patrick's decision implies that the son-mother dependence may have come to an end, and it is Ellen who becomes apprehensive at the prospect of their parting.

Detachment and the Productivity of Negative Emotions

In an interview by Harvey, Damon Galgut mentions in passing that in the last years of high school and during his university years, which followed his two-year service in the army, his thinking underwent a change insofar as "some kind of political conscience and awareness came to the full with me." As he adds, it was during his studies that he took part in anti-apartheid marches and even recalls being attacked by the police, concluding this part of the interview with the following observation: "I think by my early 20s, I was quite aware of the inverted world that I belonged to." The detachment with which Damon Galgut describes "the inverted world" of the late apartheid is visible in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, which he published at the age of twenty-eight. The most visible proof of this detachment is Patrick's conscious and deliberate rejection of identity based on race. This becomes especially visible in Patrick's reaction to the words of a white man who has come to Namibia to support white minority rule: "'It is hopeless, but I have come back to vote,' he hissed, 'for us. For *us*'" (Galgut, 2015, p. 80). Patrick's reaction is a short answer: "Not us, […] not me" (p. 80), after which he runs away from "that terrible us" (p. 80). Paul Mason emphasizes Patrick's passionate rejection of white identity, as defined by the German man, adding the following comment: "knowledge of the *us* that unhinges him makes it possible for him to create and affirm an oppositional *I* he feels to be authentic" (p. 77). While Patrick's "oppositional *I*" is authentic and consistent throughout the novel, it also grows in emotional intensity in the course of his stay in Namibia. Indeed, Patrick's willingness to participate in Godfrey's political campaigning and the subsequent decision to move out of the family home should be viewed in the context of his growing detachment with respect to the white identity as represented by his grandparents, as well as his mother and Dirk Blaauw.

What is perhaps less visible in Galgut's novel is that Patrick's stance of detachment is also displayed with respect to those protagonists who are involved in political activities, including Godfrey and Andrew Lovell. This detachment need not be interpreted solely in terms of Patrick's

inability to connect with others but as a personal and political stance that he is trying to negotiate in times of transition. Indeed, by the end of Galgut's novel, there is a strong sense that important changes are about to take place both in the state of the country and in Patrick's personal life. While there is too little evidence that Patrick's reflection on "other kinds of exile" (p. 137) can be viewed as a permanent change in his thinking about himself and others, there is the sense that, despite the frustrating sense of suspension he describes at the end of the novel, it may be the beginning of a fruitful process of personal and political evolution. It is in this sense that Galgut's novel may, in the words of van der Vlies, "serve as archive for hope that might yet be reactivated" (p. 147). Hope in Galgut's novel lies in what Wehrs, Wentworth and Vernay have called "the productivity of negative emotions." Those negative emotions ultimately lead to Patrick's decision to distance himself from the stance of superficial liberalism represented by his mother and the thinly masked racism embodied by Dirk Blauuw. In short, the hope conveyed in Galgut's novel is in detachment, despite the fact that –at this point in Patrick's life– this stance brings neither comfort nor reassurance.

Notes

1. Gordimer delivered her lecture "Living in the Interregnum" on 14 October 1982, as the William James Lecture at the New York Institute of the Humanities. The lecture was first published one year later in *The New York Review of Books* and later reprinted in Clingman's 1989 collection *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*.

2. Derealization is defined as "persistent or recurrent experiences of unreality of surroundings (e.g., the world around the individual is experienced as unreal, dreamlike, distant, or distorted)" [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edn. (DSM-5), 2013, p. 274].

3. Depersonalization is understood as "persistent or recurrent experiences of feeling detached from, and as if one were an outside observer of, one's mental processes or body" (ibid. p. 274)

4. According to Tynan (2020), this fascination with the desert has its roots in the Romantic period: "Western subjectivity, to be sure, often sees in the desert an image of its own exhaustion or ruin, and this is why literature from the Romantics onward has often sought out such landscapes as places where death and finitude are confronted" (p. 3).

5. This perception, as Tynan (2020) writes, is deeply rooted in Western culture: "[T]he entropic landscape provides us with a conceptual category for thinking about how the desert becomes a figure for exhaustion and depletion. In modernist and postmodernist culture, we repeatedly find the

desert being used to articulate the sense of an energetic zero point" (pp. 25-26).

6. Heyns (1998) writes: "Distancing himself from what he regards as the man's world, Patrick, thus, has to disown also gay desire, which is after all centred on the male. His exile is as much from his own nature as from the man's world" (p. 117).

7. Blaauw's thinly masked racism is evident when he first claims not to be a racist and then claims – in reference to Godfrey – that "some people are kaffirs. And that was a kaffir back there" (Galgut, 2015, p. 140).

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