

## Post-Apartheid Johannesburg and Global Mobility in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

Emma Hunt

In *Global Cities*, Anthony D. King contends that colonies were granted independence only when the postcolonial city had been globalized. In this way, colonialism was succeeded by a global economy as hierarchies between races became subordinate to new hierarchies between rich and poor, between the West and the developing world. Colonial planning anticipated the structure of the global city, but the global city is also a different kind of space. According to Saskia Sassen, the colonial city concentrated power in a single site, while the global city is a highly organized “network of strategic sites,” economic, technological, and cultural, that transcends national boundaries (*Global City* 348). More importantly, the global city has become the key site for new power relations produced by globalization.

Johannesburg, a creation of colonial resource extraction, is South Africa's richest and largest city. Urban policy developed in 2002 aspires to “world-class” status for the city by 2030 and ensures that the inequality endemic to Western capitalist cities will be replicated in South Africa on an even larger scale. This blueprint for the city does not envisage a developing city with links to other African cities, but a replication of London or New York without these cities' poor. Johannesburg's globalized identity was affirmed by its winning the 2010 Soccer World Cup, preparation for which has threatened the recent emergence of hybridized spaces, as the city moves forward with its multi-million dollar plan to make the city clean and safe for international spectators. In the country as a whole, President Thabo Mbeki's neo-liberalism, according to which the global economy takes priority over the basic needs of South Africans, has resulted in a disparity between those who work in the formal sector, especially in large

corporations, and those who work in the informal sector or who are unemployed. Still, in spite of an urban and national policy that courts global markets, and in spite of the proliferation of exclusive, homogenized spaces, we cannot view Johannesburg as a city where globalization has simply been substituted for apartheid. The city has also seen a conflation of space as people move from the black townships into formerly white areas. Rural migrants and immigrants from the rest of Africa cannot compete with multinational corporations for control of the city. Yet the city has been altered as much by street culture, by Ethiopian and Senegalese immigrants, by hawkers, beggars, and buskers as by new forms of surveillance, by gated communities that emulate Tuscan villages and by air-conditioned shopping malls and casinos. The result is a city of paradoxical spaces, where the formal and the informal coexist in a proximity that would have dismayed apartheid urban planners.

This article looks at two texts that have responded to Johannesburg's post-apartheid transformation, Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* (2002) and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* (2001). Both texts look at the expansion of the city beyond the borders of the nation: while the Johannesburg of earlier fictional representations stood in for the apartheid nation, here Johannesburg becomes a metonym for an increasingly globalized world. Nevertheless, Gordimer and Mpe articulate two opposing views of globalization: as an unequal exchange of migrant labour and as an equal exchange of culture. Where Gordimer warns that the city has become increasingly divided as it joins a network of global cities linked by capital, Mpe's novella celebrates the city as the site of an ideal of cultural globalization. Gordimer critiques the flows that define the current era of globalization, and draws attention to the way in which class—often concomitant with race, ethnicity, and citizenship—has a bearing on our relative mobility and access to resources. She interrogates the power relations in the new conflation of spaces, and argues that we need to recover a sense of specific place. For Mpe, the new mobility between Johannesburg and other spaces enabled by the opening of South Africa's borders after apartheid can be harnessed to build an inclusive city and a heterogeneous society that reject the boundaries of race, eth-

nicity, and nationality set up by apartheid in favour of a broad vision of allegiance based on a common humanity.

### I. *The Pickup*

The Johannesburg of Gordimer's novel is easily recognizable, although never named. *The Pickup* shows racial segregation slowly breaking down as the poor flood into the inner city and as immigrants from Nigeria, the Congo, and Senegal ply trade in sex, drugs, and tourist souvenirs in a city where being black no longer means being excluded from public space. Nevertheless, the global city that replaces the apartheid city is also a divided space with huge disparities in wealth and occupation. While Gordimer's apartheid-era fiction looked at the stark demarcation of "white" Johannesburg from the black townships, *The Pickup* shows a world divided instead between people able to move freely between countries and those who enter them illegally to work in menial jobs at the edges of global cities. The city in *The Pickup* represents the globalizing city: with its "expanding international financial opportunities" and glass skyscrapers, the Johannesburg of *The Pickup* could be any global city, detached from its surroundings and linked to other global cities by electronic communications and world markets (41).

Sassen argues that the global city phenomenon has resulted in a delinking of identities from traditional sources like those of the nation or village, but that there are no new systems of identity formation to put in their place (*Globalization* xxxii). She maintains that, in contrast to the village, "the global city is a strategic site for disempowered actors because it enables them to gain presence, to emerge as subjects, even when they do not gain direct power" (xxi). Gordimer addresses this problem of identity in the global city, where increasing deterritorialization means that there is no place to ground a sense of self. In *The Pickup* the quest for belonging finally demands a return to the concept of place, but not necessarily to the space defined by the nation's borders. Gordimer sets up a number of alternative spaces in opposition to the city, and the strategies by which her protagonists locate the self are examined through these spaces—sexual, familial, spiritual, and regional. *The Pickup* refutes Sassen's optimistic reading of the role of immigrants, women, and mi-

nority citizens in the global city, showing instead a new apartheid between Westernized and non-Westernized countries and between global cities and their surrounding regions.

In *The Pickup*, Abdu, an illegal immigrant from an unnamed Arab country, explains this hierarchy:

[The] world is their world. They own it. It's run by computers, telecommunications . . . the West, they own ninety-one percent of these. Where you come from—the whole Africa has only two percent, and it's your country [South Africa] has the most of that. This one?—not enough to make one figure! Desert. If you want to be in the world, to get what you call the Christian world to let you in is the only way. (160)

Abdu (Arabic for “servant”) will go to any country that will let him in, in order to escape the religious conservatism and political corruption that defines his own country. Citizenship means little to Abdu, for he is unable to identify with his own country, whose boundaries in the desert were demarcated by colonial powers. He measures success by the standards of the West and is determined eventually to go to America, where he will build his way up in computers. In South Africa, Abdu meets Julie Summers—young, privileged and white—when she takes her car to the workshop where he works illegally as a motor mechanic. This is the “pickup” of the title, but what remains unclear throughout the novel is who picks up whom and the pair’s respective motivations. Abdu sees Julie alternately as a burden on himself and his family, and as a way to emigrate legally to the West. He is unprepared for Julie’s decision to move with him back to his country when he is discovered by the immigration authorities and required to leave South Africa. When the couple go to Abdu’s desert country, Gordimer sets up this space as a counter to the deterritorialization of the global city, as Julie finds her sense of belonging within the spaces of Abdu’s family and the surrounding desert.

In the opening scene of the novel, Gordimer figures the city as a predatory place driven by speed and movement, rather than stillness and stasis, like the desert she introduces later. When Julie’s car breaks down, the “traffic mob” that forms behind her is described as “clustered preda-

tors round a kill” (3); Julie must battle against the mostly male drivers and the unemployed men directing cars into parking bays. The distressing contact between Julie in her car and the masses around her, gesticulating and cursing, demonstrate the relationship between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in the city, where the “haves” drive through the poorer parts of the city as quickly and unseeingly as they can. Impediments to rapid, free movement are positive, for Julie meets her “other,” Abdu, after breaking down in the city. Richard Sennett argues that the new speed with which the body moves through the city results in a lack of contact with others, with the “other,” and leads to passivity and blindness (23). The global city, in particular, with highways that connect gated communities with malls and office complexes, ensures that there is a limited awareness of the disadvantaged upon whose services the advantaged rely.

When the novel opens, Julie, like Abdu, has taken on a new identity by renouncing the life of the “The Suburbs,” represented by her wealthy and well-connected father and his new wife. Julie has instead a group of bohemian friends, known as the Table, which meets at the EL-AY Café in an area of the city (most likely Yeoville in Johannesburg) that has filled with black immigrants. The café is clearly a reference to that paradigmatic global city of which Edward Soja has claimed “It all comes together in Los Angeles” (190). It also almost certainly has its real counterpart in Yeoville’s Times Square Café, itself a reference to a famous global city. The EL-AY Café’s setting is a signal to the reader that post-apartheid Johannesburg is becoming an African city at the same time as it is being incorporated into a global network. As in Los Angeles, however, xenophobia and perceived, or real, crime is pushing the former white residents—described as aged Hippies and left-leaning Jews—into the more exclusive suburbs, as the old ethnically defined spaces of the apartheid era are partially maintained. While Julie sees her friends as being in opposition to everything that her father and The Suburbs stand for, they too are the product of globalization, for the members of the Table have lost their specific affiliations to their own cultures: a black member of the group only retains those cultural traits that could belong anywhere in the world. Another member has converted to Buddhism, and while

this might suggest that globalization is not simply the imposition of Western culture on the rest of the world and that culture moves in two directions, the members of the Table are portrayed so mockingly by the narrator that this adoption of other cultures is seen as superficial and self-serving. Julie contributes to the local consumption of global culture in her job as public relations officer for an entertainment company that flies in international stars for concerts. In the global city, Gordimer suggests, people detach themselves from local discourse and from each other, even as they increasingly participate in global cultural flows.

The Table, an example of a new kind of community detached from family and from place, is finally unsupportive of its members. Ironically, in the same way that Abdu later needs recommendations from Julie's step-father in order to enter America, Julie is described as "sponsoring" Abdu's admission to the Table, which is as exclusive as any other space (22). Although Abdu is accepted through his relationship with Julie, he rejects the Table's tolerant bohemianism, observing that the patrons at the EL-AY Café are "disgusting" and Julie's friends ineffectual (22). It is to the people that Julie has cut ties with—her father's lawyer friend and her mother in California—that Abdu looks for help when the immigration authorities catch up with him. Julie reluctantly takes Abdu to her father's house in The Suburbs, and is distressed by Abdu's admiration for the people he meets there. The luncheon party sets up the distinction between those able to navigate the world of global capital and the disadvantaged immigrant, although Julie observes that each guest, except the black lawyer, is there because of the earlier colonization of the country by Europeans. While the presence at the luncheon of a black man and an Arab immigrant may suggest that the global city is, as Sassen argues, a "site for new claims" (*Globalization* xx), it is a site that is clearly based on enormous inequality in terms of wealth and knowledge.

Julie observes that people in the Summers' circle "relocate" rather than emigrate; people who take their servants and pets with them when they move to Australia to escape the "crime and grime" of Johannesburg are not subject to the constraints that govern Abdu's life—the constraints of being nameless and of having to do manual labour without workers' rights. They, like Julie, are "the right kind of foreigner. One who be-

longed to the internationally acceptable category of origin" (140). Julie sees that the black lawyer she appeals to on Abdu's behalf "expects her to choose one of her own kind—the kind he belongs to" (80): he has been incorporated into the civilized, still largely white, world of corporate respectability. In contrast, the majority of the immigrants in the city are of the "wrong" kind, and Johannesburg's international significance is of little consequence to them. They are not part of organized labour; they are the 'truly disadvantaged,' unemployed or working in jobs that provide only subsistence. They move within the "unsuitable" spaces of the decaying inner city, or the townships on the periphery, to which illegal immigrants are especially drawn. These spaces are described as a "labyrinth to get lost in" (86), rather than a global network into which one is plugged. The illegal immigrant is forced to live as in disguise and without a name, and even the *legal* migrant is "a stray dog, a rat finding its hole as a way to get in" (227). While Julie is free to choose an identity, Abdu is only assigned vague racial epithets: he is alternately "some sort of black" (40–41), "some sort of Arab" (44), and "the young foreigner (coloured, or whatever he is)" (46).

The lack of specificity in the global city eradicates topographical and cultural markers in favour of a uniform, largely Western transnational landscape: the global city is thus not a "place" that one can mark on a map. The questions of identity that emerge from the new flows of a globalized world are also spatial questions. Julie wonders, "Where to locate the self?" Julie at first locates herself in sex with Abdu: she describes it as "the kind of love-making that is another country, a country of its own, not yours or mine" (96). It is in order to maintain this sense of location that Julie *relocates* with Abdu, now re-named Ibrahim ibn Musa, to his desert country. For Julie, whose journey is the opposite of that of white South Africans who emigrate to Australia, Canada, and Britain, traveling to this impoverished country gives her a consciousness of self that makes her seem "strangely new to herself" (117). Here she has found "home." While Ibrahim argues that there is nothing for her in his country, in Johannesburg there is nothing for Julie without Ibrahim, for she has long transferred her affiliation from the members of the Table to her lover.

Julie finds her sense of place and belonging finally not with Ibrahim, who is increasingly aligned with global capital, but with the female members of his family and in brief trips to the desert at the edge of the town. While Johannesburg and the Middle Eastern country are left unnamed, because they could be *any* global city, *any* developing country, the desert is both archetypal and a “place,” with a geographical locality and a strong identity. Nevertheless, the desert is also left unnamed, for Julie is careful to distinguish herself from colonial travelers like T. E. Lawrence and Hester Stanhope, penetrating—and naming—an apparently uninhabited interior. Julie does not want to map the desert or uncover its meaning. Julie’s desert is a place without boundaries and borders, a place “undisturbed by growth, even while you lift and place your feet it obliterates where they fall and covers their interruption as they pass on” (168). Like the sea, which Gordimer describes as having “its surface free, with crossings that have no frontier” (84), it is not possible either to progress or to create divisions in the desert; wealth or citizenship are irrelevant here. While the global city is also a frontierless space—Gordimer refers after all to the experience of cultural globalization as “living on a frontierless land”—it is above all a capitalist space, representing power and excess (“Living” 207).

For Ibrahim the desert is “desolation” (34) and “the denial of everything he yearns for” (262); he shuns it, spending his time traveling to the Arab city to organize his U.S. immigration papers. Julie thinks of the desert as a separate country and as a place that is life-affirming in its aridity; it is emigration to yet another global city that takes the spirit away as the migrant disappears into yet “another identity” (91). Although it would be crude to posit a distinction between the city (embodied in Ibrahim) as male, rational, and acquisitive and the desert (with its single Bedouin inhabitant) as female, intuitive, and eternal, Gordimer does suggest these binaries in the novel. Gordimer sets up the desert in opposition to the global city: the desert is contrary to accumulation, ambition or ego, and represents instead scarcity and a corresponding spiritual purity. A kind of heterotopia, the desert is an alternative way of ordering that comments on the order of the global city.



The importance of physical contact in Gordimer's fiction is clear, but she has also linked lack of contact more explicitly to globalization; Gordimer asks, ". . . what about this magical term globalization—are we going to know more by remote control, so to speak, and less and less about ourselves and our immediate companions within touch?" ("After Apartheid"). In the global city, people lose a sense of connection to others even as they extend their milieu through links to people across the globe. Hence, Gordimer has Julie return from her solitary forays into the desert to the closeness of Ibrahim's family, where she and Ibrahim's sisters share their knowledge with each other in a form of cultural globalization that moves in more than one direction. Julie finds a dignity and warmth in her in-law's house, "that was not large enough yet accommodated each in his and her place, home" (242). She notes the contrast between her former life in the city and her new life, which turns on a Marxist integration of self and work: "she had never worked like this before, without reservations of self, always merely been trying out this and that, always conscious that she could move on, any time, to something else, not expecting satisfaction, looking on at herself, half-amusedly, as an ant scurrying god knows where" (195). She stays in Ibrahim's hometown not only because she has found a home here, but because she refuses to see Ibrahim degraded in America, where he would lose his self-respect without necessarily gaining much material reward. Nevertheless, Ibrahim's alternative is to stay in his own country and become junior partner in his uncle's auto-mechanic business, which through pay-offs has the contract to fix all government vehicles. In fact, unless he undertakes menial work as his brothers do, or crosses the border to work on the oil fields, Ibrahim must participate in an economy that is based on nepotism and bribery.

The spaces to which Julie is drawn are gendered spaces—those of the family and the desert, whose only inhabitant is a silent Bedouin woman. Gordimer implicitly critiques the idea that all nomads or migrants are oppositional and resistant, for the Bedouin woman is the opposite of the migrant to the global city, as the desert is the opposite of the global city. In contrast to the spaces of the family and the desert, Ibrahim sees the West as a liberated space for women and thinks that Julie will feel

oppressed in his country, where women must do as men tell them. Yet, apart from Julie, Gordimer does not include any strong female characters in the first half of the novel: women in the global city are secretaries or wives of powerful men and acquire fulfillment by consuming rather than creating. The pre-capitalist world Julie finds in Ibrahim's town is very different, with Ibrahim's mother clearly the dominant figure in a household in which women undertake vital and rewarding tasks. Even the veil the women advise Julie to wear when she leaves the house becomes a practical resource against the heat and dust rather than the symbol of oppression it is most often described as in the Western media. It is true that the enclosed space of the Arab home is in opposition to the freedom of movement that enabled Julie to take up Abdu as a lover and inhabit a liberating sexual space. However, when Ibrahim receives his visas for America, Julie realizes she must give up the metaphorical country of the body in order to retain her greater sense of belonging within her adopted family.

*The Pickup* is unusual among Gordimer's works for the fact that its protagonist does not return to South Africa at the end of the novel. After apartheid, Gordimer can create a protagonist who leaves South Africa, possibly forever, because the global discrepancy between rich and poor has become Gordimer's central concern. Gordimer's treatment of space has always been ideological, and in *The Pickup*, Julie must demonstrate to Ibrahim that there is no home to be had as a migrant worker in the West, that in spite of the corruption and aridity of his homeland, it is *home*. With Johannesburg once again turning outside its borders in its attempt to be part of the global world, *The Pickup* looks instead to the Middle East, forging links across developing countries rather than with the North. Gordimer opposes the glass and steel of the corporate city by traveling to and describing the margins of this city: the countries of migrant workers on whom the city depends on for its survival. As in her earlier work, where she describes the townships that lie beyond white Johannesburg, her aim is to describe the places that lie beyond what Sassen calls the "urban glamour zone" (xxxiii).

## II. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

Mpe's novella is set in Hillbrow, a dense area of Johannesburg that during apartheid was a haven for immigrants from Europe and today is the vibrant but dangerous destination of largely illegal immigrants from Lagos, Dakar, and Kinshasa. Hillbrow has thus always been relatively cosmopolitan, a place of flow, of entry and exit, and of multiple, intersecting stories. The convoluted trajectory of the narrative of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* echoes multiple flows in the text: the flow of gossip between the city and the village as stories are told, altered, and refuted by others; the relay of news on television and radio; the publishing of books; the spread of disease; and, most importantly, the movement of the characters. The characters in Mpe's novel are highly mobile, as they move from rural Tiragalong in the Northern Province of South Africa to Hillbrow and to Oxford, England; after they die (and the characters *all* die), they surreally end up in heaven, where they sit down together to watch events on earth—relayed to them as episodes of soap opera on television. The highly unusual narrative is an address to two characters that are already dead or about to die; the narrator retells the stories of their lives on earth to the characters themselves. The ironically named Refentše (Sepedi for “we have won”) commits suicide after discovering his girlfriend with another man, and Refilwe, his erstwhile flame, moves back to Tiragalong at the end of the novella to die of AIDS. The oddly disembodied narrator combines a deeply personal, elegiac, but also ironic tone with a far-reaching eye that incorporates earth and heaven, the past and the future. The narrator, following the movements of the characters as though from above, builds up a picture of a globalized Hillbrow, with its connections to rural Tiragalong, to the rest of Africa, and to England. In fact, Mpe highlights the dangers of nationalism in the very first scene, as violence breaks out after the South African soccer team loses to France in the 1998 World Cup.

The first chapter is called “Hillbrow: The Map,” and the novella thus asserts its cartographic aim. The map the chapter charts follows the walk Refentše takes from his apartment to the University, where he is to start school. The novella is a radical rewriting of the classic “Jim Comes to Jo’burg” story, which follows the path of the rural naïf in the big city.

Unlike most examples of this genre, Mpe's aim is overturn the binary of bad city and wholesome village. Critics of Mpe's novel focus almost exclusively on Mpe's dark representation of Hillbrow, reading it solely as a fragmented space of poverty, violence, and dysfunction that emerges directly from apartheid and global inequalities. Critics such as Irikidzayi Manase focus almost exclusively "on the depiction of the restlessness and social dislocation" Mpe's characters feel, yet it is wrong to focus exclusively on the negative representation of Hillbrow, seeing the area solely as a fragmented space of poverty, violence, and dysfunction that emerges directly from apartheid and global inequalities (95). The text seeks to intertwine this dark urban narrative with one in which the city is also a cosmopolitan space of connection and opportunity—and is certainly no more violent than the rural areas from which most of the city-dwellers have come. Refentše, like many new arrivals in the city, had an image of Johannesburg before he arrived, formed from the stories of other migrants to the city, by the media, and by the people of Tiragalong. For people in the village, we read, "The lure of the monster was . . . hard to resist; Hillbrow has swallowed a number of the children of Tiragalong, who thought that the City of Gold was full of career opportunities for them" (3). Refentše also desires, however, to witness this Babylon for himself and come up with his own story. The Hillbrow that he confronts is violent, but he is also concerned to show that violence does not reside solely in the city.

As he walks the city, he notes the disjunction between what he has heard and what he sees on the streets, between the official map of the city and the unofficial map. We read that Hillbrow is "that locality of just over one square kilometre, according to official records; and according to its inhabitants, at least twice as big and teeming with countless people" (1). The impossibility of mapping Johannesburg accurately is due to the huge influx of people to the city, which means that it is changing too quickly to capture on official records. Nor does Refentše know where Hillbrow officially ends and the adjacent suburb of Braamfontein begins. First, the experience of walking in the streets doesn't correlate to the official map of the city, and secondly, people have overflowed the old rigid boundaries between neighborhoods created by apartheid planners.

The disjunction between the official version and the actual experience of the city relates to a central concern in Mpe's novella: the truth-value of different narratives, oral or textual. In contrast to Ivan Vladislavić's Hillbrow novel, *The Restless Supermarket*, in which the protagonist attempts to order the city through writing, in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* the *text* does not so much create the city as do oral versions of stories that we read in the text. Mpe uses the metaphor of storytelling to create a narrative city. Multiple stories run together at the end of the first chapter, where in a two-page sentence with no punctuation Mpe lists the urban myths that circulate around Hillbrow. Foreign Africans, called by the derogatory name *Makwerekwere*, are not only held responsible for taking jobs, but are also responsible for most urban ills, such as AIDS, violence, prostitution, drugs, and urban decay. We read that they were "stretching their legs and spreading like pumpkin plants filling every corner of our city and turning each patch into a Hillbrow coming to take our jobs in the new democratic rainbowism of African Renaissance that threatened the future of the locals," and the intensely rural image of their vinelike spreading over the city echoes apartheid fears of the white spaces of the city being overrun with black people (26–27). Yet this new prejudice is a response to democracy, which opened the borders of the country to foreigners seeking employment or refuge, the "Rainbow Nation" that South Africa was supposed to become after apartheid ended extends to South Africans only. The city thus continues to be a contested space where people battle for scarce resources and spread stories about a demonized other.

Mpe was intensely interested in Johannesburg and in the nature of cities generally. In a scholarly article on the literary representation of the city, he engages with many of the same themes and questions that preoccupy Refentše in the novel: Mpe asks why more fiction has not emerged from Hillbrow, and laments the stereotyping of Hillbrow's residents that is a result of bad press and gossip ("Our Missing Store"). He stresses the importance of literature in a changing society and suggests that the lack of critical engagement with spaces like Hillbrow has in fact led to the prejudice against black foreigners. In spite of the novella's violence, Mpe self-consciously writes a better post-apartheid city into existence:

his fictional city teaches other characters and the reader how to read Johannesburg as a more inclusive space. Mpe draws on liquid metaphors that suggest the way stories circulate and come to make up the narrative of the city. Hillbrow is described as a place “of milk and honey and bile, all brewing in the depths of our collective consciousness” (41). The stories the jealous Refilwe tells after Refentše’s death are ironically described as “a generous flow of milk” as she blackens Refentše’s name in the already prejudiced eyes of his rural kinsmen by relaying that he had been bewitched by a “loose-thighed Hillbrowan” (43). We read that the village’s “bias against Hillbrow women enabled the ink of [Refilwe’s] tongue to be galling” (44). The potential of damaging gossip to become accepted fact, to become fixed, is evident in the reference to Refilwe’s tongue as more indelible “ink.” Hillbrow is itself blackened by being talked about by migrants and by the media that spreads stories of its crime and grime. This negative city construction has to be balanced by more inclusive stories like the story Refentše writes about an AIDS victim, who herself writes “a novel about Hillbrow, xenophobia and AIDS and the prejudices of rural lives” (55). The metafictional nature of Mpe’s novel is a means of writing the city through storytelling and establishing the city’s links to multiple places.

Refilwe becomes increasingly open-minded after reading Refentše’s story: “it made her see herself and her own prejudices in a different light” (96). She comes to see that “Hillbrowans were not merely the tiny section of the population who were born and grew up in our Hillbrow, but people from all over the country, and other countries—people like herself, in fact—who entered our Hillbrow with all sorts of good and evil intentions” (96), and it is partly this new vision of the city as a place of migration opening out to a wider world that drives her to go to Oxford to study publishing, where her life follows the same plot as the central character in Refentše’s story. Here she forms a relationship with a Nigerian man, and they learn that they are both dying of HIV/AIDS, contracted before they met. The flows of people, culture, and consumer goods between Africa and England are evident from the moment Refilwe arrives at Heathrow; as a citizen of a more developed country, Refilwe passes through customs quickly, while she notes that travelers from less desirable parts of Africa,

like Gordimer's Abdu, are stopped and interrogated. She eats an English breakfast washed down with a South African beer: "Fortunately, global imperatives had encouraged the South African Breweries to bring to our Heathrow their own ale brand" (99). Here globalism is seen as entirely positive and is set up against the xenophobia and prejudice of Tiragalong. In Oxford, Refilwe introduces the owner of the local pub called the Jude the Obscure to a South African novel about a professional mourner, Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*. We read that "Here was Refilwe herself, bringing our *Ways of Dying*, ways of mourning, and ways of wondering to our *Jude the Obscure*" (108), and the juxtaposition of Mda's novel of the South African city and Hardy's tragedy set in an English university town is not only a cross-cultural exchange, but conflates the cultures and spaces of England and South Africa. This conflation of cultures and of physical worlds is made explicit in the novella's constant refrain: "Hillbrow in Hillbrow. Hillbrow in Cape Town. Cape Town in Hillbrow. Oxford in both. Both in Oxford. Welcome to our All . . ." (104). The repetition of the possessive "our" before nearly every place name in the text dispels prejudice by prohibiting an outsider's viewpoint and demanding that the reader identify with a multitude of places and with the people they contain; it never suggests a purely South African identity. Refilwe's larger understanding, which begins with Refentše's story and comes to incorporate a vast network of memories, places, peoples, and cultures, until it embraces the world and even heaven, mirrors the process the reader must go through as he or she reads Mpe's story. It is the city that triggers Refilwe's new, more inclusive identity, as the narrator now addresses her: "You have come to understand that you too are a Hillbrowan. An Alexandran. A Johannesburger. An Oxfordian. A Lekwerekwere, just like those you once held in such contempt" (122–23).

Mpe creates a picture of a fairly contained area in Johannesburg, but he also recovers for Hillbrow what AbdouMaliq Simone says are "the original functions of the majority of African cities—as points and organizers of entry and exit, as ports, railheads and crossroads" (186). Simone charts the "translocal networking" that occurs in the poor, "neglected" spaces of African cities and argues that economic survival in these spaces requires flexible identities that incorporate various beliefs,

myths, superstitions, and narratives, all played like cards at different times and requiring a great deal of social labour (176). Thus we read that Refentše's "first entry into Hillbrow . . . was the culmination of many converging routes" (2). These flows and connections are not necessarily the product of postmodern ideas about identity, or even the product of globalism, but emerge instead from indigenous storytelling and gossip networks. While the people of Tiragalong tell stories that denigrate other groups in order to maintain the discreteness of their own culture and to ensure that money made in the city returns to the rural family, rather than going into the pockets of "foreign" women, Mpe suggests that the same storytelling tradition can be harnessed in order to promote identification among regions and peoples. The novel's conflation of text and orality in its narrative style provides a concrete example of how African traditions can be used to bring spaces together rather than to keep them apart, as was the case during apartheid. Mpe also suggests that the movement of people between countries is neither new nor something to discourage, and he reminds xenophobic South Africans that many of the foreign Africans who flock to Johannesburg are fleeing from political violence, as South Africans themselves sought exile in neighboring countries during apartheid.

The "map" of Hillbrow that the first section of the novel traces, then, becomes much larger than the streets of Hillbrow and incorporates not only streets, but a social map of flows—of people, media, gossip, disease, cultures, and commodities. While some of these flows are entirely negative, like the stories of "crime and grime" spun by the media, some can be used to reject superstition, prejudice, and cultural hypocrisy. While Mpe advocates tolerance and a broad vision of allegiance between people that is not based on ethnicity or nationality, he does not reject the people of Tiragalong, but brings the rural into the space of the city and the world. His idealistic vision sidesteps the challenges of the global city, which tends to neglect both the regions around it and those city-dwellers who are not part of the global economy. Mpe could be accused of privileging migrancy and focusing on the few middle-class educated characters that are able to travel freely to study. The people who stay in Tiragalong, who remain at home, are shown to be parochial. Furthermore, while



he makes excuses for the behavior of the Hillbrowans, arguing that the density and degradation of the area and a corrupt police force encourage violence, Mpe does not make the same allowances for the prejudices of Tiragalong and its violence against its own people and towards foreigners. Nevertheless, Mpe suggests how a heterogeneous society might be built by using African methods of storytelling and networking. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, heaven is finally defined as an “archive” of stories on earth (124), which, depending on the content of the archive, can constitute heaven or hell; correspondingly, Mpe’s city is also an archive, and if formed by affirmative stories that embrace difference, will constitute a kind of heaven. James Donald writes that the “archive city,” the collective writings on the city, influences how we see the city. Mpe’s novel, Refentše’s short story, and the novel that the heroine of that short story writes all become part of an archive that rewrites the city as a more inclusive community.

### III. New Spaces

What we see in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* resonates with other recent South African texts that use Hillbrow as a way to build a positive and open, African city. The protagonist of K. Sello Duiker’s novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* moves from “lily-white” Cape Town to Hillbrow, where the presence of foreigners enables him to find home: “In their eyes I feel at home, I see Africa. I feel like I live in Africa when I walk out in the street and hear dark-skinned beauties rapping in Lingala or Congo or a French patois that I don’t understand” (454). In an echo of the vision of heaven in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* as an archive of stories, Tshepo has a vision of God as “a series of narratives” rather than a singular story (456). He also imagines an endless mixing of peoples and cultures, and reflects that, “[p]erhaps the future of mankind lies in each other, not in separate continents with separate people. We are still evolving as a people, our differences are merging” (456). As in Jonathan Morgan’s *Finding Mr. Madini* (1999), in which the frame narrator forms a writing group of homeless people to create a collection of stories, “All the different storylines from all the different places in Africa” come together in Johannesburg (Morgan 50).

With *The Pickup* Gordimer addresses the valid concern that in the new global system the importance of space is diminishing, but she does not necessarily advocate a return to the space of the nation-state. Belonging to the spaces that Gordimer creates does not require citizenship, but responsiveness to the specificities of place. These spaces sidestep the usual postcolonial divisions into hybrid or cosmopolitan spaces on the one hand and the unified space of the nation, on the other, and instead engage with spaces that exist on the extreme margins of the new corporate world. Mpe's novel, while not entirely optimistic about the direction of post-apartheid society with its lingering conservatism and xenophobia and its inability to deal adequately with AIDS and crime, articulates an alternative way of seeing the city that is not based on a postmodernism or globalism imposed by the West. Mpe's city is both distinctly African and open to the rest of the world, and is a space where the flows of people and stories recreate the city as a vital meeting point of cultures and texts. Neither of these novels advocates a return to the nation, then, but they guard against both nationalism and an uncritical embrace of global capitalism in their response to a city where exclusive spaces persist and where there is increasing prejudice against new "others." Both Gordimer and Mpe see the best kind of globalization as an exchange of culture, as "a circular, not a linear form . . . at once a setting forth and receiving in one continuous movement" (Gordimer, "Living" 213).

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