Paige Sweet

Marking Locality:

Inscribing Gendered Subjectivity through Kgebetli Moele’s *Untitled[[1]](#endnote-1)*

ABSTRACT:

This article approaches Kgebetli Moele’s *Untitled: A Novel* (2013) as a distinctive instance of writing locality and feminine subjectivity through literary experimentation. Drawing together insights on world literature, globalization and locality, and experimental writing in South Africa, my reading of *Untitled* demonstrates how the subject position of the main character, like the novel itself, emerges at the crossroads of different forms as they circulate among multiple localities. Analyzing how the novel experiments with narrative, form, punctuation, and subject formation in relation to African literary imaginaries, I suggest that the poetics of *Untitled* inscribe a (black) feminine subject position against dominant narrative conventions of gendered violation and within the interstices of globality and locality.

KEYWORDS: experimental literature; globalization; postcolonial novel; South African literature; gendered subjectivity; locality

Marking Locality:

Inscribing Gendered Subjectivity through Kgebetli Moele’s *Untitled*

If locality is produced through globalization, as Arjun Appadurai argues, then the processes that constitute subjectivity are mediated globally. In *Modernity at Large* Appadurai discusses the ways that convergences and divergences (articulated via the nation-state, diasporic flows, and electronic and virtual communities) produce locality as difference through the work of the imagination in local subjectivities (198). He makes a similar argument in “How Histories Make Geographies,” where he also calls for “a theory that relates the forms of circulation to the circulation of forms” (4). Although he includes literature among the cultural objects that produce locality in these ways, he does not elaborate on specific examples. An elaboration of this kind would, however, offer a productive counterpoint to more familiar models of the global and the local in paradigms of world literature. For example, Appadurai’s framework would pressure Franco Moretti’s contention that the novel is an inherently European form that adapts to “local” content in non-European locales. Here I extend Appadurai’s insights regarding the production of locality in the globalizing world to debates about world literature that have emerged in the wake of Morreti’s theoretical framework. This approach allows for a reading of Kgebetli Moele’s *Untitled: A Novel* that demonstrates how experimental fiction may challenge the view that “local” content fails to alter the “European” form of the novel. Following the way that experimentalism in form and content is worked through themes of sexual violence, I argue that the novel generates a textual (symbolic) subject position that diverges from the subjectivities produced in European modernism and the more familiar novels associated with globalization.

Touted as a new voice in South African fiction, Kgebetli Moele has attracted considerable critical attention. His “devil-may-care humour” and “gangster approach”[[2]](#endnote-2) seem to satisfy the desires of his publisher, Kwela, which came of age with the “new” South Africa in 1994 and strives “to document stories that have not yet been told.”[[3]](#endnote-3) While his first two novels featured frank narrators, they focused on subject matter familiar to South African fiction: *Room 207* (2006), features six young men who share a flat as they hustle to make a living in Hillbrow (it received several prizes and was translated into French and Italian),[[4]](#endnote-4) and *The Book of the Dead* (2009) experiments with point of view and takes up the perspective of the AIDS virus toward the end. By contrast, *Untitled: A Novel* (2013) moves away from the urban frenzy of Johannesburg to a fictional rural “location” (also known as a township[[5]](#endnote-5)), called Teyageneng. Teyageneng

bears significant resemblance to other postcolonial locales shaped in complex ways by the high-speed networks and fast-paced financial flows of the globalizing world. Notably, however, even as some scholars observe the way that the logic of globalization appears to be a reorganization of apartheid on a global scale[[6]](#endnote-6)—intensifying a demand for cheap labor that is deeply racialized and further entrenches economic divisions—it is rare to see such rural locations featured in literature. Similarly, *Untitled* proves distinctive in the experimental treatment of its subject matter. Eschewing what Louise Bethlehem has referred to as the “rhetoric of urgency” associated with black writers in South Africa, *Untitled* tests various narrative voices and styles as it explores the daily life of Mokgethi and her female friends navigating issues of sexuality and schooling, as well as a perverse intertwinement of the two as their teachers seem more interested in seduction than pedagogy.

The experimental devices in the novel negotiate the complex relationship between the reader and the main character, Mokgethi. The beginning of the novel inscribes an oblique reference to sexual violence as Mokgethi, the main character, attempts to write a poem. The meshing of poetry and prose and the unconventional use of spacing that opens the novel prepares the literary ground for how experimental self-expression will emerge in the wake of violence. In this way Mokgethi works through questions of sexuality through her textual relationships to language, law, education, and other literary imaginaries. After briefly reviewing debates on how the “global” (European) form of the novel fares in “local” (non-European) locations, I turn to *Untitled* to show how its experimentalism in form and content is recruited to write Mokgethi’s partial, fragmented, unfinished subject position.

I. Locating Reading

In ““Conjectures on World Literature,” Franco Moretti argues that literature from places peripheral to France and England demonstrates a compromise between the foreign (European) form of the novel and the local (non-European) content. This argument presupposes that the “raw material” of content never substantially affects the hard casing of its form. Moretti’s influential theory has rarely been considered in relation to experimental fiction, but it has been challenged on other grounds, especially by postcolonial thinkers. In “Provincializing English,” for example, Simon Gikandi argues that even if the novel form itself is not substantially modified, reading from the perspective of African novels shows how the novel form and the English language are provincialized. Similarly, Eileen Julien, who also draws on Appadurai to challenge the terms of the novel set forth by Moretti, shifts the focus onto how the expectations of readers in the global north influence what passes through the category of “world literature,” especially those that are termed “African novels.” She advances a theory of the “extroverted African novel” (in an essay by the same name) that resonates with Jean-François Bayart’s concept of extraversion and recalls Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s concern that “African literature” was falsely contorted to the forms of knowledge palatable to readers beyond Africa. Specifically, Julien notes how the conditions of global literary circulation select “African novels” that satisfy the desires of readers for postcolonial themes of hybridity or intertextuality. Contrary to Gikandi, who is intent on analyzing novels from the vantage point of African localities, Julien’s concern lies with how a global readership succumbs to an “ornamentalist interpretation,” reading the presence of local (indigenous) African languages in novels written in English or French as a sign of African authenticity.

While Julien’s core argument has been contested,[[7]](#endnote-7) and even as its emphasis vacillates between the text itself (e.g., its modes of extroversion relative to literary institutions) and its global reception (i.e., interpretive fields), her formulation is useful, especially coupled with Gikandi’s, as a provocation to think carefully about how one reads the novel form in relation to global and local conditions. Drawing Julien and Gikandi together enables a critical analysis of how the use of language in *Untitled* affects the constitution of Mokgethi’s subject position, as well as how the literary production of locality affects the reader. This is important because of the ambivalence *Untitled* has about its imagined reader. Indeed, one might describe it as an *introverted* novel *gone global*. Specifically, in contrast to the qualities of the extroverted African novel, several features of *Untitled* correspond to qualities that Julien associates with popular fiction that is read by locals, such as its mode of narrative address (what Gikandi refers to as provincialized English) or how it treats the everyday concerns of ordinary people. Moreover, *Untitled* is uninterested in demonstrating intertextuality with European novels or thematizing postcoloniality. Rather, it is explicitly in conversation with other African fiction, which situates Mokgethi in the crosscurrents of a locality produced through, yet largely excluded from, the circuits of globalization. The models Gikandi and Julien lay out are thus useful for analyzing how *Untitled* produces locality in relation to the global flows of literary forms.

The intertwining of locality through globalization occurs, in Appadurai’s view, as convergences and divergences produce difference via “mass-mediated discourses and practices” (*Modernity at Large* 199.) Directing the implications of this insight to South African literature, Leon de Kock offers a theory for how the racialized spatial logic of apartheid is mapped through the literary. In his article, “South Africa in the Global Imaginary,” de Kock proposes the figure of the seam as one way to describe how “expressions of Self are often marked by a simultaneous setting apart from various others” (266). Although it does not comprise the primary vector through which he analyzes notions of difference, de Kock does briefly remark on how language intertwines with race, affecting both the production of local subjectivity in South African fiction, and producing the notion of South African difference for global consumption. Noting that the novels which travel through these circuits are typically those from a “white South African English ‘canon,’” he reflects that writers such as Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, and J.M. Coetzee occupy the seam as a “deep symbolic structure” in part through the self-reflexive qualities of their fiction, which resonates with the self-constitution in belletristic traditions (284). By contrast, those who write in indigenous African languages “have not been taken up into global consumption unless their work is available in translation and speaks to the great South African themes of duplicity and social conflict” (ibid). Here de Kock’s analysis dovetails with Julien’s as both are concerned about the way that the politics of language are largely dictated by global consumer desires, which has the effect of contorting notions of subjectivity and location.

De Kock’s analysis subtly distinguishes between literature visible to the global market by virtue of its conformity with its genres and the range of writing that does not reach this level of visibility because it deviates from it. A similar argument might be made with respect to the level of visibility—or lack thereof—accorded to experimental writing. In one of the few studies of South African literature to address experimental writing, the final chapter of David Attwell’s *Rewriting Modernity* challenges the assumption—widely held since the 1960s—that black writing in South Africa operates primarily in the realist mode for reasons of exigency, namely to produce a literature of witness and protest.[[8]](#endnote-8) One of the principle objectives of Attwell’s book is to demonstrate how the use of print culture by black South African writers “has been crucial to their establishing themselves as modern subjects, *in direct opposition to the identities ascribed to them in colonial and apartheid ideology*” (3; emphasis added). Attewell provides one of the most insightful analyses of South African experimental writing, which makes it all the more disappointing that he summarily dismisses the significance of gender to such a project. Despite conceding that experimental aspects of literature by Bessie Head and Zoë Wicomb pertain to gender, he disregards their contributions as too obvious and insufficient to a larger argument, namely his pursuit of “the meaning of a fictional practice informed by a desire to articulate a black, urban South African epistemology” (178). While the fiction he discusses is important for the way it writes the urban experience of black men and provides significant conceptual tools for thinking about how South Africa negotiates the terms of transnational capitalism for its own version of modernity, his explicit refusal to consider gender as a component of black experimental fiction suggests that the story of modernity in South Africa is a masculine one. It also leads him to a conclusion that seems at odds with his initial objective. Whereas he began by arguing that black writers have used literature to construct identities in opposition to those ascribed to them by colonial and apartheid ideology, when he asks in his conclusion whether “black writing repeats the subject-construction of European modernism, or whether it offers something distinctive and original,” he avers that a definitive answer is not possible (202). This model likewise assumes that the subject construction of European modernism is gender neutral, or else, by default, masculine. By contrast, I would suggest that such a model not only replicates the logic of colonial modernity whereby the male-female binary is replaced by a white-black binary, effectively erasing the specificity of black female subjects,[[9]](#endnote-9) but also enshrines this logic as the criteria for modernist literariness, which neglects to consider the devices deployed in (black) writing that refuses these subjectivizing terms.

In the remainder of this article I propose an alternative conclusion inspired by my reading of *Untitled.* My reading is in dialogue with feminist literary scholars like Zoe Brigley Thompson and Sorcha Gunne who analyze how contemporary fiction revises the tropes through which sexual violation is written.[[10]](#endnote-10) The works collected in their volume aims to re-theorize rape by incorporating “arguments about trauma and resistance in order to establish new spaces for the subjectivity of the women who either have been raped or have been threatened with rape” (3). Like the literature analyzed in their work, *Untitled* seeks to subvert and displace the “rape script” that relies on binaries of victim/perpetrator corresponding to notions of subjectivity bifurcated as passive or agentive. My analysis continues in stride with this scholarship by attending to the ways that flipping the rape script in *Untitled* necessarily involves revising dominant conceptualizations of gender and sexual subjectivity. Although sexual violence in *Untitled* seems inevitable as it bookends the novel, the way it is presented as content is disrupted by the experiments with form. The importance of form for the rendering of content has been amply explored by feminist scholars who have critiqued the ways that conventional narrative form reproduces masculine structures of desire as the ground for subjectivity. For example, in *Sexual/Textual/Politics*, Toril Moi draws on the work of French feminists like Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva to argue that experimental writing breaks with conventional narrative patterns in order to forge new spaces for inscribing feminine symbolic (textual) positions. The idea that sexual difference is re-articulated through textual arrangement has also been contested, most notably for how it risks essentialism, for its privileging of avant garde writing, and for its occlusion of race. Rey Chow, for example, in “When Whiteness Feminizes…” writes against Moi to show how realist texts can produce an agentive female character, and how avant-garde texts might affirm white feminist politics through a reinscription of racial difference. As I show, the experimental qualities of *Untitled* challenge literary conventions associated with rape narratives by crafting a notion of subjectivity aligned with poetry in the process of being written.

II. Reading in The Location

 

Late Saturday night, the 7th of August, I am trying to express myself in a poem, as I like to when I am in a situation. Usually, expressing myself in a poem helps me to see a way forward, but now I am in difficulty. For this poem I had the last line before I could even title it. Long before I picked up a pen, the last line was gong round and round in my mind, like a computer screensaver, and so I wrote it first at the bottom of the page:

*I now pronounce myself deflowered*

1

The sparse cover of the book (Image 1) resembles a lined school notebook where a young student would practice her penmanship. It offers few coordinates to orient the reader, merely designating the book “a novel.” The novel begins with a short paragraph (Image 2) in which an unnamed narrator struggles with the very task of beginning to write a poem, which introduces from the outset not only a formal tension between the genres of poetry and prose, but also emphasizes how the process of writing is implicated in the search for an adequate form through which she can understand her experience. The reader, like Mokgethi, has few signs to guide an understanding of what has happened. The colon at the end of the brief initial passage opens onto a wide, blank space. The reader traverses this unmarked area—a space that awaits a future understanding that will enable poetic production—and arrives at the bottom of the page to discover the last line of the poem, which has been furnished by the violent experience that defies words: *I now pronounce myself deflowered* (italics in original). The missing period at the end of the line subtly suggests that this may not actually be the last word on the matter. And, indeed, by the end of the novel this line becomes a (new) beginning, displacing and reframing the rape it refers to. But here, at this beginning, the reader knows only that there is a struggle with form and meaning of an event that cannot be shaped into words.

Formally, *Untitled* is divided into Part I and Part II; but there are actually four sections: three different introductory passages which explain why it is “untitled”; Part I, which has chapters named after Mokgethi’s family and friends; “Mokgethi’s Poetry,” which features eight short poems; and Part II, which breaks one day into time-stamped chapters. The incorporation of various forms—poetic, pseudo-diarist, and citational—internally fragment the textual form to the point that it barely holds together as a novel. Such formal experimentation recalls Appadurai’s suggestion about the intertwining of local and global: “a variety of circulating forms affect each other to form some sort of temporary and interactive project which is the result of conscious efforts to ‘produce locality’” (“Circulation ≈ Forms” 8). Bearing this in mind, one can read the particular conjunction of forms in *Untitled* for how they elucidate the ways that the novel produces a particular view of locality in the globalizing world, as well as how a unique subjectivity is articulated in its pages.

The forms that converge often bear multiple fractures, and these fragmented forms reveal an uneasy homology between sexual and textual elements. An ambitious seventeen-year-old who aspires to study actuarial science at Oxford, Mokgethi seeks out teen-age pleasures with her friends amid a perverse intertwinement of formal schooling and informal sexual “tutoring” at the hands of the teachers. Some of her friends, like Dineo, try to report the crimes, but the police sell the docket to the accused; others, like MmaSetshaba, concede to marry their rapists; most, including eleven-year-old Little Bonolo, are accused of seducing the men. Others learn to use their sexuality as a form of power, like Lebo who issues “direct under-table” challenges (opening her legs under the table) to solicit the attention of teachers. Through these characters, the novel portrays the vulnerability of young women as well as how they craft a sense of self that negotiates, and sometimes exceeds, the scripts of victim and culprit that circulate in their community.

Mokgethi is exceptional; she alone seems to discern that despite the limited forms of agency granted to the young women, they ultimately do not control the discourses about their sexuality. Equating sexuality with a loss of self, it is not surprising that she wishes to remain a virgin. Sexuality, in her view, is a form of dispossession: “Because I have seen all the girls that I know lose themselves…. Once a girl loses her innocence, it becomes, “My man this… My man that…’ They start identifying themselves with their man and judging themselves through the eyes of the men” (6, ellipsis in original). Such passages seem to value virginal wholeness and disparage sexual fragmentation (encapsulated in the oft-used term “deflowered”). However, this ostensible opposition is undercut by the proliferation of textual fragmentation, suggesting not only that “wholeness” is untenable, but also that Mokgethi’s motivating question may be: what happens *after…*?

The first few pages of the novel stutter as they try to find the right words to begin, because, despite her attempts to avoid sexual violence, Thabakgolo, one of Mokgethi’s acquaintances, rapes her just after four o’clock on the day that concludes the novel. Although the first page of the novel obliquely refers to this event, when Part I commences on the following page, time is reset to a point before this transgression. In this way, sexual violence is the structuring event of the narrative and its main theme, but conventional narrative time is disordered, requiring a re-beginning. Indeed, if Mokgethi’s story begins *in media res*, it also begins amid the failure of narrative itself, or the failure of poetry (her favorite genre) to effectively express her difficult situation. The events cannot be formed into a cohesive narrative or poetic whole; rather, Mokgethi patches together the discordant pieces to assess the possibilities that emerge from within their fissures. Sexual fragmentation, in this sense, is repeated in the textual fragmentation. But even as it seems to function as a kind of narrative and ontological baseline, sexual violence is not granted a determinate status. Importantly, the novel does not posit a “blanking of rape” in Thompson and Gunne’s terms (4), which would obscure rape or render it “unreadable” as a political or literary subject; nor is the violence cloaked in beautiful prose. Rather, by using the trope of poetic creation, the novel thematizes the very process of finding an adequate form in which to express both the violent event and the fullness and complexity of the young women’s lives. Rather than succumbing to conventional gender norms that would equate sexual “wholeness” with goodness, Mokgethi asks what new forms—both textual and subjective—might emerge from the fragmentation of violence.

This positions Mokgethi at a critical remove from the discourses of the community. As will become evident, this critical gap between Mokgethi and the community also mediates the reader’s relationship to the location as a locality that is inflected in uneven ways by the global. An especially telling passage serves as a productive entry point to these complex interchanges. The passage occurs just after the reader learns about Pheladi, the first girl to be “deflowered” (at age 11, by the driver of her school taxi). Pheladi’s attributes are soon advertised:

*It is UNTSHOFONATE 4 tsa batho tsa lefase lo, that they will never be graced by Pheladi, and worse they will never know the ultimate epitome of Beauty, PHELADICON, that we, Mapulana, are blessed wit. Tsa Mapulana di kgona go belega, Pa*. (60; italics in original)

Reading the graffiti from the point of view of the community aligns one with the masculine perspective that young girls are valuable as sexual objects. Indeed, the tribute to Pheladi’s exceptional beauty serves to displace and mute the reporting of her violation on the previous page. However, Mokgethi’s interpretation subtly shifts attention away from a praise of Pheladi’s attributes to read its untoward aesthetics. Her appraisal of the graffiti thus inserts a slippage, focusing on its aesthetics as if it were a text, ignoring its evaluation of Pheladi and mocking its unschooled qualities:

Graffiti in the men’s toilet. The *UNTSHOFONATE* is actually unfortunately misspelled, but intentionally written in big caps, and *PHELADICON* is in a different colour altogether, a metre long and maybe a ruler wide, so artistic that even we, the girls, went to the men’s toilet to witness it for ourselves. (ibid.)

After Mokgethi’s assessment, the reader’s alignment shifts, which prepares the reader to follow her as she attempts to understand how beauty becomes the alibi for the masculine gaze and provides the logic by which girls are held responsible for the actions of men. This is registered in the arc of the chapter, which begins with a reflection on how young girls are celebrated for their beauty, but ends with Mokgethi’s reflection on statutory rape, reversing the apparent link between beauty and seduction suggested at the beginning of the chapter by naming it rape at the end. The trajectory of the chapter thus formally traces Mokgethi’s budding awareness that growing up female entails a reading against the grain of masculine inscriptions—whether on the bathroom wall or, as she will find, in the law books.

Reading the graffiti as a form of inscription—as a fragmented text—also raises the question of how English readers encounter this passage. An ornamentalist interpretation—the kind critiqued by Julien—would likely gloss the passage for the minimal understanding that comes through the English words, wondering, perhaps, whether “untshofonate” is a provincialized variant of “unfortunately.” But even as Mokgethi confirms this, she does not offer a translation; she provides an aesthetic interpretation for the reader, but not a hermeneutics. Thus, the ornamentalist interpretation quickly reaches an analytical dead end, raising Julien’s question about whether the non-English words will be read as mere index for the idea of an authentic African alterity. However, another reading is possible if one considers the hermeneutic space that Mokgethi’s reflection creates. Specifically, in this scene Mokgethi becomes an embedded reader, guiding the reader away from linguistic and cultural translation to an alternate interpretive space. Such a shift transfers the responsibility for translation from the text to the reader, requiring something like an extroverted or an estranged reader. In this specific instance, any reader who is not Mapulana presumably cannot know the beauty of Pheladi, but since most readers are likely *not* Mapulana, it provokes the question of what these readers *can* know. In direct contrast to a passive ornamentalist interpretation, an estranged reader approaches the passage as an epistemological experiment, which requires an extension toward “foreign” linguistic forms asa mode of mediation between writing and reading. Put differently, Mokgethi’s reading interpellates the reader into the seam of belonging and un-belonging as an active space of negotiating self and other at the intersection of postcolonial locality and globalizing literary circuits. This mode of reading built on estrangement from one’s own nationalist or linguistic zone is what Bruce Robbins refers to as the ethical project of world literature. The estranged reader may thus function as one possible antidote to the conditions that underpin the ornamentalist interpretations of “extroverted” African novels.

To avoid an ornamentalist interpretation, Julien advises reading indigenous languages “not as the *necessary trace* of a writer’s origins that is the proof of a genuine Africanness, but as an *appropriation* and *strategy* through which the writer attempts to resolve aesthetic and social questions” (679; emphasis in original). In *Untitled* one might engage this advice by considering how the form of the novel is affected by what I vaguely referred above as the “non-English” language in the novel. To appreciate how this is used as a strategy to resolve social questions, it is necessary to know more about these swerves away from English, which permit a more substantial understanding of how it modifies the linguistic forms that circulate within the novel, as well as the constitutive subject positions in the novel form. This reading subordinates Moretti’s understanding of the novel form to Appadurai’s understanding of how forms encompass “a family of phenomena including styles, techniques, genres, vocabularies, and other widely recognized ‘containers,’ which can be filled or inhabited by specific voices, contents, messages and materials” (“Forms ≈ Circulation” 7). From this angle, it is possible to consider how linguistic forms mediate between the production of localities and global readers.

As a starting point, an estranged reader would parse the reference to the Mapulana as a *self-referential* marker (“we, Mapulana, are blessed wit [*sic*][the beauty of Pheladi]”). Although the story takes place in a fictional location, the characters, like the author, are Mapulana and speakers of Sepulana. The relationship between orality and writing is complex,[[11]](#endnote-11) as is the relationship between dialects and official languages[[12]](#endnote-12); a study of either would provide another vantage point for considering how the deep grammar of globality inflects and infuses the polyvocality of the novel.[[13]](#endnote-13) But my analysis here has more modest objectives related to how the use of Northern Sotho affects the symbolic positions accorded to Mokgethi and the reader via the circulation of linguistic forms embedded in the novel.[[14]](#endnote-14)

One way the inclusion of Northern Sotho affects the constitution of Mokgethi’s subject position is evident in the decidedly anti-aesthetic tribute on the bathroom wall. As the only passage in the novel to refer explicitly to the Mapulana, it is noteworthy that gendered subjectivity marks the boundaries of the reference to the community: the subject addressed *in* the message (Pheladi and her beauty) is situated in opposition to those for whom the message is intended (the men of the community). These self-referential markers thus converge to mark out the linguistic boundaries of community as well as gendered subjectivity. Modifying de Kock’s terms slightly, one could say that Mokgethi occupies the seam as a structure of multiple forms—linguistic, sexual, and scriptural (if not textual). Whereas Mokgethi can transgress the gendered boundary of the bathroom to read the message, the linguistic boundary proves insurmountable to those who only read English. Thus, Mokgethi’s unreliable interpretive assistance shifts responsibility to the reader who must reflect on how the conjunction of linguistic and literary forms affects the form of the novel itself, turning it into a medium that negotiates between self and other. Put slightly differently, and in terms that anticipate part of my argument below, Mokgethi’s specific subjective position is advanced less through a self-conscious style familiar to European modernism than a distinctly postcolonial (and postapartheid) convergence of fragmented (linguistic and subjective) forms, splintered along lines of gender, age, and location.

III. Reading South African and Postcolonial Fiction

Although de Kock and Attwell are concerned (albeit in different ways) about a dialectics of the global and the local in producing South African literature, neither scholar includes a sustained analysis of how the incorporation of African languages may affect the presentation of a novel’s content (the treatment of themes or characters) or its form (the experimentation with generic conventions). With Julien and Gikandi in mind, it is possible to recognize how, in the context of postcolonial and global language politics, the inclusion of Northern Sotho points to a linguistic stitching that is constitutive of the postcolonial and postapartheid conditions that have been debated at least since Chinua Achebe’s 1975 comments on using English for African fiction. Indeed, where Achebe was concerned with using English in a new way, such that it would carry the weight of his African experience, it is also the case that contemporary postcolonial writers also use African languages in a new way to re-mark African articulations of identity in the globalizing world. For example, the code switching (intermixing two or more languages) in the novel diverges from earlier postcolonial novels, which typically glossed the meaning of passages presented in indigenous languages. Moreover, as much as a provincialized use of English is inflected by specific localities, one might also reflect on how the globalization of literary forms is constituted in relation to African languages. Given the way postcolonial fiction is written against a global horizon of readerly expectations, the decision *not* to translate suggests a confrontation between locality and globality that is staged via fictions of translational equivalence.[[15]](#endnote-15) The refusal to translate linguistic “difference” is thus indicative of a refusal to cede to the logic of globalization, which views all particularities as amenable to global “sameness.”

The refusal to translate cultural difference through the translational fiction of linguistic equivalence joins *Untitled* to other recent postcolonial fiction, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half a Yellow Sun*, both of which include untranslated Igbo. As a barrier to a passive exploration by global readers, the estranged reader must either try to discern the meaning of untranslated passages or else endure periods of non-understanding.[[16]](#endnote-16) This incorporation of language is far from the model of the novel in which the nation imagines itself; rather, it is a globalized form of the novel that situates the reader within the partial (yet functional) understanding that occurs as an intrinsic aspect of postcolonial life and globalized forms of mediated difference. Thus, while the extroverted reader may seek out a translation, focusing solely on linguistic translation overlooks the ways that these passages affect other aspects of literary form and novelistic knowledge. In contrast to the way untranslated proverbs or tales may function as local geographical content indicators in the “global” form of the novel, the graffiti (like other instances throughout the novel) lodges an unconsumable kernel in the commodity form of the novel.

Leaving the reader in the half-light of understanding is likewise affected in parts of the novel where the rough translational gloss provided does not in fact offer adequate information for understanding the meaning of the passage. One example occurs when one character brags about his assault of a young girl when the police confront him:

Ja! Sebara, se a resa sa motho. A ke sentsha bofebe.

*Yes! Sebara.* “Sebara” refers to one’s in-laws and here at home is popularly used among friends. *Yes! Sebara, it is telling the truth. I was extracting the bitch from it*” (93; italics in original).

Tellingly, the English “translation” is italicized, which situates the English reader as an “outsider” to the passage. Even more, despite the impulse to explain “Sebara,” the explanation stops short of translating the word. Rather than provide a translation, covering the seam of linguistic and racial difference, the passage functions to mark the category of difference itself and assumes that the reader is someone who is willing to negotiate such differences. It also demonstrates that the mixing of languages is less a self-conscious attempt to satisfy readers’ desires than a way of suturing the reader to a place of difference brokered through the partiality of understanding. Thus, as much as the passage interpellates an estranged reader willing to negotiate categories of difference, it also refuses to capitulate to this reader, reserving a space that resists assimilation into the book as a commodity destined for non-Sepulana/Northern Sotho speakers.

With this analysis in mind, it is difficult to consider literary form as a mere container that moves relatively unchanged among localities, accommodating local variety without consequence to form. Considering the graffiti as a form of citation—both in the way that Mokgethi refers to it and as a form of (self-)reference to the Mapulana—reveals multiple affects on the form of the novel. As a form of citation, the graffiti indexes how novels experiment with many forms. This is true when citation is used to reference a US law on statutory rape. Like the graffiti about Pheladi, this instance positions Mokgethi as an embedded reader that stands at a critical interpretative distance from the citation and the conditions it cites:

Lawfully what happened to Pheladi was rape. I was told that somewhere in our law there is something called statutory rape. Looked it up in the dictionary and it said: *Statutory rape by US law is the offence of having sex with a minor*.

So statutory rape is a US law. I think that it is only effective in the US. We are in Africa and though our lawmakers copied the law it is only relevant in law books and not in social reality. (63; italics in original)

To challenge the gap between the letter of the law and the material facts of her everyday experiences, Mokgethi leverages this knowledge to assert her own textual authority, ruling that eleven-year-old Pheladi could not have consented to sex. More than simply applying to her local circumstances globally circulating definitions about legal norms of sexuality, she concretizes the otherwise utopian understanding (“*somewhere*…there is *something* called statutory rape”) with her own verdict. The peculiar semiotics of the passage, namely the suppressed pronoun “I” who looks up the law, points to the imperfect stitching of global discourses of rape to local subjectivities and conditions. Reading between the lines of what *should be* (the letter of the law) and what *is* (the actions she witnesses), Mokgethi reflects on the conditions that impact the formation of gendered identity.

 In contrast to the outcomes she mentions in relation to her friends at the beginning of the novel, Mokgethi forges an altogether different response. After Thabakgolo rapes her, Mokgethi concludes that the masculinism of the law makes reporting the crime useless. She recalls something she heard on television: “The struggle has changed its face,” but she vehemently disagrees with the sentiment, declaring, “But this struggle has not changed its face. This struggle’s face is the same as it ever was because it lacks a woman to lead it. However, now, I am taking centre stage and after I die no woman will ever suffer as I have” (209). Just before she voices her resolve to change the face of the struggle she says, “I have just discovered that this is a very old, very big subjugation.” Taken as a whole, the passage shifts attention away from Mokgethi to place the violation in a larger, explicitly political context. The awkwardness of the phrase “big subjugation” to refer to rape coupled with the reference to “the struggle” in the same passage situates her experience and her perspective within a significant tradition of struggle in South Africa. Seen from this perspective, Mokgethi’s conflation of the “struggle” against apartheid with the “struggle” against gender inequality in general (and sexual violence in particular) positions her within an unfinished project of freedom—a project she likens to her failure to finish Nelson Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom*. Plotted as sexual freedom, Mokgethi seeks to rip the current seam that joins men and women through sexual violence and decouple the symbolic position of women as one that exists *between* men. In her view: “Even if there is one [a woman who can help her], she will be *between* men…. Yes, this woman feels my pain because she has been me—there is a man in her life who once did this to her—but the men she is *between* have done this to me” (209; emphasis added). But even as Mokgethi’s subject position is forged from the interstices of masculine symbolic systems, she does not simply flee into an ideology or place outside of South Africa where laws ostensibly offer protection. Rather, she turns to literary representations from other locations across the African continent to bring into existence a livable reality for herself locally. She thus appropriates and redirects global discourses of sexual freedom to subvert the available narrative conventions of stories about sexual abuse in South African townships.

At the same time, as a moment in the novel that refers explicitly to “social reality,” it seems to rub up against the social facts of rape in South Africa. There is a significant body of literary and feminist scholarship that reads such literary instantiations as a comment on or reflection of experiential evidence or as a way to remark upon devastating statistics.[[17]](#endnote-17) *Untitled* is clearly aware of the social reality of rape in South Africa, which directs the reader’s attention to how the novel’s stylistic and formal features relate to this content. One might consider Fiona McCann’s concern, for example, about the danger of aestheticizing rape by obscuring its violence in the beauty of prose.[[18]](#endnote-18) Through its experimentalism, *Untitled* avoids this pitfall and does not offer violence as a spectacle for a masculine gaze. At the same time, it resists resorting to narrative devices that would distance the reader from the violence. One way the novel accomplishes this lies in the way Mokgethi functions as an embedded reader that articulates strong counterpoints to such positions. Another way lies in how the novel’s circular narration and experimentation allow it to take advantage of the imaginary domain of fiction. Specifically, the novel’s use of poetry as the figure through which subjectivity is (re-)imagined advances a subtle theory of gender that refuses to be determined by normative sexual categories that prescribe a narrow set of outcomes. It is possible to find certain faults with how Moele imagines Mokgethi’s options, and some might take issue with how the narrative inscribes a figure of the always already violated black female body. Nonetheless, there remains much to be admired in how Moele imagines writing as intimately linked with reading, which together provide a way to reimagine literary expression and processes of gendered subject formation.

IV. Reading Locality

Appadurai notes that the work of the imagination is tasked with producing locality as a site of convergence and mixture between local and global. While I agree with this general observation, it is also worth tracking the ways that globalization enables contact among various (peripheral) locations in such a way as to produce locality in relation to other localities. One way this occurs in *Untitled* is through reference to novels from across the African continent.

Mokgethi enjoys reading and loves poetry, and the books she names as her favorites provide telling points of connection to other literary imaginaries. She names Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*,Camara Laye’s *The Dark Child,* and Chenjerai Hove’s *Shebeen Tales* as books that have had a profound effect on her. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the text’s preoccupations, education is the common thread among the novels she cites; it is also a theme that occupies a distinctive place in colonial and postcolonial fiction. But where *The Dark Child* and *Nervous Conditions* reflect on the cultural alienation that results from a European education, no such conflict is present in *Untitled*, nor does *Untitled* explicitly link education to political struggle (dramatized, for example, in South African novels such as Mbulelo Mzamane’s *The Children of Soweto*, Sydney Sipho Sepamla’s *A Ride on the Whirlwind*, and Miriam Tlali’s *Amandla*, all of which feature the 1976 Soweto Uprising against the apartheid decree for all education to be in Afrikaans)*.* In place of these more familiar themes, *Untitled* identifies the primary barrier to education as informal sexual “tutoring.” Like many postcolonial novels, educational aspiration is a privileged route to social and financial mobility. Similarly, in *Untitled,* Mokgethi’s aunt teaches at the University of the North, and her mother had a bachelor’s degree, which she regards as her inheritance. Mokgethi sees education as part of her ongoing struggle for full freedom, and she worries that her current location will constrict her identity to that of an object of sexual knowledge for others. Believing that her educational prospects require her to remain a virgin thus suggests a determined rejection of sexual knowledge in exchange for her self-constitution as a knowledge-producing subject. Mokgethi’s favorite books thus serve as a guiding thread, enabling her to plot an educational future according to the coordinates of other African literary imaginaries. This perspective may also elucidate why she is unable write a poem about her difficult situation: she cannot find its literary precedent.

Analyzing Mokgethi as a subject who imagines her future via books and produces poetry as means of self-fashioning concretizes Appadurai’s theory of how local subjectivity is produced through the circulation of forms and forms of circulation; it also suggests a rejoinder to David Attwell’s remarks about whether black experimental fiction diverges from European modernist modes of subject formation. Mokgethi’s identity is supplemented by the literature she reads from other African countries, which enables a coherent and expansive articulation of her sense of self and her educational prospects. The imaginaries conjoined through these novels enable her to articulate a feminine identity against the grain of masculine perspectives, including the sexualized messages in the graffiti and the idealized abstractions of legal rights. Whereas the discourses of the community reinforce violent couplings of masculinity and femininity, thereby (re)producing subjectivity as aggressively predicated on compulsory heterosexuality, Mokgethi forges her subject position amid a variety of literary forms, emphasizing an aesthetic education that is communicated through various fragments. Indeed, as the pseudo-dialogic style of the chapter, “Pieces of Mokgethi” suggests, she is a subject split between the perspectives of her community—articulated through the occasional omniscient narrative voice—and her own process of self-fashioning—pieced together from her own self description. She thus does not simply take refuge in another word or world; rather, she forges a position through the literary spaces where feminine identity and educational success are affirmed.

Whereas European modernism itself is often equated with masculinity, Mokgethi’s sense of self is recursively produced in relation to her locality and other peripheral locations. That is, her mode of self-fashioning is forged in relation to African (post)colonial literary imaginaries, which enables her to engage in a process of poetic self-creation explicitly against the grain of educational prejudices that disadvantage young women. Thus, even more than Camagu (the main character of Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness,* which Attwell discusses), who uses his American education to devise a local alternative to the neocolonial development scheme in rural South Africa, Mokgethi turns her back on a foreign education. Deciding to pursue a degree at the University of Cape Town rather than Oxford, she offers a powerful rejection of the modes of selfhood, forewarned in *The Dark Child*, formed as a product of European educational institutions. This decision does not suggest a middle ground (Cape Town as a cosmopolitan mid-point between her rural location and the globality of former imperial centers); rather, it is indicative of her desire to harness what Premesh Lalu refers to as a modality of schooling that offers a way of life more than a means of subjection. Although Lalu develops his analysis in relation to cinema, his argument about needing to rethink the place and function (in short, the technology) of the school is equally important for thinking about the aesthetic project of literature in a globalizing world. If part of Lalu’s concern is to think about modalities of schooling in which aesthetic education can produce a concept of race that differs from the logic of race offered by apartheid (and therefore a concept of the postapartheid that is not simply a more efficient version of apartheid itself), one lesson that literary scholars might glean from this pertains to how (racialized economic and other forms of) difference is imagined and materially reproduced through global literary circuits. That is, we might ask, how are literary scholars “schooled” by world literature? If world literature is going to be more (or less) than the re-entrenchment of linguistic, racial, or proprietary separation of (Euro-American) centers and (Southern) peripheries, then literary scholars might consider the model of reading suggested by Mokgethi. In linking literatures of locality and poetic production to her own mode of aesthetic education and processes of self-formation, Mokgethi experiments with new forms of being conditioned in relation to other (literary) imaginaries and her own creative (writing) practices.

Mokgethi forges her desire for a form of being that exceeds what is available in her community through her own attempts at writing poetry. Tellingly, three of her eight poems are about education. In one, “Tribute to my old school [Praise to my new school],” she describes the two schools in opposing columns that resemble a pro-con list, which demonstrates, despite the title, the stark inadequacies of her new school. It ruminates, like the final poem in the series, on “what could have been…” (139). This poem, like the unfinished poem at the beginning of the novel, embeds an open-endedness at the heart of the novel. The ellipsis in the last poem gestures retrospectively to the earlier ellipsis before Part I, and it glances prospectively to the novel’s conclusion, suggesting that the novel remains incomplete because the poetic subject cannot fully comes into expression. It powerfully suggests that the subject cannot fully come into being because it as yet lacks a form that can accommodate it. Or, perhaps, it suggests that subjectivity is necessarily and affirmatively constituted as a project still in process amid the proliferation of forms and fragments that comprise writing itself.

This is articulated forcefully in the final pages of the novel where, even as the narrative appears to arc toward the pre-determined ending (the ending that has already occurred, as it were), this ending *as* ending is displaced. Instead, the concluding lines posit the rape as the beginning of a new identity that is still to be created. After the rape, Mokgethi decides that the poem cannot end with the line she had designated: “Because it cannot be a conclusion; it is and can only be an introduction to another life…” (209). The story concludes with this sentence and these ellipses. Against conventional uses of the ellipsis, which marks the place of an implied understanding of what is omitted, these ellipses stand at the end of the page insistently holding open a space for Mokgethi to create her future self beyond the circumscribed meanings issued by the community. The next page inscribes *I now pronounce myself deflowered* at the top of the page, leaving the rest of the page blank. In this way Mokgethi not only refuses to be defined by the rape, but also wrests control of its meaning away from the predetermined ending that threatens to close off any other signification. If the beginning of the novel left the reader wondering how one declares herself deflowered, the ending shows that this pronouncement claims the time and space for her own self creation. In refusing the pre-set array of meanings associated with the rape and insisting instead on her own authorial power, Mokgethi claims a poetic space at a distance from the ideological space that marks out female sexuality in the location. Eschewing the self-consciousness of European modernism in favor of a model of subjectivity in dialogue with other African imaginaries, *Untitled* charts its course in relation to the localities brought into connection via globalized circuits of literary production.

\*

Reflecting on the changing conditions of publishing on the African continent, Tolu Ogunlesi recalls the remark Chinua Achebe made when he became the Editorial Advisor of the Penguin African Writers’ Series: “The last five hundred years of European contact with Africa produced a body of literature that presented Africa in a very bad light and now the time has come for Africans to tell their own stories” (2). In addition to the Penguin Series, there is a significant increase in African publishers who share this objective, including Kwela (Moele’s publisher). Where these initiatives could result in writing that infuses “local” content into the “foreign” form of the novel, *Untitled* demonstrates that this is not inevitable. Indeed, *Untitled* diverges from such expectations in its experimentalism and in its uneven prose. The often-choppy quality of the prose has led some reviewers to lament a lack of editorial oversight.[[19]](#endnote-19) But I read this quality as part of the novel’s experimentation with new subject matter. Diverging from the masculine notion of form (which Moretti seems to have inherited from Aristotelian metaphysics) and the white masculine symbolics of European modernism (which tends to proceed by way of a highly-stylized self-conscious style, including in the fiction Attwell analyzes), *Untitled* instead inscribes an alternative (local) feminine subject position through a novel conjunction of forms.

My reading of the novel demonstrates how this subject position, like the novel itself, emerges at the crossroads of multiple forms as they circulate among multiple localities. Thus, in contrast to theories of literature that seek to demonstrate how local derivations ultimately conform to global novelistic grammars, *Untitled* refuses to subsume difference into the terms of (globalized) sameness. Rather, its textual innovations critically mediate the ways it explores how global discourses of sexuality and education affect local subjectivity. It thus shows how a perspective of globalization that emerges amid the circulation of forms from the global south offers a reorientation to the terms of world literature that would suggest a stability of “form” for the flux of “content.” In fact, the novel’s experimentalism diverges from the self-conscious literariness often praised (and critiqued) in what passes through the category of world literature, and may even seem to be rather ad hoc. Even as this unevenness may be due, at least in part, to the approach to the subject matter, it is worth asking whether this would have been the case had *Untitled* been written, like Moele’s previous fiction, from the perspective of men. Moele reports that he was inspired to write *Untitled* after he heard that an eleven-year-old girl from his own location was raped by her teacher, which leads one to consider how might this story have been told from the perspective of Shatale or Letshele—two of the teachers in *Untitled* who abuse their students. Similarly, one might have hoped for these characters to be more developed so as to enable an analysis of the masculine subject positions that the text generates. Nonetheless, *Untitled* creates a complex position for the reader that disallows passivity as well as any compulsion to “save” Mokgethi. Rather, the reader’s position is one of negotiated difference inscribed through the text’s experimentalism with various forms.

At the same time, the text guards against a notion of locality that would be beyond the terms of translatability—a kind of pure particularity. For example, global references flicker throughout the novel—American song lyrics or a reference to *Survivor* jut out as Mokgethi is teased by her brother or writes a poem about school. But these references remain on the periphery of the novel. In all the ways discussed, the *place* of the global within the novel is *displaced*. Indeed, the appropriation of global discourses to produce locality is forged more substantially in conversation with other (peripheral) locales than constructed in the image of a globalizing world. Glossing Appadurai, one might say that the globalized production of localities—in the plural—exposes the incompleteness of the project of globalization precisely in the way that the global (as a metonym for the US or Europe) is sidelined. Like Mokgethi’s poem, which is still in production, other forms may yet be possible. Even more, it may be that the lesson Mokgethi imparts has to do with form, *not* for its capacity to shape the expression of “what happened,” but rather its very capacity to say (intransitively). Amid the stuttering to begin, it is the very positing of the “I” that initiates her position as a speaking subject, from the location but not circumscribed by it. In this sense, location is less about geography than it is about position, subjectively, epistemologically, and circuitously in concert with other localities.

Works Cited

Appadurai, Arjun. “Circulation ≈ Forms” *The Salon.* Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and

Criticism. 2 (2009) Web. Accessed 5 February 2014.

---. “How Histories Make Geographies: Circulation and Context in a Global Perspective”

*Transcultural Studies* 1 (2010): 4-13. Web. Accessed 1 February 2014.

---. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.

Attwell, David. *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*. Athens: U

of Ohio P, 2006. Print.

Chow, Rey. “When Whiteness Feminizes…” *differences*: *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*

11.3 (1999/2000): 137-168. Print.

de Kock, Leon. “South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction.” Poetics Today 22.2

(2001): 263-98. Print.

Gikandi, Simon. “Provincializing English.” *PMLA* 129.1 (2014): 7-17. Print

---. “Transporting Fiction: The Novel in a (Post)Colonial World.” *New Directions in the History*

*of the Novel.* Eds. Patrick Parrinder, Andrew Nash, and Nicola Wilson. London: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2014. Print.

Gunne, Sorcha and Zoe Brigley Thompson, Eds. *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives:*

*Violence and Violation*. Routledge, 2012.

Julien, Eileen. “The Extroverted African Novel.” *The Novel, Volume 1:History, Geography, and*

*Culture*. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.

Lalu, Premesh. “The Trojan Horse and the Becoming Technical of the Human.” *Future*

*Memories.* Web. Accessed 13 September 2014.

Mkila, Lunga. “Rape and Abuse in Kgebetli Moele’s Untitled.” *The Con*. 20 January 2014. Web.

Accessed 11 May 2014.

Moele, Kgebetli. *Untitled: A Novel*. Cape Town: Kwela Books. 2013. Print.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual/Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen P, 1985. Print.

Moretti, Franco. “Conjectures on World Literature.” *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54-68. Print.

Ogunlesi, Tolu. “Who Controls African Literature?” *Publishing Perspectives*. 24 July 2009.

Web. Accessed 16 June 2014.

Slaughter, Joseph. “Form and Informality: An Unliterary Look at World Literature.”

Unpublished Manuscript. *Academia.edu* Accessed 27 April 2013. Web.

1. The research and writing of this article was undertaken while I was an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Humanities Research of the University of the Western Cape. It is a pleasure to acknowledge their support. I would also like to thank Sonia Werner and Kate Highman for their generous and rigorous comments on earlier drafts. Additionally, I am grateful to the anonymous readers and the editors, Wendy Knepper and Sharae Deckard, for providing helpful feedback that enabled me to refine my argument. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. These comments were made by reviewers after the publication of his first book, *Room 207*; reproduced before the title page of *Untitled*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. From the Kwela website. Accessed 16 June 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For an analysis of *Room 207* that analyzes space, place, and transnational connectivity as modes of interpenetration between the local and the global in post-transitional South Africa, see Ronit Frenkel, “South African Literary Cartographies: A Post-transitional Palimpsest.” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. 44.1 (2013): 25-44. Print. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. In South Africa, the terms township, location, or the slang term “*kasie*” (from the Afrikaans word for location, *lokasie*), refer to apartheid-designated areas where people were forcibly relocated after being removed from their lands or homes. Under apartheid, townships were geographically separated from areas deemed “white” and segregated according to racial categories (Black Africans/Natives, Coloureds, and Indians). Townships today vary dramatically depending upon regional, economic, and other factors and may include upper-middle class homes as well as informal settlements or shacks. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See, for example, Samir Amin, “Globalism or Apartheid on a Global Scale?” *The Modern World-system in the Longue Durée*. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. F. Abiola Irele, for example, argues that empirical evidence would not support Julien’s thesis. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For another, more historical overview of the debate concerning experimental fiction by black and white South African writers, see Michael Green, “The Experimental Line in Fiction.” *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Print. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. For a detailed rendering of this argument, see Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/Silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman.’” [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See Sorcha Gunne, *Space, Place, and Gendered Violence in South African Writing* and *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation.* Eds. Zoe Brigley Thompson and Sorcha Gunne. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For an excellent and much more nuanced analysis of the relationship between orality and literacy in relation to missionaries in this region, see Isabel Hofmeyr, “Jonah and the Swallowing Monster: Orality and Literacy on a Berlin Mission Station in the Transvaal.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17.4 (1991): 633-53. Print. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. For example, we can detect the sedimentation of apartheid’s racial and linguistic classification policies through Sepulana, which is considered a dialect of Northern Sotho. Sepulana does not have a written form, but borrows the orthography of Northern Sotho, which points, in turn, to the historical practices of missionaries who created the written form on which the orthography of Northern Sotho is based. For a historical perspective on issues of dialects and standardization affect various speakers of languages associated with Northern Sotho, see V.M. Mojela, “Standardization or Stigmatization? Challenges Confronting Lexicography.” *Eastern Africa Journal of Rural Development*. *Lexikos* 18 (2008): 119-130. Accessed 12 March 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. One way the deep grammar of globality materializes in the novel is evident in how its syntax and the spatial arrangement of the page respond to the way order, power, and knowledge are organized within the fragmentation of Mokgethi’s environment, including the school, the home, and the street, but also the relationship of the location to the space and history of the country generally. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. A similar analysis of how Afrikaans is used (and not translated) could also be undertaken. For example: “Her father is a powerhouse, in my community’s slang a ‘gas,’ pronounced in Afrikaans” (65). Enough information is provided in the passage for the reader to understand the gist of “gas” even though it is not translated (and is not a slang word used by Afrikaans speakers in other regions of South Africa). The cues to pronunciation, which are unnecessary in a novel, make this passage especially interesting as issuing an addresses to the reader as an “outsider.” As I argue below, this assumes that the reader is someone who is willing to negotiate these linguistic and racial differences. In this way, the mixing of languages sutures the reader to a place of negotiated difference. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. I have in mind the debate about the “double audience” as a mode of directing the text toward a world audience, on the one hand, and a local or African audience on the other. For a summary of this debate, as well as an alternative to it, see Joseph Slaughter, “Form and Informality.” On translational equivalence and the globalized world literary market, see Emily Apter, *Against World Literature*. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Joseph Slaughter makes a similar point with regard to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novels (236, footnote 78). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. In addition to Gunne’s book, *Space, Place, and Gendered Violence in South African Writing,* and the collection she edited with Thompson, *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation* (both cited above), see also Lucy Graham, *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature*, which reflects broadly on how social narratives and discourses about rape and race in South Africa relate to literary representations*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. See her chapter, “Writing Rape” in *Feminism, Literature, and Rape Narratives.* [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. “Enough!” exclaimed one reviewer regarding, in his words, “writing flaws that should have been addressed by an editor.” He also complained that the “gossip and quarrels between Mokgethi and her friends make the book feel like you’re reading a teenager’s secret diary.” Mkila, “Rape and Abuse in Kgebetli Moele’s *Untitled*.” [↑](#endnote-ref-19)