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Psychic Unhomings, Amnesia, and the Risk of Decosmopolitanization in Damon Galgut's *The Impostor* (2008)

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Abstract: The apartheid regime has left behind a range of chronic and structural disturbances of home/lands in contemporary South Africa. This article examines the representation of housing in Damon Galgut's *The Impostor*. In this post-apartheid novel, houses feature prominently; they are not only the axle around which the plot revolves, but characters in their own right. Houses are depicted as relational and dynamic sites, invested with traumatic repressed material. By drawing on critical house studies, psychoanalysis, memory, and postcolonial studies, it will be shown that there is a strong intersection that needs to be unpacked between inhabited spaces, the mnemonic economy of the self, its displacements and unexpected flights, and the larger socio-economic and political sphere. This article argues that houses in Galgut's novel emerge as psychological and affective contents, as symptoms of historical amnesia and displaced whiteness; characters' psychic disturbances find fertile terrain in a country which, while parading itself as "new" and "open", risks regressing towards new forms of "decosmopolitanization" (Appadurai).

Keywords: psychic unhoming; white housing; trauma; post-apartheid South Africa; decosmopolitanization

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> When a house has been alarmed, it becomes explosive. It must be armed and disarmed several times a day. When it is armed, by the touching of keys upon a pad, it emits a whine that sends the occupants rushing out, banging the door behind them. There are no leisurely departures: there is no time for second thoughts, for taking a scarf from the hook behind the door, for checking that the answering machine is on, for a final look in the mirror on the way through the hallway. There are no savoured homecomings either: you do not unwind into such a house, kicking off your shoes, breathing the familiar air. Every departure is precipitate, every arrival is a scraping-in. (Vladislavić [2006] 2009)

> After some twenty years of absence I returned home with a family in 1991. On the first Saturday of our return, I took them on a drive to see the house in which I was born at 923 John Mohohlo Street, Western Native Township. I could not identify it. When Africans were removed to make way for 'Coloureds', it seems the township was redesigned so that it could be made more spacious, more comfortable, more liveable, in the thinking of apartheid's planners. My home may not have survived the demolition. And so it was, that a historic event was to translate into a personal failure to demonstrate to my children that my life began somewhere. (Ndebele 1998)

The apartheid regime, together with racial capitalism, have left behind a range of chronic and structural disturbances of home/lands in contemporary South Africa. The first epigraph above, by Johannesburg-based writer Ivan Vladislavić, provides a vivid account of what it means to live in post-apartheid South Africa in a house protected by an alarm system that needs to be activated and

deactivated several times a day. Paradoxically, the safer it is, the more "explosive" and, we could add, the less homely it feels. If, with the notion of home, we have traditionally been accustomed to associating ideas of safety and protection, intimacy and comfort, home in Vladislavić's description morphs into a loaded device, a "mined" site invested with constant tension and stress, fear and anxiety. The second epigraph chosen from an autobiographical essay by the former émigré writer Njabulo Ndebele functions almost as a specter of Vladislavić's sketch[1]. In 1991, after spending many years in Lesotho, Ndebele returns to South Africa. He goes back to the Western Native Township in the hope of identifying his original home, but all he can show to his family is the sign of a historical and political erasure. Ndebele's testimony evokes the many disruptions of houses and biographies which black people had to endure under the apartheid regime.

After the National Party came to power in 1948, colonial segregation was institutionalized with the enactment of apartheid laws. Those categorized as "non-white" were systematically fenced off from white South Africa and relocated to different areas. The majority of black people were displaced and moved to what apartheid planners had cynically termed "homelands". Homelands (also called *bantustans*) were peripheral territories, cynically considered "independent" by the apartheid regime but not recognized internationally. In reality, they denied black South Africans citizenship, excluded them from the country's economic and political center, and divided them according to ethnic and linguistic differences[2]. Homelands were the product of mass deportations, re-zoning, and violent relocations across the country. Partition also meant separation from family members and divisions between communities, as well as the bulldozing of homes and houses[3]. As Amy Kaplan has shown, the commonplace and old term homeland has never been an ideologically neutral term. Indeed, the idea of the nation as domestic space, she writes, "relies structurally on its intimate opposition to the notion of the foreign" (Kaplan 2003, p. 86). Yet, within the South African context, this term has undergone a peculiarly paradoxical and cynical inflection, as homelands actually did not give blacks a home/country but stripped them of their basic civic and political rights.

Although the practice of disciplining land, territory, and geography is intrinsic to every colonial project (Said 1997), according to Rita Barnard, South Africa's former apartheid system represents an "extreme" example of the "territorialization of power" (Barnard 2007, p. 5). She describes it as a "pigmeonteocratic industralised state" based on an "oppressive gridding of the land", which used to maintain its power by relying on an arsenal of "territorial devices" (Barnard 2007, pp. 6–7). This regime did not only entail an unjust distribution of land and resources. From the very beginning, Barnard maintains, the apartheid "mobilized around the idea of [. . .] racially segregated housing" (Barnard 2007, p. 48). Drawing on Michel Foucault's and Louis Althusser's thought, she makes the point that homes and different forms of housing under apartheid functioned as "disciplinary" and "ideological apparatuses" (Barnard 2007, p. 5). Bantustans and townships were meant to control and oppress black people, to make them invisible, whereas farms or white suburban homes worked by fostering hegemonic ideas of whiteness and racial separation. In an illuminating chapter on Nadine Gordimer's fiction, for example, Barnard reads the white suburban home as the quintessential colonial site: it produced a white bourgeois subject in denial of the real material circumstances in the country; from the windows of white comfortable houses, townships and *bantustans* would remain both

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1 I owe special thanks to Stephen Clingman for sending me this essay.

2 People of Zulu origin, for example, were relocated to KwaZulu, whereas Ciskei and Transkei were set up for the Xhosa ethnic group.

3 According to the apartheid system, people were divided into four racial groups: Whites, Blacks, Colored, and Asians. The apartheid regime used the term "homeland" to make the world believe that whites and blacks were living separately but equally. In reality, the black majority of the population had been deprived of resources, of the most fertile and richest sections of the land; they were dependent on the white industrial center and became victims of one of the most brutal and cheap migrant labor systems in the world. As is well known, black people could only enter white areas and cities if they were in possession of a so-called "pass" and were registered as workers. On the rhetoric of "separate development" used by apartheid politicians, see Rob Nixon's *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood*: *South African Culture and the World Beyond* (Nixon 1994).

inaccessible and unseen (Barnard 2007, pp. 48–49). This would suggest that, within the South African context, the policy of housing has always played a major role in shaping identities and subjectivities.

Although clearly written from two very different positions, Vladislavić's and Ndebele's passages above exemplify how different experiences of dwellings and housing in South Africa, both present and past, as well as cultural constructions of home as imaginary and social meaning-making processes remain severely disturbed by and fraught with historical trauma. If a vast amount of research has shown that homes are never natural or neutral, let alone private spaces, but always political sites and a product of gender, class, race, and power relations (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Martin and Mohanty 1986), in South Africa different forms of housing are also mnemonic signs, disturbed at their very foundations because they are haunted by a long racist political history of expropriation and dislocation. Indeed, Vladislavić's and Ndebele's accounts speak of complicated—to an extent, even impossible—homecomings; they are both powerful illustrations of what Homi Bhabha, in his article "The World and the Home", has called the "unhomely". He argues that the unhomely is a "paradigmatic post-colonial experience" (Bhabha 1992, p. 142), and that to be unhomed is not the same as to be homeless. Bhabha coined this term to suggest a deep sense of psychic unease which is the result of the psychic displacement of colonial traumatic events. "In a feverish stillness, the intimate recesses of the domestic space", he writes, "become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha 1992, p. 141). For Bhabha, then, to be "unhomed" means to feel unsettled by the "interstitial intimacy" that the histories of slavery and colonialism have created between "private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social" (Bhabha 1992, p. 148). In Vladislavić's passage, the self is at home but, at the same time, feels dislodged because of a strange sense of exposure and vulnerability; Ndebele returns home, but his homecoming is haunted with the house's erasure and reminds him of a larger history of eviction and racial segregation.

In the following essay, I am interested in analyzing the representation of housing in Damon Galgut's post-apartheid novel *The Impostor*[4] (Galgut 2008). More precisely, the aim is to focus on how characters relate to their homes, the kind of investment they make, as well as the narratives they spin or fail to spin around their material world. As will be illustrated in the following analysis, unhomely disturbances are a central concern in the book. The novel engages with different facets and forms of "psychic unhoming"[5] and the differently dangerous ramifications these have within post-apartheid South Africa at a time when the state's borders are being put under duress by the predatory forces of global capitalism and the transnational market. By drawing on critical house studies, psychoanalysis, memory, and postcolonial studies, I want to argue that there is a strong intersection that needs to be unpacked between inhabited spaces, the mnemonic economy of the self, its displacements and unexpected flights, and the larger socio-economic and political sphere. If, following Rita Barnard's argument, white homes used to function as hegemonic conduits under apartheid, the question arises as to what extent this inheritance is acknowledged or denied as an ideological burden in post-apartheid fiction. Salient for my argumentation is the idea that homes are not only "constructed" or produced by power and material relations; as Keith Jacobs and Jeff Malpas argue, material objects are also relational and contribute actively to the constitution of the self (Jacobs and Malpas 2013, p. 281).

After presenting an analysis of the characters' houses, I will show how their psychic disturbances find fertile terrain in a country which, while parading itself as "new" and "open", especially

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[4] 2008, the year in which the book was published, has been described by South African commentators as a watershed year, which marked "the culmination of a shift in the national psyche" (Nuttall and McGregor 2009, p. 9). Coinciding with the rise of Jacob Zuma onto the political stage and the world economic crisis, 2008 seemed to put a definite end to the dream of rainbow nationalism and the Mandela era; the waves of xenophobic attacks against black foreign nationals in May of the same year somehow epitomized this shift. Similarly, over the last decade life in South Africa has been marked by increasing social tensions and a deep sense of uncertainty with respect to the political future of the country. Although it cannot be denied that since the end of apartheid a new black elite has emerged that is in a position of leadership across various sectors of the country, the majority of the black population has remained poor.

[5] For an excellent article about the notion of "psychic unhoming" but in connection with questions of exile and belonging, see Johan U. Jacobs' essay "Home and (un)belonging in October by Zoë Wicomb." (Jacobs 2016).

to transnational shadowy economies and capital, is gradually degenerating towards what Arjun Appadurai within the Indian context has recently called "decosmopolitanization" (Appadurai 2000): the undoing of post-independence visionary cosmopolitan projects in favor of renewed forms of partition both across class and ethnic lines[6].

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Damon Galgut's *The Impostor*[7] tells the story of Adam Napier—the main focalizer of the narrative—a white, middle-aged man, who decides to relocate to the Karoo after having unexpectedly lost both his job and apartment in Johannesburg. Unaware of what this double loss will trigger, he moves to the neglected and forgotten cottage belonging to his brother Gavin, romantically believing that he will be able to take up his writing career after a break of 20 years. Overwhelmed by loneliness, he falls into depression and finds himself unable to write. He bumps into Canning, an ex-school friend who has just inherited a fortune from his detested father. Adam involuntarily gets involved with Canning and his stunning black wife Baby. He becomes complicit in Canning's corrupt business affairs, as well as in his revengeful scheme to bulldoze his father's game farm in order to build an elitist golf club with fatal consequences for the environment, Adam's neighbor Blom, and the community at large.

In *The Impostor*, houses feature prominently: there is the neglected and dusty house of Adam's brother; there is Blom's immaculate house and meticulously trimmed garden; there is the avoided and repulsed house of Canning's father. These houses are not only the axle around which the plot revolves, but characters in their own right. Houses are not inert or passive either. Instead, they are depicted as relational and dynamic sites, invested with traumatic repressed material. Houses also function, in Galgut's novel, as character reflectors. They are metonymic of their psychic life; the ways the protagonists feel in their houses, transform them, destroy them, or compulsively clean them sheds light on the complicated and labyrinthine ways in which they struggle to cope with and/or resist their traumatic past. In other words, through their houses, characters spatialize and mediate their traumatic memory; their interiors speak of family secrets and inter-generational hauntings—of failed loves and neglect, loneliness and anger, humiliation and shame. Houses, in *The Impostor*, have the power to eloquently expose the interiority of their owners, testifying to a trajectory of pain which otherwise would remain uncharted and unnamed.

What immediately strikes the reader about this novel is how Galgut manages to create a hallucinating and surreal atmosphere through superb realism and a peculiar attention to the material world: the interiors and exteriors of houses, commodities, cars, clothes, bodily accessories, but also environmental descriptions of nature and landscapes. These detailed accounts are charged with emotional conflict and unspeakable ailments. They do not aim at a realistic effect; rather than domesticating the real, they make it strange and unfamiliar. After reading the novel, the reader has the impression of having wandered through a hyper-real dream. Adam, Canning, and Blom are emotionally unstable, unpredictable men, torn by ambivalent feelings. They are lonely and wounded characters, symptomatic of psychic and emotional conflict both in their body language and in their dysfunctional, stunted relationships. These are characters so concerned with keeping their past at bay that mutual relations and genuine friendships remain foreclosed. But the reader should not turn to dialogues or conversations for clues. The dialogues the reader encounters throughout the narrative are enigmatic and marked by thick silences. As this analysis will show, whereas characters are unable to name and integrate the pain of their past wounds, their houses seem to speak a more eloquent and powerful language.

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[6] I drew inspiration for this term from Arjun Appadurai's long sociological study on the economy and politics of housing in India over the last decade. In his essay, "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millenial Mumbai", Appadurai warns us about India's conservative and intolerant ethnic politics in connection to deregulated flows of post-Fordism capital, which finds particularly fertile terrain within the real-estate sector.

[7] Further references to this novel use the abbreviation *I* in parentheses with the page number following.

Adam's and Blom's House: Emotional Disconnect versus Compulsive Pruning

In a famous essay, Sigmund Freud compares the human psychic apparatus to a house arguing that the ego is "not master in its own house" (Freud 1955, pp. 142–43). Freud's self is best conceived of as a haunted house, with false windows and unexpected doors; the ego cannot know and control all the exit and entry points. Deeper at play are stronger and unknown forces, traumatic traces, desires, affects, and compulsions, which both anticipate and control the ego's actions. Setting up a metonymic dialectics between the characters' psyches and their houses, *The Impostor* works as a bleak and postcolonial investigation of this famous Freudian maxim.

The first house with which we are asked to critically engage as readers is in the Karoo and belongs to Gavin, Adam's brother:

> The house was a *shock*. [. . .] It was very bare and basic, with a slanted tin roof. The windows had a *blind*, *blank look* to them. The paint was faded and peeling. The fence was overgrown with creeper, and the creeper had twined through the gate. [. . .] The furniture was a *depressing* mixture of old, clunky pieces interspersed with the tastelessly modern. The four rooms were functional and barren. There was no carpeting on the concrete floor, no picture on the walls, *no softness* anywhere. All of it was *immured* in a thick, brown pelt of dust. There was also the distinct sense that time had been shut outside and was only now flowing in again behind them, through the open front door. (*I* 6–7) (emphasis added)

The moment Gavin enters the house with Adam and has to face its shocking neglected and abandoned state, he reacts furiously, probably out of shame and embarrassment. He admits that it looks worse than he had expected, and that he "almost forgot that [he] own[ed] it" (*I* 8). He had bought the house because "it was very trendy at the time, having a little place in the Karoo" (*I* 8). This is the same man who drives a red sports car, who likes wearing expensive jewelry and expensive clothes, and who now lives in Cape Town in a "fancy penthouse apartment on the top floor" (*I* 16). However, as we are told that Gavin has changed jobs a few times, that he has two failed marriages behind him, and that Charmaine is probably yet another one of his "unlikely women" (*I* 17), the detailed description above suddenly turns into more than the simple account of a forgotten property. The interior design of the house, its sheer functionality and barrenness, the concrete floor and the lack of "softness" are not just a question of poor taste; the "blind" and "blank" look of the windows, the depressive ambience they convey, are also readable as symptoms of a possibly wounded self. The fading and peeling paint set in contrast to the interior "immured" with a "thick", "brown pelt of dust" suggests a layer of frailty and brokenness beneath a self-protective wall of isolation and emotional blankness.

After the visit to the house, as Adam and Gavin are sitting together over lunch, the narrator remarks that "both brothers were thinking about things that had happened in the past, which had nothing to do with their conversation", and that there was "a lot of friction, a lot of *stuff*, between them, which had played itself out in recent weeks" (*I* 12) (emphasis in the original). The word "stuff", at this early stage of the novel, functions as a narratological clue to the reader; it is Galgut's subtle way of signaling that the material world in the text constitutes an important critical underneath, a layer of reality where the immaterial and the unsaid both converge and congeal. It is meant metaphorically, as the diffuse issues and painful wounds which remain unspeakable between the two brothers, while simultaneously it refers to the materiality that surrounds the life of the two characters. The story of Gavin's and Adam's childhood remains untold in the novel. Yet, the information we obtain concerning Gavin's appetite for dubious and "unscrupulous deals" (*I* 19), the lack of compassion towards his brother, and the two clashing images of expensive, luxurious possessions on the one hand and shockingly neglected belongings on the other seem to speak of an older antagonism, but also of ambivalent parental relations. Given the shortage of housing in South Africa and the long history of dispossession and evictions, Gavin's cottage is more than a forgotten or neglected property: it becomes symptomatic of historical denialism.

As soon as Adam steps over the house's threshold, he feels the walls "pulling at him, drawing him in—claiming him" (*I* 7). This gothic and foreshadowing moment, once again, hints at how the house is not going to function as a mere backdrop to Adam's actions. It intimates to the reader that the house has agentic power over him; the house will act upon and interact with him. Very quickly, Adam falls into depression and can hardly bear the loneliness, which is actually the very prerequisite for being a writer. Paralyzed by his helplessness, he starts drinking to the point that he perceives alien presences in the house; that is, the house unleashes something approaching a psychotic state in Adam—it triggers the return of the repressed, past traumatic wounds which, so far, he was seemingly able to deny and control. "Sometimes", Adam concedes, "the presence of the past was almost apparent" (*I* 46). He starts to believe in ghosts and to have loud conversations with them. The narrator remarks how "his mind was a little loose, a little displaced on its foundations" (*I* 78). Once again, in this passage Galgut compares Adam's psychic apparatus to a shaky house. As readers, we are asked to set up a parallel between the phenomenology which emanates from the house and Adam's own; in other words, feeling and perceiving the atmosphere of the house allows the reader to peer into Adam's more intimate and deeper self. He becomes pathologically passive in a house which would actually require active work and clearing:

> The yard was *choked* with tall brown weeds that had died long ago and set solidly in the baked ground. They were thorny, massed together into an impenetrable *wall*. For some reason, those weeds were overwhelming. All the neglect and abandonment took form in them. There was a tall windmill and concrete dam to one side, but they were diminished and eclipsed by the weeds. (*I* 8) (emphasis added)

It is difficult to read the above passage as a mere setting or realistic backdrop to the narrative. The idea here is not only that the weeds metaphorically represent or symbolically stand for the messiness of Adam's life; the above material description is also metonymic of Adam's own intra-psychic conflict, the split between, on the one hand, the delusional fantasy he nourishes of being a naturalist poet in the wilderness in contact with an unburdened, halcyon time and, on the other, his unknown double, Adam's own impenetrable affective wall—traces of past wounds which he struggles to name but return to haunt him, hindering his creative writing.

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There is a house next to Adam's cottage which immediately draws attention to itself. It is the house of Blom, his neighbor, which, in contrast to his own, looks "brightly painted", "neat and immaculate" (*I* 10), its garden "green and clipped, ordered into regular lines" (*I* 10). From the very beginning, Adam's relationship with his neighbor is strangely charged with tension. The first time they see each other, Blom childishly pretends not to see Adam and then inexplicably runs inside the house. Adam feels both suspicious of and intrigued by the orderliness of his neighbor's house. It functions as an unpleasant mirror, constantly reminding him of the neglected state of his own cottage. But, while it willfully speaks of mastery and control, Adam also notices how there is something uncannily compulsive about its impeccable neatness. In fact, this "lonely", "singular" (*I* 28) man, always wearing blue coveralls, spends his days relentlessly "toiling in solitary fervor", "hacking, digging, and pruning" (*I* 27); Adam observes how he "slaves away furiously" and senses that there is something "febrile", "anxious", and "frenetic" (*I* 28) about his work. When he is not toiling in his garden, he is doing metalwork, making burglar bars and security gates. From a distance, his house looks like an "infernal industry" (*I* 28).

While Blom is compulsively productive, Adam falls into inertia. He sits down at his desk but experiences writer's block. He feels menaced by the weeds and the creepers surrounding the house; he compares them to a "besieging army" which keeps "rustling, hissing, mocking him" (*I* 83). In addition, there is the broken windmill in his garden "churning uselessly against the sky" (*I* 29); with its "blades and struts, its weird minatory noises", it is a "towering" and "skeletal presence" he feels standing "between him and the poems" (*I* 29). Whereas the windmill in Cervantes's most

famous novel allegorizes the power of the imagination, as Don Quixote delusionally but imaginatively sees in them monsters with long arms to be defeated, Adam's windmill symbolizes the crisis of the imagination. The windmill, rather than an inspiring object that Adam could potentially transfigure, turns into an anti-muse[8]. Unable to write and unable to bear his loneliness, Adam repeatedly leaves his desk, his house, and walks away. It is in this vulnerable state that Adam meets Canning and accepts his invitation to Gondwana.

In the end, the secret behind Blom's compulsive toiling in his house is also revealed; he confesses to Adam that he is actually part of the government's witness protection program for people who, during the struggle, had committed political atrocities in military camps in Angola. The seemingly "immaculate" state of Blom's house and the "infernal industry" of his iron work, speak of an impossible mediation, of the failed but re-enacted attempt to keep ghosts from the past at bay that are not easily put to rest. The impeccable neatness of Blom's house paradoxically reveals something manic and erratic, spectral affects which, despite his relentless "hacking, digging, pruning", cannot be exorcised but keep resurfacing, setting up a powerful counter-narrative to Blom's agenda to erase and forget.

Canning's Homestead: Narcissistic Domicide[9]

Canning is certainly the most damaged character in the novel. At the root of his trauma lie the premature death of his mother—who died while giving birth to him—and the destructive figure of his father, a nostalgic colonialist who, instead of showing understanding and compassion for what we infer must have been a vulnerable and soft-hearted boy, made him feel responsible for his mother's death, besides instilling feelings of inadequacy and insecurity for not being able to fulfill a certain ideal of virility and masculinity.

After the death of his father, Canning unexpectedly inherits Gondwana, a luxurious game farm, a sort of untouched paradise in which his father used to live, withdrawn, to go hunting. In Adam's eyes, Gondwana represents "an old colonial dream of refinement and exclusion, which should have vanished when the dreamer woke up" (62). On the periphery of Gondwana, there are other properties: a lodge, a set of rondawels for guests, and a large number of farm buildings. As a way of taking revenge on his narcissist father, Canning childishly decides to bulldoze the beautiful—if ideologically problematic—game farm, which also contains a little cave with original Bushmen paintings, and to transform it into an exclusive golf course. "I go to sleep happy at night when I think of how I'll dismantle his dream" (*I* 135), he tells Adam. Soon, Adam ponders, "the vision of a primitive, barbaric landscape will be completely wiped out. In its place there will be a sculpted, artificial fantasy of fairways and bunkers, and putting greens, planted with little flags" (*I* 136). The obsession and hate that Canning nourishes towards his father are both projected onto and mediated through his inherited homestead. More accurately, it is through the idea and the materialization of the golf course that we, as readers, become aware of a powerful affectivity at play, Canning's haunted and haunting past.

The design of the golf course, its impeccably mowed surface, and deceptive green cleanness, in opposition to the wilderness of Gondwana, masks a wish to flatten out what looks like an unruly, demonic past. Unable to integrate the game farm, which he sees as a product of his father's work and desires, and thus as an extension of the oppressive paternal figure into his biographical history, Canning develops a delusional as well as deranged bond with it. Rather than simply being the farmer's new owner, Canning is possessed by it. The golf course dramatizes a material re-enactment:

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[8] The novel has so far received only little attention by critics. For a reading which focuses of authorship, see Sofia Kostelac's essay, "Imposter, Lover and Guardian: Damon Galgut and Authorship in 'Post-Transition' South Africa" (Kostelac 2010).

[9] I am aware of Douglas Porteous and Sandra Smith's path-breaking study *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home* (Porteous and Smith 2001). Domicide is certainly an apt term for Canning's destruction of Gondwana; however, in contrast to Porteous and Smith, who provide excellent case studies of domicides on the part of reckless governments, the traumatic effects these have on people and the environment, I am interested in a psychoanalytic inflection of the term. As Canning's case clearly shows, domicide, before turning into a destructive act towards the external world, has a prior psychic dimension. Often, it operates on an unconscious level, and can come in tandem with deeply narcissistic personalities.

the traumatizing materiality of the game farm is disfigured and replaced with other matter, but in reality Canning repeats the past instead of transfiguring it, albeit under a different material.

The fact that Canning's father's house is a deeply affectively charged object is confirmed by his not being able to enter it; he tells Adam that the house of his childhood fills him with "dread" and "revulsion" (*I* 119). Whereas his father used to live secluded, Canning has chosen to live with Baby in the larger complex meant for guests, in a rondawel adjacent to the lodge. As Canning is too busy carrying out his destructive scheme, he asks Baby to spend time with Adam. At a certain point, they start an illicit sexual relationship. They regularly and secretly meet in the house of Canning's father, as they know that Canning will never look for them there. For the melancholic Adam, whose sense of the past is caught between "nostalgia and sentiment" (*I* 56), Gondwana is a highly attractive spot. With its lush and primitive wilderness, it represents a "return to a lost, forgotten past of his life" (*I* 140). Although he despises Baby's way of life and Canning's destructive project, Adam becomes addicted to Gondwana. He needs both Baby and the landscape. In the father's house, while having sex with Baby, he experiences a "temporal rupture" in which "future and present converge" (*I* 140). Gondwana puts him in touch with a dark "stranger-self" (*I* 150), the "Other" in him, lustily giving in to beauty and violence.

It is by scrutinizing the interior of the house that Adam has an intuition of the personality of Canning's father:

> Four rooms with small windows, low ceilings. [Adam and Baby] pass without speaking through a kitchen, a bathroom, in which there is no gentleness, no trace of decoration. There isn't a living-room; this is the house of a man who didn't believe in sitting about. It's all very bare, very basic. There is also no electricity; half-liquefied candles stand petrified in saucers. Unexplained marks stain the walls, like maps to unknown continents, and an indefinable smell hangs heavy on the air. The place feels distinctly haunted, though that might just be the human relics lying around: a pair of leather boots waits expectantly in the passage, still shaped to the feet which wore them, and a thick coat hangs behind the door, like the outline of a body. There are hats and cups on hooks, and a hunting rifle fixed to the wall. [. . .] The air of watchfulness is deepened by multiple glass eyes, all set into the heads of dead and stuffed animals [. . .]. There are birds and buck and baboons and even a stray warthog, all mounted on islands of wood in rigid perpetuity. A thronging bestiary, like the menagerie on the ark. (*I* 120)

The predatory rapture the hunter feels in killing animals, the pleasure in touching and dealing with blood, the hanging of the dead, still warm body of the animal, the reckless and goatish satisfaction, and then the self-celebratory ritual of immortalizing its sublimation and beauty through the trophies—all of these become material testimonies to Canning's father's own perverse and phallic fantasies. Read in relation to the father being hostile to everything that is vulnerable and needy, taken together with the bare and cold functionalism of the house, the lack of memories and stories, these material objects seem to be able to name a painful emotional inheritance Canning cannot. Through the interior of the house, Adam not only gets a sense of Canning's father, but also becomes aware of his own white legacy. Suddenly, he has to admit a "sneaky fascination" with him (*I* 149); the house displays a similar "roughness and simplicity" (*I* 149) to his own.

Equally telling is the moment when Adam peers into what used to be Canning's room:

> [T]here is nothing to indicate this was a child's room. A bed, a desk and a cupboard, all empty. The window looks out almost directly onto the cliff, which seals off the view in a blank pane of stone. It is easy to imagine the schoolboy Canning here, at home for the holidays—though it is just as easy to imagine him *not* here, the room cleaned out and used for other things. No, Canning has left no trace; more powerful ghosts are in residence. (*I* 121)

Read on its own, this description is about desolation, both material and psychic. When read in the context of the entire narrative, however, Canning's irrational revenge scheme, his attempted suicide as

a schoolboy, the compulsive drive to make a tabula rasa of his past, speak of a deeper damaged self, both disowned and emptied out. It speaks of a childhood endured in utter fright, isolation, and neglect. The sealed-off view onto the cliff becomes symbolic of Canning's blocked temporality, repressed hate, and imprisoned past. "The past should stay past, especially mine" (193), Canning says. The material description above cannot possibly encapsulate Canning's traumatic past, but it does convey the sense of a damaging and unspeakable wound. Whereas Canning is unable to enter the past and compulsively tries to fend it off from his consciousness to the point of self-destruction, Adam at the end of the novel is able to reflect and feels embarrassed about the white fantasies he has projected onto Gondwana, as well as about his ambiguous identification with Canning's father. His unhomely departure allows Adam to become conscious of what lay latent and repressed. The realization comes at a high price, however. When Adam finds out about the underlying corruption behind Canning's scheme and the involvement of important politicians, he starts to receive death threats from the oligarch. Canning warns him in advance but, since Adam, embarrassed about the neglected and haunted state of his brother's property, had led Canning to believe that he lived in his neighbor's house, it is Blom who, due to a misunderstanding on the killer's part, is murdered.

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Three houses which hardly turn into homes. Three men who fail to name and put the ghosts of their past to rest. Damon Galgut creates a powerful dialectics between the characters' minds and the spaces they inhabit. Canning's inherited game farm, Adam's borrowed cottage, and Blom's property under the government protection program become the stages and catalysts of the characters' inner conflicts. Canning's domicide, Adam's inability to concentrate in his cottage, and Blom's relentless toiling are symptomatic of an obsessive investment in these material objects. Yet, the more they compulsively engage with them, the less at home they feel. At stake are deeper disturbances of the self: suffered humiliations, delusional fantasies, acts of perpetration. At the end of the novel, Adam abandons his brother's property, gives up his fantasy of becoming a poet, and goes back to Cape Town, where he will start his life from scratch. Canning succeeds in selling his property to Mr. Genov, but investigations soon stop the opening of the golf course; after Blom's murder—involuntarily caused by Adam—the house remains empty. Canning is obsessed with his father but fails to acknowledge what his inheritance means from a larger political and historical perspective. He spins a privatized, personalized version of his trauma, totally blind to the larger colonial history of the country. Similarly, Adam cultivates the delusion of becoming a naturalist poet, outside of history and politics. Historical amnesia is the real ailment Adam and Canning suffer from. During the apartheid, bourgeois homes functioned as hegemonic fortresses of whiteness, as ideal places to cultivate political denial. In Damon Galgut's post-apartheid South Africa, Adam and Canning fail to acknowledge this ideological inheritance; they fail to re-locate themselves within the new South Africa—both privately and politically.

Conclusions: Historical Amnesia and the Risk of Decosmopolitanization

According to Freud, fantasies are protective fictions. They bar the way to painful memories. The more pain remains barred from the consciousness, the more recalcitrant fantasies become. Yet, fantasies are far from singular, private conflicts of the self. As Jacqueline Rose argues, these deeply asocial and progressive—seemingly immaterial, ungraspable—fictions go out to work outside in the world of politics and economics. "There is a common assumption", she says, "that fantasy has tended to be excluded from the political rhetoric of the left because it is not serious, not material, too flighty and hence not worth bothering about" (Rose 1996, p. 5). In reality, she writes, it works the other way round: "Like blood, fantasy is thicker than water, all too solid" (Rose 1996, p. 5). Similarly, Canning's obsession with his past, his unelaborated trauma, which keeps returning in the form of revenge fantasies and obsessive thoughts, spills dangerously into the economy, as well as into the larger, public life of the polis. In order to be able to carry out his destructive scheme, he bribes the

mayor and involves Mr. Genov, a Russian oligarch, who agrees to buy the golf course in order to launder his money. To fend off a possible land claim in the adjacent townships, Canning cynically pays off black people by investing in a settlement project hypocritically called Liberty Vision, which consists of "rows of replicated houses" (*I* 35). Rather than mirroring the "new" South Africa, to Adam it looks like "poverty dressed up as gentility and correctness" (*I* 35). He sees how, for black people there, things have not changed much; they still walk around "leaden and aimless" (*I* 35).

Exploiting the rhetoric of rainbow nationalism and dislocating his personal trauma from his position of whiteness, Canning invests in a material project, which, ideologically speaking, turns out to be a clear re-enactment of the apartheid policy. Potentially, in fact, with such a fortune, Canning could have easily embarked on a very different project, much more integrative and transformative, both for himself and the traumatizing history of his country, one which could have acknowledged the deep entangled history of white and black trauma, and how his father's material inheritance also entailed psychic pain and dispossession for blacks. Canning's post-apartheid elitist golf course, where, predictably, the white rich will meet up with the post-apartheid black bourgeoisie and walk around together in checkered pants "driving little carts, carrying striped umbrellas, tramping all over the landscape" (*I* 140), displaces old racial divisions, fostering new class exclusions.

In the course of the novel, we learn that Adam's brother Gavin managed to make a fortune out of property development in just a few years. In a conversation with Adam, he casually concedes that one of his company directors is a black man who functions as a nominee and is "paid a healthy retainer just to stay at home in Gugulethu" (19). Gavin's business consists in buying rundown houses, renovating them with cheap material, and reselling them at exorbitant prices. He tries to convince Adam that this is the "new" South Africa. The new South Africa is an open country, open to the market as well as to foreign investments. On closer inspection, however, South Africa's economic "openness" masks regressive, ethnically inflected politics. The oligarch's golf course, which he needs to launder money, is called Ingadi 300 because Enoch Nandi, the governmental empowerment movement "partner", is after a Zulu agenda. Interestingly, when Mr. Genov salutes his guests at the launch party of Ingadi 300 in Cape Town, like Gavin, he refers to it as a "new South African party" in which Russians, white and black investors, politicians, as well as celebrities unite to celebrate the event. At the party, Adam reflects that "It's what's absent, what *isn't* there in this house, that he feels truly part of, and which makes him afraid" (emphasis in the original, 185). What is absent and remains excluded from the "new South African party" are the silenced voices of Grace and Ezekiel, the black servants of Canning's father who, after having been unjustly fired by Baby, knock on Adam's door pleading for food and shelter. Galgut depicts a South Africa which parades itself as "new" and "open"; in reality, this is a camouflage discourse manipulated by a few in the interest of sheer profit.

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Engagements with questions of home and belonging, as well as representations of houses, feature prominently in South African literature. Some of the most famous examples include Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974), J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* (1976) as well as André Brink's *The Rights of Desire* (2000). Written at different stages of South Africa's difficult political history, what these novels share is the depiction of the unhomely as repressed or displaced "otherness"—psychically, politically, as well as historically. The theme of the unhomely is evoked in these novels as a way of engendering work towards psychic, narrative, and, eventually, political integration. The black dead body buried on Mehring's farm in Gordimer's book or Brink's imagined ghost of former slave Antje of Bengal coming back to haunt Ruben's house contribute to a radical revision of the notion of home as cosy, apolitical domestic space.

Damon Galgut's *The Impostor* contributes to this narrative tradition but pushes it a step further. What is innovative about this novel is the treatment of a wide range of material inscriptions in the political landscape (townships, post-apartheid settlements, old colonial homesteads, Gavin's penthouse), not as symbols of the repressed or as direct mirrors of the characters' psychic life.

Landscapes, houses, and things function in the novel as relational sites, as ideological inheritances of the apartheid past that fail to be acknowledged, elaborated, integrated, and, eventually, transformed. Also, they clearly emerge as sites not exterior to subjectivity but as human, psychological, and affective contents, as symptoms of historical amnesia and displaced whiteness. In reading *The Impostor*, the reader does not simply visualize or imagine detailed descriptions of interiors as settings. Besides being invited to think subjectivity in architectural terms, the reader captures the existence of houses and buildings as ethically charged contents, as political and human statements—both old and new—reflecting a mode of living and thinking, of mis-managing and mis-relating towards the present and the past.

In 1994, when the first general democratic elections took place, South Africa came to symbolize the possibility of a better and freer world. The metaphor of the Rainbow Nation encapsulated the promise of civic and political hospitality for all South Africans, regardless of gender, religious, and racial differences. By putting the fictional discourse of housing and real-estate deals at the heart of *The Impostor*, Galgut, 15 years later, indirectly also casts a spotlight on the state of South Africa's nation-building and decolonizing process. While post-apartheid white South Africans are depicted as being differently locked in their past, unable to acknowledge their personal wounds as part of a larger unjust history, the forces of globalization and finance capitalism clearly begin to foster new forms of exclusion, but also new forms of alliances both along ethnic and class lines. With a short interregnum of rainbow nationalism then, from racial apartheid South Africa seems to be heading towards financial apartheid. The unhomely, writes Bhabha, "is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (Bhabha 1992, p. 141). Only 10 years after its publication, Galgut's *The Impostor* reads as a disquietingly prophetic novel, mirroring a larger malaise as we all struggle to measure where the world begins and our homes end. The unhomely no longer seems paradigmatic only of postcolonial societies. In the 21st century, the unhomely is the shock of recognition of the home-as-world and the world-as-home.

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