

## **þý Damon Galgut s White Characters : A reading of The In Promise (2021)**

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**Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres**  
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**Damon Galgut's White Characters:**

A reading of *The Impostor* (2008) and *The Promise* (2021)

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Sous la direction de Prof. Marc DELREZ

Mémoire présenté par Lara Manzan en vue de l'obtention du grade de Master en  
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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Synopsis of the Novels .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1. <i>THE IMPOSTOR</i> .....	6
2.2. <i>THE PROMISE</i> .....	9
<b>3. The Structure of the Novels .....</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1. <i>THE IMPOSTOR</i> .....	12
3.2. <i>THE PROMISE</i> .....	18
<b>4. The Context of the Novels: After Apartheid .....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1. <i>THE IMPOSTOR</i> .....	24
4.2. <i>THE PROMISE</i> .....	29
<b>5. Narrative Perspectives .....</b>	<b>35</b>
5.1. <i>THE IMPOSTOR</i> .....	35
5.2. <i>THE PROMISE</i> .....	41
<b>6. Naming .....</b>	<b>49</b>
6.1. <i>THE IMPOSTOR</i> .....	49
6.2. <i>THE PROMISE</i> .....	53
<b>7. Titles .....</b>	<b>58</b>
7.1. <i>THE IMPOSTOR</i> .....	58
7.2. <i>THE PROMISE</i> .....	62
<b>8. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>68</b>

# 1. Introduction

South Africa's history is intertwined with a complex historical background, primarily associated with the term "Apartheid".

Apartheid, from an Afrikaans word meaning "apart-hood," refers to a set of laws enacted in South Africa in 1948 intended to ensure the strict racial segregation of South African society and the dominance of the Afrikaans-speaking white minority. In practice, apartheid was enforced in the form of "petty apartheid," which required racial segregation of public facilities and social gatherings, and "grand apartheid" requiring racial segregation in government, housing, and employment (Longley 2022)

The Apartheid laws were introduced by the National Party in 1948, essentially dividing people based on their skin color to ensure the supremacy of white South Africans in all aspects of life. The majority of black and colored individuals were relocated to designated "homelands" scattered throughout the country. These homelands were assigned based on specific ethnic groups and linguistic distinctions, the aim was to deprive them of their South African citizenship by excluding them from the country's economic and political core.

Prior to establishing himself as a novelist and playwright, Damon Galgut, born in 1963 in Pretoria, obtained his degree in drama from the University of Cape Town. At the age of seventeen, he publishes his debut novel, *A Sinless Season* (1984). Galgut's literary journey continued with the creation of several books. However, it was his fifth work, *The Good Doctor* (2003), that catapulted him to greater recognition beyond the borders of South Africa. As a result, it is shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2003 and wins the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book. He also writes *The Impostor* (2008), which unfolds within a similar context of a post-Apartheid climate, delving into the different perpetuating racial issues of the country. Galgut's literary prowess earned him to be shortlisted for Booker Prize for Fiction with *A Strange Room* in 2010. In 2021, he won the prize with his latest novel *The Promise* (2021), which takes place during and mostly after the regime of segregation in a more explicit political environment.

I shall focus my dissertation on two novels *The Impostor* and *The Promise* in order to examine in which ways the author represent this South Africa, during and mainly after Apartheid, through the eyes of the white characters. The issues related to race and the

repercussions of the old regime are perceived by Damon Galgut in both books are going to be discussed in this essay.

Indeed, Galgut strategically employs his white characters as conduits for conveying diverse messages. In my analysis, my concentration will be directed towards three central characters: Adam in *The Impostor*, Anton and Amor in *The Promise*. By studying these characters, I intend to illuminate the perspective of South Africa that Galgut seeks to depict through them as he intertwines the historical background of the country with the personal trajectories of his characters. However, I will refrain from delving into the analysis of other characters in the same depth, as their development is comparatively limited, making them less significant for the scope of this examination.

After providing a summary of the two novels, my analysis will delve into the impact of their distinct structures. These formats, despite their dissimilarity, will be analyzed with respect to Adam's character development in *The Impostor* and how they intertwine with the socio-political context enveloping the family in *The Promise*. Subsequently, the ensuing chapter will explore the contextual dimensions of the novels, delineating the somber realities of South Africa, predominantly in the post-Apartheid era, encompassing themes of corruption, racial disparities, economic concerns, and the enduring aftermath of the colonial regime. Then, the narrative perspectives of Adam and Anton will undergo thorough examination. The resemblance between these two characters will facilitate the exploration of Galgut's depiction of white South Africans. While their similarity serves as a foundation, I will also explore the distinct writing styles employed in each novel, considering their influence on the narrative portrayal of these characters. The following chapter of my dissertation will scrutinize the ironic naming attributed to the characters. This analysis will unveil the imposture of the protagonist for Adam while focusing on his poetry, reveal the irony behind the Swarts name signifying "black", and exemplify the significance of Amor's name which radiates optimism in a harsh world. Finally, attention will be directed towards unpacking the titles of both novels. These titles resonate throughout the narratives and will be examined within the context of the same three characters. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to reveal the profound insight that Galgut's characters offer into the complex society of post-Apartheid South Africa and the lingering impact of historical injustices.

## 2. Synopsis of the Novels

### 2.1. *The Impostor* (2008)

*The Impostor* shows how white people consider this new country that is South Africa after the end of Apartheid by telling the story in their voice. The novel is narrated from the protagonist's eyes, Adam, and it is segmented into three parts: "BEFORE", "GONDWANA" and "AFTER".

#### BEFORE

After losing his job to a black intern he had been training, Adam makes the decision to depart from Johannesburg and settle in his brother's former vacation home in the Karoo, where he intends to focus on his poetry. Gavin, a fraudulent property developer, suggests that Adam works for him, an offer that Adam declines, as he aspires to sustain himself through his poetry. In his younger years, Adam had published a collection of poems, yet he has not engaged in writing since then, and he wishes to start again in the Karoo.

On his way to the house, he is arrested by a police officer for ignoring a stop sign. During their conversation, it comes to light that Adam's driver's license is out-of-date. The price is high for these two traffic offences: two thousand rand. Adam is offered a two-hundred-rand bribe in exchange for the police officer to forget this interaction ever happened. However, Adam refuses the offer made by the officer and continues his journey to the Karoo.

The house turns out to be quite different from Adam's expectations, yet he puts in the effort to make it feel like home. However, the landscapes of the Karoo fail to inspire him as he had hoped, lacking the beauty he wanted to find. Seeking poetic inspiration, he leaves the house and encounters fellow white individuals who appear frustrated due to the changing dynamics of the town, a consequence of the post-Apartheid era. The town has undergone shifts such as the election of a black mayor, an increase in crime rates, and alterations in street and town names. These changes annoy the residents, particularly the replacement of an Afrikaner "hero" with a more challenging-to-pronounce African name. This new mayor comes to Adam's house to ask him to clean his garden as the weeds and the alien trees are against the regulations. Later, Adam decides to purchase supplies to resolve the garden's weed issue. While at the store, he unexpectedly hears a nickname he had not heard in a long time: "Nappy".

## GONDWANA

The nickname is uttered by Kenneth Canning, who claims to be an old classmate of Adam's, though Adam has no recollection of him. Canning, seemingly living a rich life, invites Adam for dinner at his residence and introduces him to his wife, Baby – a stunning black woman who captivates the protagonist's attention. Adam's old school friend even comes to pick him up at his house – Adam gave him his neighbor's address as he is ashamed of the state of his garden. Canning's home is set at the foot of a mountain on a large property named Gondwana, an inheritance from his father. The immense and beautiful Gondwana becomes another fixation for Adam. He ends up spending the night there.

One day, Adam asks his brother over the phone if he remembers Canning, but Gavin does not provide any answer, focusing more on the weeds in the garden that his brother was supposed to remove. When Adam decides to do something about those weeds, his neighbor, Blom, gives him some advice on their removal.

A tradition establishes itself as Adam returns to Canning's house every weekend as Adam is attracted to the life the Cannings are living. During one of these visits, he encounters one of Canning's business associates, Sipho Moloi, who asks him if he is also in business with Canning. Adam answers honestly that he is not, but that is without knowing he would later find himself involved with Canning's business by accepting to deliver a parcel to the mayor of the town.

Months after his first time in Gondwana, Adam goes on a walk with Canning. The latter tells his guest that Baby used to be a prostitute in Johannesburg, telling him that "Baby" is a fake name. In a way, this reveal crushes Adam. During the walk, Canning also shows him a farm that belonged to his father, with whom he had a complex relationship. He also explains to his friend that he plans on transforming the whole estate into a golf resort to crush his late father's dreams. A revenge for the difficult childhood he endured.

While grappling with his mixed emotions about Gondwana and Canning's revelations, Adam becomes increasingly obsessed with Baby. Gradually, an affair ensues between them, all while Adam pretends to be Canning's closest friend. This romantic involvement with Baby allows Adam to overcome his writer's block. Later in the novel, as a joke – or not? – Baby suggests that Adam could kill Canning so that the lovers might be able to live together freely. Adam contemplates this notion deeply, though ultimately finds it unsettling.



One night in the Karoo, Blom drunkenly confesses to Adam that “Blom” is not his real name. He is actually under the witness protection program for the crimes he committed during the Apartheid on account of the white government. This information shocks Adam, who returns to his house and never speaks to his neighbor again.

At the launch event of Ingadi 300, the golf course initiated by Canning, Adam comes to a realization that his friend is not the mastermind behind the plan. Instead, Nicolai Genov seems to be in charge. Canning, slightly drunk, confides in Adam about Baby’s affair with Genov, a revelation that deeply shocks Adam.

Following a weekend during which Adam did not visit Gondwana, he decides to inspect the progress of the golf course. During this visit, he unexpectedly encounters Baby, and the two agree to share an intimate moment for the final time at Canning’s father’s former farm. Their rendezvous is abruptly interrupted by Grace, a long-serving black servant of Canning’s family. To prevent her from saying anything, Baby dismisses Grace and her husband Ezekiel, falsely accusing them of theft.

Back at his own house, Adam reads the poems he wrote under Baby’s inspiration. Dissatisfied with the results, he decides to burn them. However, this act draws the attention of the mayor who tells him to put out the fire. In exchange for not pursuing charges related to the fire, the mayor requires for Adam to remain silent about the questionable contents of the parcel he had delivered. Enraged, Adam returns to Gondwana to confront Canning about the bribe he gave the mayor. He asserts that Canning should have divulged the parcel’s content and expresses his unwillingness to cover for Canning if questioned.

Shortly after, Grace and Ezekiel appear at Adam’s doorstep in search of work. Recognizing his role in their job loss, Adam tries to seek assistance from Baby and Canning on their behalf, but without success. He contacts their son, Lindile, who arrives and accuses Adam of enjoying privilege due to the segregation still prevalent in their society. Adam assumes the role of a victim, despite his actual privileged status.

Subsequently, Adam decides to depart the Karoo and relocate to live with his brother. While packing, he receives a call from Canning who wants to meet to discuss an important matter. During their encounter, Canning informs Adam that Genov intends to eliminate him due to his knowledge of Genov’s corrupt dealings. Arguing a little, Adam reproaches Canning for involving him in this fraudulent business and Canning reveals his knowledge of Adam’s affair with Baby.

Rushing to escape death, Adam leaves town in his car. Along the way, he realizes that Genov's associates might kill Blom as Adam had provided his address to Canning during their initial meeting. Despite this realization, Adam leaves without warning Blom about the danger.

#### AFTER

After a few months, Adam has lived with his brother Gavin in Cape Town until he found an employment and an apartment of his own. Adam receives a fine for his car and is required to appear in court for the multiple fines he has failed to pay. In the courtroom, Adam offers a simple apology to the black magistrate and settles all his outstanding dues without any further complications.

When leaving court, Adam unexpectedly crosses paths with Canning. In the course of their conversation, Canning informs him that he lives nearby, that Baby has left him for Nicolai Genov, and that even though the golf resort has opened, he has decided to leave it all behind him. Seizing the moment, Adam confesses his lack of recollection from their school days together. In response, Canning tells him the story of their initial meeting as young schoolboys. He recalls a time when he was on the verge of committing suicide due to his difficult relationship with his father. At that moment, Adam was grappling with bullying. Their paths converged that night, leading to an impactful conversation during which Adam assured Canning that they would someday exact revenge against their respective bullies. This revelation clarifies Canning's intense drive to transform Gondwana into a golf course as a form of revenge towards his father, driven by Adam's words. After some cordial goodbyes, both men go their separate ways.

#### 2.2. *The Promise* (2021)

*The Promise* is a story extending over four decades, each of which is linked to the death of a member of the Swart family – the protagonists of the story: Manie, the father, Rachel, the mother and the three children, Anton, Astrid, and Amor. The only one who is still alive at the end of the novel is the youngest of the family – i.e. Amor. The story is also linked to the fate of the family farm outside of Pretoria.

#### MA

The reader is directly apprised of the mother's death of some illness in 1986. Anton, the eldest child, comes back home from his mandatory military service. Amor, the youngest, comes back

from boarding school. Both of them join the middle sister Astrid, who stayed at home, for Rachel's funeral. Before dying, Rachel made her husband promise to give ownership to the black servant of the house – which is on the Swarts' property – she has been living in with her son as a thank-you for her services. Indeed, Salome, the servant, cannot legally own property because of the rules of Apartheid. Manie agrees, but when the young Amor, who has spied on the conversation, talks about his promise, he denies ever having had this conversation. After the funeral service, Amor goes back to her boarding school and Anton goes back to the military. However, at the very last minute, he decides to defect and go into hiding in another region of the country.

## PA

In 1995, after the Apartheid, the three children, who have now reached adulthood, reunite at the family farm after being told that their father has suffered a fatal snakebite. Anton has been living a difficult life after deserting the army, having had to stay far away from the family farm so that he does not have a steady job, while Astrid is married and has twins, and Amor has been living in England for several years. The three siblings have not been together on the family farm since their mother's death, and they are now reunited for their father's accident/death.

Apartheid has ended and Nelson Mandela is the president of the country. Black South Africans now have the right to legally own property – among other things – like white South Africans. This means that Salome has now the right to own her own house, which should be the one she is living in on the Swart property. However, Manie's will does not contain a clause that allows the servant to possess the house. This will simply make the three children the joint owners of the property. Moreover, a clause in this last testament forces Anton to apologize to Simmers for a past disagreement, barring which he will have no access to his part of Manie's inheritance. Anton moves back into the family farm/house and ensures Amor that he will follow through on Manie's promise to their mother. Unfortunately, this never comes to pass.

## ASTRID

The story takes the reader to the year 2004, at a time when Anton still lives on the family farm, has many debts, and is involved in a loveless marriage with his childhood girlfriend, Desirée. Astrid is married to her second husband and has an affair with her husband's business partner. Amor is now living in Durban with her girlfriend, and she works as an HIV nurse. Despite Amor's efforts to honor her mother's offer, the promise still has not been fulfilled as her siblings still resist her.

Although Astrid's marriage brings her a high social status and a certain proximity to powerful political figures, she cannot help herself from cheating on her husband. Astrid's affair brings her guilt, so she decides to confess to a priest about her sins. However, the priest denies her penance and as she leaves the church, she is murdered in a carjacking.

Anton and Amor are then once again brought together on the family property because of a funeral. This is another occasion for Amor to insist that her brother fulfill their father's promise. Anton agrees to do so in exchange for her agreement to sell some part of the land – so he might be able to repay some debts – which she refuses. The problem is still unresolved as Amor leaves the farm to go back to Durban.

## ANTON

The last part of the novel takes place in 2018, a time in which Anton has been sinking into alcoholism and depression because of his failed marriage to Desirée, his inability to have sexual intercourse with his wife, and the trauma of having killed an innocent civilian during his time in the military. After a fight with Desirée, Anton kills himself with his father's gun outside the Swart home.

Amor has left behind her life in Durban, together with her girlfriend, to live in Cape Town. It is difficult to contact her to inform her of her brother's death, but Salome manages to do so. After 31 years, as the only possessor of the family property, Amor gives ownership of the property to Desirée except for the servant's house which she donates to Salome. However, Salome's son, Lukas, is not happy about this as he considers that it does not matter because it is too late. Amor also takes this opportunity to give Salome the money she inherited from her father – which she has never used in all those years.

After scattering her brother's ashes, Amor leaves the family house to live a life in which she does not have the weight of the unfulfilled promise on her shoulders.

### 3. The Structure of the Novel

#### An analysis of the structures as reflections of deeper issues within the “new” country

##### 3.1. *The Impostor*

Damon Galgut’s novel, *The Impostor*, consists of three parts: “BEFORE”, “GONDWANA”, and “AFTER”, the middle section being the longest and most significant one. Contrary to *The Promise*, this novel is divided into chapters: each section is respectively composed of four, sixteen, and one chapter(s). The story takes place after the end of Apartheid, yet its repercussions continue to linger throughout the novel, particularly within the main character, Adam. Indeed, Adam does not know how to position himself towards this “new” South Africa, even though the functioning of the country used to be clear to him in the past. The novel’s structure highlights an irony in Adam’s itinerary, as the titles of the sections suggest a transformation on his part, which does not really come reach it. Throughout the narrative, Adam grapples with feelings of displacement and struggles to find his place in society, feeling disconnected from his own history and the changing world around him. As the story progresses, it becomes evident that Adam’s attempts to escape from his past are futile, and he must confront his own identity and the privileges it affords him.

In the first section of the novel, titled “BEFORE”, Adam struggles to come to terms with the post-Apartheid transition happening in the country. His presence in the Karoo region raises questions about his role in the community and his position in the evolving post-Apartheid society. Damon Galgut explores the complexities of Adam’s identity and his ongoing struggle to reconcile his past with his present throughout the narrative. Unlike Adam, his brother Gavin thrives in the economic and business aspects of post-Apartheid South Africa. However, Gavin’s success is built on fraudulent practices, such as using a “black man who was paid a healthy retainer just to stay home in Gugulethu” (19), i.e., an empowerment partner. Despite Adam losing his job and house, he declines the job offer which Gavin puts to him. Instead, Adam aspires to sustain himself through poetry, aiming “to make a contribution [...] not a fast buck” (20). Adam claims that he is not interested in financial success, unlike his brother. In a way, Adam’s difficulty in fitting into the new South Africa stems from his imposture, i.e., his desire to pretend to not be interested in money, not even to support himself. His imposture prevents him from understanding this new country. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that, “[o]f the two of

them, perhaps it was Gavin who stood closer to the core of things” (23). This realization, however, does not deter Adam from pursuing his poetic aspirations.

In Adam’s first published collection of poems, he had consciously chosen to exclude the politics of South Africa from his scope of representation. He remembers that a commentator had pointed out that he had therefore “deliberately [avoided] the moral crisis at the heart of South Africa” (39). This critique triggers a small realization within Adam about his own involvement – or lack thereof – in the past of South Africa. He begins to question himself: “Maybe he didn’t care enough for people. Maybe he shied away from history” (39). As Adam contemplates writing new poems, he nevertheless again expresses his desire to sidestep discussing South Africa, instead preferring “to replace politics with aesthetics” (39). However, his experience in the Karoo does not align with his expectations in this respect:

[T]he landscape they were driving through resembled nothing that he knew. He had seen the Karoo before, of course, but always in passing, on his way to Cape Town or back to Jo’burg. He had never given it his full attention till now. There were sun-blasted stretches of plain, then sudden eruptions of oddly-shaped hills. The emptiness was powerful and strange [...]. He had even begun tentatively to consider the poems that he might write. His early work, from the first collection, had been rooted in a very different landscape. Those were African poems: hymns to the Bushveld. The stark, stripped-down countryside he was passing through now was of a different order entirely. It wasn’t African; not in any conventional way. It was more like the surface of some arid, airless planet, or perhaps it was the bottom of the sea. (24-25)

Adam, feeling dissatisfied with the Karoo, does not perceive it as an authentic African landscape that lines up with his desired vision of beauty. Consequently, he finds himself unable to find inspiration for his poetry. In fact, he goes as far as attributing this to the lack of historical significance of the Karoo, suggesting that an “absence of history” (29) is responsible for the blank pages resulting from his poetic struggles.

South Africa’s big change was evident and tangible. But not here. Here the way things were seemed inevitable and natural, as preordained as the weather. There was the old racial division, all the whites on one side of the river, in their spacious and expensive properties, and all the coloureds on the other side, in the township, in their crowded little houses between pot-holed, neglected streets. Two or three times a day there would be a knock on Adam’s door and it would be somebody looking for work. There was deference and desperation in the way they appealed to him, the men holding their hats in their hands

and the women avoiding his eyes. He felt a curious mixture of pity and anger towards them. Couldn't they see he had nothing to offer, that he had lost control of his own destiny too, that his future was up to fate? (29-30)

Adam stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that history has left its mark on the landscapes of South Africa. The mention of "old racial divisions" in the excerpt triggers Adam's perception of the place as stagnant, as if it had not changed since the end of Apartheid. This frustrates him, but he continues to avoid writing about politics and wishes to detach himself from such themes.

Adam's privileged position as a white male in South Africa blinds him to the realities of history, despite his experiencing personal disappointments following the end of Apartheid. Although he aspires to write poetry about the country's landscapes, he is depicted as incapable of establishing genuine connections with the land and the people who inhabit it. His lack of understanding and empathy prevent his ability to fully engage with the complexities of South Africa's history and its present.

In the second part of the novel, Adam visits Canning's property, called Gondwana, for the first time. There, he meets Canning's wife, Baby, who is a black woman. When Adam shakes her hand, he experiences "distaste mixed with desire" (63), which reflects his conflicted feelings towards the new South Africa. Baby represents black individuals who have achieved social ascension in the transformed country. Adam's simultaneous excitement and unease comes out of his inability to fully comprehend or accept the social mechanisms of the changed society. Furthermore, Canning proudly shows off Baby, asking Adam if he is surprised by their interracial marriage, claiming they are "a new South African couple" (65). Adam thinks that her blackness is "the least surprising thing about her" (65), showing his irritation as "there is nothing new, or even especially unusual about having a black spouse these days" (65). Here, Adam does not even acknowledge the improvement the country has gone through since the end of Apartheid when it was prohibited for people from different racial communities to have any type of relationship. Even if Canning uses Baby as a trophy for his new South African identity, this highlights Adam's inability to understand and adapt to the country he finds himself in, further emphasizing his disconnection from it and his lack of integration.

In this section of the novel, a significant aspect is Adam's longing for Canning's life. There is a sense of jealousy within Adam as he perceives Canning to have the ideal life, which can be called the modern-day equivalent to the life of a privileged white man during Apartheid. When Adam first visits Gondwana, he is struck by the beauty of the land. It was previously

owned by Canning's father, before he died. After the drive with Canning, Adam finally encounters the perfect landscapes he had been searching for since arriving in the Karoo:

The place is very strange. It is like an old colonial dream of refinement and exclusion, which should have vanished when the dreamer woke up. But here it is, solid and permanent. (62)

This "colonial dream" actually seems out of time for Adam, representing the many different landscapes South Africa possesses. This highlights Adam's wish to live a modern life under the Apartheid regime.

Furthermore, Adam's repeated visits to Gondwana are driven by the sense of power he derives from the land. In this place, he is served by black maids, enjoys the beauty of the land and the big house, and engages in an affair with Baby. Returning to Canning's land every weekend, Adam rediscovers a part of himself that he feels was lost with the end of Apartheid – the powerful white man. This complex relationship reflects Adam's desire for a life that is mixed between elements of the past and the present. The past symbolizes the privileged life of a white man during Apartheid, while the present represents the abolishment of certain oppressive laws concerning black people, but only those that benefit him once again.

As Adam engages in a sexual relationship with Baby, his focus shifts entirely towards these encounters. The significance of Gondwana fades into the background as he undergoes change: "He becomes somebody else, a creature he doesn't know: this stranger self is a powerful, goatish, reckless figure, who fornicates without restraint and talks dirty and doesn't care what damage he's doing" (150). In a way, "their ensuing affair is narrated in stereotypically primitivist terms, in which Baby unleashes the cerebral poet's most primal instincts" (Kostelac 2020: 50). In a sense, the fact that he is having sex with a black woman is bringing Adam towards a primal state that only existed during Apartheid – although, this primal urge could be argued to be universal and to have always existed. There is no doubt that black women, around the world and in South Africa, have been seen as exotic by white men – Adam even characterizes Baby as an "exotic doll" (63). However, this use of the words "exotic" and "doll" to describe a woman (of color) objectifies her, it also suggests that Baby's beauty is abnormal as if black women were not supposed to be viewed as beautiful. In this story, Adam sees Baby as a manifestation of a repressed fantasy: he "cannot shake off – even in these most intimate moments – the idea of a connection between Canning's father and himself that passes through his black lover, using her as a medium" (150). The fantasy Adam constructs revolves around the notion of a black woman submitting to a white man, reminiscent of colonial domination.



Despite their intimate moments, Adam cannot escape the idea of this power dynamic. He tells Baby that he does not matter to her, to which she responds, “You do matter [...]. But of course, this won’t last” (153). Adam goes further by suggesting that she leaves her husband, a statement that surprises the both of them:

What is he going on about? He doesn’t *want* to be with her for the rest of their lives; he doesn’t even want to be with her for a few hours. What happens between them is beautiful precisely because it is hurried and secret. (154)

To Adam, Baby seems to represent a certain possessiveness, a power he possesses over Canning, but mainly over the black community.

Moreover, Kostelac argues in the article mentioned in the previous paragraph that “when Adam learns from Canning that Baby was once a prostitute, he recoils from the prospect of sharing in the story of her difficult past”. She quotes this passage of Galgut’s novel:

The burning curiosity he had felt about her has suddenly faded; he’s not sure he wants to know all the tacky details of her life. He can imagine only too well what such a story might involve: the upward struggle out of poverty, the ruthless reliance on her beauty to create opportunities for herself, the sordid rooms and squalid situations she would have passed through. [...] No, it is better not to hear all that. It is possible, he thinks, to spoil everything. It is possible to know too much. (127)

In this excerpt, Adam’s response reveals his desire to overlook and ignore the past. Baby’s history symbolizes a period of South Africa’s history – and his history – that he is unwilling to confront.

Adam’s typical white settler identity is further reflected in his relationship with his neighbor, Blom, who is also a white male. However, Adam does not like this aspect and tries to distance himself from it by not engaging in any type of relationship with him. Initially, “there was a mutually suspicious awareness between Adam and his neighbor, which grew more complex as the days went by” (27). Nevertheless, as Blom assists Adam with his garden, the latter’s perception begins to change, down to the moment when he admits that “Blom is a rough diamond” (87). Despite this, their relationship remains peculiar as Adam maintains a certain level of detachment. When he discovers about Blom’s past involvement in the Apartheid system, their relationship takes a step further back. Adam refuses to listen to Blom’s confessions about the horrific acts he committed as a henchman for the Nationalist government. As explained in a previous paragraph, the protagonist’s avoidance of this truth is a manifestation of his unwillingness to acknowledge his own inaction against the racial injustices of the country.

In Adam's mind, Blom becomes a symbol of South Africa's past and history, which he actively seeks to avoid and distance himself from. This avoidance stems from his desire to disassociate himself from the country's troubled past, rather than just for the fact that Blom is "a bad man" as he "tortured and killed and kidnapped for the government" (172).

Later in the novel, Adam makes a fateful decision when Canning reveals that Genov's men are coming to kill him. Indeed, in an act of self-preservation, Adam chooses to let Blom die in his place. Indeed, when Adam first became involved with Canning and Gondwana, he had given Canning Blom's address as his own, out of embarrassment over the neglected state of his own garden. Unknown to Adam, Canning passed on to Genov Blom's address because he knew too much about the fraudulent activities concerning the golf course in Gondwana. As a result, Blom finds himself in mortal danger due to Adam's entanglement in Canning's corrupt project.

'What now?' he says aloud.

*Don't be a fool. Keep on going, don't look back.*

'But I can't. I have to... I don't know, warn him, stop them, do something.'

*What for? It's got nothing to do with you.*

'But he's an innocent man.'

*Hardly. Remember what he told you. Doesn't any of that matter?*

'Innocent of my crimes then.'

*What crimes have you committed? You were in the wrong place at the wrong time, that's all. It was fate. (233)*

In the middle of an internal dialogue, Adam reaches a resolution: he chooses not to intervene or prevent Blom's potential murder. Justifying his decision, he argues that Blom's fate is a consequence of the atrocious acts he carried out in the name of the government during the Apartheid era. As a result, Adam decides to leave the Karoo behind and return to Cape Town as "he'll be okay among the buildings and the lights; no harm can come to him there" (233).

Towards the end of the novel, "AFTER" his experience in Gondwana, the protagonist undergoes a transformation in his life. Indeed, following Canning's revelations, Adam returns to the city and abandons his aspirations of making a living through poetry, opting instead for regular employment. He perceives his Gondwana experience as "very much in the past" (239), almost as if it had never occurred. However, these revelations do not have any impact on his decision to go back to his previous life, Adam fails to acknowledge his privileged position. In other words, Adam is unable to use Blom's truth – also Lindile's truth that will be analyzed

later – as a way to renegotiate a sense of his identity. It dawns on him that “he had been playing at poverty, while knowing all along, at the back of his mind, that he could go back to middle-class comforts whenever he wanted to” (238). A sense of “profound embarrassment” and of the “aberration” of his involvement with Canning and Baby begin to manifest within him.

In the final chapter, a significant event occurs when Adam is summoned to court for not having paid the fine that was imposed on him at the beginning of the story. Surprisingly, Adam accepts his fate without much hesitation, recognizing that “on top of all the other fines there was now another one, an admission of guilt” (241). However, his admission of guilt is not driven by a genuine understanding of the larger implications, such as his involvement in the Apartheid system or his white settler identity. He fails to fully acknowledge these aspects, revealing a continued inability to confront his own complicity.

Overall, Adam’s experiences and conflicts serve as a reflection of the larger struggles and challenges faced by white settlers as they confront their own privileges, grapple with their identities, and navigate their place in a changing society. However, as shown in this section of the dissertation, despite the multiple attempts to make Adam aware of his privileged position as a white man in South Africa, the end of his journey portrays his consistent failure to acknowledge it. Kostelac describes Adam’s inability to understand modern South Africa as “an aversive and self-pitying form of whiteness which makes the realization of a ‘new’ cosmopolitanism impossible”. The structure of *The Impostor* serves as an ironic critique of white settlers in South Africa, revealing their failure to fully comprehend their own complicity during and after the Apartheid era. Galgut’s narrative structure in this novel suggests a transformation that should have taken place based on Adam’s experiences in Gondwana, but in reality, he forgot ever realization he had. He “felt as if he’d left something behind, something vitally important that he would need in just a moment” (249) as is unable to hold onto the truth. Adam simply goes back to his old life as if Gondwana had not happened.

### 3.2. *The Promise*

The novel is structured into four distinct parts, each named after the death of a character: MA, PA, ASTRID, and ANTON. These sections unfold almost a decade apart in time, with the narrative beginning in the year 1986 and ending in 2018. However, despite the significant time gaps between them, each part of the story only covers a few days. This structural approach allows the author to intertwine the Swart family’s story with the more general context of South Africa’s history, as we shall see.

As mentioned by Damon Galgut in an interview (The Center for Fiction 2022), his focus in writing *The Promise* was more on the structure and the way of telling the story rather than the plot itself. He found the concept of bringing the Swart family together for a few days every decade through multiple funerals intriguing. As time passes, not only does the family change, but the background of South Africa is also evolving. Once the decision was made to incorporate South Africa's history into the narrative, it became important to select the significant moments and events that he wished to incorporate. Each decade represented in the novel corresponds to a major historical event. The first section captures Nelson Mandela's release from prison, the second revolves around the Rugby World Cup, the third centers on the inauguration of Thabo Mbeki's second term as President, and the final one focuses on Jacob Zuma's resignation as President of the country.

Galgut uses the Swart family as a miniature of South Africa itself. This white South African family serves as an allegorical representation of the nation as a whole. The promise made to the family's dying mother symbolizes the promises made by the nation to its citizens. When Apartheid ended in 1994 and Nelson Mandela assumed the presidency, a wave of optimism and hope could be felt across the country. The nation collectively celebrated the transition from the 46-year-long Apartheid era to a more peaceful life. Mandela's emphasis on national reconciliation helped calm the fears of white South Africans. Promises were made towards rectifying the past wrongs and injustices inflicted upon black people, just as Rachel made Manie promise to grant Salome the land she had been living on as a gesture of gratitude for caring for her during her illness. Indeed, Salome, the black maid, had been performing tasks that her own family considered "too dirty or too intimate", such as "mopping up blood and shit and puss and piss" (19). She provided invaluable support to Rachel during her illness, becoming the moral center of the family. However, Salome goes unacknowledged, as if she were invisible. Rachel's dying wish is for Salome, who took care of her during those challenging times, to have her own house and land. Manie's wavering commitment to fulfilling this promise to Salome mirrors the nation's unkept promise when it comes to improving the lives of black people. In the first part of the novel, when her son told her the house would be theirs, Salome felt hope with this promise – in a way, just as the entire country felt everything seemed possible.

In the second chapter of the novel, an even brighter spotlight is cast on the prevailing optimism that enveloped the country. In the year 1995, hope grew bigger with the Rugby World Cup and the victory of the Springboks. This major event, hosted in South Africa, created the festive atmosphere described by Galgut in the novel. It was the first sporting event that took place in the country since the abolishment of Apartheid, so it carried a lot of importance for

South Africans as the country had been kept away from the tournament for years because of Apartheid. The 1995 Rugby World Cup is then considered to be the most important event of that year. The novel focuses especially on the final of the Rugby World Cup which opposed South Africa to New Zealand – the Springboks against the All Blacks – at Ellis Park in Johannesburg. “All over the country there’s a giddy mood in the air” (150), Galgut vividly depicts the scene of the intense game, providing numerous details. The author emphasizes that the entire country was captivated, with empty streets as people across the nation were watching the match. The novel captures the collective hope that was felt across the entire nation as South Africa progressed to the World Cup final: “South Africa! The name used to be a cause of embarrassment, but now it means something else” (150). The Springboks won the game which caused the entire country to be overfilled with joy, for the triumph of the Springboks was seen as a triumph for the nation as a whole. Nelson Mandela played a significant role in the Rugby World Cup. This tournament represented a unique opportunity for Mandela to promote reconciliation and unity in the country. *History* writes: “to Black South Africans, the historically white team—along with their green and gold colors and their Springbok mascot—had come to symbolize the nation’s oppressive minority white rule” (Evans 2023). Rugby was traditionally associated with the white minority in South Africa and was seen by many black South Africans as a symbol of oppression. However, Mandela recognized the sport’s potential to bridge racial divisions and bring the nation together. He saw the Rugby World Cup as a platform to reduce the ongoing racial issues. Mandela attended the game wearing the Springboks’ green and gold jersey – this was surprising, as the colors of the team were associated with the Apartheid regime. This was a major move as he encouraged the team on the field which caused the, almost exclusively white, crowd to cheer for him. Galgut describes the feeling procured by the win: “nothing will ever, ever be better than this moment [...]. But then it does even get better. When Mandela appears in the Springbok rugby jersey to give the cup to François Pienaar, well, that’s something” (151). Clearly, Mandela’s support for the Springboks in the Rugby World Cup had a lasting impact on South African society. Mandela’s efforts to use sports for reconciliation played a crucial role in healing the nation causing the 1995 Rugby World Cup to become a significant moment in South Africa’s history.

This part of the novel depicts with great details how the country experienced a sense of unity and pride due to the team’s victory and Mandela’s inspiring actions. As Manie passes away in this part of the novel, Amor feels a renewed sense of hope that it will be possible to fulfil the promise to Salome and to make things right by her and her mother. However, once

again, Anton dismisses the promise. Despite this dereliction of duty, Anton conveys the following to his sister:

You know we can work something out with Salome's house.

Really?

Sure, he says, smiling. This is South Africa, land of miracles. We can make something happen. (157)

Filled with a sense of contentment, Amor departs from Pretoria without any remorse, "feeling happy for the first time since she touched down" as she believes "Salome will get her house" (158). Anton, in this context, becomes a symbol of hope for Amor, mirroring how the victory of the Rugby World Cup represents a symbol of hope and optimism for the entire nation, signifying the possibilities of transformation and reconciliation.

The major event in the third part of the novel is Thabo Mbeki's second term as President of South Africa. Thabo Mbeki's reelection as president represents a continuation of his leadership and policies in South Africa. He served as the President of the country from 1999 to 2008, succeeding Nelson Mandela. His reelection also represented continuity and therefore a form of political stability for South Africa and the democratic system that was put into place at the end of Apartheid. The peaceful transfer of power through elections demonstrated the country's commitment to the democratic system. In the novel, Galgut relates his inauguration that took place at the Union Buildings in Pretoria – the town in which the story unfolds – describing the celebration as "inspiring" and "uplifting" (166). Galgut uses the event to include Astrid, the middle child of the Swart family, in the historical event as she was able to attend the inauguration and claims that Mbeki would have liked to have her number. Mbeki's inauguration in 2004 was a significant event in South Africa as it reaffirmed the democratic process. The country reelected Mbeki as President, suggesting that he was trusted to pursue the reconciliation announced by Mandela as Thabo Mbeki played a significant role in the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa. Mbeki, along with other ANC leaders, fought against the oppressive Apartheid regime within South Africa. Mbeki also played a crucial role in negotiations that led to the end of Apartheid and the transition to democracy in South Africa. He was involved in the negotiations between the ANC and the National Party government, which resulted in the historic democratic elections in 1994 and the election of Nelson Mandela as the first black president of South Africa. Mbeki's commitment to the anti-Apartheid struggle continued during his presidency. He desired to address the legacies of Apartheid through policies promoting reconciliation, like Mandela. However, it is important to note that public opinion and

perceptions of Mbeki's presidency can vary. While he had supporters who believed in his vision and leadership, there were also critics who were concerned about issues such as his handling of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and accusations of not caring for poverty. A sense of disillusionment and losing unity affected the country, with doubts emerging regarding the fulfillment of the promises that were once made.

This sentiment is interpreted in the novel through the unfulfilled promise made to Rachel many years before. After returning to Pretoria for her sister's funeral, Amor becomes aware that Anton has failed to honor his commitment regarding the promise, claiming that he "meant to deal with it" but "life got in the way" (212). He even goes as far as to say that there is "no urgency in doing it immediately", mirroring the lack of urgency in addressing racial inequalities within the country. As a way of foreshadowing the following period of corruption and manipulation during Jacob Zuma's presidency, Anton proposes a mutual arrangement, suggesting that they can "help each other" (218). He blackmails his sister by saying that Salome will only receive the promised house and land if Amor agrees to sell a piece of the land in order to create trouble for the local church. Anton then creates a manipulative ultimatum: "no sale, no house, that's the deal" (219), that can be felt to be in keeping with the spirit prevailing during Zuma's presidency.

Indeed, Zuma's presidency was filled by multiple scandals, allegations of corruption, and manipulation, which led to his resignation during the year 2018. Galgut relates to this period by claiming that people "have lost all faith in this damned country" (238). Indeed, these allegations caused a decline in the trust and confidence of the South African population. He was then pressured by his own party, the ANC, to step down, which he did on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February in a televised interview – a moment that is recounted in the final part of *The Promise*. Milton Nkosi describes this televised announcement of Zuma's resignation as "the end of an era. An era of one corruption allegation after another. An era of divisions, infighting and public squabbles. There are many people who are celebrating now, and not just from the opposition benches" (BBC News 2018). Indeed, many people celebrated, just like the novel reports: "Cheers, hasta la vista, gone! After holding us to ransom for years and years, he lets go and strolls out. Live, right now! Just like that! Oh my goodness, can you believe it!" (270). It is important to mention that Zuma has denied any wrongdoing and asserts that he was a victim of persecution. The specific reasons behind his resignation are complex and have been investigated and publicly debated in South Africa. However, with his leaving, the idea of change and hope resurfaces once again as Galgut writes: "Surely everybody can sense it, the change in the atmosphere, now that the bad man has resigned..." (270).

It is worth noting that certain laws have changed over the years, allowing black individuals to own property. This means that the only obstacle preventing Amor from fulfilling her mother's promise to Salome was Anton and his blackmailing. With Anton's passing, Amor is finally able to legally give Salome her house and land. However, when Amor visits Salome, she encounters Lukas, Salome's son, who is displeased with the situation. Lukas creates a distance between himself and Amor, referring to her as the "white lady" (286). He aims to highlight the differences between them, indicating that he has experienced the weight of history – "life happened" (287), as he says. This is an impact that Amor, despite her awareness of racism, racial inequalities, and Apartheid, has not endured. The novel explores the idea that individual life is intertwined with history, which makes it impossible for Lukas and Amor's relationship to remain as friendly as it was in their youth.

This particular section of the novel takes place 24 years after the end of Apartheid, and yet South Africa remains fundamentally segregated. Lukas's anger comes from the lack of progress and his felt inability to move forward. The lives of black individuals have not significantly improved compared to the lives white individuals have always had. Lukas's rage arises from the realization that Amor cannot truly give them the land, as "it already belongs to [them]" (286). The land is actually theirs, even if white people took it from them. Salome, in this scene, shows no sign of a reaction as she has lost faith over the years.

Overall, Galgut uses the Swart family as a metaphorical representation/mirroring of South Africa's history, which serves as the background for the narrative. The repetition of death within each generation of the family reflects the repetitive patterns observed at the level of the country's political leadership. Similarly, the promise made within the family reflects the larger promises made after the end of Apartheid, particularly regarding land reforms in the interest of black South Africans. However, just like the family's promise, these promises have remained largely unfulfilled. Despite some improvements since the end of Apartheid, the country remains divided in terms of wealth, with the poor becoming even poorer and the rich becoming even richer. Galgut thus expresses the feelings of the nation as something "unspoken but the sense of promise that we all felt in 1994, the sense that South Africa could really finally transform itself, has dissipated nearly entirely" (Studemann 2021).



## 4. The Context of the Novels: After Apartheid

### 4.1. *The Impostor*

The story of *The Impostor* takes place a few years after the end of Apartheid. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the impact of this system has left a lasting mark on the country. Racial segregation and white supremacy have had significant consequences for South Africa, shaping its societal dynamics and ongoing challenges. On top of that, Galgut portrays the disillusionment of South Africans not meeting the anticipated changes after the end of Apartheid. The author exposes the unpleasant realities and ugly truths that the country is trying to conceal. In other words, post-Apartheid South Africa falls short of the expectations held by those who fought for freedom. The persistent remnants of the old Apartheid dualities persevere at the levels of politics, economy, corruption, and the social standing of certain individuals as it can still be felt in this “new” country. Damon Galgut proves to be sensitive towards this context and captures it through his novel(s).

The theme of corruption plays a significant role in the novel and is manifested in various forms. It is introduced early on, during the episode when Adam, ignoring a stop sign, encounters a police officer. This encounter occurs as he embarks on his journey to his brother’s house in the Karoo, and the first person he interacts with is a young black police officer who informs him that the fine will cost him a thousand rand. A small conversation occurs during which the police officer realizes that Adam’s license is out of date, which leads him to ask for a bribe of two hundred rand instead of the official fine. The reflection that the main character undergoes is intriguing, as he struggles to understand such behavior: “He’d heard about this sort of thing, but he’d never had to deal with it himself” (4). Adam looks at the officer and imagines him “like a dark gatekeeper at the door to Adam’s new life, blocking the path, one hungry hand extended” (5). In other words, he sees the young cop as a fraudulent person standing in the way of his perfect new life. Naturally, he is not keen to admit that the bribe could be seen as a form of revenge by black South Africans in response to the years of mistreatment they endured during Apartheid.

Adam shares the details of this conversation with his brother, Gavin, and the latter’s girlfriend, Charmaine. His brother does not shy away from asking him if he gave the money to the cop and implies that he should have accepted as the bribe would have been “a lot cheaper than the fine” (5). Nevertheless, Gavin’s moral principles are questioned more than once in the

novel. Later in the story, Gavin criticizes his brother's fraudulent connections, but his opinion soon changes when it occurs to him that he, too, could benefit from them.

The fraudulent connections of Adam's are actually linked to Canning's business. Indeed, in his attempt to sabotage his father's dreams by destroying Gondwana, Canning works with dishonorable men such as Genov – a European mafioso involved in many crimes. Mr. Genov supervises Canning's project of building a golf course on the land of Gondwana, which is called Ingadi 300 and embodies the idea of corruption in this entire business.

Black individuals are also implicated in the corruption surrounding Canning's project. Sipho Moloi and Enoch Mandi, two men involved in the business, are the symbols of corruption within the black community through this project. However, because they are only used as black representation, their impact on the project is relatively minor compared to other influential figures. Canning goes so far as to describe Enoch Mandi as "black empowerment camouflage" (185), implying that he is being used as a form of affirmative racial discrimination. In post-Apartheid South Africa, the economic system encourages "Black Economic Empowerment" (BEE) as a way to atone for the racial inequalities resulting from Apartheid. In Canning's scheme, Enoch Mandi serves as a façade for his business to seem multiracial without having him bear considerable and significant decisions. This practice, known as "BEE fronting" or "fronting practice", is a form of corruption "where a Black Person is given a title (such as director or shareholder) but does not get the powers associated with it" (Ochse and Ochse 2023). The BEE policy was originally installed to improve black people's lives in the new South Africa. However, it has been exploited, resulting in instances where individuals are given symbol positions without real decision-making power. This is exemplified in the case of Enoch Mandi, who is only given the authority to select the project's name, Ingadi 300, reflecting his Zulu heritage.

The new mayor of the town is another instance of the dominant corruption at work in the country. On a particular day, Adam is asked by Canning to deliver a package to the mayor after returning from a weekend at Gondwana. Without questioning its contents, Adam hands over the parcel. Later, while Adam is burning some of his poems in his garden, the mayor interrupts him and reprimands him for violating regulations with this activity. Additionally, the mayor points out that the "alien trees" are still present despite his previous request for Adam to remove them. "It's all right, forget the trees, forget the fire. I won't fine you. You mustn't say anything to anybody" (201). The mayor evidently chooses to overlook this issue due to Adam's help with Canning's package. Later, Gavin notifies Adam that his friend's entire enterprise is being exposed in the media for corruption:

It's unravelling, that's what's going on. What started it is this government character, what's his name again, somebody Moloi, giving the construction contract to a company that happens to have his uncle and brother-in-law on the board of directors. Now all kinds of unsavoury things are creeping out of the woodwork. Your mayor is also involved. Seems like he passed an environmental impact assessment without running it past the council. People are calling for his head. Fanie Prinsloo – remember him? – has come out and said it publicly. Corruption. (216-217)

In this passage, Gavin exposes the truth about the fraudulent business his brother was, unintentionally at the time, involved in. The mayor was bribed to make it look like Canning and his business partners were careful about the effects of their project on the environment, although it seems unlikely given their failure to wait for the council's assessment. Through this excerpt, Galgut highlights that corruption is not always ignored in South Africa.

Through *The Impostor*, Galgut suggests that despite the implementation of new laws, racial discrimination persists. The author also enlightens the reader about the efforts made by the country to rectify past injustices, such as the introduction of racial quotas. These quotas require a minimum number of non-white individuals in various aspects of life, including employment and team sports, aiming to achieve a balanced racial composition. Indeed, at the beginning of the novel, the reader becomes aware of the protagonist's situation: Adam finds himself without a job or a place to live. Adam has lost his employment to "the young black intern he'd been training for the past six months [who] was, in fact, being groomed to replace him" (15). Adam's employer explicitly states that his dismissal has nothing to do with his performance but is solely associated to the implementation of the new law. The anticipation was that the country would take measures to address and rectify the racial injustices of the past.

At the beginning of the novel, Adam moves to a small town in the Karoo with the intention of writing his second collection of poems. Through his protagonist's thoughts, Galgut deepens the evidence of the ongoing division of the country as a hangover from the days of Apartheid. The author explains through Adam's mind how the Karoo remains divided into two parts according to race:

In Johannesburg or in Cape Town, there was a sense of turmoil and ferment; South Africa's big change was evident and tangible. But not here. Here the ways things were seemed inevitable and natural, as preordained as the weather. There was the old racial division, all the whites on one side of the river, in their spacious and expensive properties,

and all the coloureds on the other side, in the township, in their crowded little houses between pot-holed, neglected streets. (29-30)

In this passage, Adam comes to a (false) realization that in big cities the “old racial division” does not exist anymore, but that in smaller towns, like the one in the Karoo, the “old racial division” is not so much ancient history. Yet, even with this information, the protagonist does not consider the fact that it could be like this in many other small towns. In his mind, the town he is in lives in the past. Adam chooses to ignore the reality of South Africa to feel better about the fact that he is a privileged white man.

The notion of racial inequality is further exemplified through the characters of Grace and Ezekiel. These elderly black servants, who happen to be married, have dedicated the majority of their lives working for Canning’s family. Even with the introduction of new laws, Grace and Ezekiel continue to be in full submission to the family as domestic servants, which now consists of Canning and his wife, Baby. Their continued adherence to their way of life can be attributed to their old age and the fact that they have always lived in submission during the Apartheid era. This background helps explain their response when they are dismissed by Canning’s wife. When Grace discovers Adam and Baby during their final intimate encounter, Baby decides to fire the elderly couple, accusing them of theft when justifying her decision to her husband. Instead of seizing the opportunity to pursue a different path and break free from their roles as servants, the couple immediately embark on a door-to-door search in the town, hoping to find employment in another household. However, despite not being responsible for their fate, their reaction serves as evidence that they do not know any other way of living than being servants. The Apartheid regime has inculcated into them the belief that they were destined for nothing more than that.

The whole episode suggests that the division between black and white is not the only type of division between people in South Africa. The novel shows that, following the end of Apartheid, divisions have also emerged within the black community itself. A social gulf exists between the characters of Baby and the two servants. At some point, Adam wonders:

What it feels like for somebody like Grace to be taking orders from Baby. Just a few years ago they would’ve both been in the same position: exiled from power, with no prospects, no future. Now everything has changed for Baby, while for Grace it has all stayed the same. (92)

Adam’s reflection illustrates that the divide among black individuals is due to power, and more particularly, to wealth. It is undeniable that certain people of color have gained access to a

higher social class through money, which created an economic disparity among them. Many black individuals, such as Grace and Ezekiel, continue to face exploitation, with the difference now being that they are also exploited by other black individuals of higher social status. A few pages later, Adam again forms a similar perception when observing an interaction between Ezekiel and Sipho Moloi:

Adam has another moment like the one in the *rondawel*, where he wonders at what wordless perceptions might be passing between this young, well-heeled black yuppie, and the poor old family retainer. But perhaps he is the only one who notices: the two of them are so far from one another, sitting at such divergent points of history, that they might be in different worlds. Instead it's Adam who's left with an acute awareness of the life that Canning's thoughtless cross-questioning has evoked [...]. (95)

Here, Adam refers to the difference between Sipho Moloi and Ezekiel. With this passage, it is suggested that Adam may not be at ease with the new societal system resulting from the end of Apartheid. His preoccupation with the role of money in creating divisions between black individuals implies a discomfort with the idea that wealth can now enable black people to live a lifestyle comparable to that of white individuals. However, as we do not have access to any other characters' thoughts, we do not know if he is the only one feeling that way.

In conclusion, *The Impostor* by Damon Galgut puts light on the lasting impact of Apartheid in South Africa. The novel explores themes of racial segregation, disillusionment, and corruption, which reveal the unresolved issues and divisions that persist in the country. Galgut portrays the ongoing struggles faced by South Africans who had hoped for a more significant transformation after Apartheid's abolition. Corruption emerges as a prominent theme in the novel, reflecting the pervasive nature of corrupt practices in post-Apartheid South Africa. As shown in the dissertation, these corrupt acts involve both black and white individuals, illustrating how corruption transcends racial boundaries and perpetuates inequalities. However, a crucial aspect lies in the observation that while certain black individuals, like Baby, managed to escape the life they endured during Apartheid, some chose to remain within the familiar confines of their previous life, driven by apprehension of the uncertainties that the world might hold for them. This reveals divisions within the black community itself, with wealth and social status. Galgut's sensitive portrayal of these issues invites readers to critically examine the realities and complexities of the country's claim of ongoing transformation.

#### 4.2. *The Promise*

In *The Promise*, there is, once again, no denying of the importance of the history of South Africa. As it has been explained in the previous chapter of my dissertation, this particular story, divided into four sections, covers a time period of thirty-two years. However, the reader only knows what happens during the years corresponding to each section, decades passing between each part of the novel. As I have explained, each part of the novel is linked to a dying character, while the rest of the family is left to reflect on the personalities and roles of the deceased. In a way, Galgut has linked the difficult times the characters go through to the changes of the political environment. As I have analyzed the major political tension of the country in the previous section, in this part I shall focus on a more general development of South Africa's history: the move from the segregation to democracy.

The novel then starts during the Apartheid regime and finishes more than 20 years after the end of the segregation. In the year 1986, South Africa is under a state of emergency as it is the height of Apartheid. The 1980s were violent as the opposition to Apartheid grew more united and active. This decade pushed South Africa towards change. As *South Africa History Online* informs us, in 1983 the United Democratic Front (UDF), a grouping of many different organizations that acted together against the Apartheid and its unfair rules, was launched. The UDF was important in this decade as it pushed forward mass actions in different areas across the country. However, the UDF gave support to most of these uprising and did not organize them. The revolts allowed the African National Congress (ANC) to gain more power and be better organized so that they could try to make South Africa “ungovernable” to force them to put an end to Apartheid. In response, in 1985, the government called for a state of emergency which gave the authorities the power to arrest people without any real reason. During the state of emergency, civil rights were diminished, and many people were arrested, tortured, or killed (in detention or even on the streets). Even “black-on-black” violence became normal, as some black people were spies for the police – which provided them with arms for them to protect themselves.

As depicted in the novel, it is a period characterized by the mistreatment of black people, not exactly as slaves but not far from it. The novel illustrates it through Salome's situation within the Swart family. As discussed in the previous section of the dissertation, despite her dedicated care for Rachel during her illness – when her own family did not want to do it – Salome receives no gratitude. Most members of the Swart clan, seemingly simply based on

Salome's skin color, consider it sufficient reason to treat her as insignificant. In essence, she is expected to fulfill her duties without waiting for acknowledgment or reciprocation.

In the second part of *The Promise*, Galgut jumps to the year 1995. The author writes about Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990: "When Mandela came out of jail, fist in the air, just a few years ago, nobody knew what he would look like. Now his face is everywhere, avuncular, friendly, stern but forgiving" (149). *History* says that "after the massacre of peaceful Black demonstrators at Sharpeville in 1960, Mandela helped organize a paramilitary branch of the ANC to engage in guerrilla warfare against the white minority government", which is what led him to prison. The leader of the anti-Apartheid movement was sentenced in 1964 to life prison alongside other ANC leaders as they were considered dangerous. Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in jail before his release. Indeed, Mandela had to wait for F.W. de Klerk to be elected as President of South Africa in 1989 to be let out of prison in 1990. De Klerk's goal was to dismantle Apartheid and he knew Nelson Mandela was the key to achieving this. *History* continues: "Mandela subsequently led the ANC in its negotiations with the minority government for an end to Apartheid and the establishment of a multiracial government". Together, de Klerk and Mandela won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. A year later, Mandela became the first black president of South Africa.

Mandela's presidency led to the abolition of Apartheid in 1991 – and its official end in 1994. Undoubtedly, the end of this regime stands out as the central aspect of that decade. Galgut uses the novel to portray the lack of cohesiveness following the fall of Apartheid in the country. Indeed, as the three siblings' father is in the H.F. Verwoerd Hospital after being bitten by a snake, Anton reflects: "Apartheid has fallen, see, we die right next to each other now, in intimate proximity. It's just the living part we still have to work out" (99). This quote sheds light on the harsh reality of this newfound existence, emphasizing the challenges of coexisting as a unified society where people of different races, specifically black and white, still struggle to live together harmoniously. Through this passage, Galgut is being ironic about South Africa's reality, highlighting that the end of Apartheid has not completely changed the country. In the preceding lines of the mentioned excerpt, it is indicated that a black man is being cared for in the adjacent bed to Manie's. At this point, we gain insight into Anton's thoughts, as mentioned earlier, enabling us to perceive his frustration arising as he "can't believe they haven't changed the name of the hospital yet" (99). As a matter of fact, the hospital is named after the former Prime Minister of South Africa Hendrick Frensch Verwoerd, also known as the architect of Apartheid. He is considered to have had the most significant role in the construction of Apartheid as well as white supremacy and racial segregation. H.F. Verwoerd Hospital was an

actual hospital, yet I came to learn that its name underwent changes, with it being officially renamed as the Pretoria Academic Hospital in 1997 and later as the Steve Biko Academic Hospital in 2008. The irony lies in the fact that this hospital, named after a racist figure and a protagonist in the Apartheid regime, is where black and colored individuals receive the same kind of care. Despite appearing insignificant, it must be incredibly challenging for black individuals to seek treatment in a hospital bearing the name of a politician who actively contributed to the establishment of Apartheid. Moreover, with this, Galgut is being sarcastic and aims to bring light on the reality of the country's ongoing division. Indeed, the irony lies in Galgut's sarcastic commentary on how death supposedly brings equality to all individuals, despite the ongoing segregation that persists within the country and people's lives.

The idea of change is ever present in the second part of the novel. Amor, who had left for England several years before, comes back to Pretoria for her father's funeral and immediately remarks changes in the place she grew up in:

The countryside looks the same but the laws piled on top of it, the invisible, powerful laws that make and then lay down at angles across the earth, pressing down heavily, all those laws are changing now. She can feel, almost as if it's part of the picture in front of her, that she has come back to the same place, but it isn't the same place any more. (128)

Amor is aware that the abolishment of Apartheid is going to keep impacting the laws of South Africa. The country still looks the same, but it is changing from the inside. This has a special meaning for Amor: now black and colored people can own land unlike when the Apartheid system was still in force. When she was only thirteen years old – in the first part of the novel – Amor was not aware of such a law that prevented Salome from owning her own house as she “[had] no idea what country she [was] living in” (82). In 1995, Amor is older and more aware of the country she used to live in. As she is still determined to keep the promise made to her mother, Amor claims “[w]hen my mother died, it wasn't possible for Salome to own the land. But the laws have changed and now she can” (149). However, this is also the point at which it becomes clear that some white people are not ready to live alongside black people. Astrid tells Amor that even if Salome has the right to own land, they will not give it to her. Tannie Marina even says that Amor “is supposed to stand with [her] own people” (149). In this instance, Astrid and Tannie Marina serve as representations of the difficulties people encounter when trying to live together with black individuals as equals after the end of the Apartheid system. The novel implies that, to some extent, even black people are aware of this challenge: “Man is doomed to live by the sweat of his brow, or at least some men are. Some women too. Just the way it is,



apparently, or so everyone in these parts seem to believe. What do you expect, a revolution?” (141). Despite the conclusion of Apartheid, black individuals are aware that the prospects for improvement in their situation are unlikely, and they understand that pursuing a revolution might result in more harm than good.

As the novel reaches its third part, there is another ten-year jump. The 2004 year is a year in which South Africa was still dealing with the consequences of Apartheid. The transition from Apartheid to a democratic society was a complex process, and the inequalities and racial divisions of the past were continuing to impact perceptions in 2004. Within the population of South Africa, it was not uncommon to encounter two distinct groups of people: those who recognized the injustices of the past and worked for equality, and those who held racial prejudices or maintained stereotypes concerning black people. Astrid, who previously regarded black individuals as servants and did not acknowledge them, now benefits from their presence. In fact, at the start of the third part of the novel, it is revealed that Astrid’s husband, Jake, is engaged in business with a powerful politician, whose most important aspect is his blackness. Astrid’s commentary of the color of her husband’s business partner highlights a change in the hierarchy. Indeed, contrary to black empowerment, in this situation Jake, a white man, is being used as a cover up by the powerful black politician.

In this part of the novel, the reader knows that Apartheid was abolished ten years ago, but they soon realize that black people continue to face challenges in integrating into society in South Africa. The effects of the system were still deeply implanted in society. As mentioned before, the racial inequalities of the old regime still had an impact on the perception and treatment of black people in 2004, even if some of them had better conditions of living. In the novel, Galgut shows us that some people like to believe the past is long gone, even though there was a period when doubts arose regarding the smoothness of societal transformations. Nonetheless, white people were taken aback by the remarkable ability of black people to peacefully coexist, defying the expectations set by history:

When the blacks took over the country she thought she’d have a cadenza, people were stockpiling food and buying guns, it was like the end had come. And then nothing happened and everyone just went on like before, except it was nicer because there was forgiveness and no more boycotts. (173)

Through Astrid’s thoughts, we gain awareness into the perceptions of white people regarding black individuals. Before the end of Apartheid, there existed a notion that black individuals were wild and violent. Astrid’s thoughts prove this stereotype to be false: for the country to be

able to move on, black people knew how important forgiveness was, yet it does not mean that they forgot the past. Despite some white individuals, like Astrid, pretending that everything is amicable between black and white communities, there are still some who cling to old perceptions. It is important to note that not all black individuals are kind, as for example Astrid was the victim of a black carjacker – just as not all white people are kind. However, this particular moment also highlights the persistence of racial inequalities. When the black man attempts to report Astrid's murder, he states that he needs "to find a white person to report it" (178). This reflects the unfair treatment that black people frequently face, as they are often unjustly blamed for crimes without valid reasons.

In the year 1994, Archbishop Desmond Tutu used for the first time the term "Rainbow Nation" to refer to post-Apartheid South Africa and its multiracial population. It was used during the country's transition from Apartheid to democracy, it signifies unity amidst diversity. The concept emphasizes reconciliation, tolerance, and acceptance among these groups, aiming for unity and peaceful coexistence. While the Rainbow Nation idea has been celebrated as a symbol of hope and progress, South Africa still faces challenges related to inequality, poverty, and racial tensions. Damon Galgut only uses this term once in the novel and it is not in the second part which occurs only a year after the first use of the term, i.e., in 1995. Indeed, Galgut uses it at a moment in which his story is set in 2004. The fact that Galgut uses this term so late in the novel could be a representation of the concept as a reminder of the country's belief to be going towards equality and coexistence of the diverse communities, although, as explained in this dissertation, it proves to be a challenging effort.

While the last part of the novel takes place in the year 2018, the reader realizes that small changes in the country that occurred. Galgut wants to inform us that the country's attempts to rectify its past injustices are not always carried out in a fair manner, often resulting in the detriment of others. For example, at the very end of the story, Amor is finally able to give the house and the land to the black maid, it took more than 30 years for her to fulfil the promise and she still has bad news to give: "There is a claim against this property by people who say they used to live here and were forcibly removed. It's possible you will be given the land and then lose it again. It could happen" (287). What Amor is referring to here is the land expropriation: it comes from the country's history of colonialism and Apartheid, which resulted in the confiscation of land from black South Africans. The government distributed the majority of land, which is productive, to the white minority, while forcibly transferring black South Africans from their lands to areas known as "homelands". However, as the Apartheid regime ended, the government showed concern towards the land reform and acknowledged these

injustices that happened. Some argued that the land should be redistributed to those who were dispossessed, promoting greater social justice. Others suggested that alternative approaches, such as fair market-based compensation or support for emerging farmers, would be more effective and less disruptive. The government created laws and programs to address the need for land reform. In Salome's situation, she patiently waited for the land she was promised nearly four decades before, mostly because of Apartheid and its laws. However, just as she finally obtains it, she is informed that she may once again face the possibility of losing it, this time due to the deep-rooted effects of Apartheid. Galgut then highlights the injustices and consequences of the Apartheid regime that still happen nowadays.

By creating his story over the span of four decades, Galgut wanted to emphasize the evolution, not necessarily in a good way, of South Africa from the days of Apartheid to nowadays. The characters in the book grapple with the lingering effects of segregation and the challenges of living together as equals. The idea of the author was to show that by trying to do better, the country actually keeps on doing worst, suggesting that it might not be the best way to correct the past. Through the historical facts, Galgut raises important questions about South Africa's true nature of change and the difficulties faced in breaking down barriers and embracing a shared future for the multiracial population.

## 5. Narrative Perspective

### An analysis of the narrative through the white characters of the novels

Both of Damon Galgut's novels analyzed in this dissertation have an important similarity: *The Impostor* and *The Promise* both use a third-person narrator that is focused on biased and unreliable white characters. This is an interesting aspect as both narratives encompasses the history of South Africa during and after the Apartheid regime, yet it never centers on the perspective of one of the black characters. One man in each story stands out as an excellent example for analysis in this regard: Adam in *The Impostor* and Anton in *The Promise*. These characters bear striking similarities, as they had supported the freedom of the black community until the fall of Apartheid. However, the transition to a new regime proved challenging for them, as they had not foreseen losing the white privileges they had enjoyed their entire live.

#### 5.1. *The Impostor*

The story of *The Impostor* follows the life of the main character named Adam Napier and his journey in this new South Africa. The novel unfolds in a nonlinear manner, shifting between different periods of Adam's life – sometimes, though rarely, going back in time. Throughout the narrative, Adam encounters a range of characters who reflect different aspects of the South African society. These encounters expose him to the country's social and political scenery, marked by racial tensions and the legacy of Apartheid. Adam's personal journey intertwines with the larger context of the nation's struggle for justice and reconciliation. As the story progresses, the narrative offers information about Adam's relationships and his encounters with others. He forms friendships and a romantic entanglement with Canning's wife, Baby, but these connections are often marked by a sense of disillusionment as none of them last long nor do they have a real purpose. Adam's relationship with Canning and Baby is driven by self-interest on both sides. Adam is attracted to the privileges and lifestyle associated with Canning's land, while Baby sees him as a means to eliminate Canning from the picture. The relationships are based on personal gain rather than genuine connection. However, as the story unfolds, Adam is forced to realize his own imposture, although it is only temporary, which pushes him to go back to his old life in the city.

In *The Impostor*, the narrator focalizes on Adam's perspective throughout the story, so that the apparent neutrality of the tone in fact reveals or conceals the protagonist's private

viewpoint. The narrator maintains a certain distance from the protagonist, observing and recounting his experiences without exploring deeply his inner thoughts and emotions in great detail – contrary to what can be seen in *The Promise*, which will be analyzed later in this section. The narrator offers glimpses into Adam's life at different stages, from his childhood (in a flashback) to adulthood, while also narrating his multiple struggles and relationships. Yet, the narrator does not provide extensive judgments on Adam's choices or behaviors, though of course the narrative style somehow invites the readers to form their own opinions. While the narrator does not explicitly express all of Adam's deepest thoughts, it expresses Adam's feelings of being an impostor – as indicated by the title. Nevertheless, this feeling of imposture proves to be fleeting and partial – which is in reality what his imposture is all about. Adam's imposture shows how he is a biased and unreliable character. However, we will focus on Adam's imposture towards his feelings for South Africa and the place he believes he has in it.

Here, Galgut creates a main character who feels betrayed by this “new” South Africa. In Adam's mind, the country was much simpler to understand under the Apartheid regime and, today, the changes that followed the end of said regime are challenging to him. In many ways, the main character tries to present himself as unperturbed by the development of his country as “he had always been clear about his moral position, but that wasn't the case anymore” for, “[t]hese days, he found himself taking the opposite stand to whatever political point had been raised” (32). This shows his indecision as he prefers to go with everyone's favorite opinion, this way of thinking also creates a lack of cohesiveness in the different views he defends. This attitude alone reveals Adam's difficulty to find his place in this new reality: he has lived his entire life under the Apartheid system and now, he does not know where he fits under the new laws.

As a white liberal in the days of struggle, Adam had always been positive towards the changes of the country. However, this attitude quickly changed when he lost his job and house because of the new measures.

But Adam remembered that, in the years leading up to South Africa's big change, Gavin had been gloomy and frightened. He'd even spoken about emigrating. Adam had been the positive one, full of hope for the future. It didn't seem right that it should have worked out like this: with Adam unemployed and homeless, and his brother talking loudly about opening up the country. (20)

Adam claims that he wants to write poetry, which is why he declines Gavin's proposal of working for him. Nevertheless, with the excerpt above, the reader could understand that Adam

is in fact jealous of his brother for being successful in this changed country that has rejected him. He wants to prove that he can be successful too, without Gavin's help, by writing poetry and eventually getting published. It needs to be mentioned that not everyone could allow themselves to make a decision such as the one Adam made: to refuse employment to live from their passion, i.e., writing poetry in Adam's case. In October of 2012, the BBC news wrote an article that presents the statistic of income in South Africa based on race: "The average annual income of a white household is about 365,000 rand, [...] and blacks at 60,600 rand". In *The Impostor*, Adam never seems to realize that, as a white man, he has privileges that others cannot even consider, like refusing a job to go write poetry in a small town in the Karoo.

Adam does not understand this new country he lives in, but most importantly he is mad and annoyed by it. After the incident that caused Grace and Ezekiel's dismissal – i.e., Grace catching Adam and Baby having an affair. Adam later finds them at his door looking for a job. Feeling guilty, he decides to welcome them under his roof while they wait for their son, Lindile, to take them to his house. A few days later, when Lindile arrives to Adam's house, the black man admits that the friendship he had with Canning, when they were little boys, was atypical because of their different positions. By saying that Lindile tries to make Adam aware of the differences between white and black people, yet Adam's reaction is not what he expected: "Oh come on [...]. For God's sake. The whole country has moved on since then. Everything's changed. Can't you move on too?" (222). Adam is mad at black people because they are not happy with what they have been given since the end of Apartheid. Lindile, who knows that far too much harm has been done and far too little has changed, calmly tells him that he simply cannot move on. Adam is in denial of his real situation in South Africa.

Moreover, during this conversation, Lindile tries to make the protagonist realize that he could have done more to help his parents. He first requests money, but Adam says he has none. Adam continues to defend himself by arguing that he and Lindile are the same as they both have a four-room house and no money. Adam genuinely considers himself as poor as he is jobless and even puts himself on the same shelf as black people. Yet, what he fails to understand is that their situations are not the same even if on the outside they look similar: Adam manages to live alone without a job, a house, and money; Lindile is a lecturer in Political Science at a college, he has no money and lives in a house with two people – soon four with his parents. In the black man's eyes, the difference between them is huge: Adam is still more privileged than he is in this post-Apartheid South Africa that has supposedly changed for the better for black people. Lindile even suggests that, if he actually wants to help, Adam could let Grace and Ezekiel live with him, but Adam continues saying he cannot help them in any way. The fact of

living alone in a house is a kind of privilege, one that he could not enjoy if he agreed to host Grace and Ezekiel indefinitely. Even if Adam feels guilty and responsible for their situation, he cannot give up his own personal comfort to help someone else. Lindile tells Adam about the reality of black people living in post-Apartheid South Africa: the lives of black people have not changed, even if the Apartheid policies have been abolished. In Lindile's case, it shows that black people always had problems making money and, although he has a job, money is still a delicate subject. Lindile's example also highlights the difficulty black people have to enjoy the same kind of privacy Adam experiences – thanks to his opportunities in terms of accommodation. Living alone in a house is a privilege that is out of reach for the majority of black people, as the reader can observe with Lindile. Adam remains silent at the end of the conversation with the black man. However, it seems that he heard the man in front of him as he forced him to understand the reality of the country he is living in: despite the changes in the laws, racial injustices are still present in South African society. In some way, Lindile helped him realize that even if he thought he had lost everything, it is not the case. Yet, Adam is not ready to acknowledge those privileges he has as it would mean letting go of them.

However, it is not the first time that Adam is made aware of the truth he is refraining himself from acknowledging. The first person to try to open Adam's eyes is Blom, his neighbor. Undeniably, their relationship has been strange from the moment Adam moved into his brother's house. Blom, or the "Blue Man" as he is nicknamed in the novel, continues trying to create a connection with his neighbor by being helpful and welcoming, even if Adam does not want to respond. Blom even claims that Adam is his "only true friend", but Adam does not believe they could ever be close in any type of way as "Blom is rural and Afrikaans and working-class; Adam is a bourgeois city type. Their proximity here is an accident, an artificial encounter" (112). In Adam's mind, he is better than his neighbor and the latter does not deserve his friendship. They both belong to different worlds, yet when Adam needs Blom, he uses him only to reject him again afterwards – i.e., Adam uses Blom's vulnerability and loneliness to his own advantage. One day, as he is already quite drunk, the Blue Man decides to be honest with his neighbor about his past: he is in fact living under a false identity and hiding in his house. Blom explains to Adam that he was a henchman for the racist government and is about to testify at a trial about the horrible actions he has done and for whom. The protagonist is so uncomfortable with Blom's confession that he refuses to hear what he has to say anymore, and the narrative only describes his sensory perceptions at that moment, without reporting on his deeper thoughts. The reader cannot know what is said because of the narrative that is centered on Adam throughout the novel and, therefore, fails to find out what crimes Blom has committed

as his confession is replaced by Adam's description of his neighbor's hands. The protagonist thus represses his awareness of Blom's truth as it implies his own passive implication in those crimes which were committed on his and white people's behalf.

Even if Adam does not want to admit his passive association with the Apartheid regime, Blom tries to make him aware of his responsibilities and argues: "Everything I did, I did for you. And other people like you" (170). What Blom is trying to bring to the surface here is that, willingly or not, Adam, as a white man, benefitted from the situation caused by Apartheid and he is guilty of not doing or saying anything against it. However, even with Blom's sentence, Adam prefers to remain silent which shows his incapacity to admit his culpability.

As a way of feeling better about himself, Adam decides to tell this story to his brother, arguing that Blom was on the wrong side during the war because "he tortured and killed and kidnapped for the government. [...] He is a *bad* guy" (172). In this small excerpt, the protagonist tries to depict his neighbor as a horrible person to decrease his sense of guilt. There is no denying that the actions Blom portrayed during the war were abominable, but the problem here is that Adam is making him look worse than he is. The dirty work had to be done in order to keep things the way white people knew them, but Adam does not want to admit that Blom did it for white people to keep their privileges over the black population of the country. In a way, Adam would still be living his perfect life as a privileged white man in South Africa if Blom – and the other henchmen – had succeeded in their mission. Yet, the protagonist is unable to acknowledge his own passive.

Both conversations, with Lindile and Blom, help Adam become aware of his own life and of South Africa. Adam's silence at the end of these conversations suggests that he understands the ongoing discrimination against black people in the modern society of South Africa, how he is still advantaged over black people, but also the privileges he benefits as a white man even if Apartheid has fallen. However, the protagonist is entirely unable to admit his culpability for either of those things. Towards the end of the novel, Adam finally faces a judge for the fine he obtained in the first pages of the novel – a fine he got for not stopping at a stop sign. He decides to not explain what happened with the cop and the bribe. Instead, he apologizes and thinks to himself that "[p]erhaps it was age, but he was learning to accept reality" (241). That is the very first – and only – time the reader sees Adam admit to his responsibility and his guilt for something as pointless as a fine, but not for something important like the racial inequalities that keep occurring to black people in South Africa.

Galgut suggests that Adam seems to understand the problems occurring in this "new" South Africa, but he refuses to admit playing a part in them. By the end of the novel, Adam



goes back to living in the city and enjoys a life that black people cannot have. There, in the city, all the problems and troubles he encountered in the Karoo do not exist. “It felt as if he’d left something behind, something vitally important that he would need in just a moment” (249). Even though his time away from the city has brought him many opportunities for realizations, Adam has not learned anything: he leaves as if nothing had happened. He even forgets the path he has gone through even if he seemed to understand a part of the problems of this new South Africa.

Even if the reader can see Adam’s incapacity to admit or even really acknowledge his privileges and implication in the history of South Africa, the protagonist’s true feelings towards this changing country are seen through his relationship with Canning’s land – Gondwana. Why would Adam keep on going there every weekend to see a childhood friend he does not remember? It is possibly because he considers himself poor and lost in this country, yet he does not feel that way when he is in Gondwana. Adam’s weekly visits to Canning and Baby’s house quickly become the only important and enjoyable aspect of his life. As it is focused on Adam, the narrative is less and less centered on his time outside of the land: “That’s what filled up time. Without the [Cannings], his life would be like an old skin with no bones or meat to give it dimension” (200).

In the beginning, it seems that Adam develops a certain fascination for Gondwana’s landscapes as they remind him “of the landscape of his childhood. His visits out here have been like a return to a lost, forgotten part of his life” (140). This “forgotten part of his life” refers to who he was before the end of Apartheid: an employed man with a house to himself. Clearly, Gondwana makes him feel like someone he no longer is – and probably never was. However, he is also aware of the repercussion it has on him: “He becomes somebody else, a creature he doesn’t know” (150). Indeed, Adam decides to take his revenge on Canning after learning about the latter’s desire to destroy Gondwana: he feels betrayed and enraged. His first idea is to leave and never speak to Canning ever again, and yet he opts for an act of vicious revenge: having an unashamed affair with his wife. It is probably something that the relaxed Adam with a job, a house, and living in the city would have never done – at least that is what Adam likes to believe. Here, this shows another type of privilege from Adam’s part: the ability to not acknowledge his dishonesty.

The narrator of *The Impostor* is not independent as he clearly only exists within Adam Napier’s perspective. Through the experiences of Adam and other characters – also seen through the prism of the protagonist’s perceptions –, the narrator explores the complex relationships of race, power, and privilege after the Apartheid system, which are all portrayed

through the depiction of the life in Gondwana Adam presents to the reader. It offers glimpses into the different perspectives and attitudes held by various characters, investigating the multifaceted nature of South African society during that time. The narrative relates of the protagonist's hesitance towards the country, creating a complex relationship between South Africa and him.

As a white South African, he was born into a society that benefits from the privileges/advantages offered by and during Apartheid. Yet, as Apartheid ended, his personal experiences and encounters challenge his understanding of the system and its implications. The legislation was changed as the country was trying to move on from the segregation regime, leaving Adam behind and causing confusion in his mind as to what might be in store for someone like him. Initially, Adam appears somewhat disconnected from the realities of Apartheid, focusing more on his own personal struggles, like losing his job, house and his impression of being broke. Gondwana allows him to experience a modern and contemporary life that resembles one during Apartheid with more advantages, such as being able to sleep with a black woman as it used to be prohibited. On this land, race, power, privileges are the norm for Adam, which is something he feels that does not exist in his post-Apartheid life. However, as the narrative progresses, he becomes increasingly aware of the injustices and inequalities perpetuated by the Apartheid regime. Blom and Lindile assist in his realization about the implications of his own living circumstances, opening his eyes, although momentarily, about the various ways in which he has been profiting from the oppression of unseen others. Once again, his silence to these conversations shows how Adam controls the narrative: he never wanted to be made aware of all of this. Adam has been pushed to understand the reality of his life, but he prefers to erase this from his – and the reader's mind – to continue to live a privileged white man's life. However, he did not expect these conversations to have an impact on himself. They brought a small sense of guilt, but mostly discomfort as he realizes he has been complicit in a system that perpetuates racial inequalities. For most of the novel, Adam feels like the country betrayed him and is against him, when in reality Apartheid used to protect him at the expense of black people, which is something he did not see. Nevertheless, it is not because he is made aware of the ongoing problems of the country that he is ready to accept his culpability.

## 5.2. *The Promise*

For *The Promise*, Damon Galgut clearly went through an evolution in his writing style which is more complex than ever before. From the beginning of the novel, there is an important feeling

of dysfunction within the Swart family. The story follows a chronological development, but the narrative structure of *The Promise* poses challenges at multiple levels, both in terms of identifying the narrator's voice and the varying perspectives from which the story unfolds. The narrative is filled with numerous references to the political tensions prevailing in the country that are manifested in the lives of the family members. Just like in *The Impostor*, Galgut uses a third-person narrator that focuses on white characters. Instead of focusing on one character, in this novel, the narrator's focus is on multiple – i.e., the members of the Swart family. However, after analyzing the intriguing narrator, I will concentrate on Anton's narrative perspective as he resembles Adam in many ways.

Galgut employs a complex writing style in this novel, which may prove difficult to grasp in the first pages of the story. The author uses a narrative technique in which the narrator switches from first person to third person within the span of a paragraph. This alteration of the narrator's perspective results in multiple and diverse viewpoints, blurring the borders of the narrator's role within the story. Consequently, the narration occupies an ambiguous space. The narrative is frequently interrupted by characters' internal monologues and thoughts throughout the story:

If she can keep focused on the hands, the shape of them, with their short, blunt fingers, she will not have to listen to what the mouth above the hands is saying, and then it will not be true. The only thing that is true is the hands, and me looking at the hands. (6)

For example, in this particular excerpt, the narration in the third person is stopped to leave room for a quick first-person narration: in the last line of the quote, the reader is in Amor's thoughts as she attempts to ignore her aunt's negative remarks about her deceased mother. The sudden shifts between internal monologues and the omniscient narrator are not preceded by an explicit indication or signaling element within the writing to indicate a shift in narration.

At times, the narrative voice makes some comments in order to force the reader to be aware of South Africa.

So Salome has gone back to her own house instead, beg your pardon, to the Lombard place, and changed into her church clothes, which she would have worn to the service, a dark dress, patched and darned, and a black shawl and her only good pair of shoes, and a handbag and hat, and like that she sits out in front of her house, sorry, the Lombard place, on a second-hand armchair from which the stuffing is bursting out, and says a prayer for Rachel. (79)

In this passage, on two occasions the narrator dissociates itself from any character and takes the floor: “Salome has gone back to her own house, beg your pardon, to the Lombard place” and “she sits out in front of her house, sorry, the Lombard place”. These two statements – made in the same paragraph and that are essentially the same – are sarcastic comments made in the prospect of forcing the reader to understand the situation of lack of power in which Salome finds herself. The idea here is to show the conditions of living of black people.

Indeed, with *The Promise*, Galgut became bolder with an emancipating narrator. Undeniably, sometimes the narrative voice seems no longer attached to any character and addresses directly to the reader. “Where you, perhaps, also grew up. Where it all of it began” (6), here the narrator suggests that the reader might be a white South African. It is fair to suppose that when writing this novel, Damon Galgut decided to imagine that most readers were going to be white South Africans as a way to expose them. At the end of the story, the narrator addresses, once again, the reader of their lack of interest towards Salome’s situation: “If Salome’s home hasn’t been mentioned before it’s because you have not asked, you didn’t care to know” (285). The author, through the narrative voice, uses the novel to accuse and confront the reader of their inaction – as well as their indifference for black people during and after the Apartheid regime.

As a way to highlight this aspect, the reader is trapped in the white gaze of the members of the Swart family. Significantly, even though the omniscient narrator of the novel jumps from one character’s perspective and mind to another, the focus never falls on the character who may be considered the main one, Salome. Indeed, the narrator never enters the thoughts of Salome or any other black individual, resulting in a lack of black perspectives in the novel. Neel Prabhakar suggests that this deliberate choice may serve to highlight the insignificance and invisibility of black people in the eyes of the white community, who historically enslaved them to fulfill their own needs. The notion of black people’s invisibility can be seen at various points in the novel: as the Swarts do not care for Salome’s opinion or perception of the world, the reader is also denied access to it. This does not apply to the youngest daughter of the family: “She was with Ma when she died, right next to the bed, though nobody seems to see her, she is apparently invisible”, but “Amor can see her [...], so she is not invisible after all” (19). With this comment, it becomes clear that Amor might be the only character who sees and gives importance to Salome.

At times, these narrative switches also extend to time and location. The readers can find themselves transported from one place to another between two paragraphs. An example of this occurs towards the end of the novel, on page 254, where Desirée discusses with her mother the

challenges of reaching Amor to inform her about Anton's death. However, in the following paragraph, the narrative abruptly transitions to Amor's night shift as a nurse working in Cape Town. Such shifts in time and location contribute to the non-linear nature of the narration in the novel. Galgut describes the narrator as someone who "behave[s] like a camera, moving in close and then suddenly pulling far back, jumping from one character to another in the middle of a scene (or even a sentence), or following some side-line of action that has nothing to do with plot" (*The Guardian* 2021).

Additionally, as we established, the many perspectives present within the novel offer a larger interpretation of the country through white people's eyes. However, the most interesting – and most alike to Adam's perspective – is Anton's. He is the eldest child of the family and a white male living in South Africa. It implies that he possesses the privilege of access to everything he desires, as everything is available to him. As a white male in the country, he has significant power. Despite his awareness that he can have anything he wants, expressed through his desire to "eat the world", there remains "a tiny sourness at the back of his throat [that] seems always to have been there, though his life is pure and mild as milk" (63). His experiences during his mandatory military service offer him a partial realization of the challenges faced in South Africa. He then becomes aware that it is far from being an easy place to live in.

Indeed, during his mandatory military service, Anton unintentionally takes the life of an innocent black woman, causing him immense guilt and leading him to desert the army. This act of murder becomes a haunting burden, intensified by the fact that it occurs around the same time as his mother's passing. Anton holds himself responsible for both deaths for a long time, admitting that "for a while [he] actually believed [he] killed [his mother]" (100). His position of power allows him to take a life without facing any repercussions. The prevailing system of power in South Africa benefits and harms white individuals, as exemplified by Anton's conflicting emotions of hate and indulgence towards the world he lives in. He struggles with an internal conflict, feeling both a sense of belonging and detachment from the country. He even claims that "when [he] is done with the army [he is] leaving this country" (52), showing his awareness of the damage the country inflicts on its people. In a way, he suffered because of the violence built into the system, yet he does not realize that white people are not the ones to suffer the most.

However, in the second part of the novel, the narrator reveals that conscription ceased in 1992, implying that Anton no longer needs to run away from the military. Anton himself describes his escape as a matter of "survival" (94), even though he ultimately ended up in Transkei and Johannesburg – he labels both of these locations as "jungles", uncertain of which

one is worse. Anton perceives his escape as the most challenging period of his life when he had to endure significant hardships. However, the reality portrayed by the narrator contradicts Anton's perspective. Here, the narrator emancipates himself from his focus on Anton to shed light on the way white South Africans perceive themselves as victims. Anton had the opportunity to depart from his small town and experience life in a larger city where the circumstances were likely not particularly difficult for a white man. The narrator swiftly reminds the reader of this underlying reality:

All just to keep on breathing another day while doing nothing, absolutely nothing, with the finest years of your youthful life... So what, who gives a shit? Others have suffered way, way more than you have, though that's somehow true of every experience. In the end, all you can say is that you got through this far, far enough for things to change and become easier, no need to hide any more. Holding on, holding out, an old South African solution. (94-95)

Anton appears oblivious to the fact that black individuals have endured, and continue to face, more severe troubles than himself. In this particular instance, Anton willingly opted for a life of escape caused by the government's oppressive laws. If he had chosen otherwise, he could have returned to the army. In contrast, black people did not have the luxury of selecting anything other than being targets during the Apartheid era. The narrator once again emancipates himself to emphasize Anton's advantage of being a white male: "Power might have saved you, Anton, got you out of the country and put your aspirations in reach" (122). Despite the eight-year gap between the first and second parts of the novel, Anton remains unaware of how significantly his life surpasses that of black individuals, even when he may not feel it.

Anton possesses the potential to awaken to the realities of South Africa, "but he too is weakened by the past, his family, himself. And he has committed a murder" (Elliott 2022). It is evident that Anton lacks the strength and conviction necessary to confront the stark reality of the country, as he is more focused on his own problems. Furthermore, he appears unwilling to give up his power. This is apparent from the early stages of the novel when he returns to Pretoria during his temporary break from the army. He is driven to his house by Lexington, his black chauffeur, who is required to wear a specific uniform consisting of a vest and cap to distinguish him, "so that the police can see he's not a skem, he is my driver" (39). Anton must sit in the backseat to highlight the difference that exists between them, to reinforce the division between white and black individuals. During the drive, Lexington refers to Anton as "Master", which surprises Anton, who thinks to himself: "Never called me master before" (40). It is intriguing

to observe that the eldest son of a wealthy white family recognizes the issues brought by racial inequalities in the country, yet he chooses to ignore them. However, as the story progresses, it becomes evident that Anton's potential will never be used for the right cause. Despite the changing dynamics in South Africa, where laws grant greater freedom and land ownership rights to black people, Anton refuses to let Salome go. She remains employed as a maid throughout the novel. Despite recognizing the inherent injustice within the system, Anton continues to benefit from the privileges given to him by the country – i.e., in this case, to have a black servant.

As the novel progresses to its third section, the situation concerning Salome worsens. In the closing pages of the second part of the novel, Anton told Amor that he would follow through with the promise. Indeed, as their father died in the second section, Anton, as the only man left in the family, promises to help Amor and give Salome the Lombard place. However, the third section of the novel, it becomes evident that Anton has never fulfilled the promise. Actually, despite Salome's advancing age, she continues to work as a maid on the farm. As Astrid passes away in this part, it is worth noting that the first-person Anton chooses to inform of his sister's death is Salome, adding an intriguing layer to their relationship.

Salome first. He's said nothing to her yet, nothing at all. She's old, she might have a weak heart, but he also sees her as childlike, someone who needs protection. She's an old child, with a weak heart. (189)

In a sense, it appears that Anton's inclination to inform Salome first comes from his perception of her as "childlike" and in need of protection. Having known the black maid for his entire life, Anton is aware of her sweet and innocent nature. However, despite her age and the experiences she has endured as a black individual in South Africa, Anton considers her in need of protection. This belief arises from the understanding that she has already undergone significant pain and disadvantages due to her skin color. Anton is aware of the suffering endured by the black community during the Apartheid and the post-Apartheid eras. He is aware of the pain she has been going through and that this news is going to bring her even more pain as Astrid is "one of the three white children Salome raised as her own" (190). When he sees Salome's pain as he tells her the horrible news of Astrid's death, he prefers her to go because "he finds her suffering intolerable" (190). He prefers to avoid her gaze and ignore the suffering of black individuals, a tendency that he, like many white individuals, has exhibited throughout his life.

In a way his acknowledgement of the black community's conditions of living can be considered as wasted potential because, just like Adam, Anton never reaches his full capacity

of comprehension. Moreover, Anton's incomplete novel serves as a perfect example of his wasted potential. During Amor's sojourn for Astrid's funeral, Anton reveals to her that he has been working on a novel, admitting that only a few pages have been completed thus far, but "there's something [he] know[s] for sure, that [he]'ll finish it" (209). However, it is something that will, of course, never happen. He attempts to justify his lack of progress to his sister, explaining that:

He'd started on it a couple of years ago, in a kind of fever late one night. How hard he's laboured at it since then, every day almost, sometimes hours at a time. How even when he's not working, but just sitting and thinking about it, it's become a refuge for him. (209)

Over the course of several years, Anton has made minimal progress on his novel, despite his describing of the writing process as hard labor, but also because he considers that if "the engine won't turn over [...] you can't force it" (232). Additionally, like Adam in *The Impostor*, Anton shares a similar perspective in terms of not concerning himself with the challenges of life and maintaining the belief that he can live through his passion of writing a novel. However, Anton's novel remains unfinished until his death, raising doubts about his genuine intention to ever complete it. The portrayal of his novel, expressed in the excerpt above, as a form of refuge highlights Anton's privileged existence, where he has been kept safe from the harsh realities of life as a white man in South Africa.

Anton's unfinished novel betokens his wasted potential when it comes to comprehending the issues of South Africa, as it mirrors his own life experiences. When Amor returns for Anton's funeral, she decides to read her brother's novel, or what little has been written of it. The initial section of the novel appears promising, comprising eighty "well-written" pages, but Amor notices a familial antagonist within the story, speculating on possibilities like "an avaricious aunt? Or a deceitful sister? Maybe a long-standing servant whose loyalties are in question?" (276). However, beyond this point, the novel remains unfinished, with only a plan outlining what should have appeared in the following parts. The presence of this plan indicates that Anton was telling his own life through the narrative of his novel. The plan suggests that, as time passed, he contemplated Salome's loyalty and his comprehension of post-Apartheid South Africa faded, giving way to his self-centeredness. Perhaps Anton feared that Salome, like other black individuals, might demand restitution for what had been unjustly taken from them, such as the land she had been living on for decades. As a white male in South Africa, even if initially he seemed understanding of the country's inequalities, Anton was actually afraid that



his power would be taken away from him. His novel highlights a decline in his awareness and perception of the country that we could feel in the beginning of the novel.

Certainly, Galgut's intention becomes evident in his effort to expose the illusion of white individuals perceiving themselves as victims of South Africa's transformations. The narrative technique employed, which immerses the reader in the Swart family's white perspective, effectively offers a multifaceted view of the perceptions held by white South Africans. Among these characters, Anton's relationship with the country stands out as particularly intriguing. While he appears accepting of the nation's changes, a deeper exploration reveals his struggle to relinquish his privileges. The narrative's focus on Anton's viewpoint unveils a privileged white male existing within South Africa, embodying the complex system of power within the nation. There is a lingering sense of unease within Anton, hinting at the underlying issues within his seemingly perfect life. Nevertheless, he remains largely unaware of the profound difficulties experienced by black individuals in South Africa, as he continues to benefit of the consequences of the old power structure. Anton's narrative serves as a microcosm reflecting the larger play of power, privilege, and racial disparities in the country. Although he initially holds the potential for change, Anton remains in his self-centered mindset, perpetuating the inequalities in the nation.

## 6. Naming

### The irony behind the character's names

#### 6.1. *The Impostor*

Damon Galgut exhibits a penchant for using names with symbolic significance, and *The Impostor* is no exception. In this narrative, the name that must be examined is that of the protagonist: Adam. Galgut employs a metaphorical reference to religion, evoking the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in the Genesis. The author cleverly employs irony by giving the protagonist the same name as the first man, drawing parallels between the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the story of Adam and Baby. This connection between Gondwana and the Garden of Eden further adds depth and complexity to the narrative. In another aspect, Galgut also uses Adam's poetry as a way to portray the character's vision of the country that could be compared to a Garden of Eden free of history.

There is no denying that the most significant reference to the Book of Genesis in the novel is evident in Galgut's choice of name for his protagonist: Adam. Described as "the still point at the center of everything. The first man, alone on the very first morning" (80), Adam embodies a symbolic connection to the biblical character. This association becomes particularly apparent the morning after Adam's first night in Gondwana, as he goes out to explore the "inexplicable green paradise" (79). Adam experiences a sense of comfort and freedom in this beautiful place, much like the Garden of Eden procures to Adam and Eve. However, his tranquility is disrupted, as "somebody else is there" (80), by the presence of Ezekiel, Canning's black servant, who enters into Adam's peace. As a result, Adam, feeling ashamed, hurriedly dresses himself, disturbed by the intrusion upon his serenity.

Within the expansive land of Gondwana, Adam encounters a profound feeling of liberation, reaching a point where he feels free from any apprehension and allows himself to surrender to impulsive thoughts and desires. In that particular passage mentioned in the previous paragraph, Adam swims in the river passing through Gondwana. This moment carries a deeper significance, as Adam himself acknowledges its resemblance to the act of baptism in the Catholic religion:

The current is barely perceptible, a faint tugging on the skin, but he imagines it washing him clean, carrying the past away. It is like a baptism, but for that you need to be fully immersed: he ducks his head beneath the surface. (80)

Baptism, as a Christian sacrament, holds the purpose of cleaning individuals of their sins. explains baptism as a result of the first man's sin: "This sin of Adam's was not your ordinary sin. This was a sin that affected all mankind forever. This sin changed the course of human history. It did not just affect Adam personally; it also affected his human nature – which means it affected our nature, since we inherited it from him" (Martignoni 2021). In other words, Adam's original sin is passed on next generations for eternity. In Galgut's narrative, Adam Napier perceives his past actions as his own sins. However, he does not acknowledge that his culpability concerns his inaction during the Apartheid era and the benefits derived from the suffering of black people. It would then mean that Adam is washing futile sins.

Adam finds a deep connection between Gondwana and his childhood – as established in the section about the narrative perspective. This association further strengthens the idea of Gondwana being Adam's personal Garden of Eden. However, it becomes evident that, similar to Adam and Eve, Adam Napier is drawn to the darkness and evilness of the land, despite his desire to escape it. The corruption of the land is revealed to Adam when Canning reveals his plan to convert Gondwana into a golf course named "Ingadi 300":

Ingadi means 'garden' in Zulu.

'Personally,' Canning says, 'I wanted a Xhosa name. [...] Ingadi just doesn't have the same ring. Not much poetry to it, I'm sure you'll agree. But Enoch Nandi is our black empowerment partner, and he's a Zulu, and he wants a Zulu name. So Ingadi it is. [...]' (137)

Indeed, the new name chosen for Gondwana, which means "garden" in the context of the golf course, directly refers to the Garden of Eden. This deliberate naming choice further emphasizes the connection between Gondwana and the biblical paradise. By naming the golf course as a "garden", it highlights the irony and parallel between the original pure land and the corrupted state of Gondwana, echoing the themes present in the story of Adam and Eve.

In Galgut's story, the character who represents Adam Napier's Eve is Baby. From the moment Adam first encounters Baby, he becomes completely captivated. She becomes a profound source of inspiration – a muse – providing him with enough creativeness to finally write poetry.

And here at last she is, intervening between him and the landscape – not an identifiable person, but an emblematic female figure, seen against the backdrop of primal, primitive garden. (106)

Baby attracts Adam, drawing him towards the beautiful landscapes of Gondwana, even though he is reluctant to be part of this corrupted world. Despite his reservations, Adam finds himself continually drawn back to Gondwana due to the attraction he feels towards Baby. This dual force of attraction – both towards Baby and the inspiration he finds in Gondwana’s beauty – compels Adam to return continuously to the setting, despite his conflicted feelings about the world surrounding him.

Adam’s pastoral reverie and the romantic narcissism which it implies are subjected to no small degree of irony in the second section of the novel, which sees “Nappy” and Baby reduced to a pitiable parody of the originary couple, Adam and Eve, trapped in a dystopia of avarice, egocentricity and betrayal. [...] Adam’s poetic interpretation of Baby as a version of the Eve archetype, for example, makes her both more and less than human. (Kostelac 2020: 49 – 50)

Adam unconsciously perceives Baby as an embodiment of Eve, primarily for the sake of his poetry. However, Baby herself is aware of the effect she holds over him and manipulates it to her advantage. At a certain point in the story, Baby confesses to Adam that she fantasizes about that “something [happening] to Kenneth”, “like an accident” (159). This revelation pushes Adam to contemplate the idea of killing Canning as a means to have Baby all by himself. Yet, he ultimately realizes “the voice that has been playing in his head is not his own; it belongs to the serpent in the garden” (161). Determining the true nature of Baby’s feelings for Adam proves challenging. It remains uncertain whether she genuinely had any romantic feelings for him or if she exploited him for her own purposes.

The conclusion of the novel clearly refers to the fall of man, which mirrors the biblical story of Adam and Eve’s disobedience towards God and their sin. In a way, Adam Nappier was seduced by evil just like Adam and Eve were. Galgut’s version of Adam sinned in the past. As Blom explained to him, his sins lie in the fact that he participated in the Apartheid by his inaction, his lack of protest, and benefitting from it. While Adam believes he has already experienced his fall as he lost his job and home, in reality he has not experienced his fall and even acknowledges towards the end that he could have gone back to his previous life. Furthermore, as Adam spends more time in Gondwana, he continues to sin by participating in Canning’s corrupt business and having an affair with Baby. However, his fall then manifests itself in the form of Blom’s murder. Adam’s neighbor becomes a victim of the sins of the protagonist, yet Adam does not experience any guilt or remorse. He refuses to acknowledge the gravity of his sins, which is why he remains unaffected by guilt for either of his sins.

In this section of the dissertation, it is worth it to explore Adam's relationship with poetry. While his name undeniably holds religious significance, it extends beyond a simple reference to the Book of Genesis. Adam's connection with his poems reveals a peculiar perception of South Africa and its population. He romanticizes the country, envisioning it as an idealized place devoid of history. Adam views Canning's reconstruction of Gondwana as a representation of an old colonial dream. Adam does not want to know about the state of the country which is why he does not mention the history of South Africa in his first collection of poems, determined to only portray the aesthetics of the country – and ignoring the politics. This quote can be exemplified by the passage mentioned at the beginning of this section when Adam experienced a sort of communion with the land of Gondwana and was disrupted by Ezekiel's presence. Ezekiel, as a black man, symbolizes the political problems of South Africa, intruding upon Adam's peaceful encounter with the land. In Adam's poems, politics are deliberately forgotten, allowing them to exist solely through beauty and oblivion.

Through his poetry, Adam denies the reality of South Africa, but he faces a challenging dilemma as the landscapes of the Karoo fail to match his idealized conception of the country's landscapes. In Adam's opinion, the "inappropriate" landscape of the Karoo is responsible for his inability to become a successful poet. When he arrived in the Karoo, he aimed to express nature with "childlike simplicity" (143), the term implies a desire to return to a state of innocence. However, this aspiration proves unattainable, as Adam struggles to find inspiration in the Karoo's surroundings. With this, Damon Galgut suggests an impossibility to go back to a state of innocence in South Africa – an impossibility to forget the past.

As the story unfolds, Adam progressively comes to realize the impossibility of ignoring South Africa's history and acknowledges that his perception of the country is overly idealized. However, as is often the case with Adam, whenever he undergoes an evolution in his understanding of reality, he quickly reverts to his habit of hiding behind his own blindness. This becomes evident towards the end of the novel when he chooses to tell his brother that he is still refining the poems he wrote during his time in the Karoo, when in fact, he has burned them. Adam intentionally chooses to ignore the truth and bury the inconvenient reality, perpetuating his own illusions and suggesting a deliberate forgetfulness.

It is undeniable that Damon Galgut used his protagonist in order to make a reference to religion and it is quite significant. In a way, through his poetry, Adam perceives Gondwana as a sort of Garden of Eden, in which there are no black people and history has not happened; it is a sort of colonial fantasy of the innocent land. Moreover, the author not only creates situations that parallel the story of Adam and Eve, but he also incorporates direct references to reinforce

these parallels, helping readers to more easily draw connections between the two stories. Through this metaphorical approach, Galgut wants to show that the past cannot be forgotten, and consequences persist in the present, specifically referencing South Africa's history. Adam's realization of his own implication can be seen as a reflection of South Africa's acknowledgment of its past wrongdoings towards the black community. However, the narrative also highlights the unsettling similarity between Adam's return to his previous life without consequence and the lack of actual change in the country itself, despite the implementation of new laws. The novel implies that nearly three decades after the end of Apartheid, the situation for black individuals in South Africa is still far from optimal. Galgut emphasizes the idea that problems of the past persist, leaving to reader to believe that genuine transformation needs more than simple legal changes.

## 6.2. *The Promise*

Regarding the naming in *The Promise*, Damon Galgut once again employs irony with the name of the family. The word "swart" is an Afrikaans word that means "black", yet in the novel, the Swart family is white. This irony present in their name is deepened by the fact that the family represents the archetype of the bourgeois class, holding onto their privileges and showing indifference towards black people. In addition to this, Amor's name also deserves attention, but of a different nature. She stands in stark contrast to her surname and the rest of her family.

The narrative of *The Promise* "revolves around the members of the Swart family who also double as a microcosm of the Afrikaner nation" (Dlamini 2022). Damon Galgut employs this white family of farmers as a narrative device to explore the impact of Apartheid and its aftermath, highlighting the racial injustices experienced over time. However, the interesting aspect of the novel is that while it uses the Swart family to express the racial injustices of the country, it never gives the opinion or perception of a black person. The irony lies in the fact that the surname of the family means "black", but throughout the story, we only see the difficulty the different members of the family have to let go of their privileges, but we never see the actual problems and issues black people have lived through their eyes.

As the novel's title suggests, a promise is made, but remains unfulfilled, and it is Amor who takes up the fight for its realization. Amor is in fact the only member of the Swart clan that is trying to make the right thing towards Salome and the promise that was made. The character of Amor is portrayed as a potential bridge between the black and white communities, serving as a symbol of love and reconciliation for two main reasons. Firstly, her name, "Amor", literally

means “love” in Spanish, and the inclusion of “black” in her surname adds a significant layer of symbolism, suggesting a connection to both communities. Secondly, her complex relationship with her family further reinforces this notion as she feels compelled to offer her love and understanding where it is most needed. Indeed, Amor has always been regarded as the black sheep of the family. Ever since she was struck by lightning on the “*koppie*” at the age of six, her entire family, from her aunt to her siblings, have labeled her as “weird”, a habit which continues throughout the novel. She has consistently been branded as “crazy” (274) by her family. Amor herself even refers to herself as a “slow child” (82), a description she has internalized over time. However, there is no justification for viewing her in such a manner. Initially, Amor’s youth prevents her from comprehending the complexities of the country’s situation. As time goes by, she becomes alienated from her family because she refuses to conform to their expectations. It could be argued that her family assigns her this perception in order to lessen their guilt and maintain their position of power as white individuals. Throughout the story, Amor seeks to distance herself from her family as a way to construct her own identity, develop her own perception of South Africa and act according to it.

Galgut emphasizes the distance between Amor and the rest of the Swart family. However, this divide is not due to Amor’s supposed “craziness”, but rather to her inability to connect with them. Amor lacks the desire for power that her family possesses. Instead, she values equality and shows compassion for those who are less fortunate. Amor recognizes the significant role Salome played in her education. The black maid has cared for the three Swart children since their birth, and Amor is aware of her contributions. For example, during Rachel’s illness, Salome took on the responsibility of looking after her, and she was present during Rachel’s passing. Yet, the family fails to acknowledge her existence, despite the fact that she is at the center of their lives and that without her they would struggle to keep on. Nevertheless, Salome continues to care for them, even if it is not reciprocated: for instance, she prays for Rachel when she is unable to attend the funeral and is deeply affected by Astrid’s death. They may not recognize her as family, but she considers them as such. Amor is the only one who feels a close bond with Salome, as shown by her commitment to the promise made by Manie to her mother.

Over the course of the nine years that have passed between the first and second section of the novel, Amor not only distances herself from the farm and her family but also from South Africa as a whole. It is not simply an escape from her surroundings, but a departure from the country itself, guided by the belief that “if you want to move forward it’s best not to look back” (105). “[Her] body, [her] country, [her] mind” have undergone important changes, and she “ran

from all of [them] as far as [she] could, but the past has its little claws, it has dragged [her] back” (107). The passage of time, which allows her to mature into a twenty-two-year-old woman, allows her to form her own perspectives, to the point that her sister qualifies her as an “impostor” (111). As Amor develops opinions opposite to those of her family, she is once again perceived as different. Though she returns for her father’s funeral, her affinity lies more with Salome than with the rest of her family. As they reunite, the black woman silently implores Amor for help with the house, revealing how long she has been waiting to own her own place. Seizing the opportunity during the reading of her father’s will, Amor asks if there is a clause regarding the ownership of the Lombard house. Her family considers “that old story” as “sorted out” (148), but Amor is resolute in making the right decision and fighting for it. She now possesses her own opinions that she desires to express them against a family that once suppressed her voice when she was younger.

As the second part of the novel takes place in 1995, it is clear that changes that have occurred in South Africa because of the end of Apartheid. However, the country’s transformation is not as visible as it may seem. Amor still has to fight for Salome to obtain her rightful house, even though it is now legally possible. In this part, the promise becomes a matter of principles rather than legality. Despite her evident transformation, her family considers that Amor “still holds herself aloof and apart” (152), building on their view of her as a girl rather than judging the woman she has become. No one takes her seriously or is willing to acknowledge that the house should belong to Salome. The white community remains fixated on its power and is unwilling to see what is right – to fulfill promises made and to consider black people as equals. Faced with ignorance, Amor decides to leave for Durban this time, leaving her family to live as white South Africans always have.

In Durban, Amor has found work as a nurse in an HIV ward, driven by her desire to help others in any way she can, the way she cannot in her own country that she left behind. Her sister, Astrid, fails to recognize the significance of Amor’s job and remains indifferent to her efforts in caring for the terminally ill, particularly with the challenging conditions of the HIV/AIDS crisis that plagued the country during that time. Astrid regards Amor on the same level as Salome, labeling her as a “servant” (165) because she has decided to work. When Astrid passes away, Amor attends her funeral, leaving only Anton and herself as the remaining members of the family. Anton, in reaching out to inform her of Astrid’s death, experiences a sense of disconnection, indeed “it feels like they’re on opposite sides” (206), though he is unaware of the specific factors having driven them apart. Anton’s intuition is not entirely



unfounded, as Amor believes in a more egalitarian world that surpasses differences between individuals and Anton's self-centered nature will shed further light on their divergence.

After attending her sister's funeral and departing from Pretoria once more, in 2018 Amor is absent from her brother's funeral. Anton's wife, Desirée, and her mother are unable to locate or reach Amor, for as far as they are concerned "[she] has vanished" (254). Little do they know that she is working as a nurse in Johannesburg, continuing her care for the sick in a hospital. Unfortunately, as Susan – Amor's ex-romantic partner – had foreseen, the demanding nature of her work is taking its toll. Amor is the most positive character of the novel and is so attached to the right thing to do that she is willing to lose herself to it: "the last of [her] tenderness [is] saved up for people [she doesn't] know (257). It appears that Amor may be attempting to compensate for other "historical wrongs" (214) – in Anton's words – in the hospital, as she is unable to rectify the one that truly matters to her. She has been hiding away in another country or city, trying to avoid facing the repeated failures she has encountered back home. Despite this, Salome holds no ill feelings toward Amor. She recognizes that Amor is the only one who has consistently made efforts to give her the house. As it turns out, Salome is also the sole individual who possesses Amor's phone number, highlighting the connection Amor feels toward Salome compared to her own family.

Upon Anton's passing, Desirée and Amor inherit equal ownership of the land and the farm. However, Amor makes a proposition to Desirée: in exchange for allowing Salome to become the legal owner of the land and house she has occupied for several decades, Desirée can have single ownership of the remaining Swart family land. Desirée readily accepts this agreement proposed by Amor. Finally, Amor can fulfill the promise that was made thirty-two years before and, simultaneously, break loose of her ties with what remains of her family once and for all.

In essence, *The Promise* portrays Amor's journey from being the black sheep of her family to an individual who rejects the injustices of South Africa. As she grows up over the different parts of the novel, Amor distances herself from her family – with which she does not associate herself to its values. However, as the Swart family represents a microcosm of South Africa, she also distances herself from the country she was born in as she does not share its values either. In a way, the Swarts represent the white community and Salome represents the black community. This perception would designate Amor as the redeemer of love between them. Even if she feels disconnected from her family, it does not mean she has no love for them, but she also loves Salome deeply enough to fight for her to have her house for decades. Her

alternative principle of a more generous and egalitarian perception in the South African context leaves her no other choice but to lose herself in her work trying to help others.

## 7. Titles

### An analysis of the titles of the novels in perspective to the main white characters

#### 7.1. *The Impostor*

Imposture lies at the heart of Damon Galgut's novel. The title itself raises a fundamental question: who is the impostor in this story? One could argue that each of the characters plays a role as an impostor in their own way, as they all have secrets and try to escape their troubled pasts through new identities, relocations, or name changes. While many characters have reasons to be considered impostors, the novel's title is clear: there is only one true impostor, and that is Adam. In this dissertation, after briefly mentioning the imposture of the characters of this story, I will analyze Adam's imposture with the delusional perception that he has of his life and his personality, especially through his poetry.

The novel grapples with complexities when it comes to identifying the impostor within its narrative. In a layered manner, every character in the story reveals themselves as candidates for the position of impostor. Canning, for instance, feigns a flawless existence as a white man in the post-Apartheid South Africa. He resides on a captivating property, enjoys a considerable wealth, is in business with powerful men, and is married to a stunning black woman. However, it is evident that his current life is a consequence of inheriting his father's wealth and land following his death. Canning pretends to be in a happy marriage when he is aware that his wife is having affairs with different men – his business partner and his friend, Adam. Furthermore, Canning later expresses that his motivation for converting Gondwana into a golf course is due to his desire for revenge against his late father. This exposes Canning's existence in luxury and shady world in which he does not belong, and more importantly, a world he would not have accessed it if not for his father's inheritance.

Baby's case is even more obvious. Adam thinks of her as an impostor when he discovers her past as a prostitute. Baby has undergone a radical transformation in her life, transitioning from a challenging life as a black woman in South Africa under its previous regime to becoming the wife of a wealthy white man with black servants at her service. Through her marriage to Canning, Baby has escalated the social hierarchy and distanced herself from her former life. Now, her focus is on further climbing this social ladder by engaging with more influential figures like Genov. This makes it difficult for the reader to discern her authentic self, as she adapts to her surroundings for her own motives.

The character of Blom can be considered as an impostor for his hidden identity. Indeed, as a way to protect himself from the repercussions of his actions during the Apartheid regime, Blom had to adopt a fake name and a new life. The life Blom presents to Adam is based on multiple lies. Despite his attempts to rectify his past wrongdoings by providing testimony at a trial, Blom remains an impostor due to his hidden true identity.

However, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, the main character of this story is the impostor. Adam's narrative unfolds in post-Apartheid South Africa, a time when democracy rules, theoretically eradicating the distinction between white and non-white individuals. Yet, in this transformed world, Adam appears to be lost and uncertain as to where he fits now.

It was a deep, cold shock to discover that the young black intern he'd been training for the past six months was, in fact, being groomed to replace him. His boss had been apologetic, talking about racial quotas and telling him it was nothing personal. But how could it not be personal? (15)

Alongside losing his job, Adam experiences the decline of his Johannesburg neighborhood and faces financial struggles that lead to the loss of his house. From his perspective, he does not attribute any of these challenges to his own actions, nor does he seem inclined to attribute them to the changes in post-Apartheid South Africa, despite the significant impact they have on his life.

Therefore, after having declined the offer to work at Gavin's company, Adam moves out of the city to live in his brother's house in a Karoo town. This decision seems appropriate since he is looking for a big change in his life. Moreover, this situation offers him the opportunity to reignite his passion for poetry. In this new setting provided by the Karoo, he believes he can fully embrace his true self. At least, that is what he wants to believe, though not always successfully as at one point he says this to Blom: "Lots of people have [started again from nothing], to escape from something. But that's just a con, isn't it? You'd just be pretending. You wouldn't really be a different person" (86). By saying this, Adam states that someone starting a new life somewhere else is just hiding his true self. Implicitly, he admits that his running away from the city is just a case of pretending to be someone else. Yet, at the same time, it seems that Adam fails to recognize that he, too, may be an impostor, deceiving himself into thinking he can find his genuine self in the Karoo.

Moreover, the losses Adam experiences seem to have a profound impact on his personality. While South Africa undergoes significant changes, Adam appears to be a passive

observer, almost like collateral damage. His uncertainty about where he truly belongs affects his perception of reality: “In the distant past, he had always been clear about his moral position, but that wasn’t the case any more” (32). Losing his comfortable life in the city also diminishes his desire to defend his former beliefs. Now, he imagines himself in the position of black people, feeling underprivileged like them. This shift in perspective arises from the fact that he now finds himself with nothing when he supported the changes aimed at improving the lives of black people. Indeed, Adam cannot admit openly that these high-flown ideals of his are in fact very fragile, and susceptible of disappearing together with the material advantages he used to profit from. Adam used to believe that he had no connection to the dark past of his country, but sometimes he catches on the fact that “maybe he didn’t care enough for people” and that he “shied away from history” (39), though he is, as always, quick to forget about this.

The life Adam pretends to lead is not only built on the fantasy of rediscovering poetry but also on a romantic dream of finding his essential self in poverty. While he does not enjoy being poor, nor is he in fact compelled to embrace poverty, he deludes himself into believing that there is a sense of self-righteous virtue in adopting the same lifestyle as the majority of his fellow South Africans. Moreover, his poetry serves as a refuge, a means to escape into a fantasy world where history is repressed. Disappointed by the landscapes of the Karoo that do not meet his expectations, Adam attempts to mold them according to his desires, engaging in a constant battle with the stubborn weeds in his garden. In a symbolic sense, the weeds could represent the past of the country that Adam is continuously trying to ignore, yet their persistence reveals that history cannot be erased or forgotten. In a way, Adam wishes to ignore the past of his country while also considering himself in black people’s place.

However, the concept of a world without history is merely impossible, i.e., a fantasy. In order to write about the beauty of South Africa, Adam feels compelled to deny its reality. This denial also extends to his own implication in the country’s past, as he attempts to distance himself from any responsibility. Yet, he finds it challenging, especially during his conversations with Blom and Lindile, which confront him with the truth regarding his situation. Adam realizes that he is not as innocent as he would like to believe. As reality keeps intruding upon his fantasy, he struggles to find inspiration for his poetry, yet he is always quick to forget those realizations. This struggle highlights the illusory nature of considering oneself blameless and innocent.

Adam is confronted with his failure as a poet when Blom presents him with the metal sculpture he created: “And it does occur to Adam that these imitations of the natural world – animals and insects and trees and stars – are what he himself is aspiring to, in words” (147). The artistic aspects of both characters clash in Adam’s mind, making him realize that Blom can

achieve what he cannot. Adam describes Blom's sculptures as "indisputably *real*" (147), but it is not meant as a compliment. To Adam, art is synonymous with beauty and, most importantly, with disregarding the real world, particularly politics. However, as Adam and the readers later discover, Blom's sculptures are seen as "real" because of his involvement as a henchman during the Apartheid regime. Blom's art carries a connection to his country's political background, something Adam refuses to acknowledge or incorporate in his own work. Importantly, it is only after Blom reveals the truth that Adam comprehends the political purpose of the sculpture. From Adam's perspective, Blom's art lacks beauty because he firmly believes that politics and aesthetics should be kept separate: "Sometimes the truth is ugly" (167).

Towards the conclusion of the novel, Adam experiences a moment of enlightenment concerning his poetry. Realizing its futility, he decides to burn the poems he wrote in the Karoo, alongside the weeds in his garden, acknowledging that there is "no way to tell the difference between poetry and parasite" (200). However, his perception of the reality of nature shifts when Canning reveals that Genov's men are coming to kill him.

He feels like a hunted animal, the focus of carnivorous intent, that must run blindly for its life, stumbling across rocks, tearing itself on thorns. He has at last become part of nature, which he'd wanted to sing aloud in poems, and there is nothing Beautiful about it" (232-233)

Adam comes to a profound realization that his perception of nature and beauty, which he once associated with his poetry, is flawed. He understands that he cannot be a poet in a world where he disregards the significance of the past and the politics of the country. This passage leads him to be confronted an aspect of life that he had attempted to erase by ignoring the political realities of the country. This passage can be interpreted as a parallel, Adam finds himself in a position similar to that of black people who were persecuted for years without reason, struggling to save their lives.

No matter how many realizations about the real conditions of his life Adam encountered during his time in the Karoo, he always forgets them. The protagonist is unable to acknowledge the privileges he possesses as he white man in South Africa and convinces himself that he is living a life of poverty, like black people, while also ignoring the country's past. There is no denying that Adam built his own impression of his life based on illusions; the protagonist has fabricated this image he has of himself. In reality, through his characters, but mainly through Adam, Galgut highlights the appearance that post-Apartheid South Africa presents, portraying a nation trying to rebuild itself while ignoring its troubled past as if it never existed. South

Africa fabricates this fake image of itself through the illusion of having completely rectified all its flaws. Actually, the country's transformation remains superficial, and the lives of colored and black people have not significantly improved.

## 7.2. *The Promise*

The title of the novel, *The Promise*, holds significant meaning. It refers to the promise made by Manie to his dying wife, Rachel, to grant Salome, their maid, the land she lives on. As indicated in the book review "The Promise by Damon Galgut", the Swart family serves as a reflection of the political environment of South Africa. This means that the Swarts story reflects the country's history. Nevertheless, since this topic has already been discussed in the section concerning the novel's structure, I will now focus on the significance of the promise within the story, particularly as it is handled by the white characters, with a specific emphasis on its relevance to Anton and Amor.

The conditions in which the promise is made to Salome are interesting. In reality, it is made by Manie to Rachel on her death bed, as the promise is never directly made to Salome. In other words, this promise is made from a white person to another white person, when it actually concerns a black individual. This shows just how little black people were considered during the years of Apartheid, but the fact that this promise is not fulfilled until three decades later represents well that the way of considering black people has not entirely changed.

The interesting aspect of this promise made by Manie is that giving the land to the black maid does not significantly impact the family's way of life. However, as the story unfolds, the reader realizes that the members of the family are unwilling to relinquish a small piece of land – that they do not even use – because it would mean giving up the advantages that came with being white during the Apartheid era. In a country trying to rectify past injustices, willingly relinquishing privileges becomes an issue for them, as they fear that eventually, all their privileges will be taken away. Once again, despite making the promise, the members of the Swart family are reluctant to let go of their white privileges.

From the moment the promise was made, Amor has held onto the belief that it must be fulfilled. As soon as she overhears her father agreeing to give the house and land to the maid, she immediately informs Lukas, Salome's son. Lukas, being only thirteen years old, is confused when Amor tells him, "it's yours now, the house" (21). At this point, Lukas has not yet experienced the full extent of the racial inequalities that exist in their country. He does not understand that black people are not legally allowed to own property; to him, if they live in the

house, it is theirs. The two children lead different lives and are unaware of their differences. Determined and convinced of her father's promise, the thirteen-year-old Amor refuses to let go of the idea of giving Salome the Lombard house, reminding her father, "you said you would give her the house. You promised" (61). However, Manie acts as if he has no recollection of ever discussing this with his wife. What Amor does not know is that Salome is unable to legally own a house due to the prevailing racial laws and restrictions.

Salome can't own the house. Even if Pa wanted to, he can't give it to her.

Why not? she says, puzzled.

Because, he says. It's against the law.

The law? Why?

You are not serious. [...] Oh, dear me, he says. Do you have no idea what country you're living in? (82)

Indeed, Amor is oblivious to the problems characterizing her country, too young to fully grasp the importance of the situation as "history has not yet trod on her" (82). She reflects on the things she has witnessed and heard, but that alone does not enable her to comprehend the true nature of the society she lives in. She wonders why her brother told their father to give the house to Salome, despite being aware that it was legally impossible: "Because [...] I felt like it" (82). As the narrator puts it, "without even knowing it herself, [...] she begins to understand the country she's living in" (83). Amor, in her youthful innocence, may not fully understand the precise events that have ruined the national history, but a small part of her comprehends that white people, particularly white males, hold power in South Africa. Her brother acted on an impulse without considering the potential repercussions. For example, the side effect hits Amor as she believed she had an ally, but it also could have had an impact on Salome as she could have been present in the room. Indeed, such a conversation would have had a profound effect on her, as "she has thought of nothing else since the words [of having her own house] were spoken" (52). Amor comes to realize that white people possess great influence over South African society and feel largely indifferent towards black people.

Initially, Manie is the reason Salome cannot get her house: he says – or claims – he never made a promise to his wife, Rachel. However, with the passing of their father, the house and land become part of the inheritance shared among the three siblings. Nevertheless, in order to honor the promise and give the house to Salome, all the siblings must agree, which is not the case. When Amor returns to Pretoria for their father's funeral and brings up the topic of the promise, everyone opposes the idea of granting the house to Salome. Even Manie's sister,



Tannie Marina, who technically has no say in the matter as the property belongs to the children, exacerbates the racial divide, creating a significant barrier between white and black individuals:

I don't care what you say, she tells them, while she dries her eyes. Whatever your principles may be, you're supposed to stand with your own people! [...] Wanting to give land to the maid! Have you ever! (149)

Astrid, the middle child of the Swart family, shares a similar perspective to her aunt, as the narrator suggests that "they are almost the same person these days" (152). However, Astrid expresses her opinions in a less confrontational manner. When Amor mentions that Salome can now legally own a house, Astrid discourages her from pursuing the idea by telling her not to be stupid, implying that it would be foolish to do so. This highlights the persistent perception that, despite the abolition of Apartheid laws, black individuals are still regarded in the same manner as before. Although he does not immediately speak up, Anton decides to approach the subject as he drives Amor to the train station before her departure from Pretoria to Durban. He initiates the conversation by arguing that "it's a worthless bit of property" (156) and suggesting that if their father did not wish to give it to Salome, his wishes should be respected.

You think Salome has such a bad deal? he says at last.

Not such a good one.

She has a house. She can live in it till she dies. We could make that official. Write it up as a legal document, saying that she has the right to stay there for the rest of her life. Will that be enough?

No. [...]

We can do it with her job too. A guarantee of employment till she's old, with a pension in retirement, as well as a roof over her head. Huh? A lot of people can't say that much. (157)

In this excerpt, Anton may appear rather willing to align with his sister's perspective, but the reality is different. Firstly, he is actively seeking a loophole to avoid fulfilling the original promise – a way to give Salome the house without it being legally hers. Secondly, as their conversation progresses, Anton starts to back out, suggesting that even this alternative solution may not be a wise idea. He argues that "not every chance is an opportunity" and that "sometimes chance is a waste of time" (157). This comment follows the revelation that Salome's son, Lukas, ended up in a bad situation, resulting in his leaving university, which was funded by Manie, and working on the Swart family's farm. Due to Lukas's actions, Anton punishes Salome as well. In a way, Anton perceives helping black people as a "waste of time" because they might

ultimately disappoint. However, he still presents himself as “generous” and assures Amor that he will “work something out”, asserting that South Africa is the “land of miracles” (158). In a single conversation, Anton manages to find multiple ways to evade fulfilling the promise made eight years before. It appears that Anton uses the country and its past as an excuse for not fulfilling the promise.

In the third part of the novel, the situation concerning the promise worsens. Astrid has passed away, which only leaves Anton and Amor as the owners of the house. Contrary to his apparent comprehension at the end of the second section, the following part reveals a self-centered aspect of Anton’s character, in which his own interests are always put first. As Anton picks up Amor upon her arrival in South Africa, he realizes that he must struggle to find the right words to say to her. However, she is not a stranger so “he quite quickly drops the performance and gets down to what matters” (207). As it turns out, what “matters” to him is talking about the investment Amor could make, with the money from her father’s estate that she never cashed, in the piece of land that he wants to sell. Yet, he recognizes that it may be too early to broach “that request” (208) and decides to shift the conversation to other topics. Eventually, Amor brings up the subject of the promise, with which Anton is annoyed and questions: “Must it be the very first thing we talk about?” (211), despite knowing this is not the first topic they mentioned. Indeed, their initial conversation revolved around his own project. His frustration arises from Amor bringing up this old issue, while she herself “[is] taken by surprise at how much it matters to her, this buried question from long ago” (211). When it comes to Anton, the subject can be whatever interests him, but what truly holds significance in Amor’s eyes is not taken into consideration, i.e., the promise. Anton and Amor really find themselves on “opposite sides” (206), as he previously believed. As they discuss matters close to their hearts, Anton concentrates on self-centered topics that serve his own benefit, while Amor raises the perpetual question of the unfulfilled promise. Furthermore, Anton believes that his younger sister feels compelled “to make up for all historical wrongs” (214), and while his assertion may be exaggerated, it does hold some truth. Although Amor demonstrates an understanding of the ongoing racial inequalities in South Africa, her primary desire is to rectify the specific injustices she has witnessed, namely addressing Salome’s circumstances.

To conclude this discussion, Anton simply finds another excuse, saying that “he meant to deal with it [...] but [...] life got in the way” (212). He dismisses the urgency of honoring the commitment made eighteen years before. Later, when Amor brings it up again, Anton becomes frustrated, as he had previously claimed that he would handle it. Amor points out that he “also said that nine years ago” (218). In his egotistical manner, Anton attempts to manipulate

his sister by suggesting “[they] can make an appointment with the lawyer and kill two birds...” (218). However, Amor sees through his intentions, realizing that he wants to create problems for the church by selling the land. As a result, Anton resorts to blackmail: “No sales, no house, that’s the deal” (219). It becomes evident that Anton has never truly cared about the promise, Salome, or even his sister. His primary concern is his own self-interest. As Amor departs, Anton contemplates: “Can call her any time, surprise her with the news that, Hey, Salome got her house. Might do it, even. Might actually do it” (225). Yet, this excerpt illustrates that Anton never had genuine intentions of fulfilling the promise in the first place. This proves to be true, as it remains unresolved in the fourth part of the novel. Despite initially showing signs of awareness regarding the injustices faced by black people in the country, Anton ultimately contributes to the problem by making empty promises when it comes to improving Salome’s life and putting himself first – much like his father did – without taking into consideration the importance of the country’s past.

As Amor persistently brings up the topic of the promise, Anton becomes increasingly frustrated and angry. During this last conversation they had, which is mentioned above, Anton goes so far as to suggest that Amor may be lying about hearing Manie make the promise. This challenge to her statement is not the first she has faced, but “[for] the first time she wavers a little” (219). Despite her uncertainty about the veracity of her claim, Amor remains focused in her pursuit: she wants Salome to own the house. At this point, even the reader begins to question whether Amor truly heard the promise. If we go back to the moment when Rachel asked Manie to give the house to the maid, the passage is enclosed in brackets, casting doubt on its authenticity:

(Do you promise me, Manie?

Holding on to him, skeleton hands grabbing, like in a horror film.

Ja, I’ll do it.

Because I really want her to have something. After everything she’s done.

I understand, he says.

Promise me you’ll do it. Say the words.

I promise, Pa says, choked-sounding.) (19)

However, what the children are unaware of, but the narrator and readers know, is that the first time Anton mentions to Manie the possibility of giving the Lombard house to Salome, the father reacted with a shock, yet “it [rang] the faintest bell” (61). Although this may not be conclusive evidence, it provides enough indication that Amor is not fabricating the story but probably

recounting the reality. Nevertheless, even if the truth remains elusive, Amor will persist in fighting for what she believes is right.

It is only in the final part of the novel, when Anton dies that Amor, after making a deal with Desirée, is finally able to fulfill this promise made so long ago. However, as mentioned towards the end of the third section of this dissertation, when Amor wants to announce the good news to Salome, she meets Lukas who is angry with this situation. He believes that no white people have the right to tell them what belongs to them after everything that happened because of the Apartheid regime.

Through this analysis of the promise, we witness a stark contrast in the characters present in the novel. Over the years, Anton consistently finds ways to evade fulfilling his promise of giving Salome the Lombard house, while Amor remains resolute in her fight with her family to uphold this promise. By using the Swart family as a means to portray post-Apartheid South Africa's reality, Galgut suggests that rectifying the injustices of the past is far from being easy, as exemplified through Lukas' reaction to Salome finally obtaining her house and land after a thirty-two-year wait. While there may be present attempts by white individuals to make amends, it cannot be neglected that promises made in the past still lack fulfillment today.

## 8. Conclusion

In both *The Impostor* (2008) and *The Promise* (2021), Damon Galgut presents narratives that offer insight into contemporary South Africa, seen through the perspectives of white characters. These characters serve as lenses through which Galgut explores the ongoing racial challenges in the country and illuminates the ways in which the actions of white individuals have contributed to these issues. Within this perception, my analysis has focused on Galgut's portrayal of how white characters perceive the nation during and after the Apartheid era. To achieve this, I conducted a parallel analysis of both novels, juxtaposing them in various aspects. This approach allowed me to see both the differences and the similarities between the two stories. While both stories center on multiple white characters, my focus in this analysis has been on Adam for *The Impostor*, Anton and Amor for *The Promise* as, in my opinion, they are the most interesting and complex characters. Through the experiences of the characters, the structures of the novels, and the narratives themselves, the author seeks to highlight the limited progress that has been achieved in the country, despite the impression of significant change.

In these two narratives, Galgut writes the characters of Adam and Anton in similar ways. On the first impression, both men were in favor of black people's liberty in South Africa. They constructed an image of progressist men in favor of equality. Yet, once the fall of the regime of segregation has given a little bit more space to black people, both men have trouble giving up their privileges.

Adam and Anton are both white males in South Africa, meaning that simply because of these two facts they are more powerful than the rest of the population. Adam serves as a means through which these societal issues are explored. His experiences, like those of other characters, mirror the complexities of post-Apartheid South Africa. In Anton's case, we are confronted to the representation of conflicting emotions and complexities of power and privilege in the country.

Adam's persistent denial of his actual circumstances reflects a larger problem in the country. He clings to a fantasy world he has constructed in his mind, deliberately ignoring his involvement in the Apartheid regime. This fantasy world of his is accentuated by the reference to religion and the Garden of Eden. This perception is further developed when we understand that Adam views Gondwana as his Garden of Eden and Baby as his Eve. Through Adam, Galgut accuses white South Africans of hiding in a fantasy world and blames them for their passiveness and lack of protest during the era of racial discrimination, all the while benefitting from the

privileges it granted them. Anton is different, while he possesses the ability to have anything he desires, there is a lingering sense of unease within him, indicating that all is not well in his seemingly idyllic life. However, Anton remains largely oblivious to the extent of the suffering endured by black individuals in South Africa, as he continues to benefit from the prevailing system of power. Although Anton has the potential to awaken to the realities of his country, he is weakened by his past, his family, and his own actions.

Through the encounters he had during his stay in the Karoo, Adam was made aware on multiple occasions of the political landscape of the country. These experiences forced him to acknowledge the self-centered perspective he held regarding the nation. Nonetheless, Adam is always quick to dismiss these realizations. In a similar way, Anton, who seems to realize some injustices, is unwilling to give up his power which causes him to actively perpetuates racial inequalities. Despite recognizing the injustice within the system, Anton finds ways to evade fulfilling his promise of giving Salome the Lombard house, highlighting his egoism and self-interest. Galgut illustrates that for white South Africans, disregarding their involvement in the country's past is a simpler path, as confronting it would involve abandoning the privileges they have enjoyed. Forgetting the past also allows them to be free of any guilt.

Overall, while Adam was made aware of his implication, Anton had potential to become better as he presented acknowledgment of the country's inequalities. However, both characters ultimately find themselves trapped in their self-centered perspectives, perpetuating the existing inequalities in the country. In essence, these characters highlight their incapacity to actively contribute to South Africa's transformative journey.

In contrast to Adam and Anton, Amor exhibits a much stronger commitment to achieving equality for all South African citizens. From the age of thirteen, she started developing an understanding of the complexities of her country, which drove her determination to help those who are marginalized. For decades, she consistently tried to persuade her family to honor their promise to Salome, facing significant challenges along the way. Recognizing the resemblance between her family's values and the wider issues the country, she chose to distance herself from both. Throughout the years, she sought refuge in various places where she could extend help to the less fortunate within hospitals, a role she felt she could not fulfill within South Africa. Unlike the two male protagonists, Amor emerges as a symbol of love closing the gaps between the diverse racial communities of the country.

As thirteen years have passed between the publication of *The Impostor* and *The Promise*, a noticeable evolution in Damon Galgut's writing style can be observed. The former novel, focuses on a singular character, deconstructing him from the inside to expose his imperfections.

Conversely, in *The Promise*, the narrative extends its focus on an entire flawed family, yet it introduces a contrasting figure – the utopian character of Amor. Through the introduction of this more positive character, Galgut aims to emphasize that not every white South African aligns with the flawed characters depicted in his stories. Nonetheless, in the second novel, with a narrator who directly addresses the reader, the author directs his attention towards inactive members of South African society.

In these stories, Galgut offers a portrayal of a fractured society that, contrary to the nation's belief, remains heavily ruled by the white community. *The Impostor* and *The Promise*, together, raise the suggestion that South Africa itself could be seen as the true impostor, as it has yet to fulfill its initial promises. Galgut highlights that the country still hurts from the Apartheid era – as it can be seen with Lukas' reaction when Salome finally gets her land at the end of the novel. However, in *The Promise*, Galgut suggests that through the involvement of well-intentioned white individuals, who are willing to detach themselves from their privileges, a more promising future can be achieved for the nation. The façade under which South Africa conceals itself need to fall to make room for progress.

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