

# Emergency Continued

## The Problematic of a Liminal Subjectivity

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the themes expounded in Richard Rive's novel, *Emergency Continued*. The novel is set in the heat of the State of Emergency sanctioned by the Apartheid state in the 1980s in response to the uprisings in Black and Coloured townships. Andrew Dreyer, a teacher and writer, is the protagonist of the story and is at odds with his sense of self, his belonging, his personal and social history, and his political agency. Using the theme of an uncertain subjectivity, this piece discusses the uneasy problem that befalls the Coloured subject. There is a great deal that needs to be unpacked regarding Rive's hint at an uneasy, traumatic and personalised past that his characters are at odds to face. These characters do, however, recognise that a historical reckoning is nonetheless necessary if any semblance of being is to be achieved. Colonialism and oppression have scared and corrupted the Coloured subject's sense of self, belonging and political agency. This discussion has relevance to the Coloured subject in a post-apartheid context as many of the complexities, histories and experiences that these individuals face are yet to be grappled with today. From a broader stance, this discussion is linked to theories of Afro-pessimism and the negated ontology beset upon Black bodies. The Coloured subject is however unique in that there is an implicit post-humanist aspect to being mixed race--the supposed product of colonial interaction. What is to be made of the unique experience of Coloured subjectivity? Can a sense of being be achieved through the seemingly impossible odyssey of historical reckoning?

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### Introduction

Richard Rive was one of the most ardent writers in South Africa's literary history. I say this not only because of the raw expression, emotion and detail that he uses in his work but also because these very works exposed the everyday pain and suffering that went unreported throughout the censorship of the Apartheid regime. Rive's works were subject to a banning order by the Apartheid regime. This was the unfortunate fate of his seminal novel *Emergency*, which encompasses the first set of states of emergency that were pronounced over particular communities embroiled in mass dissent after the Sharpeville Massacre. *Emergency Continued*, the focal point of this paper, constitutes the sequel to this dramatic, semi-biographic depiction of the events that occurred during this time. The story centres around Andrew Dreyer, the same protagonist from the prequel. As Dreyer struggles between fact and fiction, there is a clear loss which he seeks to rectify.

Admittedly, I would like to have seen more literary reviews of this novel, but this is not the point of this paper. I must stress that it is not my desire to reproduce some type of summative appraisal nor a critical review of this literary work. Rather, it is my objective to excavate and borrow some of the core themes in this work to claim a broader inquiry about a group of people that are not often mentioned in academic discourse. I am concerned here with the case of Coloured people in South Africa; a social group that constitutes a history of mixed heritage, distinctive culture and communal subjectivity constantly at odds in an intergenerational, historical and political sense. Herein, I am not trying to

make any claims or arguments without the use of hard evidence. Rather, I attempt to open the floor to questions around the essence, or lack thereof, regarding Colouredness<sup>1</sup>. Given what we know about the history of Coloured communities and the development of the unique subjectivities therein, what are we to make of contemporary claims to Coloured identity? Given Afro-pessimist notions of non-being and social death of Black subjects, how ought we to contemplate Colouredness? Though Rive's novel centres around the political activism of a Coloured community within the Western Cape, this is not the most important component that this paper borrows. Rive himself had a less than comfortable position on Colouredness as a racial classification; this is evident in his semi-biographical characters. Rather, it is the tropes of history, memory, subjectivity and intergenerational dichotomy that form the main tools of analysis for the questions that this paper raises.

### Apartheid's Racial Ideology as Social Death

Rive starts the first act of *Emergency Continued* with a letter from Dreyer to Abe in which he details the current events of his life, his family and the sombre political climate. Sombre indeed it was, as Dreyer risks life and limb searching for his son amidst the running battles between protestors and police. The first section of the novel reads as a parable of a concerned father who is out of touch with the political ambitions of his son, Bradley. In a way, Dreyer sees himself in his son. Bradley represents a certain nostalgia in Dreyer's life: a longing for purpose. He took on an oppressive regime, the freedom from which would mean something far bigger than himself. In this euphoric sense of meaning that he felt in his youthful activist days, he felt as though he had a place, not just in the struggle but in the world. Within the temporal setting of the novel, Dreyer is a middle-aged deputy principal who lives in a wealthy neighbourhood. Despite his lush and comfortable disposition, he felt that he was far out of his political prime. For obvious reasons, he was out of touch with his son, a radical student activist. What makes this situation worse is that Dreyer finds himself further roped into the Education Board's policy of subduing dissident pupils. This further entrenches the protagonist in a precarious and ironic subjective state. It is important to contemplate this break in Self that Dreyer experiences. In doing so, I draw upon the theory of social death in order to analyse this rupture. Simultaneously, it is also imperative to apply this analysis to the case of Colouredness.

In order to address this, I turn to Zoë Wicomb's discussion on Colouredness and shame, and how the relationship between the two cannot be divorced from the natal alienation of Coloured people. Wicomb, in this instance, is quite critical of the rise of Coloured nationalism that had taken root in the first few years of South Africa's democracy. The origin, in the case of Coloured Nationalism, is that of miscegenation, and more importantly the hidden shame that follows it. Wicomb (1998, p. 92) is concerned with this creation of racial ideology; that is, the construction of shame that surrounds those who have no cultural and traditional 'purity':

Miscegenation, the origins of which lie within a discourse of 'race', concupiscence, and degeneracy, continues to be bound up with shame, a pervasive shame exploited in apartheid's strategy of the naming of a Coloured race and recurring in the current attempts by coloureds to establish brownness as a pure category, which is to say a denial of shame.

The dilemma of this surge in Coloured nationalism is thus rooted in shame. The fictive haven of purity or homogeneity is constructed by racial ideology and avowed by Coloured people as a means to supplant the shame of concupiscence. In order to underpin this false sense of belonging in the

1 Throughout this paper, I refer to Colouredness as the identity, subjectivity and positionality of Coloured people, particularly in a South African context. In southern Africa, mixed race individuals are commonly regarded as 'Coloured'. This is a social group constituted by diverse ethnic backgrounds, cultures, religions and languages. For further reading, see Adhikari (2013), Erasmus (2001) and Hoffmeester (2018).

racial strata of Apartheid, it was necessary to create a myth of origin. In my analysis, District Six<sup>2</sup> ought to be viewed as the site, not of origin, but loss. The forced removals at District Six and other sites are symbolic of the severance of natality for Coloured people (Trotter, 2013).

Focusing once more on the life of Dreyer in Rive's novel, he finds himself at a point in his life where he no longer finds resonance within himself. He had inadvertently disavowed himself from his youthful past in District Six. This, thus, portrays a geographical separation that had contributed to Dreyer's social death. It severed his sense of connectedness to his community, old friends and his previous devotions and agendas. That being said, there was not only a geographic separation that had led to Dreyer's loss of Self but also a metaphysical one. This is embodied in Dreyer's relationship with Ruth, a white woman from Vereeniging<sup>3</sup> with whom he had fallen deeply in love. The relationship was ultimately not meant to be as Ruth's father had torn them asunder, viewing Dreyer as racially impure and inferior for his daughter. Dreyer never quite heals from this metaphysical separation, as evident in his letters to Abe. He is doomed to perpetual separation from Ruth due to his perceived inferiority, and this he can never fully come to terms with. It is these elements of geographic and metaphysical separations that are also evident in my broader analysis of Colouredness. Coloured people were the victims of forced removal, often from geographic sites of rich heterogeneous identity and culture. While on the other hand, there is the fictive, metaphysical notion of racial homogeneity that is beset upon the Coloured community. These elements of separation are what may establish the foundation for an analysis of social death and loss of social heterogeneity in Coloured communities.

The formalisation of race is an important marker in South Africa's colonial history. Herein, race was rationalised not solely through biology, but as a socio-legal framework (Posel, 2001). Posel (2001) touches on the fact that while the imposition of race was not exclusive to Apartheid, there was a striking vagueness in defining race pre-1948. This pre-Apartheid heterogeneity is palpable in Posel's (2001, p. 95) insinuation:

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[...] the cases of people who looked Coloured but lived in native locations, spoke a native language, had paid lobola; or adversely, people who looked native but had married Coloured women, lived in Coloured areas, spoke Afrikaans, and were devout Christians

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Furthermore, the rupture of this heterogeneity is expressed in Rive's novel, when Dreyer laments his natal alienation as he exclaims, 'I was bastardised by colonialism in such a manner that I have one foot in Europe and the other foot on this continent' (Rive, 1990, p. 97). He further links this rupture to the formalisation of race:

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Segregation was entrenched even deeper as part of the constitution. We fought to regain the past. We were yesterday's children who looked back even further (Rive, 1990, p. 100)

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In the last sentence, he longs for a meaningful past of heterogeneity<sup>4</sup>, instead of one that homogenises and 'bastardises' him. It is exhibited here that even in the face of vague racialism, prior to Apartheid, there still existed heterogeneity of culture, language and community. It must then be acknowledged that the formalisation of race, through rationalisation, gave way to the false ideal of homogeneity, or what Posel (2001) refers to as 'race as common sense'.

2 Prior to forced removals in 1966, District Six was a highly diverse neighbourhood in the city of Cape Town. It was known for having a colourful, vibrant history with residents of various backgrounds and economic means.

3 Vereeniging is a city in the south of present-day Gauteng province.

4 He expresses that this heterogeneity had a presence prior to Apartheid. His political activism was constituted by a fight to regain this sense of heterogeneity.

I thus establish that the formal implementation of racial classification was detrimental to the heterogeneity of Coloured people prior to Apartheid. The racial vagueness of heterogeneity was no doubt problematic for Apartheid and its racial ideology. It was this heterogeneity that, as per Wicomb, was contrived into miscegenistic shame<sup>5</sup>- thus prompting homogenous Colouredness as a red herring to mask that shame. Thus, in contemplating Colouredness, one must be mindful of the interconnectedness between social death, racial ideology and heterogeneity. These are intertwined in the same manner that Rive convolutes the source of Dreyer's subjective loss. Rive often hints at Dreyer's youthful past in District Six, which cross-references the reader's attention to '*Buckingham Palace*', *District Six*<sup>6</sup>. It is this reference that points towards that essence of Self embedded in social heterogeneity and hitherto lost in the infernos of social death. This heterogeneous sense of identity was done away with physically through the forced removals and subsequent destruction of grey areas<sup>7</sup>; as well as mentally through the imposition of racial ideology and the false episteme of homogenous Colouredness. Rive makes this sense of loss and nostalgia candid within Dreyer's character, although it is a difficult trauma to reckon with. It is throughout the passage of this novel that one starts to witness the development of Dreyer's character through a reckoning with his past. It is this reckoning that gives way to a newfound sense of Self. One that we can compare, in phenomenological terms, to that of a new Humanism.

### A New Humanism?

*Emergency Continued* is ultimately a story of personal reconciliation. It comprises the restoration of one's Self and one's subjective value that had been lost through the traverses of life. Dreyer is a character that overcomes this loss of Self. Everyone inevitably experiences this loss at some point in their lives through the dehumanising mechanism of modernity and capitalism that continually disfigures the human psyche and reality. Of course, it is not advertently capitalism nor modernity that is detrimental to Dreyer, but the very passage of time, of routine and ultimately institutionalisation that had altered his reality. His sense of Self had been disfigured by the events of the everyday that had slowly but inevitably led him on a path that was antithetic to his former Self. As a result, it is clear that themes of memory, personal reckoning and kinship are presented as aspects that slowly rehabilitate the beleaguered protagonist. Dreyer realises that as he searches for his son, he has a burning desire to simultaneously and symbolically find himself through re-piecing memories and old friendships.

Whether or not Rive was hinting at the humanism implicit in non-racialism, as he had done in '*Buckingham Palace*', *District Six*, one can certainly note the symbolisms of human agency that are required to overcome the alienation of social death. It is this instance that I'd like to highlight in Rive's novel. Almost through a Cartesian moment of rationalisation, one is able to re-navigate the locality of Self. This is what must also be analogised with the social death of Coloured people. If it is the case that humanity had been lost through the processes of Apartheid, forced removals and racial ideology, then could it follow that we ought to undo these processes by way of agency and reason? Perhaps this is what Rive was hinting at through Dreyer's revelation, reconciliation and

5 This disfigurement of heterogeneous Colouredness is reminiscent of Mbembe's (2001) discussion of the manipulated distortion of the postcolonial African subject

6 One of Rive's novels wherein he illuminates expressions of culture and ideologies of non-racialism that sprawled the boulevards of District Six

7 This refers to urban locations constituted by a racially diverse demographic (i.e. District Six & Sophiatown). Under the Apartheid-era Group Areas Act, these residential areas were demolished, and its inhabitants forcibly removed to reserve whites-only residences.

repatriation of Self. Through looking at the authorship of Sylvia Wynter<sup>8</sup> and Zimitri Erasmus<sup>9</sup>, I explore the rationale and intentions that a reinvention of humanism might have in remedying the rupture of subjectivity.

What could a Wynterian renegotiation of Humanity mean for the Coloured subject? Now aware of the society of race in the first instance, and the coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom in the second, what lies next for the Coloured subject in a setting of non-racialism? Does this provide the impetus for the Coloured subject to reinvent their sense of Self and Being? These are some budding questions that must be directed towards the issue of formulating a new humanism. Wynter provides us with the epistemological foreground with which to critique the way we have hitherto viewed race and Otherness. What needs to be ascertained is the path towards formulating new images of Being, outside of the paradigm of 'Man'. Essentially, the invention of a 'nonhomogeneous' Humanity within redefined parameters of race or Colouredness. If impetus is placed upon the march towards human-ness and heteronomy, then perhaps it is Colouredness that constitutes the vehicle of this trek. Thanks to Erasmus, we may focus upon the ways in which Colouredness is reconfigured in order to undo social death and embark on the journey towards finding the meaning of Self and Other. This is not dissimilar to the message that Rive seemingly displays in his novel.

Within the setting of *Emergency Continued*, non-racialism is somewhat of a forgone element of the story. Although it has a notable presence, race is not a major catalyst of Dreyer's story. One can, however, deduce the tensions and signifiers that one would otherwise recognise in our racialised world. These signifiers resemble the assemblages of race. For instance: geography, the type of language used and the portrayal of certain characters. Perhaps, like Erasmus, Rive's point is attempting to illuminate the inevitability of racial norms while at the same time validating the non-essence of race itself. Nonetheless, this novel portrays the story of a middle-aged teacher who was able to undo the estrangement that had befallen him. Like the Overrepresentation of Man (Wynter, 2003), institutionalism had stripped Dreyer of all semblance of being and replaced it with a foreign dogma that had alienated him from his own essence. This, like the history of colonised peoples, is the height of tragedy in terms of subjectivity and the order of things. This, however, only becomes clear to Dreyer when his son leaves home without notice. Perhaps this serves as a symbolism for the reckoning of the coloniality of power as Wynter poses. It is through this reckoning, and the search that it ignites, that Dreyer can reconcile an alternative yet binding meaning with which to constitute his life. This, in my opinion, is what links Dreyer's outcome to the proposal on race by Erasmus. Subsequent to reconstituting past friendships and re-entering political activism, he reaches a point at which he could offset the perplexities of his social death. Even though he finds his son and himself (in a symbolic sense), the world still carried on as it always had. He had not stopped the brutality of the Apartheid regime nor had he nullified the fugitive status of his son, but he had achieved the reconstitution of his subjectivity<sup>10</sup>. Much like the inevitability of racist structures which Erasmus speaks of, Dreyer had established a new humanism as an alternate to the structures which still ravage him. If this alternate humanism is possible for Dreyer, as I have corroborated with discussions from Wynter and Erasmus, then perhaps there lies a horizon on which Colouredness is reconstituted with its lost sense of heterogeneity. What we haven't yet uncovered, however, is the antagonisms of racialism.

8 Wynter (2003, 274) argues that the Black colonised subject, now aware of their position within a Eurocentric order of knowledge truth and power, must embark on a reinvention of Self, a production of Humanity that is 'nonhomogeneous' and non-analogous to Western modernity.

9 Along the line of Wynter's 'nonhomogeneous' human, Erasmus (2017) argues that in perceiving race 'otherwise', we ought to understand its totalising mechanics; however, in so doing, we must repurpose and renegotiate what race means in terms of identifying the Self and Other.

10 Though only to a nominal extent as I shall discuss.

## Racial Antagonism and the Coloured Question

There are some notable tracts of racialism that are discussed in Rive's novel. Although alluded to in passing, these are nonetheless important instances in the book that cannot be overlooked. We can agree that humanism—the ultimate awakening from Kantian self-imposed darkness—is indeed an inspiring story. However, one cannot overlook those imposing structures which latch onto one's very existence. This important yet nominal element of the novel is rooted in the racial relations of subordination that are apparent throughout the novel. Here, I refer specifically to Dreyer's forbidden relationship with Ruth, his first true love. As the reader learns towards the middle of the book, the two were caught and charged with the Immorality Act<sup>11</sup>. Dreyer was subsequently bailed out of prison by Ruth's father, but he had to suffer a worse punishment—the genesis of his own alienation. What's important, however, is to note the antagonisms that are at the root of this alienation. The Immorality Act and Ruth's father are two elements in the story that highlights this antagonism. It is not so much the case that Dreyer's racial inferiority is the main culprit in this instance, although this is what Dreyer laments. On the contrary, it is the negation of Dreyer's Colouredness which must be addressed. As I will discuss, it is Dreyer's Colouredness that capacitates the whiteness, and thus the perceived superiority of Ruth and her father. I bring this antagonism up, not to link with the genesis of Dreyer's social death, but to highlight the improbability of offsetting it. Analogous to Colouredness, there is no setting in which a reconstitution race will offset its negation. In other words, I argue that the superiority of whiteness is predatory on the incapacitation of Colouredness. This incapacity is what limits a socially dead Colouredness from usurping new humanity.

I argue that Colouredness, even in a post-apartheid sense, is problematic for the mere fact that it is negated by whiteness. As I have discussed in the case of Dreyer, it's not only problematic that Colouredness had lost its natal essence, but also the fact that whiteness bases its own essence upon this lack of essence. Wilderson (2008) describes whiteness as the positional form which predicates itself upon the non-position Blackness<sup>12</sup>. This is analogous to Colouredness, as the image of the Human Other, which breathes essence and form into the ontology of whiteness. Whiteness, as we have seen in Wynter's position, is simultaneously afforded the ultimate position of Humanity as based upon this negation. It is this negation that I am particularly interested in interrogating further. If it is this negation, and thus antagonism, that is the underpinning of modernity and all her symbolisms of Humanism, then does this not present an ethical dilemma for modernity and Humanism in itself?<sup>13</sup>

This reading of Wilderson thus provides a point at which to contemplate the negation of Colouredness. If it is the case, as supposed earlier, that the loss of heterogenous identity among Coloured people had led to their social death, then one must also consider that civil society does not admit those without subjective capacity. Coloured people are relegated to the gates of civil society. How is it that one comes to such a supposition? In homogenising Colouredness, Apartheid policy also produced the negated form on which Colouredness was to be socio-legally interpreted:

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'coloured person' means a person who is not a white person nor a native (Population Registration Act 1950)

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11 Apartheid legislation (amended in 1950) which legally incriminated sexual relations between whites and other races.

12 Here Wilderson speaks to elements of social death through invoking 'thanatology'—this is what opposingly gives life to civil society. Wilderson (2008, 62) goes on further to illuminate how this lack or void in Blackness provides the very capacity for Humanity in whiteness

13 Its arguable that Humanism is not an appropriate vehicle in which either to articulate the suffering of Black bodies nor to transume it into the plane of civility. Blackness is a result of social death and the suffering of 'accumulation and fungibility' (Hartman, 1997), not by way of contingency, but rather the 'matrix that positions the subject'. Wilderson (2008, 75) articulates the inadequacy of Humanist theory in so far as it does not account for the dilemma of slavery as a 'matrix'

Here we see that Coloureds are defined negatively as those who are neither white nor Black. What's more, is that this same negative aspect is used to positively define and affirm whiteness:

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'white person' means a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a Coloured person (Population Registration Act, 1950)

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This thus provides the impetus to make use of Wilderson's arguments on racial antagonization. Though not identical to the case of African Americans, Coloureds have been homogenised for the sake of racial ideology and sanctioned to social death for their perceived lack of cultural identity. As Wicomb (1998) recounts, Colouredness is used as the façade in which to mask shame; in disavowing their history, they attempt to charter new tropes of identity and belonging among an imagined community. This is what one notes in the case of Dreyer, where he imagines his ideal life with Ruth, though masked it with his pretentious relationship with Mabel and the birth of their children. He attempts to establish an alternative Self vicariously through Bradley, and it is subsequently through his search for Bradley that he is able to finally attain that alternative Self. In a way, Dreyer is thus reunited with the same sense of Self that he had lost after Ruth. How, then did he manage to overturn the incapacitation of his social death? I argue that he didn't, owing to the fact that the damnation of social death is a binding one.

Regarding Colouredness, there are indeed markers of imagined subjectivity, such as a liminal sense of self or community. There may even be a consciousness of diverging and overlapping interests among Coloured communities, though I don't believe this could ultimately resist the matrix of racial antagonism. Those without subjective capacity says Wilderson (2008, p. 50), may have the same sense of interests or agendas as the socially living, but their positionality may never be analogised:

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...whereas Masters may share the same fantasies as Slaves, and Slaves can speak as though they have the same interests as Masters, their respective grammars of suffering are irreconcilable.

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One sees that the reimagining of Colouredness and its disavowal of Apartheid homogeneity may still prove inadequate for a supposed new Humanism. The very antagonism within civil society, between the socially living and the incapacitated, poses an irreconcilable problem for any attempts to reverse social death. If the incapacitated Black were to transume a humanism of some form, then it would inevitably result in the implosion of the Eurocentric civil society- although, perhaps this is what Erasmus was insinuating. However, I agree with Wilderson's position in claiming that the ethical dilemma of Humanism is insurmountable.

Going back to my analysis on Dreyer, he didn't manage to undo his situational damnation. Apartheid and its socio-legal devices had still rendered him a non-being, despite his liminal sense of reconciliation. In the same way, it is these antagonistic devices that suspend Coloured people in its social matrix of positionality- in other words, they remain socially dead in perpetuity. Dreyer's story of overcoming subjective adversity does, however, illuminate an interesting point. There may be a crevice of simulated transcendence. Even though Dreyer is still suspended within the atrocities of Apartheid, his son's uncertain future and his pretentious marriage, he is still able to muster some liminal though non-effectual meaning in his life. Essentialist though one may view humanism, perhaps it is also true that Wilderson inadvertently wanders in the same direction. It is my position that Wilderson places too much emphasis on the racial antagonisms within civil society, so much so that he describes Blackness as the overdetermination of 'incapacity'. This incapacity doesn't necessarily disqualify existence, albeit in a merely sentient form within the margins of civil society,

modernity and humanity. Even Wilderson nominally admits this. Perhaps then it is these liminal spaces that need to be illuminated in our study of Colouredness. Here, again, I reinvoké the essence of Erasmus' supposition of renegotiating meaning within the confines of marginality<sup>14</sup>.

### Navigating Subjective Meaning in Liminality

A mysterious though an important part of the novel is Dreyer's interaction with a vagrant named Paai on Macassar Beach<sup>15</sup>. Dreyer holds a conversation with Paai and learns that he lived among the Port Jackson trees and subsisted on the marine life that he had caught on the beach. Dreyer is intrigued by the elderly beach-dweller, though baffled as to why someone would choose to live on the margins of society as Paai had. The vagrant had no interest in the happenings of civil society. Like Dreyer, he was denied access to modernity, but simultaneously has no interest in it. Dreyer comes to the conclusion that Paai is nothing more than content and certainly less happy than a schoolteacher. He finds some commonality with Paai in that they were both running from something. In my analysis, Paai is more of a pragmatic figure than Dreyer. Between the two, Paai doesn't buy into the fictive telos of transuming his damnation. Contemplating Paai's situation, Dreyer asks himself:

Can the whole world always escape to some miserable existence under Port Jackson trees, sheltered from the north-western? There would always be north-westerns. Sooner or later one must leave the flimsy shelter of Port Jacksons and stand four-square facing the north-wester. (Rive, 1990, p. 135)

I argue that Paai is indeed facing a metaphysical north-wester<sup>16</sup>. He is aware of the alienation and damnation that befalls him. Though, instead of attempting the futility of transcending his situation, he makes the most of it. On the beach, he is aware of his social exodus but chooses contentment in a world where he can nominally do as he pleases. In some way, this is a subversion of the exclusivity of modernity. Similarly, I don't argue for the transcendence of Colouredness from its hitherto damnation. There is no transcendence; there is no humanist telos. Nonetheless, there is a liminal semblance of agency within the margins of civil society.

In contemplating this vexing liminality<sup>17</sup> concerning Colouredness, one is reminded of the problem which Albert Camus attempts to surmount in *The Myth of Sisyphus*<sup>18</sup>. Referring to the mythical figure of Sisyphus, Camus (2005, p. 117) argues that this 'is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock'. It is here, that Sisyphus had charted typography of subjective meaning and found some semblance of articulation in an otherwise meaningless life. What then are we to make of Camus' Sisyphian analogy for absurdism and the problem of Colouredness? If we are to assume that there is no meaningful end to Colouredness, then we can compare the precarious positionality of Colouredness to that of absurdism. A Coloured person, expressing themselves as such in a liminal space, is already in a position to subvert those structures which offer no social meaning or articulation. Coloureds, in their social definition, is negated in their essence. But within

14 Though I agree with this marginal level of subjective agency, I don't expound it in a teleological sense. I refer to this 'renegotiation' as a purely liminal one, and not something that is capable of ever superseding the coloniality of Humanity.

15 This beach stretches along the small town of Macassar in the Western Cape, which has historically been home to a predominantly fishing and boat making community.

16 This refers to the strong winds or storms which emanate from a northwest direction.

17 I espouse this in an anthropological sense, as in the moment of suspension in one's subjectivity. For the socially dead, this is a perpetual suspension within the margins of civil society. Though socially dead, there is still a marginal, sentient existence within these margins. For more on liminality, see Turner (1969).

18 In order to solidify his point, Camus makes use of the Greek allegory on Sisyphus. Herein, Sisyphus is doomed to meaninglessly carry a boulder up a hill, only for it to fall back to the bottom once he reaches the top. This menial damnation is repeated in perpetuity.

the margins of this same society, we may find a subjective essence to Colouredness that is perceived and negotiated in a nominal way. Understood in this way, Coloureds, like Sisyphus and Paai, are damned to eternal suspense; never Black nor white but always the Human Other. It is for this reason that we must move towards perceiving Colouredness not as a teleological ambition, either towards humanism or racialism, but as a state of subversion to the void that non-racialism<sup>19</sup> poses.

To drive this point further, one could explore this element of liminality in *Emergency Continued*. Dreyer's character is one that portrays a relentless soul. He is adamant about undoing his own experience of Absurdity. This is very admirable, though futile for reasons I have already discussed. His reconciled sense of self is one that does not fully address the catalysts which induced his alienation in the first place. Thus, it is antithetical for this alternative humanism to exist simultaneously to the elements which superimpose and negate it. In my reading of this novel, the climax is not constituted by the moment where Dreyer is finally at peace with himself and his past. On the contrary, the pinnacle moment in this story is at the point where Dreyer is most perplexed—this is his 'hour of consciousness'. This is the moment of clarity, not because he finds the answers he is looking for; rather it is clear that there is no answer at all. It is between fictive answers and the reality of unknowing that one finds liminality of the non-effectual agency<sup>20</sup>. For Dreyer, his moment of liminality is the non-effectual agency he has in his writing. Conveying to Abe his longing for Ruth, Dreyer says, "In fiction, we could meet again, but in real life, this is unfortunately highly improbable" (Rive, 1990, p. 37). Here he alludes to the ability to imagine his ideal life in writing while acknowledging its improbability. This is hard to accept for Dreyer, but he embraces this liminality, nonetheless. As he writes his autobiography, he is unable to apply an ideal telos for he cannot foresee his own future. He has no choice but to encounter his turbulent life of self-alienation:

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How can one really exercise the sublime detachment of the novelist if one is directly involved in the situation one is writing about? I cannot plan what happens next since I myself must wait to find out what is going to happen next. I cannot predict what my characters will do or say and thus have no control over the direction they will take. So much for the writer's omniscience and detachment. All I am able to do right now is wait, observe, transcribe and garnish here and there. This might prove a futile exercise. I can but try. (Rive, 1990, p. 36)

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It is this suspense in Dreyer's writing, and ultimately his life, which is inescapable in my examination. This does not, however, deem this liminality in a negative sense. On the contrary, it must be seen as the locus for the subversion of those elements which have imposed this liminality in the first instance. Liminality provides the moment in which the Self can be reimagined, reconceived and renegotiated—but only in a subjective way. In other words, nothing will change Dreyer's situation except to imagine it differently in a fictional novel. In the case of Colouredness, nothing will undo its social death; but that doesn't exempt imaginings of community, Being and Self. These imaginings are non-effectual, but they occur nonetheless. This liminal, non-effectual agency is not enough to offset the racial antagonisms embedded in Apartheid's legacy, but it does offer the socially dead some nominal meaning and articulation.

We may never know what Rive's thoughts on post-Apartheid South Africa and contemporary Colouredness may have been today. I am, however, of the belief that *Emergency Continued* would not have been his final semi-biographical novel which portrays the life of Andrew Dreyer. Perhaps a

19 I refer to the void in non-racialism for the fact that it doesn't address racial antagonism. By denying race in a discursive sense, it removes the platforms by which social death and racial antagonism may be articulated.

20 By this, I refer to the liminal ability one has to create subjective meaning and articulation within the margins of the objective world. However, this liminal ability is purely subjective and incapable of effecting change upon the objective world.

non-racial South Africa would have posed another bout of introspection and search of Self for Dreyer or perhaps Bradley. My final point here is that a real, binding Self is unattainable for the socially dead. Colouredness is a still-born state of being that would prove any humanist telos futile. At best, Colouredness must seek its 'hour of consciousness' and make the most of its perpetual liminality.

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## Author Profile

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