‘We are the gift of life’: exploring the political potential of childhood reading through the work of Beverley Naidoo

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Abstract

This thesis explores the contextual agency of children, both as a real presence in the archive and represented on the page, to show that childhood reading can be a conduit for agency. I use the work of children's author Beverley Naidoo as a case study, exploring her vision for the political potential of childhood reading through her middle-grade fiction and archive. Whilst Naidoo's work constructs an agential child, her archive demonstrates how children negotiate agency as both consumers and producers of children's culture. As the first stand-alone study of Naidoo's work and archive, this thesis makes an important intervention into scholarship on child agency within childhood studies, revealing how childhood reading is a conduit for political agency. Naidoo is a South Africa-born, UK-based children's author, with a background in education, reader response research, and anti-apartheid activism. Situated within a tradition of radical children's literature (Mickenberg 2005; Reynolds 2007), Naidoo's work positions itself as representing perspectives that British child readers would not otherwise have been able to access. Naidoo's engagement with themes of racial injustice was influenced by the movement for antiracist and multicultural children's books in the 1970s and 80s (Sands-O'Connor 2017; Ramone 2020), and many of the narrative strategies she uses reflect an effort to represent experiences to which she is an outsider. I build on current scholarship on child agency (Sánchez-Eppler 2005; Bernstein 2011; Gubar 2016) by offering unique examples from Naidoo's work and archive of children as both rhetorical figures constructed by her work, and real co-producers and consumers of it. This thesis therefore locates the political potential of childhood reading in its facilitation of child agency.

For Jeanne Hakin

1924 - 2022

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All images are used with permission from Seven Stories and Beverley Naidoo.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

> 'There are books that you can classify as 'another story', there are books that make you cry or laugh, and there are books that change your way of thinking and your life'. (Puente)

This thesis is an exploration of child agency, agency held by child readers, emergent from archives of children's literature, and constrcuted in children's books. This is an engagement with the political potential of children's literature, of those books that 'change your way of thinking and your life', and the ways that the agency of children intersects with these texts when this sort of change occurs. I make this critical intervention into current scholarship on the agency of children in children's literary studies using award-winning children's author Beverley Naidoo as a case study. Using Naidoo's work and archive, held at Seven Stories: the National Centre for Children's Books, UK, I outline her vision of the political potential of children's literature, exploring the intersecting roles of children as the constructs, subjects, co-producers, consumers, and critics of children's literature within this vision. The following chapters will illustrate how this political vision emerges through Naidoo's politicisation of her child characters and her implied child readers, her creative collaboration with young people, and the responses from her readers to her representations of racism. I have opened here with a quote from Dania, a teenager who described herself as 'your Mexican reader' in her email to Naidoo in 2012, to begin to illustrate the ways that real children and their representations in children's literature are mutually informative. Dania was a real young person who claimed authority to speak about the role of literature in her life, but in being preserved in Naidoo's archive and foregrounded here by me, she also becomes a rhetorical device, a potent symbol of the agency of the child reader. Situating Naidoo's work within a tradition of radical children's literature, I draw on the work of Karen Sánchez-Eppler, Robin Bernstein and Marah Gubar to excavate these intersections between real and rhetorical children from Naidoo's work and archive. This represents an important new insight for the field, allowing me to argue that the creation and reading of radical children's literature facilitates the agency of children. This in turn opens up space within the field for children, as socially embedded subjects whose agency is always in negotiation, to be taken seriously as collaborators in and critics of children's literature.

Naidoo is the ideal subject for this case study into the political potential of childhood reading, having worked at the intersection of several fields as an educator, activist, and children's author. Each of these fields contends with the intersections between real and rhetorical children in different ways. Furthermore, Naidoo's extensive archive bears witness to her process within each of these fields, and to the voices of the children and young people who have influenced and been influenced by this work. Born in Johannesburg in 1943 to a middle-class white family, Naidoo moved to the UK in 1965, studying to become a teacher. Her involvement in the British Anti-Apartheid Movement was pivotal in her choice to become a children's author and she has continued to write for children since *Journey to Jo'burg,* her first novel, was published in 1985. Over her career, she has written seven middle-grade chapter books, nine picture books, three collections of short stories (as well as editing two further collections), three works of non-fiction, and numerous articles. Naidoo's middle-grade fiction offers a prolonged engagement with a child agency and is the site where her vision of the political potential of childhood is most thoroughly developed. The following chapters therefore engage with six of her novels: *Journey to Jo'burg, Chain of Fire, No Turning Back, The Other Side of Truth, Web of Lies,* and *Burn My Heart*, and her short story collection *Out of Bounds,* read alongside her archive. Sharing a realist mode anchored in specific historical contexts, almost all of these texts centre Black children from South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria as protagonists, depicting the ways in which they are marginalised and minoritised by racist social systems, be it apartheid, British imperialism, or the neo-imperialism of the UK immigration system. The calls for diversity in children's publishing that were prominent when Naidoo began writing have resurfaced in the last decade, as activists, authors, and critics call for better representations of children of colour in books and better opportunities for authors of colour. This study of Naidoo's work offers insights into the shifting role of white authors within these wider debates, and reveals the strategies used by Naidoo to represent her African characters accurately, but also to represent her fiction as authentic and culturally sensitive. Over the course of this introductory chapter, I will set out the understanding of child agency that underpins this thesis, explore the place of childhood reading within Naidoo's early life and career, outline my approach to Naidoo's archive, and delineate the political nature of Naidoo's work as it relates to discourses of race.

1.1 The intersections of real and rhetorical children

The intersection between real and rhetorical children, and its implications for Naidoo's model of childhood reading, is the central concern of this thesis. Arguing, as Bernstein does, for 'the simultaneity and mutual constitution of children and childhood' ('Childhood as Performance' 203-4), I build on Bernstein and Sánchez-Eppler's work in the archives of nineteenth-century childhood to argue that radical contemporary children's literature offers the ideal site for the investigation of this mutuality between real and rhetorical children. In this moment of increased attention to the political value of children's literature, particularly regarding diversity and representation, this case study into Naidoo's work and archive illustrates how children's political agency is both constructed and performed through the writing and reading of radical children's literature. Child agency is therefore at the core of the conceptual work of this thesis. The twentieth century itself has been considered 'the age of children's agency', in terms of an increased awareness of children as both social actors and rhetorical totems with considerable affective power (Oswell 3). Discussions of agency with the field of childhood studies can also fall into what Mona Gleason calls the 'agency trap', whereby 'uncritical adherence to the 'agency movement' as a way to promote children's autonomy turns cultural anthropologists into advocates for, rather than scholars of, children and childhood' (447). Whilst children's contributions to and perspectives on history and culture are of course of value, Gleason cautions against an approach that valorises resistance and rebellion as the only forms of child agency. However, it is also the case that

> adults who maintain that children have agency are more likely than ones who don't to pay close attention to the words and deeds of young people, to seek out material traces of children's agency that might otherwise go uncollected, unanalyzed, missing. (Gubar, 'Hermeneutics of Recuperation' 13)

Within my own analysis of Naidoo's archive and work, I adopt a critical yet generous attitude towards child agency, not only looking for its signs, but exploring the ways it is constructed in Naidoo's representations of children, and by the real children who populate her archive as her readers and collaborators.

Discussions of the constructed nature of childhood, and the question of whether the reading child can ever be accessed, have been at the heart of much children's literature scholarship in the past four decades. Critics such as Jacqueline Rose (1984) and Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (1994) have argued that children's literature criticism is frustrated when critics refuse to acknowledge both the constructed nature of childhood and their own contributions to that construction. This construction is what I term the rhetorical child, or children. Finding its roots in the Romantic era, the rhetorical child persists, not as a monolith, but as a fluid symbol that tends to coalesce around a particular group of values: innocence, playfulness, purity, dependency, and futurity. In her discussion of the centrality of childhood to nineteenth-century American conceptions of whiteness, Bernstein argues that this rhetorical child carries so much 'affective weight that the exhortation to "protect the children" seems to add persuasive power to almost any argument' (*Racial Innocence* 2). It is the taken-for-granted nature of childhood innocence that makes it such a potent cultural symbol, from horror films (Buckley) and humanitarian campaigns to the infantilising rhetoric used to dismiss demands for independence from Britain's numerous colonies, on the grounds that these nations required the guidance of their imperial parent figure (Doty). All writing for and about children constructs a rhetorical child for itself. In assuming 'an audience of intelligent, capable, socially aware young readers' (Reynolds, *Left Out* 2), radical children's fiction constructs an implied reader with a social conscience and an appetite for justice, a construction that scholars of radical approaches to children's books often buy into. In 'Radical Children's Literature Now!', Julia Mickenberg and Philip Nel argue that any future governed by social justice and equality 'will begin with children who are willing to question the status quo' (467), assembling a rhetorical child that is a vessel for adult hopes for social justice. Although this radical rhetorical child figure appears to differ from the compliant child of Victorian didactic fiction, its potency is nonetheless tied to its innocence, attaching purity of motive to acts of rebellion and the conversion of adults to the cause. This child is what Clémentine Beauvais would call the 'mighty child': 'a child "thrown forth" into the world, and asked to make something of it' (7). For Beauvais, authors construe this future potential as a temporally located power to achieve what the adult, whose time is running out, cannot. Rose has argued that this sort of discourse of the child places 'on the child's shoulders the responsibility for saving humankind from the degeneracy of modern society' (43). For Rose, the constructed nature of the child in children's literature renders real

children inaccessible to children's literature scholarship, making it 'more or less impossible to gauge' a child's experience of a book (9). However, this latter claim is undermined by the extensive research that has been done in recent years into children's reading practices.

In his study of child readers from 1700-1840, Matthew Grenby argues that the extensive marginalia in books owned and used by children 'might best be regarded as a sign of an extremely interactive and engaged relationship with text' (29). Acknowledging the 'partial and problematic' nature of this data based on children's historical reading, Grenby argues that while it may not 'reveal the truth of the who, what, how, and why of children's reading', it may arrive 'as close as it is possible to get to the reality of the eighteenth-century child reader' (35). Sánchez-Eppler, in her work on child diarists in nineteenth-century America, goes a step further to argue that 'docility to literary lessons becomes the condition of a certain independence, pleasure, even power' (*Dependent States* 40). These traces of real child readers within archives are entangled with the rhetorical representations of them produced by adult authors and literary scholars, but for Sánchez-Eppler, this entanglement is no reason to avoid the real child as a research object, instead considering the endeavour as a way into 'unmask[ing] the elements of compliance entailed in all efforts to speak' (*Dependent States* 40). The complex agency of child readers is becoming more visible in digital spaces; Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Amy Stornaiuolo belong to a growing number of reader-response researchers exploring how young readers use fanfiction and digital media to 'change the identities of characters to more accurately reflect the diversity of the world, to blur boundaries between traditional categories, or to create characters whose identities more closely mirror their own' (321). Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak goes further still by inviting children into the processes of literary research: 'if children's literature is to serve a constructive role in promoting young people's rights, then it is necessary - on the part of children's literature scholars - to combine well-established literary criticism with participatory research methodologies' (216). For Deszcz-Tryhubczak, involving children in children's literary research is an important means of countering the adult-constructed nature of childhood, offering children the opportunity to construct something for themselves.

All of these studies of children's reading practices are mediated by adults, which for some is reason enough to state the impossibility of talking about the real child. However,

Gubar argues that children's literature critics are 'always talking about children, whether we admit it or not' ('Risky Business' 450), and that

> embracing a critical paradigm that holds that children do not participate in the production of children's culture has caused us, for the most part, to disregard what young people have said, written, and done in the realm of children's culture. (452)

I find her position compelling, all the more so due to my encounters with the child collaborators, editors and critics in Naidoo's archive. Any method of theorising about childhood entails creating another rhetorical child, as well as acknowledging the shifting power differentials within child-adult relationships. Nevertheless, this work is necessary to fully explore the ways that these real and rhetorical children mutually inform one another within Naidoo's work and archive, and to 'avoid reverting back to even more dehumanizing and potentially disabling ways of talking about young people' ('Risky Business' 454). Therefore, it is crucial to discuss the ways that real children inform and are informed by the fluid figure of the rhetorical child, and to articulate an understanding of the agency of real children within this process. In articulating this, I draw on the tripartite model of the child in childhood studies outlined by Sánchez-Eppler in *Dependent States:*

- [Children] are objects of socialization: taught to conform to social expectations by child-rearing experts, by parents, by schools, and by didactic stories.
- They are forces of socialization: ideas about childhood and the innocent figure of the child evoked in a wide range of cultural and political discourses in attempts to reform, direct, or influence the nation.
- They are children: individuals inhabiting and negotiating these often conflicting roles as best they can. (xv)

This model helps to elucidate how the figure of the child operates both as the receptacle for a plethora of cultural discourses, and as the representative for a large proportion of the human population who are neither immune from nor entirely beholden to these discourses. Real and rhetorical children are not in conflict but co-produce each other, children being 'virtuoso performers' of the scripts of children's culture (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 28). Rhetorical figurations of the child are not controlled by a single group, nor are their meanings fixed, but are always subject to subversion and change. As Bernstein argues:

> children do not passively receive culture. Rather, children expertly field the co-scripts of narratives and material culture and then collectively forge a third prompt: play itself. The three prompts then entangle to script future play, which continues to change as children collectively exercise agency. (*Racial Innocence* 29)

This describes the cyclical process by which children both consume and contribute to children's culture, and reflects the dynamic that I observe in Naidoo's work and archive, whereby real children both shape and enter into dialogue with their representations.

This has implications for my understanding of child agency as both a construction within Naidoo's work and a real quality that can be ascribed to her readers and collaborators. Binaristic approaches to agency are unhelpful, as Oswell argues: 'it makes little sense to frame children's agency in terms of a simple binary, having or not having agency, capacity and power', since such binaries ignore the ways that agency fluctuates and is negotiated within various social structures (270). I also seek to avoid 'pitting adult perspectives against those of children and youth' (Gleason 457), or positioning the adult subject as the model for agency against which the child can be understood. As Sánchez-Eppler argues,

> independence may generally be overrated as a desideratum of civic society; interdependence or partial independence may be far more accurate terms for understanding civic life. […] Children's dependent state embodies a mode of identity, of relation to family, institution, or nation, that may indeed offer a more accurate and productive model for social interaction than the ideal autonomous individual of liberalism's rights discourse ever has. (*Dependent States* xxv)

Children's social embeddedness can therefore be seen as a positive model for human agency, one that is defined by interdependence, and located in a series of negotiations with and within social structures. Gubar has built on the shift in perspective that Sánchez-Eppler calls for here to develop her 'kinship model' of childhood. This model takes the agency of children as the blueprint for agency in general, arguing that

> we are akin to one another in that from the moment we are born (and even before then) we are immersed in multiple discourses not of our own making that influence

> who we are, how we think, what we do and say—and we never grow out of this compromised state ('Risky Business' 450).

Viewed in this way, agency is not a fixed state that is possessed by some and not by others, but must be negotiated in context, as we live our lives at the intersection of different cultural forces and discourses. To return to Bernstein, agency does not exist in abstraction, but 'emerges through a constant engagement with the stuff of our lives' (*Racial Innocence* 12). My use of this kinship model throughout this thesis entails an observation of the ways that child agency is constructed by Naidoo through her writing, and negotiated by her readers and collaborators in their interactions with different texts and contexts.

To take heed of Gubar's kinship model is to consider the discourses in which I am immersed, and the different voices that have influenced my thinking. My own agency as a researcher is negotiated with these competing influences. It is important, then, for me to also acknowledge the influence on my thinking of the children in Naidoo's archive. Building on Gubar's model, I illustrate two key ways in which children appear in Naidoo's archive: as collaborators and critics. In doing so, I argue that children's literary studies stand to benefit from recognising the child critics and collaborators that have shaped and continue to shape the field. As I will explore in Chapter 5, creative collaboration with children and young people is a key aspect of Naidoo's creative process. The very process of child-adult collaboration contributes to the construction of more metaphors and symbols of childhood, indicating the deep entanglement between the real and rhetorical child. However, it also reveals that real children can both create and respond to these rhetorical representations in ways that shape children's literature and culture. Based on his own extensive teaching experience, Aidan Chambers uses W. H. Auden's list of the tasks of the literary critic to examine the critical capacities of the children in his own classroom. Items 4 to 6 on this list state that a critic should:

> 4. Give a 'reading' of a work which increases my understanding of it.
>
> 5. Throw light upon the process of artistic 'Making'.
>
> 6. Throw light upon the relation of art to life, to science, economics, ethics, religion, etc. (Chambers 20)

There are examples from the reader responses in Naidoo's archive that correspond to each of these criteria. As I will illustrate in Chapter 6, 'children are indisputably critics' (151), who 'instinctively question, report, compare, [and] judge' the texts they read (144). This is not to blithely say that adult and child critics are identical, and that children are not affected by the limitations of literacy or life experience, but to remember that 'children and adults are separated by differences of degree, not of kind' (Gubar, 'Risky Business' 454). The real children in Naidoo's archive offer unique and original 'readings' of Naidoo's work which have been greatly informative for my understanding of child agency and the political potential of childhood reading.

1.2 Becoming a reader: Naidoo's early life

Prior to this thesis, scholarship on Naidoo has only consisted of short sections in literary studies books with a focus on one or two of her novels, and mentions in journals of education studies ('Literature for Children'; Gallo; Hodges; Self and Murphy). In this latter category, *The Other Side of Truth* is the most cited of her novels, often used as an example of the use of literature to promote critical literacy in the classroom (Bean and Harper; Cullinan, et al.; Buck). Marion Baraitser also discusses the usefulness of *The Other Side of Truth* as a tool, but in this case for bibliotherapeutic purposes in work with traumatised children with experiences of displacement. *Journey to Jo'burg* is cited almost as much, often with attention to its use for communicating values of multiculturalism and hope (Bieger; Nelms, et al.), whilst *No Turning Back* has been viewed as useful for teaching children about homelessness in a social studies context ('Teachers' Choices for 1998'; Freeman et al., 'Children's Books'). *Journey to Jo'burg* is discussed less often by literary critics, although it is often referenced as an example of a banned book (*The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*; Heale and Williams). Naidoo's work is often cited in discussions of radical or controversial children's books. For Eliza Dresang, the dangerous urban setting of *No Turning Back* disturbs the typically homely settings of children's literature, whilst for Ronit Fainman-Frenkel, *Out of Bounds* is an 'iconoclastic' text. Amongst literary critical discussions, *The Other Side of Truth* is once again the most cited of Naidoo's works (Helff; Mallan; Wester), with critics lending it the status of a radical or socially committed novel (Reynolds, 'Alchemy

and Alcopops', 'Changing families in children's fiction'; Pinsent, 'Languages, Genres and Issues', 'Postmodernism, New Historicism and Migration'). More extensive postcolonial analyses of *The Other Side of Truth* comes from Blanka Grzegorczyk and Christine Wilkie-Stibbs. Broadly, critics have not engaged with the quality or the ethics of Naidoo's representations of African settings and Black children, with a few exceptions. Yulisa Amadu Maddy and Donnarae MacCann describe *Out of Bounds* as a positive counterexample to the neo-imperialist representations of Africa that they find in many children's books. Vivian Yenika-Agbaw is more critical, as I will go on to discuss in Chapter 3, arguing that in *Burn My Heart,* Naidoo downplays the violence of colonialism to pander to a white Western readership ("Reconstructing History"). Sands-O'Connor is similarly critical, arguing that whilst *Journey to Jo'burg* was born out of activism, it presents Black South Africans as the objects of pity for British readers (*British Activist Authors*). Whilst previous scholarship on Naidoo has been split between those who evaluate her books as literary works or as educational tools, my work encompasses both of these approaches, considering both the literary and educational qualities of Naidoo's work to be essential to her vision of the political potential of childhood reading. As well as being the first single-author study of Naidoo, this thesis is also unique in its use of Naidoo's archive to appraise this vision.

My narrative of Naidoo's life and work in this thesis has been constructed in dialogue with her own narratives – those publicly available and in her archive – and by three interviews with Naidoo, conducted via videocall in May 2021 and February 2022. In her public speaking and writing, Naidoo has always placed reading at the centre of her emergence as an educator, activist, and author. Naidoo was born in 1943, in Johannesburg. All of her grandparents had been economic migrants from the UK, with Russian-Jewish and Cornish heritage, seeking the opportunities offered by the colonies to 'Europeans with white skins and an eye for enterprise' ('The submerged world in our midst'). Apartheid was the milieu in which she was immersed: South Africa was already racially segregated, but in 1948 when Naidoo was five years old, the National Party under Daniël François Malan came into power, codifying apartheid into a structure of legislation. This structure was underpinned by rigid racial categories, which, whilst being scientific nonsense concocted to control a divided population, came to define every aspect of social life under apartheid (Deegan). Naidoo's recollections of her childhood are inflected with an understanding of the inequalities of

apartheid that she lacked at the time. In a paper delivered to the International Reading Association congress in 1996, Naidoo recalled Mary, the Black woman who worked for the family, collapsing in front of her. Mary, or Mma Sebate, had received a telegram telling her that two of her three daughters, who lived over 300km away, had died of diphtheria, 'something for which [Naidoo], of course, had been vaccinated' ('A South African Author's Perspective' 3). Naidoo did not understand this event at the time, but it has become central in her narrative of becoming an author, as I will explore further in Chapter 2.

The adult Naidoo has reconstructed a childhood in which reading had an important place, but that was also shaped by her obliviousness to the racial injustice around her. Works by Enid Blyton and George Macdonald expanded her imagination 'into the world of Europe', but the rare instances of Black characters were 'savages, servants or comic buffoons' ('Literature and Respect' 5). When she learned about the Holocaust through *The Diary of Anne Frank,* Naidoo has described thinking 'if we'd been born in Europe, this could have been us' (Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022), but that she was 'in no way connecting with and responding to the terrible experiences of young black South Africans in my own country' ('ITV Beverley Naidoo/Transcript' 1). Her regret at this inability to recognise the racial injustice of apartheid recurs in many accounts of her childhood, and has 'fuelled a kind of anger' for Naidoo: 'how come I didn't understand it? Why didn't I ask questions?' (Personal Interview. 24 Feb 2022). Naidoo's writing for children can be seen as an attempt to answer these questions, as can her accounts of her schooling, within which is implied her vision of a good literature education. The doors of the library at Naidoo's Catholic girls' school were kept locked, and while she was a curious reader, she has described herself and her peers as 'donkeys with blinkers who had to follow instructions from teachers and adults who also wore blinkers' (''Little Hands' Memories of Childhood Reading' 2). Given that Naidoo's life's work seems motivated by the belief that childhood reading can produce political change, it is worth asking what agency is left to the child reader within their educational context. There is an apparent paradox at the heart of Naidoo's political vision of childhood reading: she suggests that individual child readers may be politicised by their reading, but also that readers' social and educational context may determine any meaning that they derive from a text. When these two notions are held together, they reveal a slippery and unreliable sort of reading agency, but also point to an important difference

between ‘bad’ and ‘good’ education. Naidoo’s was the bad sort: ‘I cannot call that schooling ‘education’. Education, in its correct sense, is meant to open and lead out’ (‘Crossing Boundaries’ 6). Naidoo’s vision of the political potential of childhood seems then to implicitly include a vision of good education within it. For her, this requires an educational context ‘where you can be in a dialogue’ (Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022). This good education is not one that gives children books with a better message to learn by heart, gives them an understanding of literature that can ‘open and lead out’; the implication is that such an education facilitates the agency of child learners to explore a variety of ideas.

Reading continues to hold a central place in Naidoo’s narratives of her young adulthood. In 1960, when she was 17, thousands of Black South Africans gathered outside a police station in Sharpeville township, close to Johannesburg, to demonstrate against the pass laws that restricted their movement around the country. In what became known as the Sharpeville Massacre, police armed with sub-machine guns killed 69 people and injured many more. The massacre brought the horrors of apartheid to a global audience, but in a 2021 conversation with researcher Julia Hope, Naidoo recalled being largely sheltered from these events until she was challenged by her older brother to look at photographs (Hope, ‘In Conversation’). The following year, in 1961, she began her studies at the University of Witwatersrand. Among a racially mixed student body for the first time, this was Naidoo’s first experience of an education that would ‘open and lead out’. Spending her lunch breaks with her peers, she describes having learned more from ‘those conversation and people […] than I actually learned inside the classroom walls’ (Hope, ‘In Conversation’ 69). Through these relationships, Naidoo began what she calls her ‘deracination’, attending anti-apartheid meetings, leafleting, and most crucially, reading (‘Beirut Conference’ 2). Reading Es’kia Mphaphlele’s *Down Second Avenue* (1959), his banned memoir of life as a young Black South African, was ‘a powerful experience for a young white South African’ (‘Beirut Conference’ 2). This example of reading in community is the first example of the model of collective reading that emerges from Naidoo’s vision of political reading, whereby literature is mobilised to unlock the latent political sensibilities of a reader.

As a result of their involvement in student activism, Naidoo and her brother were caught in the ‘nationwide mopping-up’ of resistance that followed the arrest of Nelson Mandela in 1964. As ‘a very little fish’ she was released within weeks, but her brother and

several others were charged and given prison sentences (Hope, 'In Conversation' 70). This precipitated Naidoo's move to the UK in 1965, to study English at York University. Naidoo heeded the suggestion of Professor Harry Rée, the former headmaster who ran the programme at York, that she consider studying Education alongside English. Again, it was reading that served as the catalyst. On Rée's recommendation, she read Camara Laye's *The African Child,* a record of the author's childhood in West Africa, and Edward Blishen's *The Roaring Boys,* a semi-autobiographical novel about a teacher in the East End of London ('Literature and Respect' 1). This showed her that teaching could be 'about racism, culture, class' (Hope 'In Conversation' 71), and she has since stated that she 'became a teacher because of the power of story' ('Literature and Respect' 1). In a 2008 article for The Open University, Naidoo describes the challenges of this time, during which her mind was in South Africa, and she felt a 'deep sense of disconnection' from British life; literature offered a refuge ('Open University' 2). Her Nigerian friends David and Bisi Oke, whose friendship would underpin her composition of *The Other Side of Truth* three decades later, introduced her to the wealth of African literature - from writers such as Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o - that had been inaccessible to her under apartheid censorship. Her description of these reading encounters encapsulates the sort of reading that Naidoo has since spent her career advocating for: 'here were African writers inviting me to cross boundaries into their very diverse, particular worlds, inviting me to enter and engage with them' ('Open University' 3). It is this sort of reading – reading to open minds, reading in community - that emerges over the course of this thesis as central to Naidoo's model of the political potential of childhood reading.

1.3 From student to teacher: Naidoo's literary and educational context

Naidoo qualified as a teacher in 1968, and having previously hoped to teach in Nigeria, settled in the UK with her husband Nandha. Her first job was as a remedial teacher in Brent, London. Within the UK education system, this was a time of profound change and heated political debate. Moves towards comprehensive education were accompanied by increasing calls for rights-based teaching and texts that would confront race, sex, and class-based bias, whilst rhetoric about the pollution of childhood innocence with permissive social

values proliferated into a 'toxic mixture of fact, reactionary fantasy and lurid, tabloid-assisted speculation' (Wagg, 14). The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), as the largest as well as the most influential and progressive local authority in the country, was at the heart of these debates (Radford). The ILEA oversaw all state education for the 12 inner London boroughs, and led the way in developing antiracist policy and guidelines in the early 1080s, before being abolished in Margaret Thatcher's 1988 Education Reform Act (Jenny Williams). Naidoo was employed by the ILEA School Psychological Service in the early 1970s and has described the ILEA Centre for Anti-Racist Education as an 'incredible partner to have' for the development of her research into representations of South Africa in British children's non-fiction for what became *Censoring Reality* (Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022). This period of change in UK education was accompanied by a new wave of books from authors such as Roald Dahl, Judith Kerr and Maurice Sendak, in what is often dubbed the second golden age of children's literature (Pearson, *The Making of Modern Children's Literature*). Whilst publishers still largely targeted white middle-class child readers, the 1970s saw this slowly change, as authors such as Robert Leeson became the first to publish stories about working-class children in an affordable paperback format ('Publishing Practices'). As Lucy Pearson argues, these changes altered the form, content, and values of children's literature:

> Attempts to create a literature which catered for children from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds, and for a wider age range of young readers, produced a shift towards more realism in children's literature, broadening the parameters for the kind of content and language perceived as suitable for children. Simultaneously, […] the social and ideological impact of children's literature was interrogated in relation to issues of gender, race and class. (*The Making of Modern Children's Literature* 71)

This turn towards realism and socially conscious fiction laid the ground for the sort of literature that Naidoo began to write in the 1980s.

A growing awareness of race was an essential part of the shift in attitude that Pearson describes, prompted in part by the increasing number of Commonwealth citizens arriving in the UK in the postwar period. These Black and Asian Britons faced widespread racism, including within education, most famously outlined by British-Grenadian author

Bernard Coard in *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System* (1971). Black British activists, authors, and educators led the mission to redress these inequalities, with Black British publishers New Beacon Press and Bogle L'Ouverture producing books with Black characters for Black readers (Sands-O'Connor, *Children's Publishing*). This was supported by the National Association of Supplementary Schools (NASS) and the National Antiracist Movement in Education (NAME), who believed it 'necessary to develop new generations of Black writers […] to ensure that Black children recognise themselves in their curriculum' (Ramone, 143). The importance of this work was recognised by some mainstream publishers; Macmillan Education's second *Nippers* series, edited by journalist and children's author Leila Berg, featured stories with Black protagonists from West Indian authors Beryl Gilroy and Petronella Breinburg (Pearson, 'The Right to Read'), whilst authors of colour such as Grace Nichols, John Agard and Farrukh Dondy had some mixed success within mainstream publishing (Sands-O'Connor, *Children's Publishing*). Naidoo herself has cited *My Brother Sean* (1973), written by Breinburg and illustrated by Errol Lloyd, as one of the few examples of 'positive images' of children of colour she could find when selecting books for her own children in the 1970s (Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022).

This was the educational and literary milieu into which Naidoo qualified as a teacher, and in her narrative of this time, classroom reading emerges as her most powerful tool in dealing with the challenges of this first teaching job. She has described how 'most of those in the 'remedial' class were black, many having come from the Caribbean as young children' ('Young, Gifted and Black', 74). These students were subject to the systemic racism ascribed by Coard to the British education system, as 'the majority of them were in my class largely for social reasons. They possessed a range of abilities which weren't flourishing and weren't recognised' (76). Being honest about her struggles as a young teacher, Naidoo has returned to the importance of reading in this context:

> Do you know what saved me? I read to those kids. Every day, for the last half hour, I read books that I knew would grip me, would grip them, and we read. And that saved me because for the last half hour we were equal, just as readers with the story. (Hope, 'In Conversation' 72)

Whether or not Naidoo's students shared this feeling of equality, this framing affords a sense of political power to this act of collective reading in its capacity to create solidarity across barriers of difference. As well as marking the beginning of a classroom reading practice, Naidoo has also described this first teaching experience as a creative touchstone for her later career as a writer, as she reflected in a 2012 *Bookbird* article: 'when I wrote *Journey to Jo'burg*, those young people were probably, unconsciously, among my implicit audience' ('Braving the Dark' 49). By linking her writing to this early teaching experience, Naidoo draws an important connection between the page and the classroom, suggesting that she imagined her books being read in a similar way as she did with her first class. In doing so, Naidoo positions her own work as a capable of performing the same crossing of boundaries, the same political action, as those texts that she had read to her students years before.

Naidoo was influenced by the anti-bias education movement that was emerging at this time, particularly by Rosemary Stones, a key figure within this movement. As well as joining NAME and delivering workshops for the Campaign to Impede Sex Stereotyping in the Young (CISSY), Naidoo also delivered workshops for the Children's Rights Workshop, set up by Rosemary Stones and Andrew Mann in 1970 to campaign against racist and sexist stereotyping in children's books and education ('Programme: Bias in Children's Books'). Naidoo's working relationship with Stones would persist into the next decade, when Stones became editor at Collins. A significant CRW initiative was setting up The Other Award in 1975, as an alternative award that 'considered representations of gender, race, class, and disability, in addition to literary and aesthetic merit in books for young people' (Naidoo, 'What Is and What Might Be' 34). Running for 13 years, The Other Award was 'the longest-lasting children's book prize honoring diversity in UK publishing' and named *Journey to Jo'burg* as one of its 1985 winners (Sands-O'Connor, *Children's Publishing* 166). The *Children's Book Bulletin*, launched in 1979 by Stones and Mann 'for news of progressive moves in children's literature' (*Children's Book Bulletin*) became 'almost like a Bible' for Naidoo (Naidoo, Personal interview. 22 Feb 22). Her archive is a testament to this, holding copies of all 6 issues alongside several issues of *Dragon's Teeth*, 'Bulletin of the National Committee on Racism in Children's Books'.

During this time, Naidoo transitioned to work as a peripatetic literacy teacher for the School Psychological Service in Barnet. After moving out of London to Watford with her family in 1979, Naidoo and her husband Nandha helped establish a branch of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in Hertfordshire, alongside exiled African National Congress (ANC) activists Benny and Mary Turok (Naidoo, Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022). The AAM was founded in 1960, as a growing globalised awareness of the injustice of apartheid, triggered in part by the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, brought about the growth of anti-apartheid activism across Western Europe (Andresen et al.). South African exiles such as the Turoks played a central role in the AAM, the main campaign approaches of which were widespread consumer boycotts, and the Free Nelson Mandela Campaign (Graham and Fevre). Working in solidarity with South African activists, primarily in support of the ANC over other South African liberation movements (Klein), the AAM 'is often regarded as one of the most influential transnational social movements of the twentieth century' (Graham and Fevre 323). The Hertfordshire group was made up 'quite a number of educators' (Naidoo, Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022), shaping a strong focus on education, and Naidoo's research for this group eventually led to *Censoring Reality* (1985), a booklet published jointly by the British Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (BDAF), and the ILEA Centre for Anti-Racist Education. *Censoring Reality* surveyed British educational books about South Africa, which Naidoo argued were collectively 'indicative of how racism is still being condoned, and indeed promoted, through what is passing for 'educational media' in this country' (2). Through her connections to the AAM, in 1981 Naidoo joined the Education Sub-Committee of the BDAF, directed by fellow South African exile Ethel de Keyser. Whilst the BDAF provided 'the necessary collaborative framework' for her to begin writing *Journey to Jo'burg* (Naidoo, Letter to Harry Rée. 13 April 1985), her decision to become a children's author can also be seen as the culmination of her involvement in literacy teaching, anti-bias education, and the anti-apartheid movement over the previous two decades.

1.4 Becoming an author: Naidoo's writing career

Naidoo's narrative of her life up until the point of becoming a writer, although constructed with hindsight, gives an indication that her vision for the political potential of childhood

reading had already begun to emerge. Reading with others, and reading with a political purpose, emerge as core commitments shared by the many facets of her work as educator and activist. Over the subsequent five chapters, I will outline how Naidoo's vision for political reading developed through Naidoo's middle-grade fiction, alongside the relevant materials from her archive. In this introductory chapter, it is therefore useful to trace Naidoo's evolution from a writer of educational texts to a writer of literary fiction, whilst acknowledging her continued commitment to the educational potential of classroom reading. After some challenges in finding a publisher, *Journey to Jo'burg* was published by Longman in 1985, in their Knockouts imprint for reluctant older readers. When Stones became editor at Collins, a trade edition was published by them in 1987. Stones also commissioned its sequel, *Chain of Fire*, which was published in 1989. Naidoo has remarked that having 'a progressive trade editor made all the difference' to the success of *Journey to Jo'burg*, giving it a presence in bookshops and public libraries ('What Is and What Might Be' 35). The novel received wide acclaim, garnering praise for its exposure of the experiences of children under apartheid. In a 1987 review for the Guardian, Stephanie Nettell wrote that the novel 'makes [readers] ask questions we must learn to answer'. In pursuing literature and education that would open minds, this is surely a review that Naidoo would have been gratified by, and marks *Journey to Jo'burg* as the initiation of her establishment as an author of what Pat Pinsent has called 'socially committed fiction' ('Language, Genre and Issues', 205). In Chapter 2, I trace the genesis of *Journey to Jo'burg* alongside that of her later novels *The Other Side of Truth* (2000) and *Burn My Heart* (2007). Arguing that across all three texts Naidoo uses a realist mode and focalising protagonists to politicise her implied reader, my analysis of these three texts also illustrates the progressive development of a more complex literary style in which to embed her political messaging. This chapter also illuminates the strategies Naidoo uses to confer legitimacy upon her representations of children of colour as a white author.

Naidoo's writing career is defined by a commitment to the role of literature in education. Naidoo continued to work in education, and in the mid 1980s moved to Bournemouth, Dorset, where she worked with special needs children in Poole (Naidoo, Letter to Harry Rée. 08 October 1987), and then as a curriculum development officer for cultural diversity with the Dorset English Advisory Team (Naidoo, 'Re: Questions re Journey

to Jo'burg chapter'). In her editorial introduction to *Free As I Know* (1987), an anthology of writing from authors such as Maya Angelou and Julius Lester published by Hyman and Bell as a resource for the GSCE English Literature curriculum, Naidoo wrote: 'for those of us brought up monoculturally, literature which springs from outside our own boundaries can be a lifeline' ('Introduction' 7). This marks a moment of crystallisation in her political vision for her own work, implying that it can provide such a lifeline for white children in educating them about other races and cultures. Naidoo put this statement to the test in her PhD research. Her thesis, entitled *Exploring issues of racism with white students through a literature-based course*, was completed in 1991, and turned into a book, *Through Whose Eyes?: Exploring Racism – Reader, Text and Context,* a year later. Whilst Naidoo has always maintained a commitment to the anti-racist potential of reading, this book complicates that belief, showing the impact of classroom and school context on anti-racist learning. I explore the outcomes of this research in Chapter 6, as a precursor to my analysis of anti-racist responses to classroom readings of *Journey to Jo'burg* from Naidoo's archive. This chapter puts Naidoo's vision of the political potential of reading, and classroom reading in particular, to the test, arguing that responses from Naidoo's readers both thwart and exceed her hopes for anti-racist readings of her work. As well as working in education, writing for educational imprints, and conducting research within the field of education studies, Naidoo also began to use her developing profile as an author-educator to critique the British education system. In a talk given in 1996 for an event run by the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), Naidoo criticised the National Curriculum, which had been implemented in 1988 through the Education Reform Act, for its 'functionalist focus [that] allies itself to an uncritical approach' ('Making Waves' 6). As in her descriptions of her own education as a child, Naidoo's vision of a literature education resists this sort of functionalist approach. Despite her critique of British education in this period, Naidoo seems nonetheless to have been committed to working within this system, as well as producing books to be read in school. During the 1990s, Naidoo published several picture books with educational imprints, including the Letang and Julie series (1994), *Global Tales* (1997), and *Where is Zami?* (1998). When writing and speaking about her work, Naidoo rarely references these educational publications, focusing more on her chapter books. However, these educational publications fulfilled some of her hope to provide a 'good' education, insofar as they were aimed at improving literacy and representing Black characters and multicultural values, whilst

perhaps allowing her to develop her writing, build a profile, and generate some small additional income.

By the time Naidoo came to publish her third novel, *No Turning Back* (1995), she had developed a distinctive literary style and a methodology for collaborating with young people in the development of her work. In Chapter 5, I outline the development of this methodology in relation to the writing of *No Turning Back* and *Web of Lies* (2004), arguing that Naidoo's vision for political reading includes children as co-producers of children's literature and culture. This methodology would come to inform the writing of all her subsequent middle-grade fiction, and has been an important part of Naidoo's strategies for representing children of colour as a white author. Naidoo's role as a writer of political literary fiction was cemented upon the publication of *The Other Side of Truth* (2000), for which she won the Carnegie Medal. The novel has been described by critics as 'sophisticated' (Roback et al.) and 'gripping' (Kory), and Nell D. Beram wrote in *The Horn Book Magazine* that *The Other Side of Truth* 'honors its political and ethical engagements, [and] succeeds as a first-rate escape-adventure story as well'. These reviews and the Carnegie Medal suggest that at this stage in her writing career, Naidoo had found a balance between a well-developed plot and characters, and her political mission. Run by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), the Carnegie Medal is the UK's longest running children's book award and has a key role in constructing the idea of national literature for children in Britain and creating 'a 'universalising' understanding of aesthetic worth' (Pearson et al. 94). Whilst Naidoo's win marked a small shift in the landscape of diversity in British children's books as the first Carnegie winner featuring a Black protagonist, it would be many years before an author of colour would take the prize[1]. *The Other Side of Truth* ushered in a prolific period of writing for Naidoo, and over the next seven years Naidoo published *Out of Bounds* (2001), a collection of short stories, and two further novels: *Web of Lies* (2004), the sequel to *The Other Side of Truth,* and *Burn My Heart* (2007)[2]. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will argue that in each of these novels, Naidoo undertakes a

[1] Elizabeth Acevedo became the first person of colour to win the prize in 2019 for *The Poet X.*

[2] Naidoo has also produced five further picture books: *The Great Tug of War* (2006), *S is for South Africa* (2010), *Aesop's Fables* (2011), *Who is King?* (2015), and *Cinderella of the Nile* (2019), as well as a short collection of illustrated short stories, *The Call of the Deep* (2008), and *Death of Idealist: In Search of Neil Aggett,* a biography of the anti-apartheid activist and trade-unionist for adult readers. Her most recent novel, *Children of the Stone City,* was published in October 2022.

politicisation of childhood by creating child protagonists who transgress borders and push for political change. When I asked about her choice to write for children in particular, Naidoo suggested that reading as a child can be highly formative: 'childhood is an incredibly important period, before you're beset by all the pressures […] of adult life'. For this reason, she believes that reading is of huge importance: 'there's a possibility that it might make a huge difference to a child' (Personal Interview. 24 Feb 2022). Despite the evolution of her fiction over the past four decades, this hope in the transformative political potential of childhood reading seems to have remained Naidoo's consistent motivator.

1.5 Affective dialogue in the Naidoo archive: a methodology

Naidoo's archive has been central to constructing my own narrative of her life and work, and this thesis is unique in its use of Naidoo's archive alongside her published work. This has allowed me to explore her creative process, but more importantly, has revealed the ways that rhetorical children have been mobilised and real children have spoken throughout this process, and the ways that these real and rhetorical children are mutually informative and central to Naidoo's vision for political childhood reading. Naidoo donated her archive to Seven Stories in 2016. The archive is large, containing research, drafts, correspondence, and responses from readers. It has also clearly been well organised and even curated by Naidoo, whose research approach to writing children's books is clear from her impulse to keep things that others might have discarded, and from the annotations and labels that she has added to certain folders and items. Seven Stories is the only site that holds her work. Due to the nature of my Collaborative Doctoral Award with Seven Stories and by virtue of living in the same location, I have spent extensive time in Naidoo's archive, allowing it to shape the method and direction of my research in ways that would not have been possible had my time and access been more limited. Furthermore, I have maintained correspondence with Naidoo during my research, bringing my insights on her archive into dialogue with her, upheld by the pre-existing working relationship between Naidoo and Seven Stories. This has added a depth to my research, but also an extra dimension of care. My extensive time in the archive has also been one of the most pleasurable parts of the research process; as Kenneth Kidd et al. suggest, 'archival research represents time out from our day-to-day lives and

commitments' (175), time which I looked forward to. Alongside this archive itself, the relationships built and the conversations had in the archive have proved invaluable in developing my ideas. This experience of archival research is one of a layered dialogue, with the many voices in her archive, with Naidoo herself, and with the Seven Stories staff, whose knowledge and experience have enriched my own.

As Jacques Derrida suggests, archives are more than repositories of knowledge, but sites where knowledge is constructed and institutionalised (*Archive Fever*). To archive the work of a particular author is to confer status, authority, and a sort of literary immortality upon them. This authority is there, as Derrida insists, to be deconstructed, but it is also valuable in the case of children's literature. In this relatively young field, archiving 'adds academic value to children's materials' (Kidd 2). Looking to preserve knowledge for the future, the archive also reflects backwards. For Helen Freshwater, the 'allure' of the archive is its offer of a return to the past, under whose spell scholars forget 'that the archive does not contain a complete record of the past that it promises' (739). This allure is deepened for scholars of children's literature, whose hope that they 'can recover the texts of childhood experience' is also a hope to rediscover their own lost childhoods (Kidd 2). Indeed, as Sánchez-Eppler argues, this desire for the recovery of a lost past marks an important intersection between archive studies and childhood studies, since 'both elaborate the repositories of our cultural and personal pasts' ('In the Archives of Childhood' 213). For both Kidd and Freshwater, archives can reveal the totemic and affective power of childhood, but I argue that archives of children's literature such as Naidoo's also have the potential to reveal how real children intervene in the production of children's culture, acting as an important site for dialogue between the real and rhetorical child.

As discussed, my research into Naidoo's archive is structured by my working relationship with her. An archive such as Naidoo's does not hold the living author, only their substitute, or what Robert McGill calls the 'author function' (131). The tensions between the living author outside of the archive and the author function may manifest in the researcher's 'ambivalent desire not only to prod living authors into acknowledging them but also to reject authors in favor of incorporating the author function' (131). I may engage with and critique Naidoo the author function, whom I find in the archive. This is different from the living author who possesses hopes for her archive that may differ from mine, has the

potential to offer insights that her archive hides, and is free to read and engage with anything that I write about her. Naidoo herself has said that there was 'an element of trust' involved in giving her archive to Seven Stories, knowing that it may be used by others in ways that she could not foresee (Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022). Early on in my research process, realising this created the desire in me to both embrace and totally reject her influence. However, establishing a working relationship with Naidoo has enabled me to see my relationship to this archive of a living author not as a struggle with conflicting desires, but as a three-way dialogue between author, author function and researcher. I draw on personal correspondence with Naidoo at various points in this thesis, through which both Naidoo and I have been able to offer each other insights into the archive that are specific to our unique vantage points. This dialogue has allowed me to see the tensions between living author and author function as a source of creative and intellectual strength for my work.

In Chapter 6 I discuss Louise M. Rosenblatt's transactional model of reader-response in relationship to *Journey to Jo'burg*. Considering that a researcher brings their preconceptions and expectations to bear upon the archive in a specific reading context, I would like to suggest a transactional model of archival research, whereby meaning emerges in a contextualised dialogue between archive and researcher, or sometimes, between archive, researcher and living author. In this way, 'archive research teaches you as much about yourself as about your research subject' (Kidd 13), and I would argue that my archival methodology is as much about observing myself in the archive as it is about observing the archive itself. This is primarily an observation of affect, in the sense of a 'prepersonal', bodily occurrence (Shouse). I recognise that 'affect in the archive is both a privilege and an occupational hazard' (Russell 205). I have been privileged by visceral encounters with the physical materials of Naidoo's career, my first reaction to which has often been joy, surprise, or sadness. However, I would go further than Russell to suggest that affect in the archive has not been a side effect, but rather my entry point into ideas that are now at the core of my research. The most significant example of this is my excitement at reading responses to *Journey to Jo'burg,* the analysis of which appears in Chapter 6. These letters are examples of archival objects that 'open a window into the intellectual and emotional lives of young people in the past' (Smith 313) and have challenged my assumptions about the agency and critical abilities of children. This began my process of exploring the ways that real children

engage with the rhetorical children who populate literature and children's culture, an exploration of which now sits at the heart of this thesis.

1.6 The political and didactic potential of radical children's literature

In exploring the political potential of Naidoo's work, it is important to outline the nature of this politics, particularly in regard to the politics of race that is a central concern of all the primary texts examined here. As argued above, winning the Carnegie Medal for *The Other Side of Truth* in 2000 helped to cement Naidoo's reputation as an author of political literary children's fiction. I describe her work as political, not simply because Naidoo and her reviewers do, but because her work engages with the ways that societies structure themselves around ideologies of domination that mark out certain bodies as 'Other', whilst inviting her readers to consider the possibilities for social change. In describing the political potential of Naidoo's work, I am employing what Jenny Edkins would term the 'broader' definition of the political, going beyond the machinations of governments and political parties and being concerned with how power is wielded, and by whom. For Edkins, '"the political" has to do with the establishment of that very social order which sets out a particular, historically specific account of what counts as politics and defines other areas of social life as *not* politics' (2). Naidoo herself engaged with this sense of the term in her 2002 *Booklist* interview with Hazel Rochman, where she discussed her handling of political themes in *The Other Side of Truth*: 'politics can be so blinkin' boring, the way the big "politicians" have colonized it. But actually, politics is our lives. It affects all of us' (Rochman). Naidoo's implication is that this broader meaning of the political is the truer, encompassing the many ways that we endeavour to live together in public. In their special issue of IRCL on 'Children's Engagement with the Political Process', Blanka Grzegorczyk and Farah Mendlesohn argue that 'if political children's literature maps how boundary lines spread, its central drive can reveal how the resulting conditions become collectively meaningful' (2). Naidoo's work aligns well with this definition, as she has herself defined her own work as 'intrinsically a form of political fiction for young people – political obviously with a small 'p'' ('Making Waves' 12). It is in using this broad definition of the political that transcends party politics and, crucially, includes the lives and choices of children as well as

adults, that I situate Naidoo's work within a tradition of radical children's literature, that '[questions] accepted understandings of childhood in terms of how much a child can know, and how much power a child gets to have' ('Radical Children's Literature Now!' 447). Naidoo's work positions itself in critical opposition to racist power structures, seeking to politicise its young readers. Scholarship on the radical tradition to which Naidoo belongs has rehabilitated the profound radical potential of children's literature (Reynolds, *Left Out, Radical Children's Literature*; Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left*). As Mickenberg argues, the idea of radical children's literature subverts the ideal of childhood innocence, and yet has 'been an adjunct to nearly every social movement of the modern era' ('Radical Children's Literature'). Radical children's literature, at its best, is interested in the complex agency of child readers: 'truly radical children's literature finds a balance between taking children seriously as individuals with agency and will and recognizing the real limits to their power, their ability, and their development' (Mickenberg, 'Radical Children's Literature'). Naidoo's depictions of children negotiating their agency within oppressive contexts are a prime example of such literature.

There is, however, a tension at the heart of radical children's literature between this exploration of child agency and the impulse to teach something to readers. This is in a sense a didactic impulse, asserting the moral authority of the adult author. Didacticism can connote a patronising or preachy style of writing. However, as Clémentine Beauvais has argued, a certain form of the didactic is an essential part of radical, or 'politically committed literature' (148), and it is therefore worth exploring how notions of didacticism function within the political work of Naidoo's chapter book fiction. Beauvais notes that the didactic is often viewed as undesirable 'without much explanation as to what it actually is' (71), whilst contemporary children's literature nonetheless frequently embraces an ethical or educational mission. Within an existentialist framework, Beauvais argues that the didactic mode constructs childhood as 'situated potential' (83). The didactic mode contrasts the authority of the adult author, whose time is running out, with the 'might' of the implied child reader, whose power lies in their future potential. The child in question is a textual construction and receptacle for adult desires, but this child is also constructed as agential, able to do what they wish with those desires. This mode operates in different ways in each of Naidoo's novels, some of which are more prescriptive than others. Beauvais is careful to

distinguish between the didactic mode and an 'overly prescriptive, unproblematic, idealistic' form of didacticism which seeks to impose an adult's view of the world without accepting that the reader's response to the text is inherently unknowable (89). Although she does not use this language, this line between overly prescriptive didacticism and the more open-handed didactic mode is an important one for Naidoo. She has stated that 'it's hard to have these conversations that are frank, that are open, and I don't think you have them by hitting people on the head (Personal Interview. 22 Feb 2022). For her, imbuing her work with an ethical message also entails an acceptance that this message is out of her hands once it is encountered by readers: 'I don't know the journey you're going to go on – I hope you go on a journey' (Personal Interview. 22 Feb 2022). Naidoo has laboured over the balance required for this sort of writing, especially when first starting out as a writer. *Journey to Jo'burg* was rejected for publication by Victor Gollancz in 1983 on the grounds that 'the message overwhelms the narrative structure and plot' (Goldsworthy). This critique is echoed in an article by Carla Hayden and Helen Kay Raseroka from 1988, who found the novel unrealistic and lacking in dramatic tension, and the incidents of plot 'designed to show the forces of apartheid, without regard to their likelihood in real life'. As I will illustrate in Chapter 2, Naidoo's work grew more sophisticated as it progressed, indicating that she was perhaps better able to strike a balance between message and plot as she gained experience as a novelist.

1.7 Race, representation, and British colonial amnesia

At the heart of the political work of Naidoo's middle-grade fiction is an intervention in British discourses of race and racism. These discourses are structured by what Stuart Hall has termed a 'profound historical forgetfulness' (58). If racism is engaged with at all in the UK, it is often outsourced to the US, whose complex racial history, along with its problems and solutions, is too often elided with that of the UK. Hall argued in 1978 that 'the homegrown variety of racism begins with this attempt to wipe out and efface every trace of the colonial and imperial past from official and popular recall' (58). This imperial amnesia exists to facilitate a unique type of British racism whereby people of colour, and the issue of race itself, are made the scapegoats for any and all social ills. Paul Gilroy expanded on Hall's

work 25 years on, developing the term 'postcolonial melancholia' to describe the mix of amnesia, nostalgia and shame that proliferate in British narratives of imperialism. The 'post' in postcolonial indicates a discursive rather than a temporal reality, and a means of mapping the persistence of colonial dynamics into the present (Gandhi). As an antidote to amnesia, Gilroy proposes that 'frank exposure to the grim and brutal details of my country's colonial past should be made useful' in shaping multicultural relations and challenging neo-imperialism (3). Leela Gandhi echoes this, arguing that postcolonial discourse and literature can act 'as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath' (Gandhi, 3). This sort of theoretical resistance is at the core of postcolonial analysis of children's books. Perry Nodelman has drawn an analogy between children and colonised people, using Edward Said's *Orientalism* to argue that 'our descriptions of childhood similarly purport to see and speak for children, and that we believe them to be similarly incapable of speaking for themselves' ('The Other' 29). Whilst this analogy begins to analyse the power dynamics between adults and children, I agree with Clare Bradford's critique that 'Nodelman's use of postcolonial theory sidesteps the question of race' (7), ignoring the intersectionality of children who are also colonised, as well as those children who have benefited from colonialism and continue to do so. Furthermore, contemporary children's literature is steeped in the '"politics of knowledge" about colonization' (Bradford 4), and colonial dynamics and postcolonial resistance emerge in children's books in unique and specific ways. From the *Boys' Own Paper* and the robinsonades of the nineteenth-century to the fantasies of the twentieth, British children's literature has 'been intertwined with imperial ambitions since its inception' (Subramanian 1). Representations of Africa in British children's books often serve only to 'develop for Westerners a mirror of themselves' (Maddy and MacCann, 3), rather than engaging with the subjectivity of their African characters (Yenika-Agbaw, *Representing Africa*).

Children's books that contribute to the imperial mission often also contribute to a sense of white, Western superiority, and stereotypical or absent portrayals of Black characters cause Black child readers to believe that their faces and experiences do not belong in literature, as Darren Chetty ('You Can't Say That!') has highlighted. In her seminal article, 'Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors' (1990), Rudine Sims Bishop explains that children from all ethnic backgrounds are disadvantaged by poor or absent representations

of children of colour. Minoritised children 'learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part' from books that do not reflect them or their experiences, whilst

> children from dominant social groups […] need books that will help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans.

The importance of diverse books has been proven, but as Sands-O'Connor argues, 'depressingly little has changed in British publishing over the last 50 years', despite the work undertaken by Black British publishers and campaigners in the 1970s and 80s *(Children's Publishing* 184). The 2020 *Reflecting Realities* report from the British Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) stated that while 33.9% of English primary school pupils were from an ethnic minority origin, only 8% of children's books published in the UK featured a main character from an ethnic minority background. Melanie Ramdarshan Bold has found that 8% of the YA books published between 2006-2016 were written by authors of colour, and 1.5% were written by British authors of colour, indicating that British children's publishing is 'clearly outdated for, and not reflective of, the communities it serves' ('The Eight Percent Problem' 404). Despite the presence of independent publishers with a mission of promoting diversity, such as Jacaranda Books, Hope Road, and Knights Of, as well as the previously independent Tamarind Press,[3] authors of colour still struggle to break into the mainstream book market (Ramdarshan Bold, *Inclusive Young Adult Fiction*).

Rhiannon Tripp argues that 'representation can be improved once the industry's own internal biases are examined and understood' (149), and Ramdarshan Bold, Sands-O'Connor and Chetty are at the forefront of the campaigns to reverse these trends in the UK. These British campaigns have been influenced by similar campaigns in the US, especially since the publishing industries of the two nations have become increasingly intertwined. The #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign (Thomas, 'Stories Still Matter') and the #OwnVoices campaign begun by YA author Corinne Duyvis (Crisp et al.) both originated on Twitter and have had a broad global impact, articulating a collective dissatisfaction and anger at 'the lack of diversity in childhood and teen life depicted in children's books and media' (Thomas,

[3] Tamarind Press was established by Verna Wilkins in 1987.

'Stories Still Matter' 112). Naidoo and her work do not fit comfortably into this picture. Naidoo's authorial position is one of insider-outsider in both South Africa and the UK, but, as Ramdarshan Bold's research indicates, Naidoo's whiteness nonetheless privileges her within the British children's publishing market. In some ways, Naidoo can be seen to have become the acceptable face of radical children's literature. Sands-O'Connor notes in her discussion of the intersections between Black empowerment activism and children's literature, that Naidoo's *Journey to Jo'burg* has remained in print, whilst books by authors of colour such as Farrukh Dondy and Buchi Emecheta, whose works framed a more overt critique of British racism, have not (*British Activist Authors*). Especially in the current climate within the field, and in the era of #OwnVoices, Naidoo's position as a white writer who consistently depicts characters of colour is worth reflecting on. Several critics have expressed suspicion of white authors writing characters whose identities they do not share (Gardner; Yenika-Agbaw, *Representing Africa*). Furthermore, Naidoo's primary market is British school children, and a tiny minority of her readers will share the experiences of apartheid, displacement, colonisation, and homelessness that her novels depict. As Naidoo has acknowledged, 'the children I'm writing about are not on the whole the children who are going to be reading' (Personal interview. 24 Feb 2022). As Sims Bishop has argued, it is important that writers find ways to 'deal effectively with the limitations of their experience and knowledge' ('Reframing the Debate' 36). Naidoo can be seen to negotiate with the power dynamics at play as a white author writing about racism, but also as an adult author taking on the task of speaking for and about children. As I will explore in Chapter 2, much of Naidoo's research process can therefore be seen as an attempt to overcome this gap between herself and the subjects of her novels, whilst demonstrating to her readers that she has done her due diligence as a white author.

1.8 Chapter summary

Over the course of the subsequent five chapters, I will unpack some of these issues, exploring the various ways that child agency is represented and negotiated within the four key facets of Naidoo's vision of the political potential of childhood reading. Beginning in the first three chapters with the rhetorical children constructed through Naidoo's work, my latter two chapters turn to the real children whose voices are found in Naidoo's archive, and

who shape and engage with the representations explored in the first half of the thesis. In Chapter 2: Political Children, I draw on Naidoo's archive to explore the genesis of *Journey to Jo'burg, The Other Side of Truth,* and *Burn My Heart.* In doing so, the first facet of Naidoo's political vision for childhood reading that emerges is a politicisation of her implied reader. Each of these texts make claims to authenticity in order to ensure the effectiveness of Naidoo's critique of racist systems, whilst inviting readers to mimic the political awakenings undergone by the child protagonists. This chapter argues that in so doing, Naidoo's novels construct an implied reader whose political agency is waiting to be unlocked by the act of reading. Whilst each of these novels uses a realist mode, focalising narrators, and detailed peritexts to politicise their readers, tracing the genesis of these texts also reveals the development of Naidoo's literary style, and the increasing complexity and ambiguity of her political messaging. In Chapter 3: Border Children and Chapter 4: Disobedient Children I explore the second facet of Naidoo's vision: her politicisation of childhood itself. In Chapter 3, I explore this in relation to Naidoo's depictions of borders in *Out of Bounds, The Other Side of Truth,* and *Web of Lies.* Drawing on the work of Achille Mbembe and Bernstein, I argue that Naidoo politicises childhood by undertaking a re-politicisation of the concept of childhood innocence, showing it to be deeply implicated in the performance of the borders of nations and the boundaries drawn by segregation. In Chapter 4, I explore Naidoo's representations of child activism in *The Other Side of Truth, Chain of Fire, No Turning Back,* and *Out of Bounds*, arguing that Naidoo creates a vision of child agency that must be negotiated in context, is sometimes costly, and is situated within communities of interdependence.

Chapter 5: Expert Children marks the turn of this thesis from the rhetorical children of Naidoo's fiction to the real children in her archive. In this chapter I explore the third facet of Naidoo's vision of the political potential of childhood reading, which is her mobilisation of children and young people as her collaborators. I examine the collaborative research methodology that Naidoo developed whilst writing *No Turning Back* and *Web of Lies,* drawing on her experience as a teacher, and utilising interviews, participatory drama and creative writing. Naidoo's work positions children as both producers and consumers of children's culture, and this chapter will argue that these collaborations are therefore a crucial aspect of her vision of the political potential of childhood reading, giving children a

central role in the construction of her radical literature. Finally, Chapter 6: Reading Children suggests that the fourth facet of Naidoo's vision can be found in the responses of, and at points in Naidoo's dialogue with her readers. This chapter examines whether the vision of political childhood reading that has emerged over the preceding four chapters can be seen to be realised in the responses from Naidoo's readers found in her archive. Exploring patterns of anti-racist reading in responses to classroom reading of *Journey to Jo'burg,* I illustrate how the agency of these readers emerges on the negotiation between text and context. In doing so, I argue that this complex agency both confounds and exceeds Naidoo's vision for childhood reading. Over the course of these five chapters, I will argue that real children and their representations are always mutually informing one another. Children construct children's culture and they consume it, but more importantly, they construct it *as* they consume it. The specific ways that this plays out in Naidoo's work, from her representations of children, to her mobilisation of the figure of the child as collaborator, to the unruly responses of her diverse readers, illustrate that child agency is both constructed and facilitated through the creation and reading of radical children's literature.

Chapter 2. Political Children

Constructing a political reader

> 'Not only did it capture my imagination but it made me think – how would I cope in Sade's situation, what would I do, and about how refugees coming into a new and strange country feel.' (Anna)

I have already defined Naidoo's work as political, in the sense that it interrogates how social power is constructed and wielded, and represents children as agents of social change. In this chapter, I use three of Naidoo's novels - *Journey to Jo'burg, The Other Side of Truth,* and *Burn My Heart* - as case studies to illustrate how Naidoo's vision of the political potential of childhood reading begins with the construction of a politicised reader. This politicisation is approached in two ways in each of these texts: firstly, readers are invited by the text to learn about a social issue relating to racism and/or colonisation, and secondly, they are invited to understand and sometimes occupy the subject positions of the children at the heart of these social issues. Anna, a reader of *The Other Side of Truth* from Belfast, wrote in a letter to Naidoo in 2002 that she had arrived at this latter sort of reading, beginning to place herself in the protagonist's shoes. In doing so, Anna is also responding to the script offered to her by the text, in recognition that this sort of reading is something that the text asks of its readers. In order to invite readers into a journey from ignorance to knowledge, each of these texts is written in a realist mode and contained within a peritext that highlights the connection between the fictional text and the political reality that inspired it. These strategies have a secondary purpose, which is to scaffold the legitimacy of Naidoo's choice to write about primarily Black African children from her position of white privilege.

In this chapter I read each of these novels alongside the relevant archive materials in order to shed light on Naidoo's creative process. I also explore her stated aims for each text, not because her intentions are fully determining of the text's meaning, but because her stated intentions contribute to the public narrative of her work and its purpose, which in turn invites readers to read in certain ways. Although I draw out the commonalities between these texts, showing how Naidoo's creative process is a function of her political vision for each text, it is important to note that these novels differ from each other in terms of their themes and development. Naidoo's first novel *Journey to Jo'burg* (1985) is the

simplest of the three novels discussed, and has the clearest political motivation. Born out of her work with the BDAF, *Journey to Jo'burg* is an anti-apartheid novel for British readers, inviting them to mirror the journey from ignorance of apartheid to political awakening undergone by the protagonist. By the time Naidoo came to write her fourth novel, *The Other Side of Truth,* she had fully developed her unique writing style and development process. Naidoo developed immersive and detailed documentary research in order to better represent the subject position of her Nigerian refugee protagonist. The use of focalisation invites readers to identify with the protagonist, whilst deconstructing stereotypes of refugees. *Burn My Heart* (2007) is the most recent of Naidoo's works covered by this thesis and is also the most structurally complex, featuring alternating focalisers with different perspectives on the end of British colonisation in Kenya. It is also the most ambivalent of Naidoo's work, asking readers to switch between different subject positions, ultimately creating a crisis of narrative perspective. Showing the development of her writing style and process, these three novels, despite their differences, each carry the same commitment to inviting readers into a political experience of reading, contributing to Naidoo's vision for the political potential of childhood reading.

Throughout this chapter, I make frequent reference to Naidoo's readers. To be clear, I am not referring to the actual readers of Naidoo's work, a discussion which I save for Chapter 6. It is important to maintain a distinction between real readers and readers constructed by a text, even as these real and rhetorical readers mutually influence and inform one another. In this chapter I am interested in the latter, in the readers that the text imagines for itself. Drawing on Wolfgang Iser, I consider how the text constructs an 'implied reader' who 'embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect' (34). The implied reader, or what Aidan Chambers terms 'the reader in the book' (34), is 'the reader who will best actualize a book's potential meanings' (Stephens, 55). I argue that the implied reader, rather than being a monolithic figure that can be described in its totality or mapped on to any real reader, is an assemblage of different qualities which can be described through a close reading of the text. My aim in this chapter is not to describe all of these qualities, but rather to show how certain qualities of the implied reader are a function of the political bent of Naidoo's work. Of course, the implied reader in each of Naidoo's novels is different, but there are certain commonalities across *Burn My Heart, The*

Other Side of Truth and *Journey to Jo'burg.* The implied readers constructed in these texts are all likely to identify with the protagonist and possess limited knowledge of the subject matter of the novel, yet are inclined towards empathy and possess a basic understanding that racism is wrong. All of these implied readers are willing to go on the journey from ignorance to knowledge that the text proposes. The implied reader is a function of the political mission of each text, each of which constructs the process of reading as a politicisation of the implied reader. The 'political child' of this chapter's title is the implied reader of each of these texts, and is a central part of Naidoo's vision of the political potential of childhood reading.

2.1 Constructing the real: peritexts, focalisers, and identification

As I have outlined in the Introduction, representation matters. Diverse books are recognised as essential reading, in order to 'reflect the needs, concerns, and everyday lives of children' (Thomas, 'Stories Still Matter' 118). As expressed by Sims Bishop's metaphor of 'windows and mirrors' texts, children's literature is a powerful tool for raising awareness, and for reflecting readers' worlds back to them. But as Ramdarshan Bold argues, in a publishing context like that of the UK in which the majority of authors are white and middle-class, authorship also matters. As a white author with a deep commitment to representation, Naidoo developed a process for writing that combines extensive first-hand and documentary research with consultation with child and adult experts, as I will explore more in Chapter 5 in relation to her child collaborators. This process creates a structure of authenticity that Naidoo uses to legitimise writing about experiences to which she is an outsider. Her texts themselves employ various strategies to present themselves as credible and authentic in the service of the political messaging. I will go on to explore two of these strategies: the use of detailed peritextual information to create a realist mode, and the invitation to readers to identify with the focalising protagonist. As John Stephens has noted, all children's literature is ideological. A part of my objective in this chapter is demonstrating the ways in which Naidoo uses focalising protagonists and a realist mode to construct the ideology of each text. Just like any literary mode, realism is 'linguistically constituted' (Stephens, 241). Yet realism seeks to hide its constructed nature, aspiring to 'an intensely

realized verisimilitude' that 'may attempt to efface self-conscious textuality' (Stephens, 288). For Stephens, this is particularly true for political or committed fiction such as Naidoo's, which has an overt ideological mission. Indeed, Naidoo's use of realism, which is constructed using focalising characters and peritexts offering historical detail, is an immediate function of the political mission of each text.

In all three novels discussed Naidoo uses the peritexts to directly address readers, reinsert her authorial voice into the text, and provide context. In *Journey to Jo'burg* the peritext consists of a preface explaining the historical context, excerpts from two newspaper articles, a map of the route taken by the characters on their journey, and a dedication to 'Mary', Naidoo's childhood maid. Early editions also included a photo diary of the novel's events at its end. The peritext of *The Other Side of Truth* begins with an epigraph from John Donne, a Foreword written by TV presenter Jon Snow, a pronunciation guide, and Acknowledgements. It ends with an Author's Note and a glossary. Finally, the peritext of *Burn My Heart* consists of a Foreword giving the historical context, and an Afterword, glossary, and Acknowledgements. Each of these peritexts draws a direct link between the world of the text and reality, conveying a legitimacy on both text and author. These peritexts ask readers to read in a certain way, inviting them to look for parallels between the fictional text and reality. It is of course not a given that children will read the peritext. After reading *Journey to Jo'burg,* the writer of the reader's report from Gollancz recommended incorporating the text's preface into the text, on the grounds that 'most children don't read prefaces' (Gollancz reader's report: The Journey). Whether or not this reader is correct, use of author's notes and the like points to the construction of a particular type of implied reader, one who is critically literate and conscientious and will understand that these features structure the close relationship between the text and reality. Arguing that in their experience young readers in fact often do read peritexts, Sivashankar et al. develop a framework of 'Critical Peritextual Analysis' (CPA) for analysing how authors of texts about Africa use the peritext to structure their own legitimate relationship to their subject matter (481). Dividing these authorial relationships with their subject matter into three categories (spatial, affiliative, and personal), Sivashankar et al. argue that in constructing a sense of the text as authentic, the peritext can reveal 'the power relationships between the creators of the text and the cultures they are depicting' (486). In this way, Naidoo can be seen to use

the peritexts to structure her relationship with her African characters and settings in ways that lend legitimacy to her authorial voice.

The second strategy explored here is the use of focalising characters with whom readers are invited to identify. Indeed, Naidoo has explicitly stated that she envisions her readers 'feeling the challenges that those characters are feeling' and 'imagining beyond the confines of your own life' (Personal interview. 24 Feb 2022). As noted by Nodelman, it is a common strategy in works for children to 'focalize the action through those child protagonists and ask readers to think of themselves in terms of what happens to the child protagonists' (*The Hidden Adult* 18). This use of focalising characters, in combination with third person narration, is common to all of Naidoo's chapter book fiction, which maintain this strict focalisation through the characters without intrusion from a narrator. In representing experiences that are different to her own using the third person, Naidoo maintains one degree of distance from her characters. This is also ethically complicated, because by not constructing an omniscient narrator, Naidoo also conceals her own authorial voice. However, while her authorial voice is concealed in the text, it is often revealed in the peritext through an author's note or foreword, through which she directly addresses the reader. This narrative style invites readers to identify with the focalising character, since the subject position that readers are asked to read from is the subject position of that character. For some critics (Nodelman, *Alternating Narratives;* Tribunella; Coats), identification with the focalising character is a core function of children's literature, whilst others caution against encouraging child readers to identify closely with protagonists (Stephens). Maria Nikolajeva criticises an overemphasis on identification, arguing that 'character-tied positionality endorses solipsism, an immature child's conviction that the world revolves around himself' (201). Whether or not readers do in fact identify with the protagonists is not within the remit of this chapter, but will form some of the discussion of reader responses in Chapter 6. Suffice it to say that Naidoo risks the pitfalls outlined above in order to invite readers to share the subject positions of her characters and their journeys from ignorance to political awakening.

2.2 *Journey to Jo'burg*: from ignorance to knowledge

Naidoo's political approach to writing her children's books is evident from her first novel, *Journey to Jo'burg,* which was born out of her anti-apartheid activism with the AAM and the BDAF. Of all her novels, *Journey to Jo'burg* has the most transparent political motive, and its genesis reveals much about Naidoo's political vision for children's literature. Depicting the journey of Black South African children Naledi and Tiro across the country to find their mother, the novel proposes a straightforward identification with the central characters through Naledi's focalising perspective. In doing so, the text invites readers to share in the psychological journey that the children also undertake. Alongside a peritext that reinforces the connection between the fictional text and the reality of South African apartheid, this use of focalisation invites readers to share in Naledi's journey of political awakening. In doing so, the text constructs an empathetic implied reader who is unfamiliar with South African apartheid, and who is politicised by the knowledge the text offers. In *The Hidden Adult,* Nodelman notes a common pattern in children's stories, 'beginning with their protagonists at home, taking them on a journey, and returning them home again at the end' (61). Whereas for Nodelman, this pattern is often used to reinscribe the innocence of children, Naidoo uses the same pattern to disrupt the innocence – or ignorance – of her child protagonists. At the start of Naledi's journey, her home is depoliticised, but by the end of the story, her home has become politicised by the knowledge, and the possibility for resistance, that she has brought back with her. This was Naidoo's first novel, and the journey to publication was difficult. Through both writing and publication Naidoo benefited from the help of numerous people. Both of these facts are woven into the narrative of the novel's genesis that Naidoo has created, which ties *Journey to Jo'burg* to histories of anti-apartheid resistance and claims the political nature of the text. Both before and after publication, Naidoo received some criticism that the story was didactic and implausible. I argue, however, that Naidoo was able to overlook these critiques precisely because her novel constructs an implied reader with no prior knowledge of apartheid. Despite its flaws, this text has a clear vision for its intended readership, which it seeks to politicise by inviting them on a journey from ignorance to knowledge.

Journey to Jo'burg is the story of Black South African siblings Naledi and Tiro, who live in a small village with their grandmother, Nono. Their mother works hundreds of miles away as a maid in Johannesburg, and the children are not permitted to live with her due the

country's strict segregation laws. When their baby sister Dineo falls ill and Nono puts off sending a telegram to their mother, the siblings decide to travel alone to Johannesburg to bring her home. They are helped along the way by various kind strangers, including Grace, a young woman from Soweto, a large Black township of Johannesburg. The children learn about segregated buses, witness a pass raid by police, and are told by Grace about the 1976 Soweto uprising, during which many Black students were injured or killed by police while peacefully protesting against the racist education system. Naledi and Tiro find their mother and bring her home, and at the hospital with Dineo, Naledi witnesses overcrowding, exhausted doctors, and the death of another baby from malnutrition. Dineo recovers, and the children are left to contemplate the possibility of resistance. With some insights from Tiro's perspective, the novel is largely focalised through Naledi, inviting readers to share in the political awakening that she experiences. Exploring the genesis of *Journey to Jo'burg* through Naidoo's archive, I discern how she constructed this focalising perspective. These archival sources include minutes of meetings of the Education Sub-Committee of the BDAF, correspondence with publishers and chair of the BDAF committee Ethel de Keyser, and drafts of the text, as well as Naidoo's commentary on the novel's genesis from outside the archive. Naidoo's curation of a narrative of this novel's genesis forms a crucial part of her public authorial persona, as it is also the narrative of her genesis as a children's author, which is always linked to her anti-apartheid activism work. The novel grew out of Naidoo's work with the BDAF, and emerges as a collaborative effort, benefiting from the feedback of many contributors. De Keyser took the main role of seeking feedback and finding a publisher, and after numerous rejections, *Journey to Jo'burg* was published by Longman as part of their educational Knockouts imprint for reluctant readers in 1985, quickly followed by a US edition from Harper and Row. A UK trade edition was published by Collins in 1987, in their Young Lions imprint. Numerous editions and translations of the text have been produced subsequently. In this chapter I focus mainly on the 1st editions from Longman and Collins, with brief discussion of the 2016 edition from Collins.

2.2.1 Why write fiction?

Naidoo's narrative of the genesis of *Journey to Jo'burg* reveals much about her belief in the political potential of children's fiction. This narrative has been curated in talks, interviews, and essays produced by Naidoo for the public, and in her archive, most significantly from minutes of the BDAF from 1982-87, and from letters between Naidoo, de Keyser, and various publishers. This belief that 'fiction is a very powerful medium' for communicating an anti-apartheid message was shared by the BDAF, who prompted and supported Naidoo throughout the development of *Journey to Jo'burg* (Naidoo, Personal Interview. 24 Feb 2022). In the BDAF minutes, Naidoo has highlighted in yellow ink the passages from each set of minutes relating to *Journey to Jo'burg*. Alongside, she has also included a handwritten list of each set of minutes in which her novel was discussed. She has also labelled the folder of correspondence with de Keyser: 'Don't throw away! Record of how to persist to get published! A tribute to Ethel…' (Naidoo, 'Original folder: Early BDAF correspondence'). It is unclear whether Naidoo has highlighted the BDAF minutes and included the imperative 'Don't throw away!' for herself, or for a future researcher/archivist, and the reality is most likely a combination of the two. This narrative is a core part of Naidoo's persona as an author of political children's literature, and the retelling of it reveals her vision for the political function of children's books, and where she sees the place of her work within this vision. In her interview with Julia Hope, Naidoo recounted the discussions amongst the BDAF that led to her writing the novel:

> we all said, "We need a work of fiction." Why? Let's go to the heart first; let the head follow afterwards. Go to the story first. Ethel then asked, "Anyone here know a children's writer, preferably famous?" I said, "No, but I've got a story to tell." (Hope, 'In Conversation' 73)

As well as alluding to Naidoo's imperatives for writing, this account also demonstrates her belief in political power of fiction, which lies in its ability to produce an emotional response and take readers on a journey of inner change. In a preface attached to the first manuscripts circulated to her publisher, and using language that prefigured Sims Bishop's essay 'Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors', Naidoo explains her intent 'to open a window for children in Britain, onto an area of South African life that they rarely, if ever, see' ('Journey to Jo'burg: A statement on its origins', BN/01/01/03/01/01). This political imperative is

about raising awareness, but this statement likewise offers her vision of the process of reading:

> My hope is that readers will move in and out of the story, their imaginations extending to perceive something of the real oppression experienced by so many children in South Africa. Perhaps, too, they will begin to understand the spirit of resistance.

According to Naidoo, at its best, reading will prompt children to reflect on their own reality, develop empathy, and understand the need for social change. Naidoo's personal imperative is intertwined with this political one, as shown by the novel's dedication to Mma Sebate. When Mma Sebate's children died, Naidoo has described how 'I felt incredibly sad for her, but at the same time, I didn't really understand that I was part of this' (Personal Interview. 24 Feb 2022). This dedication therefore frames the novel as Naidoo's effort 'to explore the country of my childhood from the perspective of the child I was not' ('Crossing Boundaries', 7). As this comment indicates, the 'story to tell' was not her own story, and aspects of her writing process, including seeking feedback from Black South Africans, can therefore be seen as an attempt to overcome this.

2.2.2 Plausibility and authenticity: some responses to feedback

Naidoo's archive reveals that she sought guidance and feedback on *Journey to Jo'burg* from within and beyond the BDAF. Her use of feedback reveals her desire to seek the guidance of South African experts as an inexperienced author, but the feedback she chose reveals as much about her construction of an implied reader. Beginning to write in late 1981, Naidoo received the first feedback on her initial draft from BDAF members in January 1982, the evidence of which can be seen in her annotations to the word-processed first draft. While a lot of the input on the book came from white activists linked to the AAM, de Keyser also sought the input of Black activists, including Ruth Mompati, a South Africa exile and the chief representative of the ANC in the UK from 1981-82 (Orford and Turok). The archive contains Mompati's response in a summarised form in a letter from de Keyser, and Naidoo can be seen to have made edits to her use of language and descriptions of the

South African landscape in line with Mompati's suggestions. However, both Naidoo and de Keyser disagreed with Mompati's chief critique. Mompati questioned the plausibility of the story, asking whether children in this situation would really attempt a journey to Johannesburg rather than seeking help from others in their community. De Keyser wrote that Mompati 'misses the point since it is the children's wish to fetch their mother without disturbing their Grannie' (De Keyser. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 29 October 1982). Despite de Keyser's reasoning, I would suggest that Naidoo maintained the premise for the journey in spite of its implausibility, because the character's physical journey is an effective vehicle for the psychological journey on which she invites readers. This is reflected in the review written by Carla Hayden and Helen Kay Raseroka for *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* in which they argue that 'the creation of the need to walk to Johannesburg, is not culturally, or even realistically, plausible', but does justify the children's journey. The fact that the novel has been so successful despite this element of implausibility is an indication that both its intended and real readership are not from a South African background, and so would not be largely troubled by the novel's implausible premise.

De Keyser also sought feedback from Dorothy Kuya, a Black British activist, communist, and co-founder of Teachers Against Racism, who at this time was also the editor of *Dragon's Teeth.* Kuya's suggestion that Naidoo write a factual preface was heeded, but Kuya also questioned the effectiveness of the novel's political aims, suggesting that the book 'would not do anything positive about apartheid' and that 'it was unfortunate that neither the author nor the illustrator was a black African' (BDAF minutes. 3 September 1982). Naidoo and the rest of the BDAF disagreed on the former point, proceeding with publication, but Naidoo's subsequent reflections indicate that she had dwelt on her outsider status as a white author. In correspondence with American journalist Carol Bergman, in which Naidoo asked for advice on getting *Journey to Jo'burg* published UK, Naidoo made this admission: 'the problem was of course one of authenticity, but we felt we couldn't just sit and wait for the sort of material we need for children here to emerge from South Africa' (Naidoo. Letter to Carol Bergman). Naidoo had clearly reflected on her position as an outsider and sought to justify the legitimacy of her work. This same impulse is seen in the peritext, which positions Naidoo as having done her due diligence in making the book as authentic as possible from her perspective as an outsider.

2.2.3 Publishing against the odds and the apartheid authorities

The struggle to find a publisher has become a central part of the narrative that Naidoo has constructed about the genesis of *Journey to Jo'burg.* After four rounds of redrafts, de Keyser sent the book out to publishers in July 1982. Despite it being noted that there was an appetite for diverse books, and Penguin were 'putting out a multi-ethnic book list by Rosemary Stones and appear to be very interested in this area' (BDAF minutes. 14 July 1982), the first copies of the manuscript had no success.[4] De Keyser attributed this to a 'severe downturn in children's publishing' (BDAF minutes. 04 February 1983), but Naidoo has since suggested that some publishers did not believe that the story would interest British readers, while 'others said that I had created a mismatch by writing in too simple language about a topic that was only suitable for older readers' ('Braving the Dark' 47). Correspondence with publishers Gollancz suggests an additional reason: that Naidoo's political vision for the book made it too didactic. The reader's report argued that 'the children in the story feel that they have learned something but I am not convinced that the child reader would' (Gollancz reader's report: The Journey). Naidoo declined to pursue the changes suggested by Gollancz on the ground that they had 'mis-read the intention' (BDAF minutes. 01 July 1983), but I would suggest that Gollancz had understood her desire to teach readers about apartheid through an identification with her protagonist's political awakening.

In the summer of 1983 Longman Education agreed to publish *Journey to Jo'burg* in their Knockouts imprint (BDAF minutes. 29 July 1983). This imprint was targeted towards secondary school age 'reluctant readers', for which it was judged ideal due to its mix of challenging themes and simple language. Longman requested certain changes, and as I go on to discuss, these changes served to give clearer insight into the protagonist's perspective, seemingly fixing the problems that Gollancz had highlighted. The political work of the novel has always been linked to its anti-apartheid origins, and it was agreed that copyright and royalties would be shared between Naidoo and the BDAF. A short passage explaining the work of the BDAF and its involvement in the writing of *Journey to Jo'burg* appeared in this

[4] De Keyser approached, but had no success with numerous publishers, including Penguin, Heinemann, Hamish Hamilton, A & C Black, and Methuen, as well West German publishers Weisman Verlag and Frauen Buchverlag.

and subsequent editions of the book until 1994, including in the editions produced by Collins from 1987 onwards. In a section entitled 'What inspired this book?' at the end of the 2016 Collins edition, Naidoo explains that the BDAF was dissolved in 1994, and its work carried on by the Canon Collins Educational Trust for Southern Africa, who continue to receive 50% of the royalties. This 2016 edition also reproduces a copy of a letter that Naidoo received in May 1985 from the South African Customs and Excise department labelling *Journey to Jo'burg* as an 'undesirable publication', after Naidoo had attempted to send copies to her sister-in-law in South Africa (Controller of Customs and Excise). This further serves to foreground the radical potential of the text, signalling to readers its status as a political text.

2.2.4 Constructing a focalising protagonist

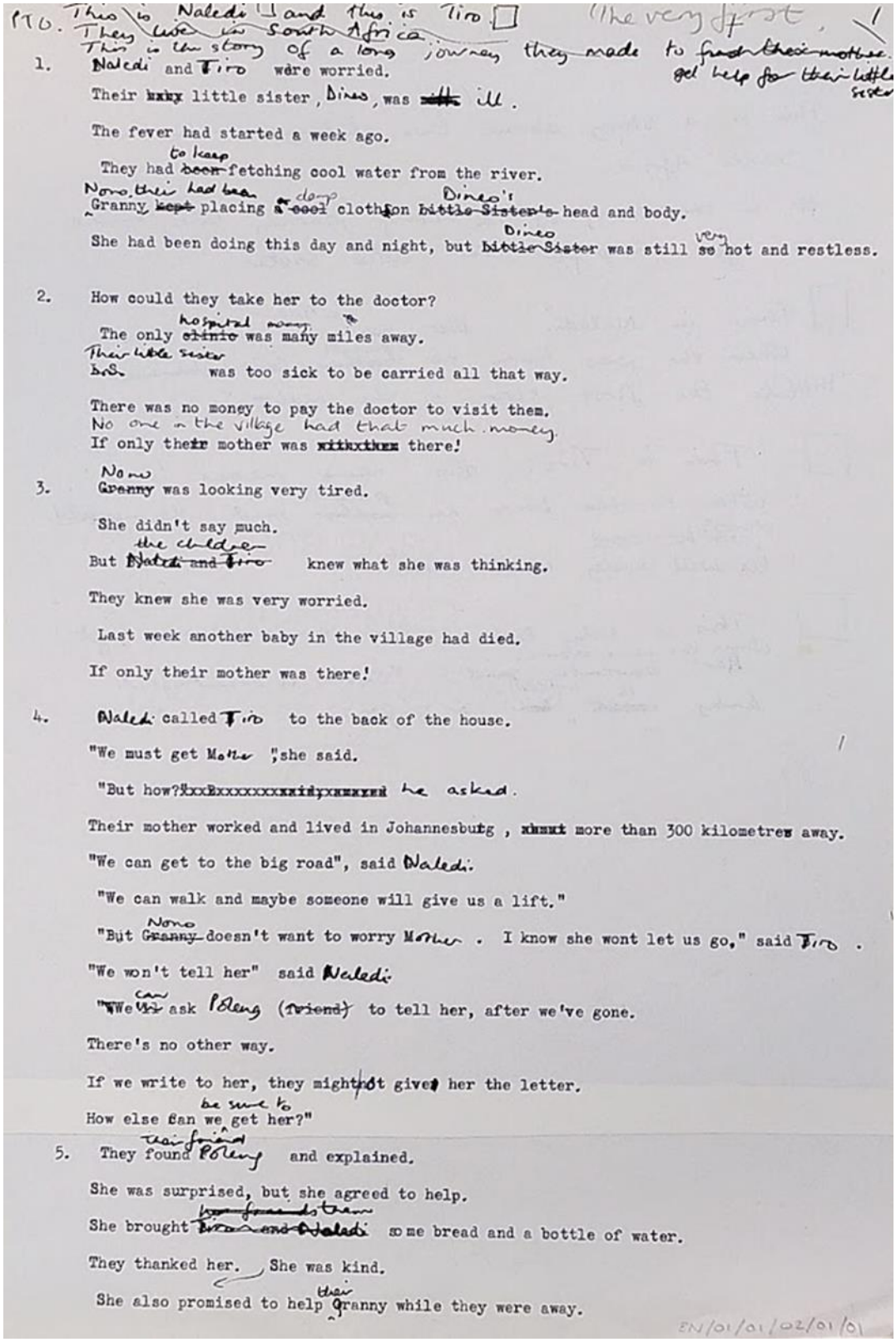
Journey to Jo'burg invites readers to identify with the protagonist Naledi's journey from ignorance to political knowledge, and in so doing constructs a reader that is politicised through their reading. Naidoo's archive reveals how she constructed the focalising perspective that has come to be typical of her work. Naidoo's archive holds 6 full drafts of *Journey to Jo'burg,* as well as additional alterations to certain passages as requested by Longman. Over these subsequent drafts, it is possible to observe how Naidoo developed the text to make the events more immediate and more closely focalised through Naledi's perspective. At the beginning of the novel, the text offers some context as to why Dineo's illness is so concerning, which in the first draft reads: '[Naledi and Tiro] knew [Nono] was very worried. Last week another baby in the village had died' (Naidoo. Journey to Jo'burg draft: 'The very first' 1). In this first draft (see Fig. 1), readers are given no further context to this death, but in the second draft, this passage is developed solely from Naledi's perspective:

> Only a week ago, another baby had died in the village.
>
> It was always scary seeing the little graves, but especially this fresh one now.

> The children had to pass the place of graves on their way to bring the water each day. As they came near, Naledi fixed her eyes on the ground ahead, trying not to look, trying not to think.
>
> But it was no use.
>
> She could not stop herself thinking of her little sister being put in a hole in the ground. (Naidoo. Journey to Jo'burg draft: 'The very first amended!' 2)

In the first draft, the knowledge of the death of the baby is shared across three perspectives, and the emotional response to it is Nono's, a character whose perspective is hardly developed in the remainder of the story. Readers are therefore distanced from the prospect of Dineo's death. In the second draft, Nono's perspective is removed, as is Tiro's, and readers are offered insight into Naledi's inner life, which is temporally and spatially located at the gravesite as the children fetch water. The text guides readers through Naledi's thought process, first withholding and then disclosing her mental image of her sister's burial, increasing the impact of this harrowing image. This second version remains largely unchanged in the published text. Focalising this moment from Naledi's perspective gives the story greater immediacy, and constructs an easy identification point for the implied reader.

Anna-Zohra Tikly, the teenage daughter of Mohamed Tikly, an educator, ANC activist, and South African exile in the UK, gave largely positive feedback in which she answered key questions posed by Naidoo ('Anna-Zohra Tikly'). She concludes her feedback with: 'the only aspect of the story that I found strange was the ignorance of Naledi and Tiro of the situation in South Africa in the beginning' (Tikly). As I have already argued, Naidoo seems to have risked making the narrative implausible in order to take her readers on a journey towards awareness, and Naledi and Tiro's ignorance about certain aspects of apartheid life is an aspect of this. The text uses the characters' ignorance to encourage readers to identify with Naledi's shock in witnessing the slums of Soweto and the violent behaviour of the police. Maintaining the integrity of the focalised perspective also requires that the text use other characters to communicate key pieces of context. Much of this is


PTO. This is Naledi and this is Tiro. "The very first"
They live in South Africa.
This is the story of a long journey they made to find their mother.
get help for their little sister

1. Naledi and Tiro were worried.

Their ~~xxxx~~ little sister, Dineo, was ~~sick~~ ill.

The fever had started a week ago.

They had ~~been~~ to keep fetching cool water from the river.

Now their Granny ~~kept~~ placing a ~~cool~~ cloth on ~~little Sister's~~ Dineo's head and body.

She had been doing this day and night, but ~~little Sister~~ Dineo was still so very hot and restless.

2. How could they take her to the doctor?

The only ~~clinic~~ hospital was many miles away.

Their little sister was too sick to be carried all that way.

There was no money to pay the doctor to visit them.
No one in the village had that much money.
If only their mother was ~~xxxxxxxx~~ there!

3. Now Granny was looking very tired.

She didn't say much.

But ~~Naledi and Tiro~~ the children knew what she was thinking.

They knew she was very worried.

Last week another baby in the village had died.

If only their mother was there!

4. Naledi called Tiro to the back of the house.

"We must get Mother," she said.

"But how? ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~" he asked.

Their mother worked and lived in Johannesburg, ~~xxxxx~~ more than 300 kilometres away.

"We can get to the big road", said Naledi.

"We can walk and maybe someone will give us a lift."

"But ~~Granny~~ Nono doesn't want to worry Mother. I know she wont let us go," said Tiro.

"We won't tell her" said Naledi.

"~~We~~ can ask Boleng ~~(friend)~~ to tell her, after we've gone.

There's no other way.

If we write to her, they might not give her the letter.

How else can we be sure to get her?"

5. They found their friend Boleng and explained.

She was surprised, but she agreed to help.

She brought ~~Dineo and Naledi~~ some bread and a bottle of water.

They thanked her. She was kind.

She also promised to help their Granny while they were away.

EN/01/01/02/01/01

Figure 1: The opening page from Naidoo's first draft of Journey to Jo'burg *(Journey to Jo'burg draft: 'The very first').*

done through the character of Grace. In creating the need for the children to stay overnight in Soweto with Grace while their mother seeks leave from her employer, the text allows the children to gain knowledge of the recent Soweto uprising of 1976, through Grace's retelling: 'People were screaming, bleeding, falling. […] A little girl standing near Grace, about eight years old, raised her fist, and next thing she was lying dead' (*Journey to Jo'burg*. HarperCollins, 2016. 62). By embedding these events as a story told to the children by Grace, the text maintains its focalisation through Naledi's perspective. In this way, Grace is the textual embodiment of the adult author, conveying the necessary knowledge of apartheid to readers through the viewpoint of the child characters. This maintains a close parallel between the knowledge possessed by Naledi and the implied reader, facilitating the invitation to identify with the protagonist that the text makes to its readers.

As discussed, Naidoo agreed to make some alterations to the text before publication by Longman. These alterations add tension to the story, show readers more of apartheid through the eyes of the protagonists, and give the characters more agency. Most of these alterations take the form of additional episodes which show examples of the suffering inflicted on Black South Africans. In one of these scenes, Naledi and Tiro witness the police doing a pass check at a train station, and see several people being arrested. Rather than passive witnesses, Naledi and Tiro are agents within this scene, summoning another boy who rushes to the scene of the arrests with his father's passbook. This boy's comment about the pass - "I'll burn this one day!" (*Journey to Jo'burg*. HarperCollins, 2016. 57) – also constructs children as agents with the capacity to resist, rather than passive victims. The final alteration that Naidoo made was to the ending of the book. In the first draft, the story ends with an addition in pen: 'somehow their journey has changed them. Tiro dreamed about tomorrow' (Naidoo. Journey to Jo'burg draft: 'The very first' 15). Later drafts add a passage from Naledi's perspective, which ends in a similar way: 'somehow she felt their journey had changed things for the better' (Naidoo. Journey to Jo'burg draft: 'The very first amended!' 21). These early drafts demonstrate that the children have undergone a psychological shift, but the nature of it is not elaborated upon. In the alteration added to the final draft, the nature of this psychological journey is made more explicit. Reflecting on what Grace told her about the Soweto uprising, Naledi realises that she too is being educated for servitude: 'it wasn't their schools they were talking about. It was her school

too! All those lessons on writing letters... for jobs as servants […] always ending with "Yours obediently"' (Naidoo. Journey to Jo'burg draft: 'The final version' 36). By narrating Naledi's thoughts, the text makes the nature of her psychological shift clearer, focusing on one specific example of apartheid oppression that directly affects her. This narration of Naledi's thought process continues, as she at first despairs at her own lack of power - 'what could she do?' - before fortifying herself with a plan to reach out to others in her school. The text ends as Naledi falls asleep to an image of herself as part of the resistance, 'surrounded by friends, old and new' (36). The effect of these alterations is to offer readers specific examples of the effects of apartheid and the means of resistance. These changes afford the child protagonists more agency and more knowledge, offering these same things to readers by focalising the story more closely through Naledi's perspective, as well as dealing with the some of the issues highlighted by Gollancz and other publishers. In doing so, the text invites readers to share in the political awakening that Naledi undergoes, thereby constructing a politicised implied reader.

2.2.5 Peritextual realism

The peritext of *Journey to Jo'burg* makes a clear link between the text and reality, and is an essential part of Naidoo's construction of the novel as a realist text. This realism serves a political purpose by strengthening the text's anti-apartheid message. Stating that 'we don't often hear of these children', the preface positions the novel as an untold story that readers have been prevented from accessing (*Journey to Jo'burg*. Longman, 1st ed.). In the 1st and subsequent editions from Longman and Collins, the preface is accompanied by excerpts from two newspaper articles that were sent to Naidoo by de Keyser in the autumn of 1981 when she had just begun writing. The first is a *Daily Dispatch* article entitled 'Joyous end to hunt for mom', which reports on the reunion of a mother and her twelve-year-old daughter who had travelled alone to find her from Berlin (now called Ntabozuko) to East London, both in the East Cape province of South Africa. This was a journey of around 50km. The second is from *The Cape Times,* entitled 'Boy of 11 attempted 1289-km walk', reporting a similar story of a child's attempt to be reunited with his mother. De Keyser expressed surprise at having come across these articles, since Naidoo had already begun writing using

a similar theme (De Keyser. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 23 October 1981), and Naidoo has annotated a photocopy of the *Daily Dispatch* article expressing a similar sentiment: 'it was a strange experience but emphasised for me how I was writing a story connected to reality' (Photocopy: 'Joyous end to hunt for mom'). Emphasising a connection to reality seems to have been a priority for Naidoo, perhaps in response to criticism that the story was implausible, but also to strengthen the political mission of the novel, which was to expose British readers to the reality of apartheid. The newspaper articles function as intertexts, inviting readers to read the novel in light of the knowledge of the real events that the articles describe. However, as Stephens argues, decoding intertextuality in this way 'depends upon the audience's semiotic and literary competency' (84). Readers lacking in these competencies may be unable to distinguish between the fictional and factual texts, and the newspaper articles may partially disguise the fictional nature of the text, implying that the story is based on these real events when the connection is actually more tenuous. The inclusion of the articles therefore reveals much about the implied reader that the text constructs: a critically literate implied reader who is able to differentiate between factual and fictional texts, whilst discerning the connections between the two.

Alongside those aspects already discussed, the peritext of the 1st Longman edition also includes a series of photos at the end which correspond to quotes from the text. Whilst the use of photographs was Naidoo's preference, this was not always popular with some publishers; Barry Cunningham, editor at Penguin, resisted the idea of photographs as he found them to be 'too literal' (De Keyser. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 15 September 1982). I would suggest, however, that this literal quality attracted Naidoo to using photographs, as they suggest a close link between the fictional text and reality, and when it came to publishing with Longman, the decision was made to use photographs at the end of the text rather than illustrations, perhaps also to cater to the slightly older target audience of the Knockouts imprint. The photos were sourced by Longmans from the archives of the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF), the parent organisation of the BDAF. This connection further strengthens the activist bent of the work. Examples of these images include a photograph of a Black woman caring for a white baby, with the caption 'Naledi was sure Mma must be thinking of Dineo', and another of crowds at the funeral of a student killed during the Soweto uprising, with a caption about Grace's brother

Dumi (*Journey to Jo'burg*. Longman, 1st ed.). Placing these photos alongside quotes from the novel suggests a close relationship between the text and reality. As discussed above, this also constructs a mature implied reader who is able to distinguish between fact and fiction, and to explore the relationship between them.

During negotiations with Longmans about the number and type of photographs used, Naidoo requested some additional images, because those initially chosen by Longman projected only 'an unrelieved image of deprivation. She thought it vital that the book also convey a spirit of resistance' (BDAF minutes. 24 January 1983). This indicates an intention to strike a balance between revealing the oppressive conditions of apartheid, and representing her South African characters as agential. However, as Sands-O'Connor discusses, the book cover of Longman's 1st edition '[complicates] Naidoo's desire to give agency to Black South Africans' (*British Activist Authors* 144). This cover is a photograph of two Black children looking out of the frame with sad expressions, whose story Naidoo tells in a note accompanying the original photos within her archive. The photograph is a posed portrait of real South African siblings who had fled South Africa with their mother to seek asylum in the UK. Naidoo explained that they 'were asked to dress in their oldest clothes' but that 'the sadness in their eyes was real' (Naidoo. Handwritten note: 'We were fortunate'). As Sands-O'Connor notes, the use of a photograph for the cover, alongside the use of photographs and newspaper articles within the peritext, indicate Naidoo's effort to draw a close connection between the text and reality. But unlike the newspaper articles particularly, this cover conveys more of Black victimhood than agency. This decision can perhaps be ascribed to the culture of the time, 'an era of high-profile charity efforts' such as the Band Aid charity supergroup, in which campaigners prioritised the 'need to engender sympathy in the reader' in order to raise money (*British Activist Authors* 144). This indicates that at points the political motivations of the text were in contradiction with Naidoo's impulse to represent Black South Africans as agents of resistance rather than objects of pity.

Journey to Jo'burg is constructed in a realist mode with an invitation to readers to identify with the focalising protagonist in order to reinforce the political impact of the text. The implied reader that the text constructs is a political reader, able to interrogate structures of racial injustice, but also a critically literate reader who is asked to consider the relationship between textual representations and reality. As shown through my archival

analysis, this construction entails a series of trade-offs. Whilst structuring the text in order to take British readers on a journey from ignorance to awareness, Naidoo risked creating an implausible narrative in order to facilitate the political journey of her characters and implied reader. Furthermore, in constructing an implied reader who identifies so directly with the ideology of the text, the agency of this reader is also undermined; the text's depictions of resistance risk constructing a reader who is obedient to Naidoo's ideology. Stephens argues that an uncritical identification with the focalising protagonist can be a 'dangerous ideological tool', making readers 'highly susceptible to the ideologies of the text' (68). This contradiction between the construction of child characters as resistant and the construction of the reader as obedient is one I will discuss further in Chapters 4 and 6. However, there is more room for the sort of ambivalence that this contradiction produces in Naidoo's later work. The flaws associated with *Journey to Jo'burg* are perhaps a product of Naidoo's inexperience as an author, and her later works are more structurally complex. As I go on to demonstrate in my discussion of *The Other Side of Truth* and *Burn My Heart,* as Naidoo's work becomes more complex and more literary, her political messaging becomes more oblique and more complex, as does her vision of the political potential of childhood reading.

2.3 *The Other Side of Truth*: a political counternarrative

Whilst *Journey to Jo'burg* seeks to fill a gap in readers' knowledge of apartheid, *The Other Side of Truth* politicises its readers by inviting them to participate in a political counternarrative about the place of refugees in British society. *The Other Side of Truth* is more structurally complex than *Journey to Jo'burg,* narrated in what Pinsent calls 'a complex tissue of different modes', conveyed through the flashbacks, dreams, and letters of refugee protagonist Sade, as well as through the linear third person narration ('Languages, Genres and Issues' 206). As I go on to discuss in Chapter 5, in the intervening period between the two novels Naidoo had developed her methodology for writing, a mixture of in-depth secondary research, and interviews and workshops with adults and young people. There are consistencies between the two novels, chiefly in the use of a realist mode and a focalising protagonist with whom readers are invited to identify, and a peritext that reinforces the connection between fiction and reality. However, the use of focalisation is more complex,

illustrating the limits of Sade's perspective. Whilst proposing that readers identify with the protagonist, the text also probes the limits of such identification, suggesting that solidarity is achieved in spite of cultural differences, rather than by overcoming them. The genesis of *The Other Side of Truth,* as narrated through my archival analysis, shows Naidoo's effort to construct an authentic refugee perspective in order to provide a counternarrative to stereotypes that erode solidarity with refugees in the UK. This production of a counternarrative through the construction of a single refugee subject position is the core political impulse of the novel. Furthermore, in positioning the novel as a political counternarrative, Naidoo suggests that her fiction, and children's fiction more generally, might have a key role in developing the political sensibilities of child readers.

Julia Hope describes refugee stories for children as an 'emergent genre' over the past three decades, of which *The Other Side of Truth* is a part ('"One Day We Had to Run"' 296). This increase in the production of refugee stories for children in recent years represents the growth of a longer tradition of representations of refugees in children's books. Hope cites Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971) and Anne Holm's *I Am David* (1965) as early examples, and more contemporary texts include Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* (2001) and Manjeet Mann's *The Crossing* (2021). As the number of refugees worldwide increases,[5] and as this genre has emerged, so has a plethora of literary criticism. Some critics explore reader responses to refugee literature, particularly investigating the therapeutic or socialising impact of such stories for refugee children themselves (Hope, '"The Soldiers Came to the House"'; Baraitser; Arizpe), while others advocate for texts authored by and with refugee children themselves (Tomsic and Zbaracki). Other critics have discussed how representations of refugees are constructed, most notably in the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 2018 special issue on 'Migration, Refugees, and Diaspora in Children's Literature'. Within this special issue, Debra Dudek highlights the importance of Australian picture books about refugees in countering aggressive anti-refugee rhetoric and encouraging 'readers to see the human faces' behind the media stories (375). Leyla Savsar argues that stories of displacement have great potential to represent displaced and migrant children as 'inventors of culture rather than mere appropriators or learners' (396). In his

[5] There were 89.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2021, according to the UN Refugee Agency ('Figures at a Glance').

Introduction to the special issue, Philip Nel highlights the potential of refugee stories to act as 'windows and mirrors' texts, cultivating 'an empathetic imagination' whilst also '[affirming] the experiences of children in those communities' (358). Amongst these positive potential impacts, it is also the case that refugee narratives for children can also promote an assimilationist approach to multiculturalism. Arguing that *The Other Side of Truth* proposes a refashioning of British urban space, Grzegorczyk notes that the novel resists this assimilationist imperative. In doing so, part of the political work of this novel lies in the suggestion of 'an important social role for books sometimes dismissed as lacking the positive message of multi-ethnic integration' (53). In suggesting such a social role for itself, I argue that *The Other Side of Truth* situates its political work in the promotion of solidarity with displaced people, and its investigation of the limits of identification.

2.3.1 Turning detective: curating the genesis of the novel

By 2000, Naidoo was established as an author of realist fiction with a political ethic, and through many speaking and writing opportunities had developed her public authorial persona. One such piece of writing for the Open University (OU) in 2008 best illustrates Naidoo's narration of the genesis of *The Other Side of Truth* as a political text. In order to retrace her creative process for her 2008 OU article, Naidoo became a researcher in her own archive (which was at this time solely in her possession), shedding light on one of the main reasons that she has organised and curated her archive so thoroughly:

> To aid my memory – the story that I tell myself – I shall use old notebooks, files of research materials and a photograph album made at the time. It's well over a decade since I began the work in January 1997 and I approach the present task in the spirit of author as detective. (Naidoo. 'Open University: *The Other Side of Truth*' 1.)

My use of this article is a key example of my dialogue with Naidoo's archive and Naidoo herself throughout this thesis, as I have discussed in my Introduction. In referring to the notebooks, this article draws on a part of Naidoo's archive that I do not have access to, as they remained in her possession when she gave her archive to Seven Stories in 2016. The notebooks become visible as a gap in the archive, and it remained for me to piece together

an idea of their contents from other sources. This OU article, as a piece of autoethnographic archival research, is now itself absorbed into the archive, and has become my touchstone in narrating the genesis of *The Other Side of Truth*.

As is the case with *Journey to Jo'burg,* Naidoo's motives for writing *The Other Side of Truth* were an intertwining of the personal and the political. In a paper to the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) conference in 1996, Naidoo criticised British asylum policy, alluding to the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act which restricted access to appeals and introduced a 'white list' of countries whose citizens were largely excluded from receiving refugee status (Schuster and Solomos). Naidoo argued that these policies were 'designed to remove refugees from our consciousness and community even before they step foot into Britain' ('Making Waves' 4), training the British public not to see those seeking sanctuary from war and persecution. As with *Journey to Jo'burg,* Naidoo wrote *The Other Side of Truth* to uncover that which had been made invisible, planning her novel around 'the abuse of children through the official refugee process' ('Themes and ideas for a refugee novel'). For Naidoo, British asylum policies revealed the racism at the heart of the country's governing institutions, and she has positioned *The Other Side of Truth* as her attempt to bring that racism to light:

> 'Yes, of course apartheid was shocking, and I'm glad they read my books about it. But I picked up some complacency. I wanted to look at things right here, including the increasing racism, and it became clear that the story had to be about refugee children.' (Rochman)

As Naidoo highlights, *The Other Side of Truth* marked a shift in her focus, but there is also a continuity in her positioning of her fiction as a way of 'looking at things right here'. As with *Journey to Jo'burg,* with hindsight Naidoo has also reflected on her personal investment in *The Other Side of Truth,* as seen in this interview transcript from 2010: 'although I did not consciously set out to explore what had been my own experience of exile, I think it does come through in the way Sade's mind involuntarily returns to her home, family, country' ('ITV Beverley Naidoo/Transcript' 2). Whilst quick to differentiate between her own experience as a white person and those of her Black child characters, drawing out a personal connection not only seems important for Naidoo in order to make her work seem more authentic, but is also framed as a necessary condition for her creative process.

2.3.2 Naidoo's immersive research process

The comprehensive and lengthy research process that emerges from the archival materials related to *The Other Side of Truth* lends a structure of authenticity to Naidoo's work. This is central to her politicisation of the implied reader, since it serves to construct a child's viewpoint that readers are invited to identify with. Naidoo has explained that in order to construct her child's viewpoint, 'I spend a lot of time doing research. But then I dump most of the documentary stuff, get away from it, and imagine one child's story' (Rochman). This lengthy research process is in service to the construction of the focalising protagonist, and the realist mode in which the novel operates. Naidoo's connections to Nigeria, and her visits to the various sites at which the UK asylum system operates were crucial to this. The backdrop to *The Other Side of Truth* is the rule of Nigerian military dictator General Sani Abacha from 1993-98, and the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. Saro-Wiwa was an Ogoni writer and activist, who led protests against exploitative oil extraction and environmental damage in the Ogoniland region of Nigeria, chiefly by oil and gas multinational Shell. Saro-Wiwa was hanged on spurious murder charges alongside eight other Ogoni leaders, prompting an international outcry and the further suppression of Nigerian journalists, a number of whom fled to the UK. *The Other Side of Truth* depicts Nigerian children Sade and Femi, whose mother is assassinated in an attempt to kill their journalist father. The children flee to the UK, and their father follows, only to be detained. Focalised through Sade's perspective, the novel depicts her struggles at school and in foster care, as well as her efforts to get her father released. Having begun with secondary research, Naidoo visited Nigeria in 1998, staying with friends Bisi and David Oke. Photographs from this visit document time spent in Lagos, Ife, and Ibadan, and show scenes of cities, countryside hills, and the Oke family. Beyond this short visit, Naidoo capitalised on these connections in Nigeria to construct a more authentic representation of her characters. The Okes' daughter Adetinuke Tadese gave feedback on Naidoo's use of terms in English, Yoruba, and Nigerian Pidgin, and offered a selection of titles for the working draft. She can be credited with suggesting: 'The other side of truth', writing: 'I feel the title should emphasise the pain associated with the truth Baba insisted on reporting' (Tadese).[6] Naidoo

[6] The children's father, Papa, was named 'Baba' at this stage of drafting.

also sought guidance from British Nigerian theatre director Olusola Oyeleye, with whom she had already collaborated on several projects, including her doctoral research and her work with young people in South Africa whilst developing *No Turning Back*. Oyeleye corrected elements of the Nigerian context, asking for more depth in the relationship between Sade and Femi, and advising Naidoo on her depictions of people smuggling: 'how you introduce the illegal travel is very important. In order to avoid the idea that all Nigerians travel in this way' (Naidoo. 'Dare to Tell (Working Title)': annotated). Oyeleye is keenly aware of the importance of not creating stereotypes of Nigerians in a book for a largely British readership, and this is perhaps an indication of why Naidoo chose to seek feedback from her and Tadese, as they would be able to lend an authenticity to her representations of Nigeria.

Alongside documentary research drawing on resources from the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, the Refugee Advisory project, and the British Refugee Council, Naidoo immersed herself in the various settings in which she would place her characters, and sought the input of child experts. Building on the methodology for collaboration that she had built in South Africa whilst developing *No Turning Back,* Naidoo visited Warwick Park School in Peckham, London, in April 1997, chosen as it was situated in the same part of London as Sade and Femi's foster home. She conducted two workshops with Year 8 (aged 12-13) students to 'look at character development and plot, as well as focusing on dialogue as a way of developing both character and plot' (Naidoo. Letter to Annie Donaldson), and sent a copy of her manuscript to the school in April 1999 seeking feedback. As I explore in greater depth in Chapter 5, these aspects of Naidoo's writing and development show a regard for children as experts, as well as demonstrating her effort, as an outsider to the experiences about which she was writing, to make *The Other Side of Truth* both plausible and authentic. Both Lunar House, a tower block in Croydon which housed the Asylum Screening Unit, and Campsfield House detention centre were key to her research process, and as I explore in Chapter 3, are written into the novel as sites at which the UK border is performed. When visiting Lunar House, Naidoo queued alongside the asylum seekers attending there in order to immerse herself in the perspective of one of them (See Fig. 3). Her archive holds a blue ticket with a number corresponding to her place in the queue, and this ticket stands out in the archive as a totem of the dehumanising effect of the immigration system in the UK, representing a complex human life made deliberately

invisible by bureaucracy. Naidoo has described the immersive nature of her exploration in these spaces:

> I simply sat and watched the ebb and flow of people being called by number to a kiosk window. I couldn't hear the conversations but could observe the body language of officer and applicant, while feeling the suppressed tension in this bleak room. (7)

This immersive process served her construction of Sade's character, who takes on a similar observer role as described above. As she and Femi wait to be seen by an immigration official, she watches the 'tense and troubled' expressions on the faces of the others there (133), wondering, 'were all these people trying to escape because of dangers in their own countries?' (134). This research process is part of the construction of Sade's worldview. This worldview is crucial to the politicisation of the implied reader, who is invited into solidarity with refugees through an identification with Sade as focalising protagonist.

The second place that emerges as central within Naidoo's research process for *The Other Side of Truth* is Campsfield House, a detention centre that is fictionalised in the novel as Heathlands, where Papa is held after reaching the UK. Naidoo volunteered as a visitor during her writing process, documenting the experience:

> My second notebook contains an amateur sketch of rows of barred windows behind a high wire fence topped with swirling razor wire. Not exactly what you expect at the end of a leafy Oxfordshire lane on a fine June day, nor from the name Campsfield House. (Naidoo. 'Open University: *The Other Side of Truth*' 7)

In her narration of this process in hindsight, Naidoo drew a direct connection between her perception of these places and the perspective that she constructs for Sade. In the novel Sade compares the Oxfordshire scenery to something from 'a fairy story' (220) in contrast to the 'six-metre-high wire fence topped with great loops of barbed wire' (221). As well as giving an insight into her process, Naidoo's account here also makes explicit the connection between the text and reality, contributing to her broader narrative about herself as a writer

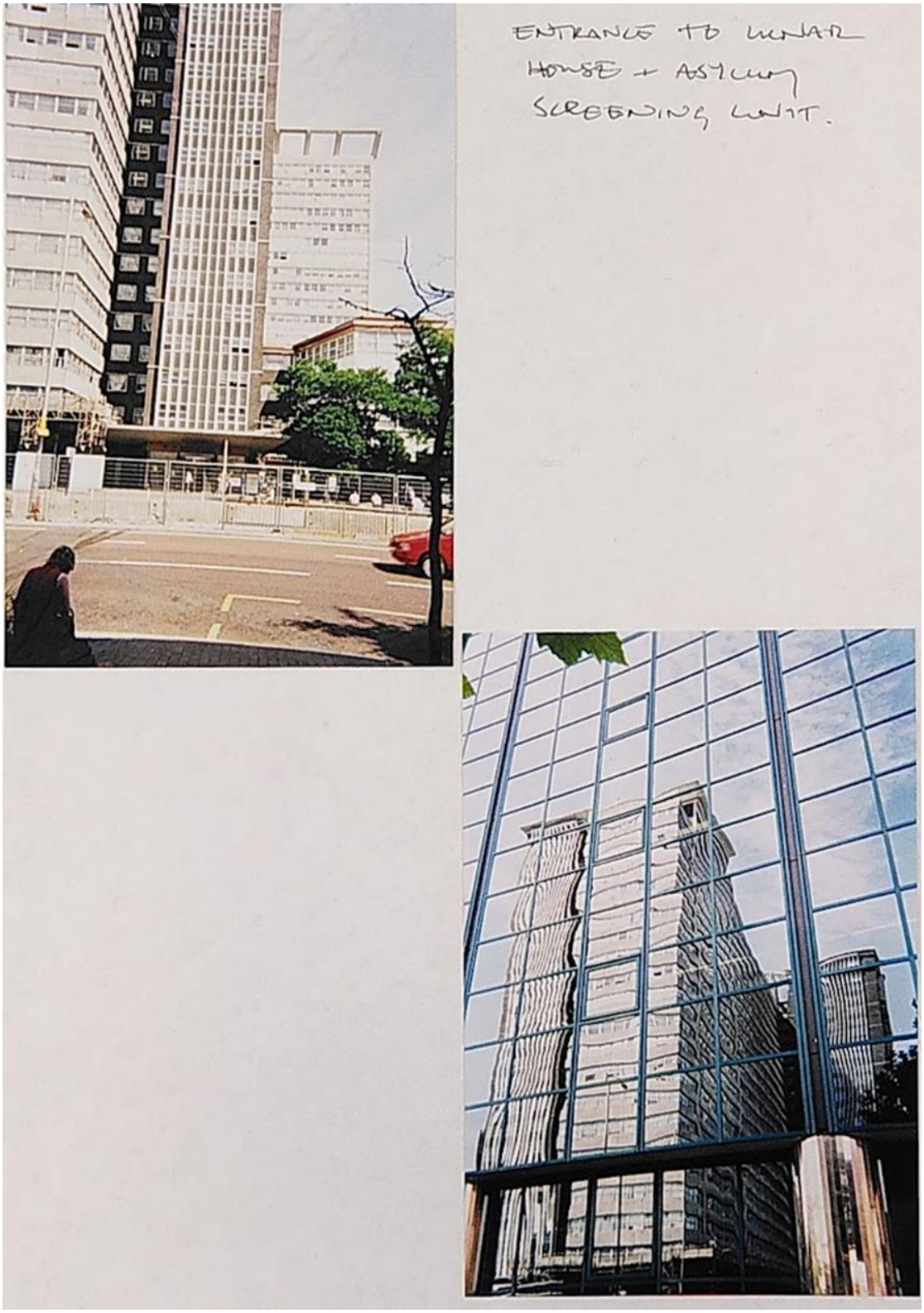


Figure 2: Naidoo's photos of Lunar House, the Asylum Screening Unit in Croydon, London. This corresponds to the place where Sade and Femi are registered and finger-printed in The Other Side of Truth *(Naidoo, Photos: 'Entrance to Lunar House + Asylum Screening Unit').*

of political children's fiction anchored in reality. Naidoo visited Campsfield to meet a young Nigerian man named Emmanuel, a journalist who worked for Chief Bola Ige, a critic of Abacha's military rule. After Ige and others working with him were arrested, Emmanuel fled to the UK, where he was detained, not having been told that 'asylum is to be asked for at the point of entry' ('In Summary': Emmanuel's testimony). After his asylum application and appeal were rejected, Emmanuel returned to Nigeria. He wrote to Naidoo in 1999 to thank her for her friendship, letting her know that it had become somewhat safer under the rule of Abdulsalami Abubakar, who succeeded to the presidency after Abacha's death in 1998 (Emmanuel). Naidoo did not base the character of Papa on Emmanuel, instead drawing on numerous newspaper reports to inform the character. However, by mentioning him in her OU article, and including this correspondence in her archive, his presence in Naidoo's life takes on the same significance as the newspaper articles sent to her by de Keyser when she was writing *Journey to Jo'burg,* reminding her of the link to reality. As a white author living in Britain, these connections lent authority to her role in telling stories that were not her own. This construction of authenticity supports the realist mode in which Naidoo chose to write, making it easier to invite readers into solidarity with real refugees through an identification with the refugee protagonist.

2.3.3 Blending reality and fiction in the peritext

As with *Journey to Jo'burg, The Other Side of Truth* is bounded by a peritext that reinserts Naidoo's authorial voice and proposes a way of reading that invites readers to connect the fictional text to the reality it represents. The Author's Note at the end gives simple historical context, whilst the opening Foreword invites a more complex reading of this connection between fiction and reality. Written by British journalist and television presenter Jon Snow, the Foreword describes the novel as 'no dry polemic about freedom of speech – it's a fast and vivid account of a family's flight from threat […] a wonderfully accessible story laced with powerful messages of family commitment and human rights' (Foreword). There is a suggestion of the old dichotomy between instruction and delight here – Snow makes it clear that *The Other Side of the Truth* does both, whilst encouraging readers to read the novel for its message. His foreword lends a political authority to the book, through his credentials as a public figure and a known champion of children's rights

and voices, including as sponsor of the Canon Collins Educational Trust (Naidoo. Letter to Jon Snow. 02 June 1999), but a closer reading reveals his deeper connection to the novel. When Naidoo was writing *The Other Side of Truth,* Snow was the presenter of *First Edition,* a weekly news and current affairs television programme made for and with children by Channel Four, as well as the Channel Four News at 7pm every weekday. Naidoo researched *First Edition* for *The Other Side of Truth* in order to include a fictionalised version of it in the novel called *Making News.* Sade watches *Making News,* and sees Mr Seven O'Clock News, 'a tall thin man with silver-grey hair' who is a clear analogue for Jon Snow (258). She takes Papa's story to him, and this is the turning point of the narrative in which Papa's story is publicised and he is eventually released. As I go on to discuss in Chapter 4, this is also a crucial point for Sade's character, as she goes from being passive to exercising agency. In her request to Snow for the Foreword, Naidoo wrote: 'I am sure you will see from my theme about the price sometimes to be paid when a writer speaks out, as well as the role of 'Mr Seven O'Clock News', why I am so keen for you to do it!' (Naidoo. Letter to Jon Snow. 22 July 1999). It is unclear whether many readers would make the connection between Jon Snow's foreword, and Mr Seven O'Clock News, but by basing *Making News* on *First Edition,* and inserting a fictionalised Jon Snow into the narrative, Naidoo is drawing a further link between the novel and reality, and inviting readers to participate in political discourse on freedom of speech and children's rights.

2.3.4 Identification and its limits

Whereas the political status of *Journey to Jo'burg* is clear, from its straightforward message to its clear links to the BDAF in the peritext, the political purpose of *The Other Side of Truth* is more oblique. Whilst it proposes an identification with focalising protagonist, the text also probes the limits of this identification, creating a tension. Of all of Naidoo's work, *The Other Side of Truth* has received the most attention from critics, who are often concerned with the question of who this text is for, and whether it would appeal to readers with their own experiences of seeking asylum. For Grzegorczyk, *The Other Side of Truth* was

> ‘written for a dual readership, [but] still read largely by a white middle-class British reading public which receives them as fictionalized ethnographic case studies – appreciated for their representation to the mainstream of the experience of minority groups and evaluated on the authenticity of their ethnic subjects. Moreover, migrant stories are intended to play a critical role in the acculturation of young members of migrant and minority communities in Britain’ (54).

Whilst I agree that the novel’s readership is largely British, archived reader responses - and the fact that the novel is often taught in British comprehensive schools - indicate that the ethnic and class backgrounds of readers of *The Other Side of Truth* would be more varied than Grzegorczyk suggests. Furthermore, I agree with Hope, who in her reader-response research using refugee narratives in the classroom argues that ‘a simple dichotomy between refugee and non-refugee children [is] a blunt and unworkable instrument’ (‘”The Soldiers Came to the House”’ 319). As *The Other Side of Truth* seeks to illustrate, refugee children have diverse experiences and cannot be homogenised into a single group that will all read a text in the same way. This is the tension at the heart of *The Other Side of Truth*: the text proposes that readers identify with protagonist Sade in order to generate solidarity with her, yet also seeks to dismantle stereotypes, probing the limits of such an easy identification. All of the novel’s events are focalised through Sade’s perspective, including complex pieces of cultural and political context, encouraging readers to see the world through her eyes. However, the text also makes it clear that some things, including an understanding of other refugee children, are off-limits to Sade’s perspective. This illustrates the heterogeneity of refugee experiences, whilst demonstrating the limits of identification as a reading strategy. The implied reader of this text is therefore harder to define in *Journey to Jo’burg*, but Sade’s proximity to Britishness suggests an implied reader with an ready understanding of British culture, and a willingness to empathise with asylum seekers. The politicisation of the implied reader in this text consists of their invitation to participate in a political counternarrative.

In order to maintain the integrity of Sade’s worldview, and invite readers to share it, all of the context and exposition in *The Other Side of Truth* must come through Sade’s perceptions. The text nonetheless maintains a degree of distance between the implied

reader and Sade by showing how her perceptions are affected by her psychological state. The novel opens with a description of the shooting that kills Mama:

> *Sade is slipping her English book into her schoolbag when Mama screams. Two sharp cracks splinter the air. She hears her father's fierce cry, rising, falling.*
>
> *'No! No!'*
>
> *The revving of a car and skidding of tires smothers his voice. […]*
>
> *His strong hands grip her, trying to halt the growing scarlet monster. But it has already spread down her bright white nurse's uniform. It stains the earth around them.*
>
> *A few seconds, that is all. Later, it will always seem much longer.* (1-2)

This sequence, and the dreams, memories and flashbacks that follow, are differentiated from the main linear narrative by italics. Narrated in the present continuous tense, these episodes are set apart temporally from the rest of the text, experienced as recurring traumatic memories rather than remaining in the past. The last phrase indicates that this memory will return to haunt Sade in her dreams, as it does when she experiences bullying at school from a girl called Marcia:

> *Two sharp cracks splinter the air. She hears her father's fierce cry, rising, falling.*
>
> *'No! No!'*
>
> *The revving of a car and skidding of tires smothers his voice.*
>
> *'Mami mi?' Sade whispers.*
>
> *Marcia looks loftily down at Sade crouching beside Mama.*
>
> *'It was meant for you!'* (171)

The language of the opening sequence is repeated in nightmares in Chapter 14, and here in Chapter 22, indicating that the trauma of her mother's death is compounded by the stress and bullying Sade experiences in the UK. This offers readers a complex portrayal of the trauma of displacement, but also places the reader in a position of greater knowledge than the focalising protagonist. Pinsent argues that readers are 'encouraged towards forming

what feels like an 'objective' judgement, while still remaining close to the perceptions of the focal character' ('Language, Genres and Issues' 206). Whilst invited to identify with her, readers are also shown that Sade is not to blame for Mama's death, as she believes. This places distance between readers and protagonist, but it is a sympathetic distance.

As discussed, Naidoo has framed *The Other Side of Truth* as a response to political and media discourses that sought to silence and stereotype refugees, constructing a politicised reader who is able to participate in a counternarrative. In her research, she drew on reports and articles from the British Refugee Council Resource Centre. Many of these articles detail the experiences of asylum seekers in the UK, as well as revealing the more insidious narratives about refugees that were emerging in the late 1990s. An article from *The Birmingham Post* reports on the cost to 'the taxpayer' of 'immigrants abusing the system' (Worrall), whilst another from *The Sun* celebrates the 'fresh war on bogus refugees' (Watson). Terms such as 'swamped', 'flooded', and 'bogus' recur, representing asylum seekers as a homogeneous enemy. *The Other Side of Truth* situates itself as a counternarrative to this narrative of suspicion, using Sade's perspective to deconstruct the stereotyping that this narrative generates. When social workers tell Sade and Femi that they can apply for refugee status, Sade is shocked, and thinks to herself: 'Refugees? They were those winding lines of starving people, with stick-thin children. […] You saw them on television. Were she and Femi really refugees?' (115). Sade realises that she has come to represent 'the stereotypes she has anonymized' (Wilkie-Stibbs 39), offering readers insight into the dehumanising effect of such stereotypes. Furthermore, in showing how Sade and Femi's story differs from these media representations, the text invites readers to question attitudes to refugees in the media and participate in the political counternarrative that the text constructs.

Naidoo's choice to represent Sade and Femi's story as different from the stereotype of 'winding lines of starving people' is also a pragmatic one, allowing her to write characters who are within reach of her personal experience. Naidoo has described how her friendship with the Oke family had given her 'a strong sense of a close-knit middle-class family, at ease in both Yoruba and English, where the parents not only place enormous value on education but on personal qualities of integrity and truth telling' (8). Naidoo makes the parallel with Sade's family obvious, presenting this friendship with the Okes as vital for her capacity to

depict an authentic Nigerian family. Representing Sade as English-speaking and middle class provides opportunities to push back on stereotypes of refugees and Africans in general. This is something remarked upon by one of the readers represented by Naidoo's archive; in 2005, Ysanne commented in a letter that she 'had not before taken into account the fact that asylum seekers are often educated, middle class people' (Ysanne). When a teacher complements Sade on the quality of her English, Sade thinks: 'why shouldn't her English be good? Ever since she had learned to talk, she had been speaking English as well as Yoruba!' (151). As well as teaching readers who might not know about the variety of languages spoken in Nigeria, this is also a conspiratorial moment for readers, as they are invited to share knowledge that the teacher lacks, aligning them closer to Sade's narrative perspective. However, it is Sade's use of English as a first language, and her proximity to Britishness as a Commonwealth citizen, that make her an easy character for Naidoo to write, and perhaps for British readers to identify with. As Heather Snell notes, in assuming that readers must identify with the protagonist, authors can depict characters 'in ways that emphasize their commonalities' with readers (270). Remembering that 'Papa listened every morning at breakfast to the BBC World Service broadcasting from London' (74), Sade is situated within a commonwealth in which power can be equated with a proximity to English language and culture. As well as making an oblique comment on the way that Nigerian culture has been shaped by a relationship with the UK, this also made Sade an easy protagonist for Naidoo to write about, since Naidoo already possessed the cultural and linguistic knowledge to represent Sade authentically.

The inclusion of another refugee character provides Naidoo with an opportunity to reflect on the political value of reading, but also to probe the limits of Sade's narrative perspective. When Sade is enrolled in school, Sade meets Mariam, a Somalian refugee who fled overland and by boat with her mother to the UK. The school library becomes a refuge for the two girls from their bullying classmates, and on one occasion Sade sees Mariam reading a book, the cover of which 'showed a dark-haired girl in a headscarf looking towards distant mountains. Last week, Sade had seen Mariam spend most of her time in the library studying the cover of that same book. Perhaps the picture allowed her to dream' (195). For Mariam, this book with a young Muslim woman on the cover is a 'mirror' text, in which she can see herself reflected. By including this scene, Naidoo is not only suggesting a model of

how children read, but also positioning *The Other Side of Truth* itself as a 'windows and mirrors' text, with the capacity to positively impact refugee readers in the way that Mariam's reading has impacted her. Responses from readers indicate that the text has indeed been read in this way. Salma, a middle school student from Alexandria, Virginia, USA, wrote in 2006:

> I was really happy when you added Mariam in the story and her journey and all that stuff. I was really happy because I myself am a Muslim, so I was just ecstatic to know that a Muslim girl around my age was added into such a great book. ('Letter from Salma. 13/9/06')

The relationship between Sade and Mariam also adds nuance to the easy identification with refugees that other aspects of the text suggest. On Sade's first day at school, she is introduced to Mariam by her teacher: '"Mariam came from Somalia, less than a year ago. So, East and West Africa! I'm sure you'll become good friends"' (155). The teacher's assumption of immediate solidarity between the two African girls is complicated by the gulf in their actual experiences. Readers are not given direct access to Mariam's story of displacement but learn about it second-hand through Sade. Sade asks Mariam about her family because she plans to steal from Mariam's uncle's shop, as she has been pressured to do by school bullies. Rather than experiencing a growth of empathy, Mariam's story 'left her feeling quite numb,' (195), and readers do not find out what Mariam had told Sade until another chapter has passed. When Mariam's story is revealed, it is through Sade's memory of it: 'after Mariam had told her story so simply in halting English, but in words that painted such terrible pictures, Sade had shut down her mind. But now the shutter had lifted and Mariam's words and pictures were burningly clear.' (203) Although the text discloses how 'hundreds of people were packed into one small boat as if they were fish in a net' (207), it does not represent Mariam's actual words. Readers are held at a distance from Mariam's narrative, and instead invited to share Sade's shock. Sade's difficulty in understanding Mariam deconstructs homogeneous stereotypes of refugees, but also serves as a caution against the easy identification that the text seems to propose at other points. The barrier between Sade and Mariam is also suggestive of Naidoo's awareness of her own limitations in terms of the sort of refugee experience that she had the capacity to write about.

The dual impulses to dismantle refugee stereotypes and to create solidarity with refugees through an identification with the protagonist create a tension within *The Other Side of Truth.* In inviting the readers to share in these two political impulses, the text constructs a more critically – and politically – engaged reader than is perhaps required for *Journey to Jo'burg,* asking them to hold this tension. Whilst the identification with the protagonist that this text proposes is complex, Naidoo also relies on a realist mode, constructed in part through her peritext, to persuade her readers that the text bears a close connection to real life, and is therefore politically relevant. This mode also creates a structure of authenticity that lends legitimacy to her own authorial voice. As my discussion of *Burn My Heart* will also show, as Naidoo's fiction for children becomes more complex, the subject position of her implied reader becomes more ambivalent. This is partially the result of her growing experience as an author, but could also be related to the context in which she was writing. Whilst the activities of the AAM made space for the overt critique of apartheid in UK texts, Naidoo perhaps felt compelled to make her critique of the UK more veiled, since it would be liable to affect her capacity to publish.

2.4 *Burn My Heart*: the limits of political literature

Naidoo's sixth novel, *Burn My Heart,* bears certain similarities to the novels previously discussed. Written in a realist mode that invites a comparison with reality, it employs focalisation techniques that invite readers to identify with the characters. The key difference is in the use of alternating focalisers that present contrasting worldviews from either side of a racial divide. Set in Kenya in 1952 at the beginning of decolonisation, the text constructs a Western implied reader. Proposing that this reader identify with both the white settler and the native Kenyan protagonists, the text seems to promote empathy across the racial divide. However, the text also offers readers an awareness of the violence of British colonialism, and the ways that systemic racism precludes such interracial friendship. These two contradictory political impulses make for an anxious text that knows its own Western perspective to be flawed, and that both moves towards but ultimately forecloses the possibility of reconciliation. Reading the text alongside the associated archival materials, I show how Naidoo arrived at her use of alternating focalisers through developing

and ultimately discarding a frame narrative from the point of view of the white settler protagonist. Her peritext positions *Burn My Heart* as a traditional historical novel, and the text itself employs alternating focalisers to invite readers to identify with both characters. The text ultimately finds its own white gaze to be inescapable, perhaps touching the outer limits of the political potential of Naidoo's fiction.

As with *Journey to Jo'burg,* the political impulse of *Burn My Heart* was to make readers aware of a reality that they were assumed to be unaware of. However, whilst in the former novel this political reality was the then current events of apartheid, in *Burn My Heart* it is Britain's colonial past that the text sets out to expose and critique. Naidoo's acknowledgements for *Burn My Heart* indicate that a work-related visit to Kenya in 2004 inspired Naidoo to set her next novel there. Initially planning 'a short novel about an elephant orphan and a Kenyan child that would engage the empathy and imaginations of young people and adults' (Naidoo. ' Re: elephant novel'), Naidoo soon abandoned this in favour of a historical novel set in 'the final years of colonial rule before independence' (Naidoo. 'Possible Frame?: Dec 04'). Under British colonial rule since 1895, Kenya saw large numbers of the Kikuyu people, the majority ethnic group in Kenya, displaced as their fertile land in the Highlands was taken over by white settlers. Around 1950, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, otherwise known as the Mau Mau, formed a militant resistance to colonial rule. Acknowledging that it is a contested term tied to the mythology of fear that surrounded the KLFA, I have chosen to use the term Mau Mau for clarity, since that is the term used most commonly in the novel. Indeed, the novel acknowledges the contested nature of the term, since the Kikuyu characters use the term 'Muhimu', which was the collective name that the militants themselves used. In October 1952, the British declared a state of emergency, beginning an aggressive counter-insurgency that lasted until 1960. Although the KLFA was defeated, Kenyan independence followed quickly in 1963. The association of the Mau Mau with violence and secret oath-taking created an atmosphere of fear that was stoked by the British authorities. Roxanne Doty argues that 'fixing the meaning of this rebellion around evil, darkness, irrationality, criminality, and abnormality' (106) became the justification for brutality. Anyone suspected of having taken the Mau Mau oath could be arrested and tortured, and vast numbers of mostly Kikuyu people were removed to concentration camps known as "protected settlements". The statistics reveal the

disproportionality of the British counter-insurgency. The Mau Mau are known to have killed 32 white settlers and around 1800 native Africans. Whilst records are scarce, conservative estimates put the number of native Kenyans killed by the British at around 11,000, and over 100,000 were detained. For those too young remember it, this violent and shameful period in British history is rarely taught to British children.

2.4.1 Reconciliation in the context of colonial violence

Burn My Heart begins in late 1951, spanning a period of a year and half during which the State of Emergency is declared. As with the other texts discussed here, it is narrated in the third person, but it differs in employing alternating narrative perspectives: that of Mathew, a settler boy whose parents live on Kikuyu land, and Mugo, a Kikuyu servant boy whose family work for Mathew's. Whilst the boys regard each other with good feeling, the relationship is by no means an equal one. As the Mau Mau presence grows, fear increases among the white settlers, and members of Mugo's family are recruited to join. When Mathew and his friend Lance make a small fire on Mathew's family farm, sparks catch and destroy the stables and several fields. As a result of Mathew's subsequent silence, it is assumed that the Kikuyu farm labourers have deliberately caused the fire as part of a Mau Mau plot. Mugo and his father Kamau are arrested and tortured, and whilst Mugo survives the experience to be relocated with his family to a barren Kikuyu reserve, Kamau's ultimate fate is unknown. Mathew watches Mugo being driven away without being able to speak to him, and the two boys are never reconciled. Mugo has the last word, and the final chapter from his perspective shows him contemplating joining the Mau Mau resistance. In her foreword, Naidoo writes that the Mau Mau 'hardly appeared even in history books. So what was this all about? Why the silence?' (*Burn My Heart* 1). She positions her novel as a way of interrogating that silence, of shedding light on a shameful and hidden part of British history for child readers. This is reiterated in her Afterword, which ends with a Kikuyu proverb: 'kĩrĩ ngoro kĩrutagwo na mĩario… *the word in the heart is drawn out by talking*' (188). This enigmatic conclusion implies that speech, and speech about British colonial atrocities that have been covered up, is the heart of the novel's mission. Reflecting on her choice to depict the torture of Mugo and his father by the colonial police at the end of the novel, Naidoo

wrote in her 2012 article for *Bookbird* that 'Silence has impelled me towards it. I grew up in a world of Silence about atrocious goings-on' ('Braving the Dark' 51). Once again, Naidoo linked her imperative for writing to her own apartheid upbringing. Her work asserts the importance of speech in the face of racist atrocities and positions itself as an example of such speech, asserting the political role of her work and children's literature more broadly.

This first political mission, to expose readers to the realities of the British empire, is accompanied, and at times contradicted, by a secondary mission to promote interracial friendship. This secondary mission is emphasised by the peritext, as seen in the blurb: 'Mathew and Mugo. Two boys living on the same Kenyan farm but they share an uneasy friendship. […] No one knows who to trust and Mathew and Mugo are caught in the middle' (Back cover). After reading a draft of the novel, South African author Maren Bodenstein encouraged Naidoo to flesh out the relationship between Mugo and Mathew on the grounds that: 'we have two lonely boys and we want them actually to get over the racial divide and be friends' (Bodenstein). As Bodenstein recognised, the text seems to propose a movement towards friendship across a colonial divide. In doing so, Yenika-Agbaw argues that *Burn My Heart* '[panders] to a white, Western audience' ('Reconstructing History' 87). Reading the novel alongside Meja Mwangi's *The Mzungu Boy* (2005), she states that 'making friendship the central concern in their narratives despite all that is happening, the authors downplay the significant oppressions that their African protagonists endure' (97). I agree that the text primarily targets a Western, specifically British audience, for whom the African context is presented as other. I also agree that in depicting both boys as equally robbed of the opportunity of friendship by their social context, the text partially erases the violent power dynamics between them. Yet this secondary mission of reconciliation ultimately contradicts the first, producing a text that is inherently anxious. Its violent colonial setting, in which all Black Kenyans are presumed guilty, ultimately renders impossible the interracial friendship that the novel proposes at its outset. This does not render this proposal of friendship any less troubling, but it does make room for an anxious reading experience in which British readers are shown that their perspective is inescapably tied to the violence of colonialism. This in itself is a political move, albeit not the one that the text seems to propose for itself.

2.4.2 Creating and dismantling the white settler's frame narrative

As with *The Other Side of Truth,* the archival materials associated with *Burn My Heart* bear witness to a lengthy research process, using newspaper reports, academic books, and correspondence with experts and Kenyan residents. There are also signs of Naidoo's collaboration with young people. In April 2006, Naidoo sent a copy of her manuscript to be read by young people at OYA!, an education project for African teenagers in Barnet, London (Ní Chréacháin). As I go on to discuss in Chapter 5, this research provides the scaffold for Naidoo to position herself as an authentic voice in representing the views of these young people, but also as an authentic voice to discuss racial injustice due to her first-hand experience of apartheid South Africa. Where *Burn My Heart* differs from the other novels discussed in this chapter is in the use of alternating focalisers, and in the radical changes that Naidoo made to the novel's structure while drafting. Naidoo's original plan included a contemporary narrative that would frame the core narrative set in the 1950s. Before she dispensed with it all together, Naidoo's frame narrative went through three clear iterations, each assembled from multiple drafts, and each centring the perspective of an adult Mathew retelling his childhood story. The clearest version of the first iteration can been seen in a plot outline from 27th January 2005. The frame narrative is set in the UK after a few decades have passed, focusing on Mathew's 11-year-old son, Kim. Kim is feeling guilty about Sameh, 'a gentle boy with learning difficulties' who is bullied by Kim's classmates after Kim fails to stand up for him ('27.1.05. Story within story', BN/01/06/01). When Mathew learns of this, he takes the opportunity to tell his son his own story of his failure to stand up for a friend, which leads into the core 1950s narrative set in Kenya. Fragments of Naidoo's drafts from this period show her intention to write the core narrative in the first person, foregrounding Mathew's perspective as a white settler. Structuring the novel so that the adult Mathew retells his own childhood gives precedence to his adult perspective, allowing him to convey an overt moral message:

> I was just a bit younger than you, Kim, when I did something I wished ever afterwards that I could forget. […] I know it's not the same and the consequences for Sameh will not be as dramatic. But when you betray a friendship, you betray a truth. ('Contemp. frame: Dad 1st person)

The core message about not betraying a friend comes across as didactic in this passage, whereas in the final novel the core message is more ambiguous, dwelling on the impossibility of friendship in the context of colonial violence. In a letter to her editor, Jane Nissen, Naidoo indicated her intention that the frame story 'should create a kind of shadow that leaves the reader uneasy' (Naidoo. Letter to Jane Nissen. 07 April 2005). However, by framing the core narrative with a narrative about school bullying in this draft, the narrative of decolonisation is not presented to readers on its own terms, but as a broader analogy to illustrate the importance of honesty and fairness.

In June 2005, Naidoo abandoned this frame, citing the dominance of the father's voice as a reason:

> I've finally decided to ditch my frame story! The dad's voice has just proved too limiting for the core story that needs to be told. I'm beginning to tell the 1950s story in 3rd person alternating the viewpoints of the two boys. (Naidoo. ' Re: this and that')

Nissen affirmed this decision on the grounds that the frame narrative 'unnecessarily complicated the powerful core story' (Nissen. ' Re: this and that'). Subsequent drafts show a development of the alternating perspectives, and the structure and plot that Naidoo developed by the end of 2005 remains largely the same in the published novel. However, in 2006 Naidoo began to develop the second iteration of a frame narrative. This frame also centres Mathew as an adult, in his 60s and suffering from terminal cancer. Before his death he writes down his story for his grandson Matty, and this is what forms the core 1950s narrative. The frame narrative takes the form of letters to Matty, which clearly position Mathew as the author of the core narrative. This frame makes visible Mathew's control of the narrative: 'I could not make up a happy ending, not even a hopeful one. I've had to face myself all over again' (' Dear Matty retrieved' 1). By presenting Mathew's refusal to 'make up' a happy ending, this draft creates a sense of veracity, putting Mathew-as-author in the role of truthteller, for whom reliving his guilt is the price of this truth. Since Mathew is presented as the author, Mugo's portions of the core narrative are products of Mathew's imagination, and the white adult overtly speaks for the Black child. After the end of the core narrative, the frame narrative continues with a concluding story that explains how Mathew could know the parts of Mugo's story that he was absent from. He describes how his family moved to England soon after the detention of Mugo and his family, and that as a young

man, he returned to Kenya to reunite with Mugo. When the two men meet again, Mugo takes Mathew up Kirinyaga (Mount Kenya). Mathew confesses to starting the fire, and Mugo tells Mathew his own version of events, including being confined to a reservation with his family, and the deaths of his father and brother before independence. The two men part after this, and Mathew describes how 'we would go back to our world and he to his. Worlds apart' (' Dear Matty retrieved' 6). By ending in this way, this draft attempts to balance the difficulty of friendship across colonial divides with the desire for resolution and reconciliation. As Nissen wrote in an email from herself and fellow editor Hilary Delamere, the reunion of Mathew and Mugo ends the text 'on a high note of connection in spite of the past' (Delamere). This draft also includes numerous phrases that attempt to establish some agency for Mugo. Mathew comments that 'Kenya's new president might talk about forgiveness but he couldn't speak for Mugo, could he?' (' Dear Matty retrieved' 2). This question attempts to conceal the fact that Mathew does in fact speak for Mugo throughout, in constructing his perspective.

Later drafts of this second iteration of the frame narrative include two short sections entitled 'To begin' and 'To begin again' that open and close the novel as a whole. From late April 2006, only these two short sections remained as the third iteration of the frame narrative . 'To begin' sets out the different creation myths taught to Mathew and Mugo as children, and opens 'Do I tell you my side or his?' (' To begin...'). Although not made explicit, the narrative perspective of this section remains with Mathew, who describes how 'We twirled the globe on our teacher's table, counting all the countries coloured pink that flew our Union Jack'. 'To begin again' asserts a similar claim to veracity as seen in earlier drafts, stating 'I would have liked to have given you a happier ending, at least a hopeful one. But I promised to tell the whole truth... his and mine... mine and his' (' To begin again'). Then follows a series of Kikuyu proverbs, alongside questions such as 'If you dispossess me, will I forgive and forget?' Taken together, these two sections attempt to create a sense of balance, inviting readers to acknowledge both perspectives. At the same time, whilst they yoke Mathew and Mugo's histories together and attempt to show them as moral equals, these sections also begin to communicate the difficulty of reconciliation, by ending on a question: 'how do we first clean the wound?' In an email to Nissen, Penguin publisher Yvonne Hooker critiqued the inclusion of 'To begin' and 'To begin again', worried that they

would ‘get in the way’ of the core story, and that ‘the reader of 10-11 is going to start the book with no knowledge of the Mau Mau uprising’ (Hooker). As an alternative, Hooker suggested dividing the information in the author’s note in order to provide ‘an exciting and factual bit at the beginning to set the scene’. Naidoo heeded Hooker’s guidance, and by the end of June 2006 all traces of the frame narrative were gone, replaced by the factual introduction and Afterword that appear in the published text.

In a piece for *Writing Children’s Fiction: A Writers’ and Artists’ Companion* edited by Linda Newberry and Yvonne Coppard, Naidoo provided some further explanation for her abandonment of the frame narrative: ‘I tried writing a first person frame story in which we would see Mathew and Mugo as young men, giving space for possible reconciliation. But it just didn’t seem to work well and felt too contrived’ (‘ For Arvon Book’). As I argue in my analysis of the published text, the colonial violence of the novel’s context rules out the possibility of reconciliation, even as readers are invited to hope for it. Furthermore, in the passages depicting Mugo and Mathew together as adults in the drafts, Mugo only exists to provide an experience of catharsis and spiritual regeneration for the white protagonist. By stripping away the frame narrative, Naidoo destabilises this white gaze and removes any possibility of closure for the characters, ending the novel with them bewildered and estranged. Furthermore, it is Mugo who has the last word in the published text, in a radical departure from the drafts that give it to the adult Mathew. The ‘high note of connection’ between Mathew and Mugo is removed, changing the narrative from a focus on reconciliation to a focus on violence, making for a far more powerful and unsettling story. However, including the voice of Mathew as author in her drafts had also revealed that the core narrative is a story of Kenya told by a white author with a settler background. Mathew the author became a surrogate for Naidoo in these drafts. By removing Mathew’s voice entirely from her factual intro, and replacing it with her own authorial voice, Naidoo gives the text a veneer of authority as a historical novel that it otherwise lacked, but also makes the white authorship of the text less visible to the scrutiny of readers. This constructs a reader who remains at a distance from the Kenyan characters, despite the alternating perspectives, and who is ultimately denied the reconciliation that the text seems to promise. This process of redrafting and finally removing the frame narrative reveals much about the negotiations between Naidoo and her editors, and about her process as a white

author in representing British colonialism to a British audience. The impulse to prioritise the white settler perspective is strong in all the stages of the frame narrative. Removing the frame narrative in the published text weakens this perspective – although not removing it entirely – making *Burn My Heart* into a less problematic but more anxious text.

2.4.3 Peritext as moral framework

As with *Journey to Jo'burg* and *The Other Side of Truth,* the peritext to *Burn My Heart* establishes a clear link between the text and reality, positioning readers to read the novel as a legitimate critique of British colonialism and to read Naidoo as a legitimate voice for making that critique. In removing the frame narratives and adding in a factual introduction in her own voice, Naidoo heeded Hooker's suggestion that 'background is needed or the story loses impact', recasting the text as a more traditional historical novel (Hooker). However, Naidoo chose to retain a scrap of her frame narrative as an epigraph:

> I kept some words that had come to me when writing the frame and I used them as a frontpiece, suggesting the voice of an unseen narrator:
>
> *"How do I tell you this story? Do I tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Do I tell you my side or his? What if I had been born on his side and he on mine? We were both only children…"* (' For Arvon Book').

Placing these words in the peritext removes any sense of Mathew's authorship, whilst retaining a sense of the subjectivity of the narrative, and of the nature of truth itself. As with any peritextual detail, it is unclear whether children picking up this book would even read the front piece, but by placing it there, the text invites readers to embrace this subjectivity. 'We were both only children' evokes the innocence of childhood, suggesting that Mugo and Mathew are caught up in forces that are beyond their control, even as the attitude to innocence and agency in the text itself is more complex. When discussing the use of a factual intro, Hooker wrote:

> it feels so important to get this right at the beginning – to be exciting, compelling and accessible for the readership. The Mau Mau uprising was a tremendously

> powerful and scary episode – I can remember being scared as a child in Dorset! (Hooker)

Naidoo emphasises this fear in the foreword: '*anyone who was a child in Britain in the 1950s will probably remember hearing about the Mau Mau. The stories were frightening and yes, some parents used the name as a threat '* (1). Yet Naidoo's framing of this fear also draws out the subtext to Hooker's comment: the presence of the Mau Mau as an object of fear in Hooker's childhood springs from the 'control of discursive space' that became a central aspect of the British counter-insurgency (Doty 59). Naidoo partially interrogates this control in her foreword: 'The British' insisted that Africans were like children, not ready for independence. When the African leader Jomo Kenyatta called for land, education, freedom, decent wages and equality, they called him a dangerous agitator' (2). While Naidoo uses her peritext to directly address readers, inviting them to empathise with the colonised Kenyan people, at times the text presents the Mau Mau as bogeyman figures to convey a climate of fear. Being able to observe how this climate of fear was constructed would require readers to read using the critical lens that Naidoo offers them in her foreword. Whilst *Burn My Heart* has a glossary attached for the various Kikuyu and Swahili words used, Naidoo also uses her foreword to clarify the terms 'mzungu' and 'wazungu' (meaning white person and white people, respectively). Her reason for doing so may have stemmed from the initial resistance from her editors to the use of these terms, which Hooker argued would be confusing for readers. Naidoo insisted that 'reader will have learnt a new word [sic]' (' DEAD SECRET'). Attempting to use the novel to teach British readers about another culture, Naidoo stresses the importance of language as part of this learning experience. The push-back from the editors could account for Naidoo's decision to define 'wazungu' and 'mzungu' so explicitly in the foreword, even though these terms are also in the glossary. It is clear from the foreword alone that this text constructs a reader who is able to read with the critical lens offered to them in the peritext.

Having created a sense of ambivalence and subjectivity throughout the text, as I will go on to explore below, Naidoo uses her Afterword to reassert her authorial presence. Contrasting the beauty of the Kenya with its recent violent history, Naidoo writes: 'this is what I have felt watching the morning mist rise up the slopes of Mount Kenya… Kirinyaga' (185). Inserting herself into the Kenya landscape, this is an example of a 'spatial relationship'

with the African setting (Sivashankar et al., 486), albeit a tenuous one, which Naidoo uses to claim some legitimacy in writing about Kenya, since she has been there and 'felt' the impact of history. Giving the mountain both its English and its Kikuyu name presents Naidoo as a balanced observer capable of seeing both perspectives. She uses the rest of the Afterword to centre the British involvement in the events she depicts, offering British readers a way of reading the novel's events as a part of their own history. Citing those few Britons who 'protested strongly', she writes that 'the British government backed its officials in Kenya, giving in to the fears and demands of the white settlers' (186). She makes it clear that this is not just of historical concern for British readers, but that 'the ghosts of the past have a way of rising' (187), mentioning the ongoing campaigns for compensation from former Mau Mau detainees. Whilst the text itself is morally ambiguous, the peritext offers a clear moral framework through which the text can be read, inviting readers to better recognise the violent colonial context in which Mathew and Mugo were growing up.

2.4.4 Alternating focalisers and the melancholy white gaze

For Perry Nodelman, identification with a focalising character is a key function of children's literature, which is disrupted by alternating narratives since 'a reader cannot easily identify with two different characters at the same time' (*Alternating Narratives,* 5). I argue that *Burn My Heart* does indeed have a disruptive impact, inviting readers to identify with both Mathew and Mugo whilst preventing a complete identification with either. As with the other novels discussed in this chapter, by offering readers insight into an unfamiliar time and place through the perspective of a key character (or characters, in this case), *Burn My Heart* invites to readers to occupy both Mathew and Mugo's subject positions. Nissen assumes this sort of reading, saying that by the end of the novel 'the reader will be relating strongly with young Mathew' and 'certainly will have been identifying themselves with Mugo too' (Delamere). For critics such as Sara Day and Robyn McCallum, alternating, or multivoiced narration is used to make readers aware of different subject positions, and to regard them as equally valid. Indeed, it is this suggestion that readers will, as it were, 'see both sides', that Yenika-Agbaw views as the main failing of *Burn My Heart.* For Clare Bradford,

> The potential advantage of binary narratives is that they are capable of producing a dialogue that interrogates the givens of both cultures by showing them to be constructed, relative, and contingent. However, such dialogue depends on the extent to which cultural and historical discourses are accorded alterity. (114)

Employing alternating focalisers does not necessarily give these perspectives equal weight, as one of the perspectives may still be coded as 'other' and constructed from stereotypes. Given that *Burn My Heart* is an English language book published for a British audience, Mathew automatically holds the greater narrative authority. However, while Mathew is the easier character to identify with, he also has the more limited worldview of the two boys, and is shown to have less moral integrity. While the text has a political motive in terms of its exposure of this period of British colonial history, the politicisation of the implied reader is much more ambivalent in this text, since identification with the focalising protagonists also invites readers into more of a self-critique.

The text indicates the limitations of Mathew's settler worldview through the dual narratives of land ownership that the boys have received from their parents. Mathew has been told that his grandfather acquired the land, complaining that 'the dealer had made a handsome profit on the governor's giveaway prices' (32). There is an irony in this perceived injustice, as the simplicity of this tale of land acquisition erases the displaced native people from the narrative. This erasure is also visible in the naming of the landscape. The nearby mountain, which is Kirinyaga to the Kikuyu, is called Mount Kenya by the settlers in a linguistic act of colonisation. Mugo's family story narrates their perspective of this encounter with the settlers: 'this was their land, their sacred place. Their family had lived under their mountain Kirinyaga for generation after generation. But the mzungu men insisted that 'proof' of his ownership was on his piece of paper' (39). These two small sections must do a huge amount of narrative work, providing a history of British colonisation that is essential for understanding the novel's events. These juxtaposed narratives of the nation, whilst mirroring each other, are not given equal moral weight. By structuring them so that the indigenous account follows the settler one, the novel allows the indigenous perspective to write over the settler perspective, positioning it as the more valid truth claim. This use of alternating narratives has the effect of giving the indigenous perspective more validity, rather than positioning both perspectives as morally equal.

Yenika-Agbaw has argued that *Burn my Heart* privileges 'interracial friendships, teasing out ideas of possible reconciliation between the colonizer and colonized' by downplaying the violence of colonialism ('Reconstructing History' 88). I agree with her insofar as the text *appears* to privilege these friendships, and to soothe the expectations of Western readers, for whom embracing interracial friendship may be easier than confronting structural violence. However, the text ultimately thwarts the expectations that it establishes by never allowing a crossing of this racial divide. The promise of friendship that it offers is impossible given the violence of the colonial context. Mathew shows a limited concern for Mugo, but by sharing in Mathew's perspective readers are implicated in his objectifying gaze. In the novel's opening chapter Mathew observes how Mugo's 'cheeks glistened like the smooth polished walnut stock of Mathew's gun' (4). Within what Mathew perceives to be a friendship, Mugo is still a highly prized object, and when Mugo removes his shirt in order to keep it clean as the boys venture into the bush, 'Mathew watched Mugos muscles flex as he edged his body under the barbed wire' (8). There is both admiration and a fetishising desire in Mathew's gaze which, especially as this is the first description of Mugo, readers are invited to participate in. Whereas Mathew looks forward to spending time with Mugo, it is Mugo's duty to look out for the accident-prone Mathew. Kamau cautions Mugo to take responsibility when he is around Mathew because 'he is only a child and you will soon be a young man'. (42) Although the racist social structures in British colonial Kenya afford Mathew higher social status, the text shows him to be inferior to Mugo in terms of knowledge and experience, repeatedly needing Mugo to help him out of trouble. However, the boundaries between friendship and service are nonetheless blurred by the text. When Mugo and his family are arrested at the behest of Mathew's father, Mugo is aggrieved:

> He had shown [Mathew] how to make a ball out of banana leaves, a snare out of sisal… all the things he would show a younger brother. When the boy had been silly or showing off, he had done his best to ignore it. He had looked after the boy like Baba said he had looked after the bwana when they had been children. So how could he forget the way the bwana had looked at Baba and him […] accusing them of betraying him. (182)

Whilst Mugo treats Mathew with forbearance at best, he also has expectations of mutuality from the relationship. Within his feelings of betrayal, there is also a sense that he views his

position as a servant as natural: he serves the family just as his father did before him. In creating a Black character who does not ask for anything better than to be the servant of a white child, the text normalises this master-servant dichotomy, even as Naidoo attempts to dismantle it by writing the novel from dual perspectives.

Whilst his perspective is shown to possess the greater moral validity, Mugo's perspective is also limited. This has the effect of limiting the perspectives of readers, who are only invited to share in what the characters experience. Naidoo chose to position Mugo as an outside observer rather than a participant in the Mau Mau oath-taking scene and the militancy engaged in by other Kikuyu characters. Mugo views the Mau Mau members with fear, and when shadowy figures appear in the night to take his family to an oath-taking ceremony, Mugo manages to hide and follow at a distance. The actual recitation of the oath occurs outside of Mugo's sight. This moment is therefore concealed from readers, who are invited to regard it with the same suspicion and fear as the white settler characters do. The oath-taking scene represents the Mau Mau as uncompromising. When Mzee Josiah and Mama Mercy refuse to take the oath on grounds of their Christian faith, Josiah is beaten with a club. Mugo's father intervenes on the grounds that they are old and frail, but the captain replies to him: 'when the wazungu settlers stole our land, did they care about our old people? It doesn't matter if you are young or old. […] If you refuse, it means you want to help the wazungu settlers' (59). Within this discourse of resistance, there can be no moral compromises or grey areas. Readers view this scene as outsiders, from Mugo's perspective, and the Mau Mau ideology of resistance that this scene represents is outside of the moral framework offered by the novel, which attempts to embrace subjectivity and the grey areas between moral absolutes. However, this scene also conveys ambiguity in the empowerment and sense of belonging that the resistance movement offers. Mugo observes that as more people enter a small hut and re-emerge having taken the oath, 'the atmosphere in the shed seemed to lighten. It seemed to Mugo that some stepped back inside taller and with their eyes alight' (59). Singing songs and learning shared signs, the servants share a sense of solidarity, that Mugo, and therefore readers, are also outsiders to. While it risks perpetuating the rhetorical association of the Mau Mau with darkness, secrecy, and danger, Naidoo's choice to have Mugo observe the oath-taking scene without participating in it serves two purposes. Firstly, it allows Mugo's fear of the Mau Mau to create narrative

tension. Secondly, it allows Mugo to be a neutral narrative presence in the conflict between Mau Mau and settlers, reinforcing the position of neutrality that the text seems to propose for itself in narrating the story from opposing subject positions.

However, this neutrality, and the possibility of interracial friendship that it implies, is ultimately dismantled at the novel's conclusion. Whilst both Mathew and Mugo perceive the other's culture as a threat, each also views the other as an exception to that rule. But the terrible knowledge that is deferred until the novel's climax is that Mathew and Mugo's good regard for one another is irrelevant in light of the racist system of which they are a part. When Mathew confesses to starting the fire and begs for Mugo and Kamau to be released, he is told that 'the inspector would have been coming for them anyway' (164). As Kikuyu people they are presumed guilty. The final lesson that the text offers is that there can be no moral neutrality: just as all Kikuyu are presumed guilty, all white settlers are implicated in this colonial violence. The integrity of the alternating narratives is disrupted by the structural violence of colonialism that they depict, and the two subject positions are not regarded equally. It is significant that Mugo is given the last word in the text, contemplating as his family are taken to a Kikuyu reserve: 'if he were called to join Gitau and the others fighting for *ithaka na wiyathi,* their land and freedom, would he not go?' (184). This ending also makes space for readers to sympathise more with the Mau Mau, rather than remaining at a distance from them. The settler perspective is shown to hold more narrative power in this novel, but also to be morally bankrupt. Giving Mugo more knowledge and prioritising his interpretation of the relationship, whilst making him the locus of the implied reader's objectification, creates a crisis of narrative perspective. I describe this crisis as the melancholy white gaze, which knows itself to be flawed and depraved, and yet cannot escape itself. The politicisation of the implied reader does not occur through a full identification with either protagonist, but through an identification with this gaze. While Naidoo's development and removal of a frame narrative shows an attempt to establish some narrative neutrality through her writing process, this is ultimately undermined by the novel's violent conclusion. And while the peritext reinserts Naidoo's authorial voice in order to assert an anti-colonial message, this is in turn undermined by the fact that the idea of anti-colonial resistance is held at a distance until the last page of the novel. Of all Naidoo's work, the political work of this novel is the most ambivalent, inviting readers not into an

explicit political awakening, but into an anxious experience of the limits of their own perspective.

2.5 Conclusion: from political message to political reading experience

My analysis of Naidoo's archive in this chapter has revealed that much of Naidoo's creative development processes have been undertaken as a means to overcome the limitations of her perspective as a white South African author, living in the UK and writing for the UK children's book market. It also traces the evolution of this creative process, as Naidoo became a more experienced and established author, but also as she transitioned from writing for an educational market in the 1980s, to focusing more of her energies on writing in a more literary style for the trade market as her career developed. As my analysis has shown, as Naidoo's novels became less didactic and more literary and narratively complex, so their political messaging became more oblique. *Journey to Jo'burg* is a politicisation of the traditional home/away/home dynamic common to many children's books, inviting readers on a journey from ignorance to knowledge of apartheid through an identification with the journey of the focalising protagonist. The political implied reader of this text is in some senses also an obedient reader who acquiesces to the political awakening that the text proposes for them. *The Other Side of Truth* is more complex structurally but also in terms of message, driven by the dual impulses to dismantle refugee stereotypes and to create solidarity with refugees. Both encouraging and preventing a complete identification with the focalising protagonist, *The Other Side of Truth* constructs a more critically literate reader who is able to hold the tension between these two impulses. *Burn My Heart* also proposes dual political purposes, of postcolonial reconciliation and the comprehension of British colonial violence. Whilst in *The Other Side of Truth* dual messaging produces some tensions, in *Burn My Heart* these dual political impulses are in direct contradiction with one another, meaning that the novel ultimately fails to deliver what it offers to its readers. Yet this also serves the construction of a critically and politically literate reader who is able to persist within the anxious reading experience produced by this contradiction. Naidoo's construction of a politicised reader is consistent over the course of her writing career, but the evolution of this politicised reader reveals the evolution of her

vision for the political potential of childhood reading. In her later works, this vision seeks to produce an ambivalent reading experience for a critically literate reader, over the straightforward comprehension of a political message. The reader imagined by this vision is also a more agential reader, who is expected to do more than simply receive the message that the text offers.

Chapter 3. Border Children

Innocence and the politicisation of childhood

If half my face was black
and half my face was
white, and all my body was
coloured, what would be my rights?

Would the powerful faces of
the government see my body
as less privileged than
my face,

Or my left eye to be a
criminal and my right to be
a saint?

(' Apartheid')

As I have discussed in my Introduction, Naidoo's work is political in that it is concerned with how power is constructed and wielded, and by whom. The politicisation of Naidoo's implied readers that I explored in Chapter 2 represents the first facet of the political work of her middle-grade fiction. In Chapters 3 and 4 I will explore the second facet: the politicisation of childhood itself. In this chapter, I do so by highlighting the political value of childhood in its rhetorical sense, particularly as it relates to the construct of childhood innocence. In an analysis of *Out of Bounds, The Other Side of Truth,* and *Web of Lies*, I will argue that these texts interrogate the ways that childhood innocence is implicated in the construction of political and social borders. The poem above was written by a British secondary school pupil after reading Naidoo's *Journey to Jo'burg* in 2005. Using the image of a body divided, the poem reflects on the absurdity of the racial borders drawn by apartheid, and the ways that these borders are performed on and within the bodies of South African children. The rhetorical values of childhood coalesce around the value of innocence, a value which serves to depoliticise childhood. In each of the texts explored here, Naidoo undertakes a re-politicisation of childhood, not by deconstructing childhood innocence, but by showing how it is mobilised in the performance of borders. What is essential to childhood is therefore shown to be deeply political, as Naidoo herself makes recourse to the concept of childhood innocence in the communication of her political messaging. Drawing on the work of Achille

Mbembe alongside Bernstein, I will illustrate that the three texts explored undertake a politicisation of the idea of childhood innocence itself, by showing children to be deeply implicated in the construction and transgression of the physical and social borders imposed by apartheid, and the performance of the UK border within the UK asylum system.

3.1 'Racial innocence' and the logic of the border

As I have already argued in my introduction, the figure of the child as a rhetorical device and a potent cultural symbol is organised around the idea of innocence. This concept of childhood innocence is apolitical, or rather, it is depoliticised, in that it is hollowed out of all associations with the machinations of social power, and 'manifested through the performed transcendence of social categories of class, gender, and, […] race' (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 6). In this chapter, I will argue that Naidoo's fiction works to contest this depoliticisation of childhood, and to re-politicise childhood by demonstrating how innocence is mobilised in the construction of political discourse. In my analysis, I highlight one of the key ways in which this contestation of childhood innocence is undertaken through an exploration of the borders drawn by nations and by segregation. *Out of Bounds, The Other Side of Truth,* and *Web of Lies* each mobilise and interrogate the concept of childhood innocence to illustrate how this innocence is integral to the logic of race by which these borders are upheld and policed. Bernstein argues that 'the idea of childhood innocence and the bodies of living children have historically mystified racial ideology by hiding it in plain sight' (18). I extend Bernstein's concept of 'racial innocence', demonstrating that these three texts bring to light the ways that racial borders are both constructed and concealed through the logic of childhood innocence, therefore reinvesting it with political meaning. This inevitably calls into question the logic of another border: that between childhood and adulthood. The rhetorical power of childhood innocence is central to the erection of this border, which defines adults and children against one another. By this logic, which Gubar would call the 'difference model of childhood' (' Risky Business' 450), the child is the negation of the qualities ascribed to the adult, and is therefore free from associations with political concerns, and therefore with race. The re-politicisation of childhood innocence that I observe in this chapter is central to Naidoo's vision for the

political potential of childhood reading, revealing the political values with which rhetorical childhood is already overlaid. The interrogation of childhood innocence that I observe in Naidoo's middle-grade fiction therefore lends itself to a kinship approach to understanding childhood, whereby both children and adults are shown to be subject to and implicated in the same political forces.

In this chapter I have chosen to examine Naidoo's re-politicisation of childhood innocence by examining one aspect of the political realities explored in her fiction: that of the border. My understanding of borders within this chapter is informed by the work of Mbembe, recognising the two ways in which borders are represented in Naidoo's work: the physical borders of nations and segregated townships, and the social borders between segregated races and between the self and those considered to be 'strangers'. In both of these senses, the border is a function of a racist social system that seeks to divide. As Mbembe argues:

> the idea is to make borders as the primitive form of keeping at bay enemies, intruders, and strangers—all those who are not one of us. In a world characterized more than ever by an unequal redistribution of capacities for mobility, and in which the only chance of survival, for many, is to move and to keep on moving, the brutality of borders is now a fundamental given of our time. Borders are no longer sites to be crossed but lines that separate. (3)

In examining the border as a central feature of both colonial rule and the contemporary control of global movement, Mbembe explores the violence of the border as enacted against the bodies of segregated, colonised, and displaced people. The border is crucial to Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, which acts to remove certain 'others' from normal political and social life, conferring upon them a sort of social death. In this chapter I argue that, in Naidoo's work, children are shown to be both affected by and implicated in the construction and dismantling of these borders. In their work on borders in childhood studies, Spyros Spyrou and Miranda Christou argue that 'if borders and borderlands are made and remade through social activity, that if they are not mere things but events and performances, then children and not just adults, actively participate in the process' (3). This deeply political understanding of childhood is informative for the work of this chapter, as is the concept of the border as performance. If borders are both physical and discursive, they

can be understood as scripts in Bernstein's sense of the term, invoking mimetic and transgressive performances from the children living at these borders. As well as being performed on and in the bodies of Naidoo's child protagonists, the borders of apartheid and immigration policy in the three texts discussed here also invite children to participate in that performance, often invoking the scripts of childhood innocence to do so.

Whether made hyper-visible in apartheid South Africa, or concealed in the UK, race and racism are inherent within the logic of the border, as 'the ever-present shadow hovering over Western political thought and practice' (Mbembe 71). Borders are the inevitable result of racialised thinking, which seeks to categorise and separate. According to this logic of the border, the children of colour in Naidoo's work are rendered 'alien' or 'strange'. As Sara Ahmed argues, the stranger is a function of the border, rather than the reason for the border's creation. The stranger is 'an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities' (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 6). In the context of the nation, the ideal citizen is constructed in opposition to the imagined strangers just outside that border, who 'function to establish and define the boundaries of who 'we' are in their very proximity' (3). As Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo argues, 'whereas those children resembling their nation's imagined face […] get invited to become members of the body politic, children who do not share this likeness are rendered *unbecoming*' (377). In both of the contexts described by *Out of Bounds, The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies,* this imagined face is a white face. While the contexts of these texts differ hugely, it is worth exploring the nature of these contexts, and how they are constructed with regard to race.

As Heather Deegan argues, the formative years of segregation in South Africa occurred during the British colonial administration of the nineteenth-century. By the time South Africa achieved full independence from Britain in 1931, laws had already been passed to restrict Black movement and land ownership. Successive white governments added to these segregation laws. The Afrikaner National Party under Daniël François Malan appealed to voters with a 'policy of explicit racism', and after their election in 1948 would implement this racism with a tranche of apartheid laws (Deegan 20). Key laws included the 1950 Group Areas Act, which comprehensively enforced separate racial residential areas, the 1953 Bantu Education Act, which created a curriculum for Africans based on ''Bantu culture' and

prepared students for manual labour', and the 1955 Natives Resettlement Act (Deegan 24). This last act gave the state powers to forcibly remove Black South Africans to townships, which were racially segregated urban areas, and 'bantustans' or 'homelands', dispersed rural areas designated on the basis of tribal ethnicity. This division of land was 'scientifically planned for the purposes of control', denying citizenship and land ownership to Black Africans whilst allowing for the influx of cheap Black labour into white areas (Mbembe 79). Developed under the pretence of allowing Black Africans to be self-governing, the creation of the bantustans was, as Steve Biko describes, a 'gigantic fraud':

> Not one of the so-called "Bantustan nations" have an intact piece of land. All of them are scattered little bits of the most unyielding soil. In each area the more productive bits are white controlled islands on which white farms or other types of industry are situated. […] Generally speaking the areas where bantustans are located are the least developed in the country, often very unsuitable either for agricultural or pastoral work. Not one of the bantustans have access to the sea and in all situations mineral rights are strictly reserved for the South African government. (81)

Biko goes on to explain that the motives behind the creation of the bantustans were to fragment collective African identity, boost intertribal hostility, and 'cheat the outside world into believing that there is some validity in the multinational theory so that South Africa can now go back into international sport, trade, politics, etc.' (83-4). The ANC, the Pan African Congress, and a myriad other groups persisted in both violent and non-violent resistance to these laws. The response to this was a series states of emergency, by which the apartheid government enabled the use of military force against its own citizens. As discussed in the Introduction, the entire edifice of apartheid rested on the scientific nonsense of racial classification, which divided people into categories of Black, Coloured, Indian and white, presupposing 'the existence of originary and distinct (already constituted) subjects, each made of a "flesh-of-race," of a "blood-of-race" able to develop according to their own precise rhythms' (Mbembe 46). When discussing *Out of Bounds* I use these terms at key points in order to place certain characters in their historical context, whilst acknowledging that these are socially constructed categories that were used as instruments of violence during the apartheid era.

Whilst the racism of the apartheid state was made hyper-visible in its codification into law, the logic of race remains concealed as it pertains to the UK border. Robinson et al. point out that Britain 'is a country with a long tradition of emigration and immigration', dating back to the French Huguenots who sought sanctuary in Britain in the seventeenth century (104). Migrants and refugees are integral to the demographic make-up of the UK, and yet anxieties about the permeability of the UK border are also integral to British political life. The numbers of people from conflict zones seeking asylum in the UK rose sharply in the 1980s and 1990s. The issue of asylum has become bound up with broader immigration debates, accompanied by widespread fear – and fearmongering – about 'bogus' asylum seekers taking advantage of the British welfare state, driven by tabloids in a 'distasteful contest to boost their readership' (Spencer 56). Although bound by the 1951 Geneva Convention to assess the claim of anyone seeking asylum and not to return them to a country where they may face a threat to life (' The 1951 Geneva Convention'), successive British governments have introduced legislation to deter asylum seekers from arriving and settling in the UK. The 1993 Immigration and Asylum Act introduced compulsory fingerprinting, as depicted in *The Other Side of Truth*, whilst limiting access to welfare. The 1996 and 1999 Acts both aimed to accelerate the application procedure and limit the right to appeal (Spencer). Access to visas became more limited, causing asylum seekers to use more dangerous methods of travel. These pieces of legislation, which extended the power of the British Home Office, can be seen as extensions of the UK border that can be brought to bear on certain bodies more than others. As Sarah Spencer notes, 'there is an irony that asylum, an institution established to serve humanitarian goals, nevertheless became the catalyst for enhancing the coercive powers of the state' (72). Whilst asylum seekers of all races can be found in the UK, the issue of race is an often-unspoken subtext within the discourse around asylum. As Gilroy points out, 'antipathy towards asylum seekers and refugees cannot be concealed, but the idea that it has anything to do with racism or ultranationalism remains shocking and induces yet more guilt' (104). As I have already suggested in the Introduction, racism in the UK is often concealed by a postcolonial anxiety, made up of nostalgia coupled with a refusal to face the atrocities of the imperial past. Whilst the British and South African contexts depicted in *Out of Bounds, The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies* are by no means parallel, there are certain similarities in the ways that borders operate in the lives of the child characters depicted. Both borders are physical,

and yet performed in certain spaces and towards certain people in order to curtail their movement. In both contexts, the logic of the border is underpinned by the logic of racism, although this logic is made invisible to some and hyper-visible to others, creating an atmosphere of surveillance. In the following analysis, I argue that these texts politicise childhood by interrogating the ways that childhood innocence is implicated in the construction of these borders. These texts present childhood as political not through dismantling the idea of childhood innocence, but by revealing how political discourses make use of the construct of innocence, and how children themselves both perform and subvert childhood innocence through their political existence.

3.2 *Out of Bounds*: the borders of apartheid

In her short story collection *Out of Bounds,* published in 2001, Naidoo interrogates the role of borders, between people and between areas of land, in the construction of apartheid ideology, and the role of children in policing and transgressing those borders. In each of the four stories analysed here, 'The Dare', 'The Noose', 'The Playground', and 'Out of Bounds', Naidoo both invokes and interrogates the concept of childhood innocence, showing how this logic of innocence was bound up with the logic of race that underpinned the borders of apartheid. These stories politicise childhood by showing the child characters, and the concept of childhood innocence itself, to be at the heart of the construction of political and social life in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Drawing together stories published in other anthologies as early as 1988 alongside some new stories written for the collection, *Out of Bounds* tells a chronological tale of apartheid history. Beginning in the 1940s, each story is set in a different decade of the apartheid regime and is linked to key events and pieces of apartheid legislation. These connections are set out in a 'Timeline Across Apartheid' that comes at the end of the book. By retelling South African history through the eyes of individual children, the text places those children at the centre of that history. For Ronit Fainman-Frenkel, the text's chronology means it functions as a novel as well as a collection of short stories, and whilst it privileges child perspectives, it is as much a text for adult readers as for children. By operating across these narrative modes,

> Naidoo draws attention to the inability of conventional systems of classification to make sense of a particular South African context where things are not what they seem. She therefore opens the possibility for meaning to be found outside of conventional bounds, where difference and sameness are not mutually exclusive of each other. (57)

Fainman-Frenkel is gesturing to the potential of this text to bring into question both the racial borders of South Africa, and the border demarcating a text's intended readership. This text does not just bear witness to historical events but constructs a historical discourse in which marginalised children are re-centred in that narration of history. As with the texts discussed in Chapter 2, *Out of Bounds* opens with a Foreword that invites the text to be read as realistic and political. Written by Anglican bishop and leader of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission Desmond Tutu, the Foreword exhorts readers to, 'after reading these quite disturbing short stories, renew our commitment to the new democracy and its culture of respect for fundamental human rights' (ix). This invitation to readers to be disturbed and unsettled by the text is an invitation into political life. This proposed reading is a didactic one, in Beauvais' sense of a 'complex transfer not just of knowledge but also of desires for the future' (43), in which readers are invited to understand the ideology of the text through affective engagement. In her request for Tutu to contribute the Foreword, Naidoo appealed to his record of advocacy for human rights, thanking him for his role as 'a steady and wonderful beacon' in the anti-apartheid struggle (Naidoo. Letter to Desmond Tutu. 5 September 2000). Tutu's response to Naidoo is not preserved in her archive, but in her letter of thanks for the Foreword she writes: 'I hope they may contribute to the purpose you suggest. 'Never again…' So much self-scrutiny, vigilance needed' (Naidoo. Letter to Desmond Tutu. 1 October 2000). In these letters, Naidoo proposes a kindred vision shared between herself and Tutu, in which she aligns her work as an author with his influential anti-apartheid and reconciliation work. As with those discussed in Chapter 2, it is a text that sets out to politicise its implied reader, and the following analysis of these four stories will reveal the ways that it also politicises childhood by showing how children and the very concept of childhood innocence were implicated in both the construction and the transgression of apartheid's borders.

3.2.1 'The Dare': performing racial innocence

The first short story in *Out of Bounds,* entitled 'The Dare', is set in 1948 to correspond with the first Afrikaner Nationalist government, which codified apartheid into a set of laws that erected physical and social borders across the nation and its body politic. Written in the third person, 'The Dare' is focalised through the perspective of Veronica, a white girl whose friends dare her to sneak on to their neighbour Jan Venter's farm and steal one of his prized poinsettias. She is terrified of Venter, but he ignores her theft, while she witnesses him beating a Black child who had stolen an orange from him. This story narrates Veronica's awakening to her own whiteness, which affords her the complacency of crossing borders and transgressing unobserved. In an interview from 2022, Naidoo indicated that her inspiration for this story came from her own childhood memories of time spent 'on a dilapidated farm that my dad had been visiting since his own childhood. You can get glimpses of it in 'The Dare' […]. As a white child, I could run freely picking fruit from the orange trees' (' Q&A with Beverley Naidoo'). Distinguishing herself from the Black children who would have been punished for doing the same, Naidoo implies a parallel between Veronica and herself. As with many accounts of her childhood, she remarks that she 'didn't stop to question why I was permitted to enjoy this freedom'. Whilst Naidoo laments this fact and may use her fiction as a corrective to it, I argue here that this lack of questioning is part of the construction of white childhood that reveals itself in 'The Dare' as yoked to innocence. As Bernstein argues, 'childhood innocence—itself raced white, itself characterized by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness—secured the unmarked status of whiteness, and the power derived from that status' (*Racial Innocence* 8). Whilst for Bernstein this is specifically applicable to constructions of race in nineteenth-century America, I extend this understanding of innocent obliviousness to demonstrate that whiteness in apartheid South Africa relied on a similar construction.

Veronica's relationships with Black South Africans start and end with her maid Rebecca. As her parents are often away working, Veronica is close to Rebecca, seeing her as a friend and confidante. From Veronica's perspective, this is a straightforward relationship. For instance, when Veronica and her family travel away from Johannesburg to spend

summer on the van Reenen farm, where the story takes place, Veronica notices that Rebecca does not join them because 'she went to visit her children, living with her grandmother, a five-hour bus ride away' (3). Couched within a timeline of apartheid, the text invites readers to be aware of the subtext that Veronica is oblivious to, which is the apartheid policy of urban separation which means that Rebecca must live apart from her children in order to be able to earn a living for them. At the beginning of the story, Veronica is blind to her own ability as a white child to cross the racialised borders that apartheid drew between people. She describes how 'sharing secrets with Rebecca was fun, especially when Rebecca had let her visit her dim, tiny room in the servant quarters' (3). Stepping over the border between her space and Rebecca's is exciting for Veronica, whilst for Rebecca it is highly risky, as revealed when 'Rebecca made her promise, 'Remember, you are not to tell your ma or pa'' (4). Veronica's whiteness means that she does not have to police the racial borders of segregation. Even as these borders cause Rebecca extreme disadvantage, it becomes her job to police them, because she will suffer more for not doing so. A key part of the construction of Veronica's whiteness, as constructed through her childhood innocence, is an obliviousness both to the borders of race, and to the consequences for Black people if those borders are crossed.

For Veronica, the privilege of the white child is not just to be oblivious to race, but to be subject to the obliviousness of others, to be able to go unnoticed. As Ahmed argues, to be coded as a stranger in a certain space is 'an experience of becoming noticeable, of not passing through or passing by, of being stopped or held up' (*On Being Included* 3). Veronica's experience is the opposite of this, as she is able to pass freely through the world without being stopped or held up, or being made the subject of another's gaze. After he has caned the Black boy for stealing the orange, Venter then approaches Veronica, and without remarking on the stolen flower he ruffles her hair and says: '*Jy is 'n van Reenen, nè?* Tell your father I'm satisfied with the fence' (10). Veronica's whiteness is a cloak for her crime, which Venter fails to notice, recognising her only as a friendly neighbour, and the hair ruffle codes her as innocent child. This moment is also the break in Veronica's obliviousness to her own privilege, but she uses this knowledge to become a 'virtuoso [performer]' of racial innocence, using it to her own advantage (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 28). She returns to her friends 'quite calmly' with not one but five stolen flowers and considers how 'she might

even take the gang some oranges' (11). This is suggestive of the broader way that whiteness functions as a cloak for the plundering of resources without consequence. And whilst Veronica is able to remain unnoticed, the Black servant boy is not: if childhood innocence is coded as white, the Black child in this story is coded neither as a child, nor as innocent. This can be observed as a Black maid comes to his defence: ''He's only a child, my Baas. Once the Baas was also a child!'' (9). The ineffectiveness of this defence, which only angers Venter, reveals that this recourse to childhood innocence holds little meaning when not attached to whiteness. In this opening story, Naidoo illustrates that this construction of whiteness as innocent, invisible, and able to cross borders is essential to the apartheid project, and that in learning to perform the scripts of racial innocence, white children were implicated in the construction of apartheid's racial borders.

3.2.2 'The Noose': apartheid death-worlds

'The Noose' is the second story in the collection. Set in 1955, in Naidoo's 'Timeline Across Apartheid' the story is located alongside three pieces of apartheid legislation: the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the 1950 Population Registration Act that enforced the system of classifying people as white, Coloured, Indian, or Black, and the 1950 Group Areas Act that segregated each of these groups. The title and the repetition of the motif of the noose represents these systems of segregation, these borders between people, as executioner's tools, used to confer forms of social and real death upon non-white South Africans. The story introduces Jacob, a 9-year-old Coloured boy, as his family are preparing to be moved from their mixed community to a segregated township. As Jacob frets over the move, and worries that his parents will forget his 10th birthday in the upheaval, his father is required to attend the Pass Office to receive his Population Registration Certificate that will designate him as a Coloured person. After a degrading process of questioning and physical examination, the officers reject his application to be registered as Coloured. The story ends as the family realise what this will mean for them, as Jacob foresees his father losing his job and being separated from the family. The process of racial classification operates as a constant threat of death held over the lives these characters. Within his formulation of 'necropolitics', Mbembe describes how power is deployed against the stranger to create

'death-worlds, that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead' (92). The social and physical borders of apartheid created such 'death-worlds' in which non-white people were subjected to social death through exclusion from normal social life, and physical death in the form of starvation or execution. Whilst 'The Dare' interrogates the construction of whiteness in its relationship to childhood innocence, 'The Noose' mobilises childhood innocence as a rhetorical device that Jacob is robbed of. In this sense, the creation of apartheid deathworlds constitutes an adultification of non-white children, who are robbed of their childhood innocence in being made subject to the borders of apartheid.

As in the texts discussed in Chapter 2, focalisation through Jacob's perspective requires that all necessary political context be communicated to Jacob – and therefore to readers – through conversations with the various adult characters. Jacob's Uncle Richard is vocal in his critique of both the Boers and the English:

> White people have had the noose around all our necks ever since your great-grandpa's people sailed from over the seas with their bibles and your great-grandma's people had the land. Now his people have the land, her people got the bible and we, in the middle, landed in the ditch! (18).

This framing of apartheid lets readers know that the racist violence of South Africa predates apartheid, originating with the first European settlers in the 17th century. Uncle Richard presents Coloured people as alienated from both parts of their cultural heritage, with social borders on both sides preventing them from attaining whiteness and from mixing with their Black African neighbours. Uncle Richard's stance is one of resistance to this bordered existence, saying 'one day you Coloureds who keep praying that Brother Whitey will invite you to sit at his table will realise that the drawbridge to his castle was pulled up a long time ago! The only place he'll have you is toiling in the kitchen with our black brothers' (18). Uncle Richard speaks in solidarity with Black South Africans and criticises those who crave proximity to whiteness. This moment demonstrates how the borders are enforced through this aspirational whiteness, eroding solidarity between Black and Coloured people.

The passbook features in 'The Noose' as the tool by which these borders between people and areas are performed. Jacob knows that his family's 'black friends hated the little

book that they had to carry everywhere they went […] as if they were work animals to be kept chained and branded with their owner's label' (26). This policing of the borders of segregation is represented as a dehumanising process in which Black people are dispossessed of their bodies. When he witnesses the pass office, Jacob describes the Black people lined up outside as tired-looking, 'like prisoners of war' (26), and Jacob's father describes the experience of being questioned and examined by the pass officers 'like I was a horse' (30). This examination of the body is another example of how being coded as a stranger is to be made hyper-visible and subject to state surveillance, as is the case in 'The Dare'. Just as 'The Dare' narrates Veronica's awakening to her own whiteness, 'The Noose' dramatises Jacob's growing awareness of the ways that his racial coding operates as a spectre of death: 'the year I turned ten, apartheid gripped me fully by the throat for the first time' (12). His awareness of the vulnerability of his racialised body is a coming-of-age moment: 'I suddenly felt much older. […] And for the first time I knew what Uncle Richard meant by 'the noose around all our necks'' (31). This is suggestive of a kinship model of childhood, whereby both adults and children are shown to be subject to the same social forces. For Jacob, gaining knowledge of this threat of death entails a loss of the ignorance and innocence of childhood, causing him to feel that he has aged. This is one of the key instances in which, whilst interrogating its construction as it relates to race, Naidoo also utilises the affective power of the concept of childhood innocence to give impact to her narrative. However, as Bernstein suggests, racial innocence entails an 'exclusion of black youth from the category of childhood' (16). In utilising the trope of childhood innocence, 'The Noose' also suggests that the borders of apartheid place Black and Coloured children outside the borders of childhood that are policed by racial innocence.

3.2.3 'The Playground': dismantling racial purity

Reserving the next three stories in *Out of Bounds* for my discussion of child agency in Chapter 4, I turn to 'The Playground', which is set in 1995, a year after Mandela is elected as president of the newly democratic South Africa. The story coincides with the mandatory desegregation of schools, and depicts Rosa, one of the first Black children to attend what was previously an all-white school. This story demonstrates how, as a result of 'the

annihilation anxiety felt by the settlers' (Mbembe 46), the physical and racial borders of apartheid are built on a white obsession with racial purity. This racial purity is shown to be underpinned by the innocence of the white child, which stands to be polluted by integration. Whilst interrogating this construction of innocence, this story also indicates how the performance of childhood innocence can be a cloak for the transgression of borders, but also utilises its rhetorical power to represent children as best placed to make this sort of transgression.

The apartheid border is literally visible in this story, which opens with the image of a fence. As she walks past the fence of the previously all-white school that she will soon join, Rosa compares the curiosity of the white children to 'cats hoping to play with a mouse' (77). In entering what had previously been their space, Rosa is made hyper-visible – just like the Black boy in 'The Dare' – to the predatory white gaze, transgressing a social border that is still in place even as the legal border has been removed. This shifting landscape is experienced by Rosa through strong conflicting emotions: 'why shouldn't she be inside if she chose? But with the children's laughter now breaking behind her, she felt hot and angry' (77). Rosa can articulate her right to belong in this newly desegregated space, whilst still feeling the effects of racism on her sense of physical safety. Her attendance at the desegregated school will not require her to transgress the laws of her country, but will require her to defy its entrenched social borders. The second border in this story is between Rosa and Hennie, the son of the white family for whom her mother works as a maid. The two children have played together 'since they were babies' (80), whenever Rosa's mother went to work, and yet are divided by the racial hierarchies of their society. Rosa recalls that Hennie's mother, Mevrou van Niekerk, concealed from her husband the fact that the children play together each day, arguing that their play was 'just children's games' (82). Childhood innocence here acts as a cloak for the transgressive and political potential of these games, which form the groundwork for the dismantling of social borders that Rosa and Hennie will perform as older children. Hennie's father, Meneer van Niekerk, was less flexible, and when he found out about Hennie and Rosa's games, he responded angrily: 'What do you think you're doing? Running around like a savage? Half-naked with this *piccanin?*' (81) Meneer van Niekerk's concept of whiteness is tied to purity, which he sees as being at risk of pollution by proximity to Rosa's blackness. Hennie's father insists that his

son must 'know he's a white boy' (81). Hennie's capacity to be a white child, and therefore a child at all, depends on his ability to uphold the racial innocence ensured by segregation.

While upset by memories of this event, neither Rosa nor her mother is shaken from their resolution that integration will benefit everyone. To galvanise her before she starts at her new desegregated school, Rosa's mother teaches her the Southern African philosophy of *ubuntu*:

> My grandmother taught me an old Zulu saying: "*Ubuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu*" … "People are people through other people." It means we are who we are in the way we treat others. Even here, Rosa, people will begin to learn that too. (85)

Invoking the philosophy of *ubuntu* links the text to the anti-apartheid struggle, as this phrase was often used by Mandela, and by Tutu in his work on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, this is not a didactic moment for Rosa, but rather a statement about what integration will mean for the white population. Rosa's mother's argument that 'people will begin to learn' is directed at white people, implying that they will stand to benefit from losing their ideology of racial purity, instead being able to define themselves by a care for those they considered strangers. In keeping with this lesson, it is Hennie, not Rosa, who undergoes an evolution of character through the dismantling of racial borders. After being reprimanded by his father, Rosa remarks feeling 'quite invisible' to Hennie on the subsequent occasions that she accompanies her mother to the van Niekerk house (83). His character development therefore comes as surprise to Rosa when he steps in to protect her from bullies at her new school: ''Leave Rosa alone!' She knew that voice! Swinging around, she saw Hennie stride out of the alley. His angry eyes and forehead were so like his father's! Even his voice had the same fierceness' (90). This moment represents Hennie's embodiment of his white supremacist heritage and his choice to depart from it, crossing the social borders that his father had taught him to observe. The positive effects of integration on the Black population are taken for granted in 'The Playground'. The revelation offered by this story concerns the effects of integration on the white population. The philosophy of *ubuntu* is a rejection of the purity insisted upon by whiteness, stating instead that an encounter and relationship with the 'other' is the best foundation for identity formation. However, in rejecting apartheid constructions of racial innocence, this

story suggests that the performance of childhood innocence can also be the site for the transgression of the borders of race.

3.2.4 'Out of Bounds': care across borders

Whilst 'The Playground' begins with a fence, 'Out of Bounds', the final story in the collection to which it lends its title, begins with a wall. Set in 2000, 6 years after the first democratic elections in South Africa, this story coincides with floods that led to many refugees coming into South Africa from Mozambique, as well as causing many South Africans to be internally displaced. 'Out of Bounds' embodies what Fainman-Frenkel describes as 'a post-Apartheid shift where certain types of prejudice have become linked to class rather than race' (61). The story depicts the perspective of Rohan, the son of a wealthy Indian family. Squatters displaced by the floods have moved on to nearby land, and Rohan's father and the other families nearby have reinforced the concrete wall that surrounds their property. It is unclear whether the squatters are internally displaced people, or from Mozambique, but Rohan is warned to stay away from them. But when a young boy Solani comes to Rohan's house to ask for water, Rohan lets him in, and accompanies him back to the squatter camp to bring water to Solani's mother, who is giving birth. This story disavows the innocence of childhood in depicting this act of care across borders as a type of disobedience, but it also invokes the power of this innocence in positioning Rohan and Solani as best placed to transgress these borders because they are children. Throughout, this story privileges Rohan's perspective, positioning this encounter with difference as an opportunity for his development into a political subject.

The residents of Mount View, Rohan's community, perform a kind of care that includes some and excludes others. They rally round a neighbour when she is robbed, but view the squatters with suspicion. Discussion among the neighbours is summarised by the narrator: 'why should private house owners be expected to provide water for these people? That was the Council's job' (95). By positioning the squatters as strangers, the residents of Mount View are able to abdicate responsibility for their care. Rohan's father describes them as 'tough as ticks', a dehumanising metaphor used to convince Rohan that the squatters do

not need any help (95). Rohan's mother is shocked by a TV news report of a woman having to give birth in a tree, which corresponds to a real news report held in Naidoo's archive (Njanji): ''Those poor people! What a place to give birth!'' (97). Whilst she feels sorry for those who are suffering in another country, this sympathy does not extend to the squatters, who are viewed with suspicion. This corresponds with Ahmed's formulation of the stranger, who is defined as such only through proximity: 'others become strangers […] only through coming *too close to* home' (*Strange Encounters* 12). When Rohan asks his mother if the floods will come to them, she responds ''No, we'll be alright, son. But that lot out there will get it. The government really should do something' (97). Whilst she is able to grieve for the suffering of those in another country, she cannot do so for those to whom she lives in close proximity, because to do so would mean taking responsibility for their suffering. In order to absolve herself of responsibility she remains at a greater affective distance from those in closer proximity to her. This reveals the means by which the community places borders around its capacity for care.

Rohan engages in an act of disobedience by crossing the borders of care that his community has established. Having been explicitly forbidden to do so, Rohan opens the door to help Solani when his parents are away. Whilst Rohan has some fears of his parent's anger, his worldview is different from theirs, in that he has not cultivated the affective distance from his squatter neighbours that his parents have: 'This was an emergency. Not on television but right in front of him. Still Rohan hesitated. His parents would be extremely cross that he had put himself in this situation' (99). The sound of the water filling Solani's bucket reminds him of 'the water swirling beneath the Mozambiquan woman with her baby. *Her* rescuer had been taking a really big risk but hadn't looked big-headed' (100). The story from the television comes to mirror the one in front of him, so that rather than distancing himself from his neighbours as his parents do, he acts to help those in proximity to him. When he enters the squatter camp to help carry water for Solani's mother, Rohan learns that it is not only within his own community that strangers are feared. He is shouted at in Zulu – a language he cannot understand – by a man who is suspicious of his presence in the squatter camp. When Rohan later asks about it, Solani responds: 'they don't know you. Sometimes people come and attack us. So if a stranger comes, they must always check first' (106). Rohan reflects that they must surely know he was from Mount View: 'the houses that

also did not welcome strangers' (106). The absurdity of the fear held by his own community is exposed when Rohan realises that he is just as feared by the squatters. There is a moment of solidarity between the two boys in their joint transgression of the social boundaries set up by their elders, as Rohan realises that 'each of them had taken a risk' through this interaction (107). In this way, this story both interrogates and utilises the idea of childhood innocence. The text valorises Rohan and Solani's disobedience, which breaks the code of innocence that their communities would uphold, but the text also positions Rohan and Solani as best placed to transgress the borders of care because, as children, they have not yet been polluted by the suspicious attitude held by the adults in their communities. Even as it depicts this border crossing as a joint transgression, the story nonetheless privileges Rohan's perspective. Solani remains an enigmatic figure throughout, and his point of view is absent from the text, which is solely focalised through Rohan's perspective. Solani is a vehicle for Rohan's self-development. Having had no previous interest in current affairs or politics, after his encounter with Solani 'Rohan surprised his parents by joining them for the eight o'clock news' (107). He has become engaged in empathy for those outside his community and politicised by his encounter across the borders of his community, praying that 'Cyclone Gloria would keep well away' from the squatters' shacks below (107). Whilst it models care across borders, this text also positions such encounters as opportunities for the political development of privileged children. This is also suggestive of one of the pitfalls of the mode of reading that Naidoo's work invites. In inviting readers into political awakening, as I have suggested in Chapter 2, these texts risk using their African characters as tools for the political development of their British readership.

These four stories, when read together, offer a fictionalisation of Spyrou and Christou's assertion that 'children are implicated in acts of inclusion and exclusion in ways that create and recreate borders, sometimes solidifying their power and at other times challenging or transgressing it' (5). Children are implicated in the creation and transgression of borders in *Out of Bounds,* and childhood innocence as a construct is shown to be wedded to the logic of the border. For the white children in the collection, childhood innocence is a script that they are invited to perform, reinscribing an obliviousness to race and racist oppression that is at the heart of whiteness. For the Black characters, this performance of innocence is also used as a cloak for their transgression of the borders of apartheid. Whilst

interrogating childhood innocence and its role in the construction of white purity, these texts also show Naidoo utilising childhood innocence as a rhetorical device for inviting sympathy from readers, and for imbuing her characters with a greater purity of motive in their care across borders. The political work of this collection does not lie in a total disavowal of childhood innocence, but in exposing the ways that the politics of race are constructed in partnership with this logic of innocence. The politicisation of children in this text comes from their capacity to creatively perform and subvert the scripts of childhood innocence as a route into political life.

3.3 *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies:* performing the UK border

In representing the working of the UK border in the lives of Sade and Femi, *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies* depict a political form of childhood, in which the workings of political bodies and legislation in the lives of children are made visible. At the end of *The Other Side of Truth,* Sade, Femi, and Papa are reunited, in a hopeful ending to an otherwise bleak text. *Web of Lies* picks up the story two years on. The novel is narrated in the third person, focalised chiefly through Femi's perspective, interspersed with extracts from Sade's journal. The family are still waiting to have their asylum claim assessed, and Papa has found work as a taxi driver, as well as beginning a tentative relationship with Cynthie Wallace, a fellow journalist from Sierra Leone. Both children chafe against the restrictions imposed by their father and by their unresolved immigration status, and Femi joins a gang selling drugs. After a deal goes wrong and Femi loses the money, a dispute leads to another boy being shot and injured. Femi is initially arrested before being quickly released, but in retaliation the family's flat is subject to an arson attack by the gang. As a result, gang leader Errol is arrested and charged with arson, and the family leave London together to settle with the children's uncle in Devon. The novel once again ends with the family safe and together, but their asylum claim remains unresolved, giving a sense of precarity to the safety achieved at the novel's end. In *Out of Bounds,* the physical borders erected by apartheid legislation translate onto social borders, which are performed and transgressed by Naidoo's child characters. In *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies,* the physical UK border operates in a similar way, as a physical space that is performed at certain

sites and on certain bodies. This performance places the characters in a state of limbo, in an atmosphere of persistent surveillance. As in *Out of Bounds,* the logic of the border in these two novels is underpinned by racism, which is depicted through individual acts of anti-African bullying and misogyny, as a systemic force, driven by a concealed colonial past. In her focus on Sade, Wilkie-Stibbs argues that these forces

> deprive her of her chance to experience the kind of ideals of childhood to which she would otherwise be exposed, and to grieve. Thus, the boundaries of officially inscribed definitions of childhood, and of what it means to be a child, as conjectured by Western norms, are again brought into sharp focus and are challenged. (37)

I agree that in their depictions of the UK border and the logic of race underpinning it, *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies* contest the construct of childhood innocence. However, as well as showing the refugee protagonists to be both excluded from the category of innocence, these texts also represent them as able to perform and wrestle with the construct of innocence as they endeavour to negotiate their own agency within this atmosphere of surveillance.

3.3.1 Non-places in The Other Side of Truth

In Chapter 2, I discussed Naidoo's immersive research process, whereby she spent time in the spaces her characters would occupy in order to imagine their perspectives. Several of these spaces were sites pertaining to the UK border, in particular Campsfield detention centre and the Asylum Screening Unit at Lunar House in London. In this chapter I argue that in *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies,* the detention centre, the asylum screening unit, and the airport appear as 'non-places' in which the UK border is performed. Furthermore, this performance of the border creates a sense in which the characters are under constant surveillance. The motif of 'the eyes' recurs throughout *The Other Side of Truth*, pointing to this state of surveillance. This is foreshadowed in Lagos airport, where they meet a man 'wearing a flowing white agbada with a pattern of staring jet black eyes', who observes Femi's discomfort as they queue for security, asking: ''Doesn't he want to go on a plane?'' (41). Although intended innocently, this deepens Sade's sense of fear and

paranoia, creating a sense of being constantly observed that will persist throughout the novel. Sade makes up names for many of the people she meets, and these are adopted by the third person narratorial voice as events are focalised from her perspective. This man at the airport is 'Mr Agbada Eyes', and the officials at British passport control are 'The Eyes': 'The Eyes suddenly flicked back to them, resting briefly on each in turn. As if taking three snapshots. Sade's stomach tightened and for the first time she began to worry about the passport' (53). 'The Eyes' alludes to an association with surveillance. Fearing not only being watched, but being recorded, the family have a sense of being made the object of the gaze of the British state which persists throughout the novel, and becomes the key mechanism by which the UK border is performed in both this text and its sequel.

The concept of the 'non-place', coined to describe transitory and non-relational spaces of modernity such as airports, shopping centres, and chain hotels (Augé), has since been associated with 'surveillance' and 'disciplinary confinement' (Sharma, 130). I argue that the airport, the asylum screening unit, and the detention centre function as non-places in *The Other Side of Truth,* through a suspension of the normal rules of social life, and the creation of a perpetual sense of surveillance. The asylum screening unit and the detention centre become extensions of the UK border as it manifests itself in the airport: when they visit Papa at Heathlands detention centre, Sade perceives that 'once again they were entering the territory of The Eyes' (221). Hidden away in the Oxfordshire countryside and given a neutral-sounding name, 'Heathlands did not sound like a prison. But when Sade and Femi clambered out into the country lane where Mama Appiah parked, they stared up at a six-metre-high wire fence topped with great loops of barbed wire' (221). This description highlights how concealment from the general population, who can move freely, is a key facet of the logic of the border to which Sade and her family are subject. This is similar to dynamic of white obliviousness seen in 'The Dare', whereby white children are invited to perform innocence and ignorance of the borders of race, whilst Black children are made hyper-visible by the borders. In the same way, those deemed 'legal' in the UK are made oblivious to the performance of the border, whilst those are defined as 'illegal' experience the border as a constant presence. Inside Heathlands, Sade points out the cameras to Femi: 'the Eyes were everywhere' (222). Naidoo's depiction of these border spaces is recognisable in Mbembe's concept of necropower, which operates through 'a division of space into

compartments' and 'a setting of boundaries and internal frontiers' (79). In this sense, just like the segregated spaces of apartheid South Africa, these spaces function as 'death-worlds', in which detained refugees hold the 'status of the living dead' (92). For the characters in *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies,* this living death is the state of limbo in which the border is always a felt presence in their lives.

The logic of racial innocence operates more covertly in constructions of the UK border, but nonetheless is used to render certain children as 'other' by distancing them from the innocence commonly ascribed to children. In interrogating this, Naidoo also invokes the construct of childhood innocence to generate sympathy for Sade and Femi, as is the case in 'The Noose'. As discussed in Chapter 2, in order to maintain Sade's focalised perspective, all contextual information is conveyed in conversation with other characters. Taking Sade and Femi to Lunar House to register their asylum claim, the children's lawyer, Mr Nathan, rages at their being made to stand outside in the winter cold: ''twenty floors of office space – and not a decent waiting room!' He jerked his head upwards. 'It really is a disgrace! No other government department makes people wait outside like this!'' (132). As with many of the benevolent adult figures in the novel, Mr Nathan becomes a conduit for Naidoo's authorial voice at this moment, communicating a critique of the immigration system. His comment implies that making people queue outside is a deliberate choice which increases the atmosphere of hostility that is unique to this facet of government. This choice can be seen as a function of necropower, which operates with 'the capacity to define who matters and who does not' (80). The second function of the border as it operates at the asylum screening unit is the association of asylum seekers with criminality. As part of their screening for an asylum application, Sade and Femi must be fingerprinted, which greatly upsets Femi: ''Do they think we are thieves?' he muttered fiercely. 'Many people say that children should not be fingerprinted,' said Mr Nathan quietly. 'But I'm afraid the rules allow it.'' (134). Mr Nathan is the novel's voice of protest at this practice, standing in for the "many people" who argue that the immigration system – "the rules" – undermines the personhood of child asylum seekers. Femi's fear that they are judged to be thieves signposts the criminalisation of young Black male asylum seekers that hangs over him in Britain, and persists in *Web of Lies*. Furthermore, as Wilkie-Stibbs argues, on entering the UK, the children lose their right 'to be presumed innocent' (38). The finger-printing episode

highlights how asylum seeker children are defined against the logic of childhood innocence, and against the category of child itself, having both their age and morality called into question. In interrogating this construction of innocence, Naidoo also uses the words of Mr Nathan to reinscribe Femi's innocence, in order to underscore the harshness of the treatment he receives and generate sympathy for him.

3.3.2 Immigration limbo in Web of Lies

As in *The Other Side of Truth,* the immigration system continues to feature in *Web of Lies as* an invisible, ever-present character. The sense of surveillance persists in this text, as does the sense of living a border existence in limbo. When Femi's involvement in Errol's gang puts the family in danger, Papa speculates about moving out of London, even though their lack of refugee status will make it hard for him to find work. Femi is unsettled by his words: '*Refugee status.* There it was again. The immigration officers held a giant cloud over them, threatening a storm at any point. Papa was talking about choices but it seemed they didn't have any' (165). The lack of agency that the family experience is reinforced here, as is the sense of the immigration system as a constant invisible threat. The phrase 'refugee status' is like a refrain in Femi's life, reminding him that he cannot enter certain spaces and forming the lens through which his day-to-day experiences are filtered. Describing the headmaster of his school as 'grim enough to be an immigration officer!', he contemplates making a joke about it to his friend Gary, but realises that 'he had hardly ever spoken, not even to Gary, about their immigration trouble' (11). As well as affecting his daily life, his immigration status and his family's story are a burden that Femi feels unable to share with anyone. His choice to keep silent, as he does for most of *The Other Side of Truth,* is in one sense the only act of autonomy left available to him – he chooses to guard his story after everything else has been taken away. Yet the text also suggests that this choice is the result of shame, which I argue is another facet of how the immigration system is depicted as creating 'death-worlds' for asylum seekers. This shame stems partly from his feelings of difference when compared to his peers. When he is unable to join his peers on a school trip to France, Papa explains that 'Femi could leave England, but the immigration officers wouldn't let him back in! […] Where would they expect him to go? A twelve-year-old boy,

who didn't even speak French, all alone in France' (12). Written in the third person narrative voice, it is unclear whether these words are Papa's perspective, Femi's, or that of the unseen narrator. This is another example of Naidoo invoking the construct of childhood innocence in order to reinforce the political purposes of the novel.

The depiction of the immigration system in *Web of Lies* is more complex than in *The Other Side of Truth,* representing its incompetence as well as its production of surveillance. Femi refers to 'The Interview' which Papa will have to attend with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) to verify the truth of his asylum claim. After being called to The Interview, Papa receives a letter informing him that 'the immigration officers had lost all his papers, including their own records of The Interview' (14) and that he must begin the process all over again. As well as reinforcing the lack of control that the family have over their future, this episode is constructed to represent the IND as incompetent. Rather than giving the family some freedom, this incompetence in fact deepens the sense of limbo in which the characters live, placing them at the mercy of an unreliable and unpredictable system. The sense of surveillance never dissipates, and Femi fears that his gang record will affect their asylum claim. The truth that is deferred until the end of the novel is that the family are very unlikely to have their claim approved. This is communicated to readers through Sade's diary entries, after she has learnt that every Nigerian asylum request for the past three years has been rejected: 'if they haven't believed THOUSANDS of other Nigerians, what are our chances??? They claim to be fair but, if you are Nigerian, they don't even care whether your story is true' (211). Based on Naidoo's research of asylum policy during the period, this language presents the system as rigged against Nigerians. Sade acknowledges that her father could have concealed this news, but she would 'rather face the harsh truth than be tangled in another web of lies' (213). This is a political statement, and a rejection of innocence, insofar as it is a rejection of the impulse to protect children from knowledge of the politics of their existence. It can also be read as a defence of Naidoo's writing. In Sade's description of the sort of story she wants to be part of, readers are invited into a celebration of stories that do not hide harsh truths from them. By writing in this way, Naidoo is commenting on her refusal to construct her readers as innocent, instead constructing a political reader who is capable of receiving knowledge of political realities.

3.3.3 Anti-African racism in The Other Side of Truth *and* Web of Lies

The problems that Sade and Femi face are related primarily to their status as asylum seekers, but certain incidents show that race is the subtext through which the UK border is upheld in British social life. In all of these incidents, it is important to note that it is her African rather than her Nigerian identity that is highlighted, indicating that her British peers hold a homogeneous view of Africans. The main antagonists that Sade faces in *The Other Side of Truth* are two girls in her class, Donna and Marcia, who use their knowledge of her African identity to make her feel excluded. Sade's name becomes the focal point of this anti-African racism, marking her out as different from her British peers. Mocking her spelling of Sade, one of them jibes: 'don't need to spell in the bush!' (158). When the teacher notices their taunts, they respond: 'Remember you told us about African customs, sir. You know, long names. How they all have different meanings and that' (158). In a performance of innocence, Donna and Marcia are depicted as using these scripts of education as a cloak for their racism. When Sade is cornered in a bathroom by Donna and Marcia, who mimic their teacher's praise of her English proficiency, Sade responds: 'we have lots of languages. One of them is English' (163). Exposing the limits of Donna and Marcia's knowledge, whilst conferring this knowledge on readers, this moment invites a shared conspiratorial moment between Sade and readers. However, whilst readers are encouraged to critique Donna and Marcia's behaviour as racist, by aligning readers' perspective with Sade's, the text does not necessarily invite readers to question their own bias.

The depiction of this anti-African racism in both *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies* is complicated by the fact that some of the perpetrators of this bullying are Black British themselves, allowing for an exploration of the covert ways that race informs the borders of British identity. In *The Other Side of Truth,* it is made clear that Donna is white and Marcia is Black British with Jamaican ancestry. After the bathroom incident, Sade's Somali friend Mariam explains: ''They don't like Africans. I don't know why'' (164). Les Back et al. have explored the hostility faced by recent migrants to Britain from other minority groups, arguing that 'a colonizing culture makes the colonized in its own image, drawing them within the colonial order and establishing a hierarchy that divides and orders' (144). They describe this pattern as 'new hierarchies of belonging', whereby the systemic racism present

in the UK causes different ethnic minorities to be divided against each other. In *Web of Lies,* this prejudice takes on a different quality. Marcia still refers to Sade as 'Miss Queen of Africa' (159), but Sade is also pursued by Errol, Marcia's older brother and the leader of the gang who grooms Femi. Towards the novel's end, she recounts how Errol had caught her alone after school months previously: 'He and his friend pushed me against the wall, and he was saying all these stupid things, like I was an "African Queen", and his tongue was flicking all over my face and his hand crawling all over me and I was struggling to get away' (189). This sexual assault is based on a fetishisation of her African-ness, which is the other side of the coin of the racism she experiences from others. Elsewhere, Errol explains why he targets Sade: she is a 'decent' girl, 'different' from the other girls: 'like one of them African princesses – and she's got pride' (35). He views her lack of interest in him as a challenge, but he also fetishises her as an African; this connects this incident to the anti-African racism she was subjected to it *The Other Side of Truth*. In seeking to expose the racial hierarchies that covertly inform the borders of Britishness, and inviting solidarity with Black Africans, these two novels also risk generating stereotypes of Black Britons, who are some of the main antagonists in both texts. As I go on to discuss in Chapter 5, a key part of Naidoo's process in representing experiences outside of her own in *Web of Lies* was to collaborate with young people. The themes of anti-African racism that Naidoo raises in her novel were raised in workshops with her young collaborators, many of whom were recent immigrants from various African countries and saw this as a key issue facing them in school. This process seems to have enabled Naidoo to construct the anti-African racism depicted in *Web of Lies.*

3.3.4 Systemic racism and colonial history in **Web of Lies**

Whilst *The Other Side of Truth* only explicitly represents these individual acts of racism, *Web of Lies* does more to suggest that racism is shaped by social systems and colonial history, and is therefore deeply implicated in shaping the UK border that is weaponised against Sade and Femi. The high-profile deaths of young Black men in London haunt both novels. Naidoo dedicated the second edition and all subsequent editions of *The Other Side of Truth* to Damilola Taylor, a 10-year-old Nigerian boy and recent immigrant to the UK who was stabbed by two other boys on his way home from school in 2000. This was

followed by one of the most high-profile police investigations of its time, provoking criticism of police procedures, and 'much national soul-searching about inner-city poverty, gang culture, and youth crime' (Jones). Within a folder in her archive containing newspaper articles for her *Web of Lies* research*,* Naidoo has written: 'beginning with newspaper I bought on way to Smarties Award, 29/11/2000. 'my Femi'…' ('Original folder label: beginning with newspaper'). Elsewhere, Naidoo recalls how she picked up this newspaper that reported on Taylor's death on the way to receive this award for *The Other Side of Truth* (Rochman). As well as dedicating *The Other Side of Truth* to him, this folder, which contains many reports from around the time of Taylor's death, indicates that he became an inspiration as she developed the character of Femi in *Web of Lies.* Taylor is not mentioned in *Web of Lies,* as the novel takes place in 1997, three years before his murder, but Naidoo's research reveals that he was an important touchstone in her development of the narrative. Taylor's murder was never deemed to be racially motivated, but tapped into nationally shared fears about the pollution of childhood innocence in urban environments. Naidoo's references to Taylor invoke these fears, which she uses to generate further sympathy for her child characters. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, questions about Taylor also formed a key part of her collaborative work with young people during the novel's development, providing a touchstone for strengthening the credibility of the work.

While the integrity of the novel's timeline means that Taylor is not referenced directly in the text of *Web of Lies,* the text does directly reference the death of Stephen Lawrence, an 18-year-old Black British man who was murdered in a racist attack in London in 1993. This was a similarly high-profile case, triggering the 1999 Macpherson report, which exposed the structural racism of the British criminal justice system in its handling of the murder (Storry). By the time *Web of Lies* was published, the Stephen Lawrence case had become a byword for racist policing, and in referencing it, the novel gestures to the racist social systems underpinning the performance of the UK border in everyday life. When Femi protests at the unfairness of not being allowed out alone, Papa says: '*was it fair when those racist boys killed Stephen Lawrence? He was also minding his own business'* (40). The text is clear that this was a racist attack, and that London is dangerous due the presence of racists on its streets. Papa's statement is suggestive of a double standard that applies to Femi as a young Black man: he must make more effort to keep himself safe, but he could also be the

victim of racist violence even if he makes this effort to 'mind his own business'. In minding his own business, Lawrence is positioned as innocent, and although he was 18 at the time of his death, this innocence is underscored by his youthful proximity to childhood. Through the reference to Lawrence and Taylor, their child-like innocence is invoked to strengthen the critique of racism in both texts, and to interrogate the systems of racism by which border the construction of British identity.

In *Web of Lies,* this suggestion of systemic racism is linked to Britain's colonial past. Papa's fear for Femi's safety is mingled with anguish at the disconnect between the reality of life in Britain for an asylum seeker, and the story that Britain told about itself to its colonies and former colonies. In an article, Papa writes that 'when I was a schoolboy, I grew up believing the streets of London were paved with gold. Our teachers from England impressed on us that everything was perfect in the 'mother country'' (41). *Web of Lies* is set in 1997, and as the parent of teenagers, Papa is likely to have been a child in the last decades before Nigerian Independence in 1960, as is implied by his article. As a child of British colonialism, he was taught to revere and aspire to Britishness. This informs both his decision to bring his family to the UK as refugees, and his disappointment and fear at the reality of London life. His 'mother country', the place where he sought protection and nurture, has transpired to be a place of further danger for his family. The text also suggests that traces of empire are made visible within the architecture of London. A key instance of this comes from Sade's recollection of her first visit to the Tower of London:

> Last summer, when Uncle Roy had brought them all on a trip here, Sade had said that the cawing made her think of the cries of people whose heads had been chopped off inside the Tower. But when the guide invited them to admire the brilliance of the diamonds in the Crown Jewels and the Royal Sceptre, Papa murmured that the ravens could be cawing for people in Africa too. *How many people have lost their lives because of diamonds? If only we could eat the wretched stones, they would offer us life, not death!* (78)

In Sade's imagination, the Tower becomes a site not of national pride, but of historical trauma, having born witness to many deaths. For Papa the ravens bear witness to a different sort of violence: that of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation in Africa. The Crown jewels, a symbol of Britain's wealth and global power, are for him symbol of death, linking

diamond mining to poverty and exploitation in Africa. In imagining the ravens of the Tower of London as witnesses to these traumas, the text repurposes this well-known London tourist attraction as a site of mourning, allowing for an interrogation of British colonialism, and inviting readers to observe the ways that the borders of the British empire still define contemporary British life

3.3.5 Border agency: wrestling with childhood innocence

As I will go on to explore in the next chapter, the question of childhood innocence is bound up with the question of child agency. Throughout the texts explored here, Naidoo's characters are shown to possess a contingent agency in the ways that they both repurpose and reject the scripts of childhood innocence in negotiating their experiences at the border. For Femi in *Web of Lies,* his sense of his own agency also clashes with the expectations placed on him as a child. Femi recalls an incident in primary school where had 'defended himself against three bully boys and their sly taunts about refugees' (39). Femi prides himself on being able to look after himself, learning self-sufficiency and not leaning on authority figures for his safety. This sense of self-sufficiency clashes with Papa's restrictions on his going out alone:

> Papa said that the decision was for his 'own good'. It was the same when he and Sade were smuggled out of Nigeria. He hadn't wanted to leave, but Papa and Uncle Tunde had insisted that London would be safer. Grown-ups said what suited them. Papa just didn't want to believe that he could look after himself. (40)

Whilst Papa's fear is rooted in the dangers he perceives in London, particularly for Black boys, Femi views his protectiveness as an extension of the forces that led to him being taken to the UK against his will. Femi's resentment is rooted in the lack of choice he has been given about the course of his life, and this provides context for his choice to join Errol's gang. *Web of Lies* dramatises the complexities of Femi's search for agency, setting up an antagonism that Femi perceives between himself and the adults in his life. This episode shows Femi wrestling with his status as a child, and resisting the innocence that his father would ascribe to him. Yet even as he insists on his own agency, he is vulnerable to

exploitation, and the novel insists on holding these two truths in tension. In this way, the border between innocence and experience is blurred, as Femi still requires care even as he rejects the scripts of childhood innocence. In this episode, as in all of the texts explored in this chapter, Naidoo does not seek to dismantle the construct of childhood innocence, but probes its limits, interrogating the ways that it is implicated in defining the borders of nations and the social borders between groups of people.

Whilst *Out of Bounds* shows how apartheid made racism the explicit law of the land, in *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies,* race operates more covertly in defining the UK border. Race is shown to police the borders of British identity, and is performed by children, as well as being legible in the landmarks of London that allude to British imperial history. While the UK border is made permeable and largely invisible for UK citizens, for the asylum seeker protagonists the border is hyper-visible, as well as rendering them hyper-visible to the surveillance of the state. This visibility is concentrated at certain sites at which the UK border is performed, which function as non-places, extending a sense of limbo into the daily lives of the asylum seeker characters. In dramatising the work of this border, these texts illustrate how childhood innocence is implicated in the construction of the border, as child asylum seekers are excluded from the logic of childhood innocence. At other points, Naidoo utilises the rhetorical power of childhood innocence to generate sympathy for her characters, whilst showing how her characters both wrestle with and perform the scripts of childhood innocence. As is the case in *Out of Bounds,* the politicisation of children in *The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies* comes not from the disavowal of childhood innocence, but from the depiction of it as a malleable rhetorical device, which is liable to be performed and subverted by children even as it is implicated in policing the borders of race.

3.4 Conclusion: the innocence of the child reader

In this chapter I have argued that Naidoo's work re-politicises childhood innocence by showing how it is implicated in the construction of national borders and systems of segregation. In these texts, children are subject to the surveillance and performance of the border, as well as implicated in the construction of such borders, by performing scripts of

child-like obliviousness. Even as she interrogates innocence in this way, Naidoo makes recourse to the rhetorical power of childhood innocence at various points to generate sympathy for her refugee characters. This interrogation of innocence is not unique to Naidoo, but occurs across much of what is considered radical children's literature. Naidoo's politicisation of childhood through this engagement with childhood innocence is a crucial facet of her vision of the political potential of childhood reading. As I have suggested above in relation to *The Other Side of Truth,* these texts propose a mode of childhood reading that self-consciously rejects the impulse to protect the innocence of children in their reading. These novels position themselves as not concealing harsh truths from their readers on the grounds of age. The use of a realist mode, and the presentation of these stories as authentic and true to life is an important aspect of this, as I have discussed in Chapter 2. These texts offer their child readers what is presented as essential knowledge, whilst flattering readers that their child status is not a barrier to such knowledge. This knowledge, and the implied call to action, is nonetheless dependent on the implied reader's status as a child. Whilst Naidoo's work may call into question the logic of innocence by which the border between childhood and adulthood is upheld, inviting more of a kinship reading of childhood, her political vision nevertheless relies on a differentiation between adult and child. As Beauvais has argued, the didactic discourse of political children's literature such as Naidoo's depends on the 'futurity and temporal otherness' of the child in their capacity to embody the adult's unfulfilled hopes for the future (94). However, as I will go on to demonstrate in the next chapter, whilst attempting to maintain such a didactic discourse, Naidoo's work also probes the permeability of this border between adulthood and childhood by showing adults and children engaging in intergenerational solidarity, negotiating agency in similar ways within constrained social circumstances.

Chapter 4: Disobedient Children

Scripts of child agency in the context of activism

> 'My favourite scene in the book is the scene of the student march […] because it tells me that if some people think you are a threat they will try to get rid of you.' (Al-Amir)
>
> 'When the villagers pick up the stones of the demolished church […] it shows that they are still a strong community and are one.' (Elizabeth)

In Chapter 3, I argued that Naidoo's work develops a political model of childhood through a re-politicisation of the concept of childhood innocence. This politicisation of childhood does not simply rely on placing her characters in contexts of social upheaval and political change, but on a blurring of the border between adulthood and childhood. In this chapter I argue that Naidoo's work further contests the innocence of childhood by exploring the agency of children as political actors in contexts of activism, civil disobedience, and social action. In my analysis of *The Other Side of Truth, Chain of Fire,* and *No Turning Back*, and three short stories from *Out of Bounds*: 'One Day, Lily, One Day', 'The Typewriter', and 'The Gun', I explore how Naidoo uses these narratives of activism to construct a political model of childhood. This allows me to develop a kinship understanding of child agency, wherein agency is neither fixed, nor seen to be determined by age, but is continuously negotiated by both children and adults in specific social contexts. The above quotes from Al-Amir and Elizabeth were written in response to *Chain of Fire,* one of the texts that I will go on to discuss here, which they read in their New York school in 2009. Their responses are embedded in a social context and can be read as performances of a certain script of classroom learning, forming the outcome of an exercise in which students were asked to describe their favourite part of the novel. Yet as I go on to discuss in depth in Chapter 6, such socially embedded children's responses can also be read as critical perspectives on the text. In this instance, Al-Amir and Elizabeth's words illuminate important facets of the ways that agency is constructed in *Chain of Fire* and in each of the texts explored here: that children possess power in the central role that they play in movements for political change, and that agency is negotiated in communities of interdependence, rather than being defined as the fixed attribute of certain individuals. In taking heed of Sánchez-Eppler's

suggestion that 'interdependence or partial independence may be far more accurate terms for understanding civic life' (*Dependent States* xxv), my critical stance towards these texts can be summarised as a refusal to view dependency and obedience as the absence of agency, or to view adulthood as the model for agency. Modelling agency to readers, the representations of agency explored in this chapter are a crucial facet of Naidoo's vision of the political potential of childhood reading, suggesting that reading can be productive of positive social change.

Representations of child agency in literature are of crucial interest within childhood studies. As Oswell argues, 'children's agency is now thoroughly suffused with the question and problem of the writing of children's lives' (272). Several recent edited collections have explored representations of child agency in literature and popular culture (Castro and Clark; Conrad and Kennedy), whilst Gubar has contested the archetypal obedient child of the 'golden age' of children's literature, instead arguing that the literature of this period constructed children as 'socially saturated beings, profoundly shaped by the culture, manners and morals of their time, precisely in order to explore the vexed issue of the child's agency' (*Artful Dodgers* 4). Scholarship on child agency often intersects with that on child activism, and many scholars advocate for the social importance of fiction that engages with children's roles in political processes (Mickenberg and Nel; Reynolds, '¡No pasarán!'; Musgrave). Grzegorczyk and Mendlesohn address children's literature as 'a form of discourse that can reach into and shape certain areas of social and political experience' (2). Indeed, radical children's literature is often linked to broader activist causes, as Sands-O'Connor has illustrated in her work on British activist writers addressing children of colour, and issues of race and racism: 'the author's voice, translated onto the page, is designed to change minds or gain support for a political cause' (*British Activist Authors* 3). I have already linked Naidoo's writing for children to her activism, and whilst her work since *Journey to Jo'burg* can be seen to have become less didactic and more oblique in its political messaging, it nonetheless positions itself as commenting on and intervening in real-world political issues. A crucial aspect of this is her repeated return to representations of activism. Activism is a thread running through all of Naidoo's middle-grade chapter book fiction, from Naledi's tentative vision of student resistance, 'surrounded by friends, old and new' at the end of *Journey to Jo'burg* (91), to Mugo's choice to join 'the others fighting for *ithaka na*

wiyathi, their land and freedom' at the end of *Burn My Heart* (184). In this chapter, I use the term 'activism' in its broadest sense, from Sade's use of the journalistic resources at her disposal in *The Other Side of Truth,* to representations of uMkhonto we Sizwe, the paramilitary wing of the ANC, in *Out of Bounds.* I have chosen to focus on the four texts used in this chapter as the activist activities of the protagonists are central to the narrative and have implications for the representation of child agency that each text constructs. In drawing together these representations in *The Other Side of Truth, Chain of Fire, No Turning Back,* and *Out of Bounds,* I demonstrate that Naidoo's representations of child activism are central to her vision of the political potential of childhood reading in offering models of child agency to her readers.

4.1 *The Other Side of Truth*: inherited agency

Resisting the elision of the concepts of agency and rebellion, *The Other Side of Truth* depicts how Sade's political agency emerges through a negotiation with the tools and values inherited from her parents. The text draws an obvious link between her choice to take her family's story to the press and her father's journalistic vocation, but Sade uses these journalistic tools in her own way, having to first overcome an internalised parental voice. Sade's relationship with her parents is crucial to her sense of identity and belonging, and her mother's murder not only catalyses the family's flight from Nigeria but also causes a psychological rupture for Sade. To cope, Sade conjures her mother as an internalised voice that speaks mainly in proverbs. When they are stranded in London, Sade reflects that: 'Mama […] would have summed it up with one of her proverbs. *Even the best cooking pot will not produce food by itself'* (84). This internalised mother's voice offers guidance, suggesting to Sade that she will need to seek other adult help. This is already a complex portrayal of child agency: Sade imaginatively thinks her way out of this situation but does so by recognising her own need for dependency on adults, even by constructing an inner adult voice to guide her. Whilst the novel places a moral value on freedom of speech and human rights, it also depicts the cost of a parent's activism to their children. Sade experiences this cost as a removal of her agency: 'she hadn't chosen to come. […] why did Papa have to write all those things that upset the brass button generals?' (292). She feels disempowered by her

father's activism, which has set in motion events that she has no control over. However, this resentment is immediately converted into guilt, which is manifested in the internalised mother's voice: '*evil enters like a needle and spreads like an oak tree*. If Mama could see her now, that's what she would say. You are letting evil into your heart. How can you think of blaming your own father!' (292). Sade exercises some agency in questioning her father's choices, but this also produces a sense of moral disruption. Sade's internalisation of her mother's voice represents her need for dependency on an adult figure for moral guidance, but also her struggle to negotiate a moral code separate from that of her parents.

As well as complicating the relationship between agency and parental authority, *The Other Side of Truth* also complicates the relationship between agency and speech. For most of the novel, Sade chooses to guard her story closely. Sade 'clammed up' when asked about her journey to the UK by her teacher (151), and when asked about their story by a social worker, Sade refuses to speak and gives the social worker a false name. As she later reflects on this choice:

> Conflicting thoughts raced through her brain. Part of her wanted to tell Mama Appiah the whole truth, including that she had given Iyawo-Jenny a false surname. But fear stopped her. When Papa was safely in England, then it would be different. […] Until then it was better that they were Sade and Femi Adewale. (125)

Sade's choice is the most reasonable one she can draw from the evidence before her, and her silence, rather than demonstrating passivity, is an act of agency. Kerry Mallan describes how silence in *The Other Side of Truth* is a mechanism 'for survival when life is threatened or under surveillance' (44). Sade's story is the only thing she has control over, having had everything else taken away from her, and her refusal to share it can be seen in this light as a political act. When she does reveal her story, it is in pursuit of activism. She shares her story with Mr Seven O'Clock news in order to raise awareness of her father's detention, sparking protests from the British-Nigerian community. Her speech always remains within her control:

> Sade found the thread she needed. She began with Papa, locked up in Heathlands Detention Centre. Papa who believed so strongly in telling the truth that his articles made the Brass Button generals in their home country very angry. So angry that gunmen had tried to kill him and killed Mama instead … Slowly she unravelled the tale. (260)

This language of weaving and unravelling points to the constructed nature of her testimony, which is controlled by her. In breaking her silence, she has also instigated social change by publicising her family's story. The text suggests that children are capable of political speech, and belong firmly within the political sphere. Sade's choice to use the media to help release her father is undoubtedly the result of her upbringing as a journalist's daughter. Sade trusts the British media, and the text suggests that while governmental institutions cannot be trusted, journalistic and media institutions can. *The Other Side of Truth* dismantles the easy equation of agency with speech and rebellion, instead presenting a form of agency that is negotiated out of the values and tools inherited from one's parents.

4.2 *Chain of Fire*: agency in community

Chain of Fire offers a vision of children as the leaders of political movements, as well as dependants on communities of resistance. Naidoo's second novel and the sequel to *Journey to Jo'burg, Chain of Fire* picks up the story of protagonist Naledi two years on. Published in 1989, and set in the early 1980s, the novel depicts Naledi's maturation into an adolescent and into an activist. Naledi's village of Bophelong is a 'black spot', the term used by the apartheid government to describe an area of land bought freehold by a Black community before was made illegal to do so. A key part of the apartheid policy of forced removals was the clearance of such areas, and *Chain of Fire* opens as the villagers are told that they are to be removed to 'Bop', or Bophuthatswana. Naledi leads her school in a peaceful protest against this, which quickly becomes violent as police intervene and several children are injured or killed. Various measures are introduced to wear the villagers down, such as cutting off their water supply, abducting and beating those suspected of leading the resistance, and stopping welfare payments to the elderly. Eventually the people of

Bophelong are removed as their houses are bulldozed; the novel ends as they attempt to adjust to life in corrugated iron huts in a barren and remote area. This is an unflinchingly bleak ending, but by focalising these events through 15-year-old Naledi, Naidoo ends on a small note of hope in depicting Naledi's development into an activist. Constructing a rhetorical child who is an agential activist, this text offers readers a reflection on the nature of choice, an affective blueprint for activism, and a treatise on the necessity of interdependence within communities of resistance. The vision of child agency in this text is more wedded to the idea of rebellion than that in *The Other Side of Truth,* but nonetheless places value on intergenerational community.

Chain of Fire combines the histories of youth resistance and forced removal to create a model of child activism. As discussed in Chapter 3, the forced removal of Black South Africans was a central part of the apartheid project of segregation. Indeed, it has been described by The Surplus People's Project as 'the cornerstone of the whole edifice of apartheid' and the means by which an estimated 3.5 million Black people were displaced between 1960 and 1982 (Platzky and Walker xviii). Youth protest was central in the resistance to apartheid, both in South Africa and internationally. The most prominent example is the 1976 Soweto uprising, which is an important reference point for both *Journey to Jo'burg* and *Chain of Fire.* In response to the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974, which made Afrikaans a compulsory medium of instruction in all schools, school and university students in the Johannesburg township of Soweto marched in protest on 16 June 1976. They were met with a violent police response; official records put the death toll on this day at 176 but the real figure is thought to be much higher. Subsequent protests outside schools and at the funerals of those shot by police persisted until the end of the year. Describing the Soweto uprising as 'an international symbol of resistance to tyranny', South African activist Baruch Hirson argued in his 1979 book *Year of Fire, Year of Ash* that in their protests, 'the youth showed an ingenuity that their parents had been unable to achieve' (9). As an international symbol, Soweto inspired anti-apartheid protest in many countries. A notable example is the Non-Stop Picket, as part of which both adults and young people maintained a continuous campaign for the release of Nelson Mandela outside the South African embassy in London from 1986-1990. For Gavin Brown and Helen Yaffe, involvement in the picket was not merely 'a backdrop to these young people's lives; they

grew up through their political engagement' (18). This description of youth activism as a part of coming of age is strikingly similar to the trajectory of *Chain of Fire,* in which Naledi's growth in maturity is also her growth into an activist. By imagining both a child's perspective of forced removal, and a child as the leader of resistance, Naidoo creates a model of what it is to be a political child.

Reading *Chain of Fire* alongside the relevant archival materials reveals the ways that Naidoo has written a child's perspective into the historical records, representing children as agents of hope with the capacity to lead adults. On one of the many post-it notes affixed to her archival materials, Naidoo has written: 'at time of writing CHAIN OF FIRE, I was in exile and reliant on detailed documentation to build up a credible picture of what would happen to a family being "removed"' (Handwritten notes: 'Saul Mhize shot at Dreifontein in '83' 1). The archival documentation of this research process is indeed extensive, and my experience of reading it is one of being confronted by its weight both in terms of quantity and content, recording as it does the atrocities of forced removals and the detention of children. Given that most of this material shows the speech of adults about children, Naidoo's novel can be seen as a reinsertion of an imagined child's voice into these historical records. In doing so, at points Naidoo inserts elements of these news reports into her characters' dialogue. A 1984 article from the *Rand Daily Mail*, preserved by Naidoo, records the removal of the Bakwena-Ba-Mogopa tribe to Pachsdraai, in Bophuthatswana. The story of Mogopa bears striking similarities to that of *Chain of Fire's* Bophelong, indicating that Mogopa was a model for Naidoo's creation of her fictional village, which is also removed to Bophuthatswana. In the article, the concluding words are those of Mr Ezekiel Pooe:

> "My children, only God knows why He made it possible for the Government to take use from our land. But I believe that God will punish those who throw His children around like stones. They will one day pay heavily for their sins in purgatory and those they had forsaken will be glorified in Heaven." (Tema)

By homing in on this sense of divine justice, the writer of this article foregrounded the strength that the Bakwena-Ba-Mogopa people found in their faith, positioning forced removals as cosmic injustice.

Naidoo repurposes Pooe's words for her novel, inserting Naledi as an interlocutor in order to change the meaning of the words. In *Chain of Fire,* elder Rra Rampou speaks to a reporter after the villagers have been removed:

> "Only God knows why He let us be taken from our land. But one day He will punish those who throw us, His children, around like stones," declaimed Rra Rampou.
>
> "But we can't wait so long, Rra. We must do something ourselves." Naledi watched the reporter scrawl her words rapidly onto the page. (228)

In reimagining this exchange between reporter and elder, Naidoo inserts Naledi's voice into it in order to replace the eschatological vision of divine justice with one of immediate direct action. Whilst Rra Rampou feels powerless to act, Naledi sees herself as agential. By depicting the reporter writing down Naledi's words, Naidoo writes Naledi into the *Rand Daily Mail* article, creating a child's voice of protest and depicting Naledi as an activist leader of her community. In doing do, Naidoo situates resistance thoroughly in the realm of childhood.

In many of Naidoo's novels, the activist-protagonist figure has a mentor who communicates context and politicises the protagonist. Grace assumes this role in *Journey to Jo'burg*, and in *Chain of Fire* it is Taolo, the son of an anti-apartheid activist whose family is exiled to Bophelong. Taolo is already familiar with activism, and he galvanises Naledi:

> "Look, sis, in Soweto children have been resisting with just their hands and stones against trucks, tanks with fully armed police and soldiers. Okay, so they keep killing us, but they still didn't break us. Even more people are on our side now. Parents see what the police are doing to their children and they also join in the struggle. We're getting stronger all the time." (37)

By invoking Soweto, this speech from Taolo normalises child activism, positioning children as an important force in the resistance. Taolo's words are directed at readers as much as at Naledi, letting readers know about the wider backdrop of youth protest in South Africa. This

speech constructs an agential activist child, who is not afraid to die, and whose willingness to protest outstrips that of adults. In constructing such a child, Taolo, a child himself, is invoking a type of rhetorical child in order to galvanise his peers. In this sense, Taolo can also be seen to conceal the voice of the author, communicating the moral message of the novel. In his role as mentor, much of the political context of the text comes through Taolo:

> "They take six pieces of land and put some dummy 'President' in charge. It doesn't even matter if these bits of land don't even all join up. Then they say, 'These pieces aren't South Africa anymore. From now on we say they are Bophuthatswana, and any Twanas we don't want, we send them there.' […] They want to force us back to the days of our great-grandfathers, pushing us here and there, keeping us apart so they can control us! Divide and rule! Hell man, the *whole* of South Africa belongs to us." (44)

Over a hundred years of apartheid history is condensed here: from the British colonial policy of 'divide and rule', to the creation of Bophutathswana and the other 'homelands', to the implementation of Black chiefs in these areas who remained under the pay of the white government (Deegan). Providing this context through Taolo positions children as politically literate and capable of driving resistance without adult support. This passage also constructs a reader with a certain amount of political literacy, who is able to join the dots of apartheid history that Taolo draws out. Although marketed to a British readership, apartheid's roots in British colonial history are only to be inferred by a reader with prior knowledge.

Through Naledi's character development, *Chain of Fire* reflects on the nature of choice. Naledi's concept of choice changes as she comes of age into a state of political awareness. Her best friend Poleng is the chief's daughter, a man who, as quickly becomes apparent, is being offered money and a house to preside over the removal of the rest of the village. When this is discovered, Naledi is sympathetic: 'Poor Poleng, thought Naledi, pained and upset by what her father had done, but trapped. It wasn't her fault' (31). Naledi believes Poleng to be a victim of circumstance and sees her tears as enough evidence of this. Taolo challenges this:

"Where's your friend? Is she hiding her face again today?" His voice had a bitter edge to it.

Naledi's instinct was to defend Poleng after their brief meeting.

"She can't help what her father does. She's upset."

"So, she's got problems. We all have." (37)

In this confrontation between their different worldviews, Naledi believes Poleng to be unable to wield agency beyond her earlier show of emotion. Taolo perceives that they are all constrained by their circumstances, and must choose how to respond to them. At its heart this is also a conflict over what it means to be a child: Naledi sees Poleng as powerless in light of her father's decision, whilst Taolo rejects the notion that a child is defined by the choices of their parents. By the time she has endured police violence and death in her community, Naledi's worldview has shifted. After their removal to Bop, Naledi resolves not to venture over the hills that separate her from the fertile land given to the chief's family:

> if the friend to whom she had once been so close wanted to see her, let her come over the hill, down into the barren slum where they had been dumped. Let her search among the row upon row of iron huts and tents. It would be the first test – and if she didn't pass it by coming, then what was the friendship worth? (227)

Naledi no longer believes that choice is fully defined by circumstance. This adds further clarity to the meaning of resistance in *Chain of Fire*. It is not enough for Poleng to be 'pained and upset' by the forced removal of her townsfolk, if she is not able to embody those emotions and place herself amongst those who have been displaced as a show of solidarity. This highlights the difference between emotionally recognising injustice and taking embodied action. The conception of child agency that this episode offers is an uncompromising one. This text rejects the idea that a child's identity and action are defined solely by their circumstances and the decisions of their parents. There is a harsh lesson offered here to readers whose level of privilege might be closer to Poleng's than to Naledi's: it is not enough to 'feel bad' about injustice, and being a child does not excuse one from taking embodied action.

In constructing an agential activist child, *Chain of Fire* also offers a blueprint for the affects and the psychology of resistance. The spatial restrictions placed upon Black South Africans are experienced bodily by Naledi:

> Naledi felt as if a belt were being tightened and pulled across her chest, trapping her. It was no good just listening to these terrible stories. They had to do something. Her voice rang out without her planning it. "We must refuse to go! All of us must refuse!" (46)

As discussed in Chapter 3, apartheid laws manifested themselves in physical violence against Black bodies. Naledi's choice to protest is an affective one, according to Shouse's sense of affect as 'the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience'. It is the physical response to anxiety in her body, rather than an ethical decision, which prepares Naledi for action, acting as the primary driver behind her instigation of resistance. In creating a child protagonist who listens to her body and trusts her instincts in defiance of adult authority, Naidoo is creating an affective vision of child agency. Sadness and anger are presented as the core affects of protests, but within this vision of child activism is a sense that the results of these affects must also be controlled. Naledi's ability to resist effectively is linked to her ability to control her pain. After watching her friends beaten and dragged into police vans during their peaceful protest, Naledi feels 'desolate and alone' (122), afraid of being arrested herself. To overcome these overwhelming emotions, she hardens herself: 'deep inside her, somewhere down in her stomach, Naledi felt a little ball harden, as if it was tying up raw nerve endings. She would have to be hard to get through this thing' (123). It was her pain that spurred her to resist, but to maintain this resistance, Naledi must learn to not feel pain, to cultivate an emotional hardness and deadness. This adds another layer to the model of child activism that the text envisions: in order to act, one must be able to control one's own pain.

Whilst the focus of *Chain of Fire* is on the growing political awareness of the individual protagonist, the link between the agency of the individual and the community is apparent in the motif of fire that recurs throughout the text. This is clear from the novel's title and back matter: 'resistance is like a chain of fire' (back cover). When headmaster Mr

Molaba cautions his rebellious students that they 'are playing with fire!' (47), readers are prompted to look on his words with irony, since this old adage is reworked to provide a symbol for the resistance. The novel lacks a typical 'happy ending', and justice seems far off for the people of Bophelong. However, hope is manifest in Naledi's character development, and the climax of her coming of age is the realisation of her identity, not as a lone resistance fighter, but as the member of a resistance movement:

> Naledi's heart burned. It was a fierce fire within her, as fierce as the sun bearing down on her now, forever, welding new links in a chain…invisible but strong, binding her to people right here in this barren place as well as to Taolo, to her imprisoned friend Grace and to so many others. (240)

This reflects the sort of agency as interdependence that Sánchez-Eppler advocates for, which is not defined by the individual's ability to act alone, but a community's ability to act together. In combining South Africa's history of forced removals and its legacy of youth resistance to apartheid education, *Chain of Fire* constructs an agential activist child figure, and places children at the centre of political change in South Africa. Through this construction, the text offers readers an affective model of activism, whereby resistance springs from a bodily response to injustice that must be met with embodied action. Furthermore, this novel shows that resistance is only meaningful within a collective. In modelling a type of agency that synthesises the body, the mind and the community, this text emphasises the importance of the interdependence of these elements.

4.3 *No Turning Back*: agency as dependency

Although it is not a novel of activism in the same sense as the other texts here, *No Turning Back* depicts South Africa on the cusp of social change, positioning marginalised children as central in shaping that change. Published in 1995, *No Turning Back* is the story of Sipho, a Black boy who flees the township where he has been living with his mother and abusive stepfather to live on the streets of Hillbrow, a deprived neighbourhood of Johannesburg. Having heard that children survive there on the streets, Sipho chooses to try

his luck, befriending other street children and learning how to earn a little money. The crisis for Sipho comes when he is employed by Mr Danny, a white shop owner, who invites Sipho to live with him. Sipho flees after a brief stay, on realising that as a Black child in a white family he will always be deemed 'other'. By the novel's end, he has found a home in a shelter for homeless boys, with whom he joins in a peace march, and has a tentative reunion with his mother and new baby sister Thembi. The border between child and adult that is rendered permeable by Naidoo's work, as discussed in Chapter 3, is further contested in this novel as Naidoo pushes the boundaries of what is considered appropriate in a novel for children. While her novel, in consideration of its young readership, does not show the full extent of violence and sexual abuse that Naidoo's research shed light on, it depicts the boys sniffing glue, being abducted by police, and quarrelling over territory with homeless adults. Naidoo's archive contains newspaper articles documenting domestic and institutional abuse which attest to her attempt to push the limits of children's literature.

Naidoo's research for the novel, and the narrative itself, centres on the 1993 peace marches in Johannesburg that preceded the election of a fully democratic South African government in 1994, in which disenfranchised youth played a key part. Nelson Mandela was released from prison in February 1990, and elected to the Presidency in the country's first fully democratic election in April 1994, marking the final end of apartheid. The intervening period, during which *No Turning Back* is set, saw some of the worst sustained violence in South Africa's townships. Clashes between the South African police, the African National Congress, and the Inkatha Freedom Party were common in the years running up to the election; between 1990 and 1993, over 10,000 people were killed in such 'political' violence (Deegan 70). Beginning to write as apartheid began to be dismantled, Naidoo was able to return to South Africa to research *No Turning Back,* something that was unavailable to her for her previous two South Africa novels. As I will go on to argue in Chapter 5, this marked an important turning point for Naidoo's work, instigating a methodology for collaboration with children that would inform much of her future writing, and affording her strategies for strengthening the credibility of her work in representing experiences that she did not share. Whilst at Orange Grove Primary School in Johannesburg, Naidoo and her collaborator Olusola Oyeleye were invited to attend a 'Youth Peace Link' event, the poster for which is preserved in Naidoo's archive (see Fig. 3). During the event, young people from all

backgrounds joined hands, sang, and were presented with 'peace scrolls' (Poster: 'Youth Peace Link'). In a planning document for this event, which was initiated by The Catholic Youth of the Johannesburg Diocese, young people are urged to use their political voices: 'you the youth of South Africa will show our leaders that you can make a difference' ('Young Healing Hands on Africa'). This event communicates a vision of child-centred activism that carries through into Naidoo's work, and is the basis for the Peace March that Sipho participates in at the end of *No Turning Back.* The novel is an extended reflection on the nature of freedom, the role of educational institutions in facilitating the agency of children, and the role of children in shepherding in the new democracy. The italicisation of non-English words and the extensive bibliography at the end of the novel are signs that the novel is aimed at an English-speaking audience. Published by Viking in 1995 and then by Puffin in 1996, this a text intended for outsiders to the community it depicts. The use of terms such as *malunde,* the Zulu slang term for street child, is a reminder to the reader of the specific geography of this novel, and a sign that this narrative depicts a culture that is different from theirs. This use of language allows the characters to describe themselves in their own terms, whilst teaching the reader something new, and inviting them to partially occupy this new perspective. Whilst decentring the experiences of British readers in this sense, *No Turning Back* also positions the *malunde* as the object of the British reader's gaze.

The narrative of *No Turning Back* is driven by Sipho's negotiation with the idea of freedom. He chooses to leave his mother's house after a particularly bad beating from his stepfather, believing that his mother has chosen her husband over him. Remembering her promise to take him into central Johannesburg, he thinks: 'Ma had lost her job before she could keep her promise. Now here he was speeding down a highway, entering Johannesburg on his own' (7). Choosing to parent himself rather than be parented, Sipho's first act is one of agency, by which he takes control of his circumstances. Sipho's choice is juxtaposed with the lack of choice that his mother possesses, but this dynamic also reveals that the limits of agency in contexts of poverty and abuse. For Eliza Dresang, the urban

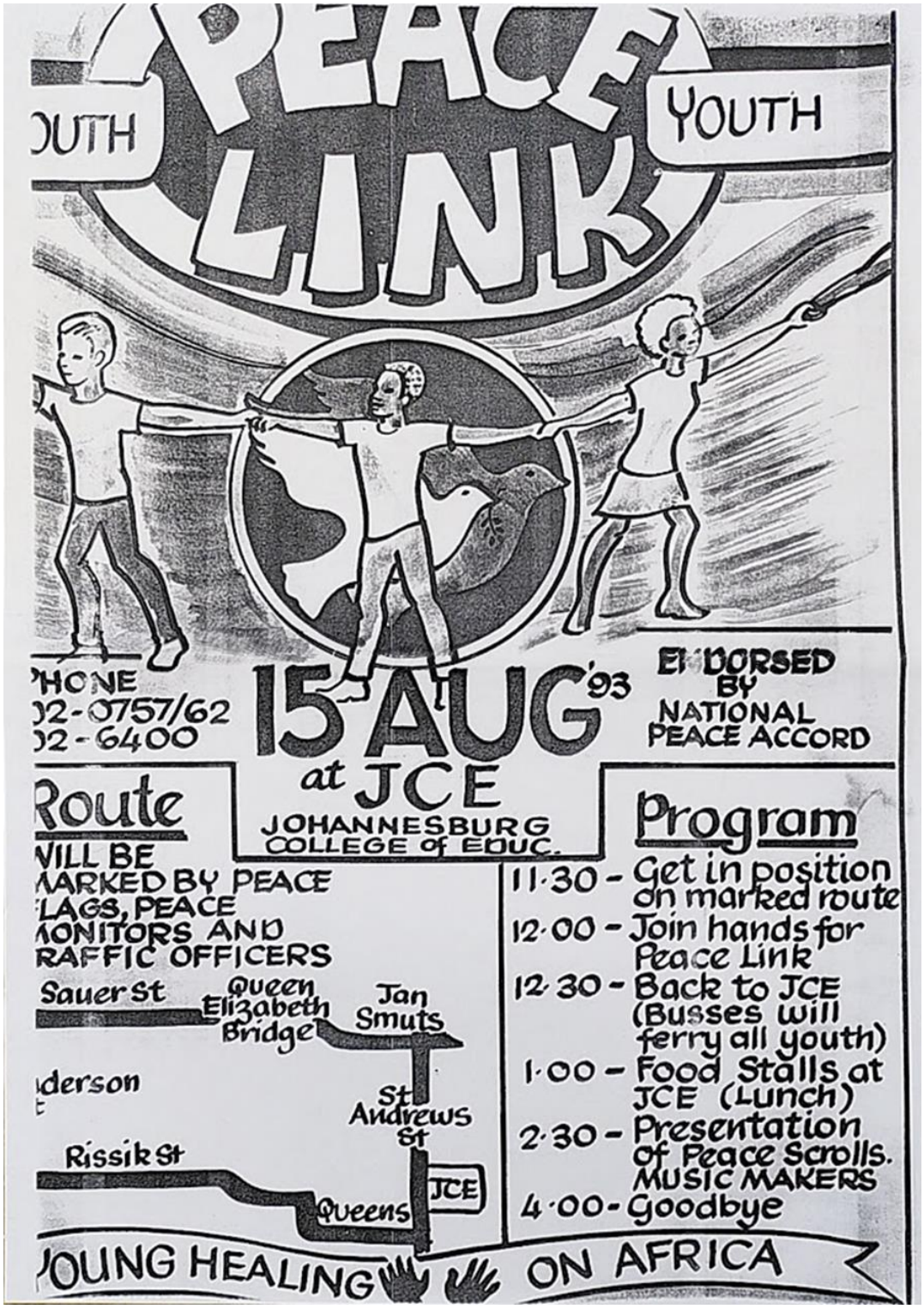


Figure 3: Poster for a Youth Peace Link event, held in Johannesburg on 15 August 1993. During their visit to Orange Grove Primary School, Naidoo and Oyeleye were given this poster and invited to attend the event. This directly inspired the Peace March that Sipho attends in No Turning Back (Poster: 'Youth Peace Link').

setting of *No Turning Back* disturbs the typical homely setting of the traditional children's book (261). In this sense, the text can be read as a revision of Nodelman's home/away/home structure that, as I have argued in Chapter 2, is exemplified in *Journey to Jo'burg.* Sipho journeys from danger at home to a place of alternative dangers on the streets of Hillbrow. His return home is not a physical one but is symbolised by a reconciliation with his mother. His journey has equipped him with new knowledge: 'He himself had blamed her for letting his stepfather beat him. Never thinking how hard it had been for her too' (183). Sipho has learnt enough to see the limits that poverty and abuse have placed on her freedom, and readers are invited to share in his new knowledge. This is suggestive of a kinship understanding of agency, whereby both adults and children are shown to be constrained by the limits of their social context, with only difficult and life-altering choices available to them.

In depicting Sipho's search for freedom, *No Turning Back* also suggests a tension between freedom and safety. The boys who take Sipho into their group teach him how to navigate living on the streets with a series of personal stories. Although their stories vary, 'everyone agreed that as a *malunde*, anything bad could happen to you and there was nothing you could do.' (46) This conflicts with the narrative of choice that Sipho is trying to build for himself. Being situated outside of the structures of civic society leaves the boys vulnerable, so that paradoxically as they are free from the control of parents, school or the law, they are less free from being harmed. In a manner suggestive of Sánchez-Eppler's argument that an understanding of child agency must include an acknowledgment of a child's right to care and dependency, it is clear that being free from adult authority means that Sipho's bodily autonomy is put under threat. This tension between freedom and safety is constantly negotiated by Sipho and his peers. One of the other boys, Joseph, mocks Sipho's need to return to Mr Danny's house by curfew, declaring ''when you are *malunde,* you are free!'' (120) For Joseph, freedom is equivalent to being unconstrained by adult authority, as his glue habit means that he cannot access homeless shelters without breaching their rules. When Sipho is considering taking refuge in the Themba Shelter, he considers Joseph's words: ''We like to be free!' Any adults inside this shelter would want to know who he, Sipho, was. They would ask him why he wasn't in school and then they would

ask about his family' (145). Beaten both by police and his stepfather, and made to feel inferior by Mr Danny, Sipho has no reason to trust adults. Evading the gaze of adults is something that Sipho perceives as necessary to safeguard his agency, and entering the shelter means sacrificing this. However, Jabu, Sipho's closest friend in Hillbrow, refutes Joseph's concept of freedom: ''when he's sleeping on the cold ground, you are sleeping in a warm bed and when he's hungry, you have hot food inside you'' (121). For Jabu a limitation on one's freedom is a necessary sacrifice to make to ensure one's safety. Whilst the text suggests a kinship model of the shared agency of children and adults, *No Turning Back* never fully closes the gulf between adults and children. Trustworthy adults are seen to be the exception rather than the rule. Whilst the text acknowledges the dependency of children, accepting this dependency is seen to be a difficult choice for the child characters. Indeed, all that remains for these characters are difficult choices, indicating that their agency is constrained by poverty and continued racism.

Within this tension between freedom and safety, the text nonetheless presents certain adult institutions as facilitating rather than restricting children's agency. As discussed in the Introduction, Naidoo has often drawn a distinction between "good" and "bad" education. The education Sipho has previously received in the township has been of the "bad", repressive kind, and in contrast with the freedom that he has experienced living on the streets. He is quizzed on his educational background when he enters Themba Shelter, and his inability to answer causes him anxiety: 'he couldn't tell this head teacher that he didn't have a 'best subject'. Or that school to him meant being hit and called 'stupid'' (159). As a school-age child, there are certain scripts of childhood, in Bernstein's sense of the term, that he is expected to perform. His inability to perform the socially constructed idea of childhood when prompted causes him to feel alienated. However, the educational context in the shelter is different from the one he had experienced in the township. First experiencing shame for his inability to perform childhood in the required way, Sipho becomes able to express himself and process his trauma through art. His drawings are both a way of processing his memories and accessing his emotions: 'first he drew himself hiding in the dustbin and the man with the broken bottle standing over him. He made himself very small and the man very big.' (163). Sipho articulates his lack of agency here through this disparity in size, and his creativity is positioned as a way that he can take back control of a

narrative in which he has felt powerless. Mary Tomsic has explored art created by displaced children, arguing that:

> Drawings and artwork by children hold considerable evocative power. They are a form of expression through which scholars can examine children's voices and understandings of children's experiences. These cultural creations, however, cannot provide transparent, direct access to children's voices. (138)

Whilst Tomsic examines art created by real children, her statement regarding its evocative power nonetheless prompts me to ask how this representation of a drawing child functions as a narrative device. Sipho's artwork tells readers that Sipho carries trauma, that he feels small and powerless, and that his friendships are a lifeline to him. It also demonstrates that this text advocates for the therapeutic value of creativity. However, it also reveals the influence of the institution upon Sipho's life. In light of Tomsic's analysis, Sipho's art can be viewed less as a direct insight into his character, and more a sign of his performance of the requirements of this particular educational institution. When Sipho finally manages to articulate some of his pain through art, teacher Joe responds thoughtfully: 'you have said a lot in this, Sipho. Well done' (165). These words draw the creative therapy episode to a close, the significance of which lies in Sipho finally being able to receive affirmation from an adult where he has previously experienced only abuse. In this episode, Sipho creates a sense of belonging to this institution by demonstrating his ability to rehearse the scripts it has offered him. Sipho's belonging to this new education institution also becomes the means by which Sipho is empowered to help his mother and baby sister: 'if he did well in school, one day he would get a job and a house. Ma and Thembi could stay with him then' (187). There is a clear distinction between this and the punitive approach taken in Sipho's previous school. The agency afforded to the characters in *No Turning Back* depends on them being able to access the good sort of education. Dependency on such education is represented as a conduit for child agency, rather than its impediment.

No Turning Back is concerned with activism in its depictions of violence and the peace marches created to respond to this violence. The text reflects on children's roles in this sort of activism, and within the possibility of a post-apartheid reconciliation between

different racial groups. The racial inequality that persists during the final years of apartheid is exemplified by Sipho's relationship with Judy, Mr Danny's daughter. Judy is an idealist, who defends Sipho and Maria, Mr Danny's Black cleaner, to her prejudiced father. However, her attempt at friendship with Sipho exposes some of the blind spots in her idealism, whereby she is unable to perceive the effect that her own whiteness has on the dynamics of such a relationship. After leaving Mr Danny's house at night without saying goodbye, Sipho has a surprise meeting with Judy and her Black friend Portia weeks later at the Peace March. Sipho experienced covert discrimination from Mr Danny, and overt racism from Judy's brother David while living with them. Judy apologises on behalf of her brother, but Sipho is unable to respond:

> It wasn't just David. Couldn't she see that? Sipho looked away. How could he explain? He should leave, find Jabu and avoid this conversation.
> 'Your Dad is confusing me sometimes, too.' Portia spoke softly.
> […] Portia had always seemed to be enjoying her time with Judy. But what was it like for her in Mr Danny's house? Did Mr Danny and David sometimes say things that made her feel uncomfortable too … even though she was Judy's best friend? He saw Judy turn to look at Portia as of there was a question she needed to ask her. (173)

For Sipho, explaining the gulf between himself and Judy is labour that he is unwilling to undertake. What Judy perceives to be an individual problem is in fact systemic, rooted in the racism of their society. Whilst Judy believes that to advocate for equality herself is enough, Portia's comment reveals that their respective social positions affect their friendship, irrespective of whether Judy realises this. As Judy turns her gaze towards Portia, there is a suggestion that Judy's blind spots are being exposed, but the labour still rests with Portia and Sipho. By placing this encounter within the context of the Peace March, the text suggests that the optimism of the march is complicated by the deep-rooted systemic racism of South African society. Sipho and Judy never get to the point of real friendship, and the novel ends with a sense that, in this area and others, there is much work to be done.

Despite the note of hope on which the novel ends in depicting the involvement of young people in the peace marches, *No Turning Back* resists an easy idealisation of the

peace process. Having just been told that his mother has been burnt out of her home as a result of clashes between hostel-dwellers and township residents, Sipho feels 'jolted' at the words of one of the peace songs he is taught at school:

'look around, link your hands
Feel the peace flowing out
Feel the love burning again…'

> Burning. Blues and whites were once more wiped out by a picture of fire. […] Jabu was singing. His mother had probably also been burnt out of her home. Didn't that make him angry and want to do something back to the attackers? But that meant the killing would go on for ever. (170)

The word 'burning' triggers a traumatic memory for Sipho. Whilst this upbeat song expresses the idea of love and peace, Sipho's reflections show the limits of the easy reconciliation proposed by this song. However, he also reflects that the cycle of violence must be broken at some point, even if he does not feel emotionally capable of doing so. Involvement in the peace march causes inner conflict for Sipho, as the words he hears jar with his own traumatic experiences. The words of this song are based on a song sheet from the Peace Link event that Naidoo attended in Johannesburg with Orange Grove primary school ('Peace in Our Land', BN/01/03/01 file 1):

'Forget about the past
And build a new nation.'

> How could he forget what had happened to him. Bad things were still happening. He could hear a voice in his head saying that he didn't believe these words. (*No Turning Back,* 176)

Whilst the peace marches convey hope, and the sense of young people driving that hope in the image of the 'long line of young people linking hands […] as far as he could see' (169), Sipho's trauma can be seen to represent the traumatised nation. The text suggests that

whilst peace and reconciliation are possible, the process will be painful and costly, especially for young Black people like Sipho. Children are represented as agents of the peace process, and even more so when they act collectively. However, as with Sipho's search for agency within the safety of the shelter, peace seems to require certain trade-offs. As in *Chain of Fire, No Turning Back* depicts an agency that is rooted in communities of young people working together for change. The novel's ambivalence towards the concept of freedom stems from the tension between freedom and safety that Sipho and his peers must negotiate. Dependency is depicted as a necessary part of child agency, as Sipho finds that he can take some control over his future only when he is embedded in an educational institution with certain rules that he must comply with. The idea of the fully independent agent is revealed to be a myth, as both the adult and child characters are subject to the racist structures within their society. This text suggests a kinship model of agency that is rooted in interdependence, but nonetheless is the result of costly negotiations with one's social context.

4.4 *Out of Bounds*: agency in negotiation

As discussed in Chapter 3, *Out of Bounds* centres children's perspectives on key events in apartheid history. In that chapter, I discussed the ways that these stories politicise their constructions of children by showing how childhood innocence is represented as deeply implicated in the borders of apartheid and its logic of race. In this chapter I turn to the middle three stories in the collection, 'One Day, Lily, One Day', 'The Typewriter', and 'The Gun', all of which depict children in contexts of activism, civil disobedience, and militancy. In 'One Day, Lily, One Day', the child of white activists wrestles with her silence in the face of racism, realising the costs of each of her choices. This story suggests that while childhood can be political, political knowledge can be a burden. Immediately following 'One Day, Lily, One Day', 'The Typewriter' can be read as a response to it. The children in the story are more agential even as they are more oppressed, as the text positions Black children as the instigators and leaders of protest in the context of the Soweto uprising. Finally, 'The Gun' takes place against a backdrop of increasing militancy from the ANC. The story locates agency in the capacity to defend oneself from attack, again depicting choice to

be particularly costly. Although optimistic about the roles of children as agents of social change in South Africa, *Out of Bounds* does not romanticise the agency of those characters. Agency is not a fixed possession of the child characters, but is constantly in negotiation. Choice is depicted as costly, and agency entails compromise.

4.4.1 'One Day, Lily, One Day': the cost of activism

'One Day, Lily, One Day' is the third story in *Out of Bounds,* and the second from the perspective of a white child. Depicting activism as costly, it functions as an interrogation of white silence in the apartheid context, asking to what extent children carry the same responsibility for resistance as adults do. The story coincides with the Sharpeville massacre, which brought global attention to apartheid policy. Thousands of Black South Africans gathered outside a police station in Sharpeville township in 1960, close to Johannesburg, to demonstrate for the abolition of South Africa's pass laws. These laws were a key facet of apartheid, requiring all non-whites to carry passes that stated their racial classification and gave them limited permission to access areas designated for Whites. Police fired on the protesters with sub-machine guns, killing 69 people, and injuring many more. The government used the massacre to declare a State of Emergency and outlaw the ANC. 'One Day, Lily, One Day' recounts events immediately before and after Sharpeville from the perspective of Lily, the daughter of white activists. Lily's father has been imprisoned several times over her childhood, and Lily's parents' links to the anti-apartheid resistance are the 'Big Unspoken' among Lily's classmates, leading to her being shunned by many of them (33). The mother of Lily's only friend Caroline is deeply suspicious of Lily. Lily's parents employ a Black maid called Janey, whose niece Busi Lily befriended as a younger child. When the events at Sharpeville occur nearby, Lily is told at school that 'the natives are coming to attack us!' (38). Her mother later explains the real nature of the massacre, and Lily discovers that Busi has been gravely injured by gunfire. Lily's father is arrested again when a State of Emergency is declared, and Lily finds herself entirely friendless at school. Through an exploration of Lily's silence, and the implications of her parents' activism on her life, this short story represents child agency as highly costly.

‘One Day, Lily, One Day’, much like *The Other Side of Truth,* confronts the cost to children of their parents’ activism, as noted by Joshua, a reader who wrote a critical comparison of ‘One Day, Lily, One Day’ and ‘The Playground’ in 2005: ‘the two stories show that speaking out can lead to trouble’ (Hepple). ‘One Day, Lily, One Day’ exposes the ways in which, for both adults and children, our choices are dictated by our social contexts. Lily did not choose her segregated social context, nor did she choose the activist life of her parents. The effects of her parents’ activism centres on Lily, whose viewpoint shapes the narrative perspective. When she learns that Busi has been injured, the text focuses chiefly on Lily’s reaction as she clings to Janey: ‘I could feel Janey wanting to get up and I was clinging on. I heard Mommy’s voice. ‘Lily, you must let Janey go. Busi needs her!’ (42). As with all the texts analysed so far in this thesis, focalisation through a single protagonist creates a narrowing of the narrative perspective that can sometime produce a solipsistic effect. The narration focuses on the emotional cost to Lily of the knowledge of Sharpeville, and on her need to be comforted by those whose suffering is greater than hers. As in this instance, it is often the Black characters to whom Lily goes for comfort. The story’s title is a quote from Uncle Max, a Black friend of the family. When she is sad that he cannot take her to the park as her parents do, he responds: ‘‘One day, little Lily, one day. When we have freedom, you and I will go to the park’’ (33). Similarly, it is Janey who comforts Lily when she is friendless at school: ‘‘One day, Lily, it will come right’’ (45). Whilst this represents the Black characters as possessing deep resources of hope and strength for resistance, it also decentres the suffering caused to them by apartheid. However, Lily’s limited perspective also focuses on the inner conflict that this produces: ‘sometimes I feel so mixed up and angry. Nasty, stupid thoughts come into my head. Like why couldn’t Mommy and Daddy be like the other parents who don’t bother with politics and don’t care if things aren’t fair?’ (44). Whilst Lily’s parents’ activism is costly for her, the phrasing of this passage indicates that Lily never questions their moral position. She frames her own thoughts as ‘nasty’ and ‘stupid’, and while she wishes that her life could be different, the description of parents who ‘don’t care if things aren’t fair’ functions as a criticism of that moral outlook. Even as she suffers due her parents’ activism, the text makes it clear that she holds the same position as them. Whilst she has no control over her external circumstances, Lily nonetheless chooses to wrestle with the moral questions these circumstances produce.

In this sense, Lily is not the archetypal agential child sometimes valorised by childhood studies. Gleason describes the common 'agency ideal' within childhood studies as an overemphasis on resistance and rebellion as the hallmarks of child agency (447). The interplay between speech and silence is central to 'One Day, Lily, One Day', much of which dramatises Lily's choice to not speak. Lily is not a rebellious child, instead making choices to please the adults or children around her in order that she will be included. When she is invited to tea with Caroline and her parents, she makes sure 'not to talk with my mouth full and not to speak unless spoken to' (35). Lily recognises that silence is a desirable quality in a child and so she performs this quality in return for the social rewards she wants. This choice is also a costly one, and Lily's guilt pervades the narrative. When Caroline sees Uncle Max at Lily's house, Lily does not 'explain that Uncle Max was a friend, not a 'boy'' (37), instead distracting Caroline with play. As explored in Chapter 3 with regard to 'The Dare', Lily attempts here to perform a sort of obliviousness in front of her friend, using childhood play as a cloak for the racial tensions that emerge in this scene. Naidoo's framing of this choice to be silent frames Lily as agential, in the sense that she is consciously performing the scripts of childhood that have been offered to her. The narrative shift comes after Sharpeville when Lily tries to tell Caroline about Busi. In this instance, it is Caroline's turn to perform obliviousness to race. Caroline asks Lily to stop talking, as her mother 'never lets me listen to anything like that', leaving Lily to wonder: 'If I had never tried to tell Caroline about Busi, I wonder if we would still be best friends?' (43). Lily's speech is costly, ending her friendship with Caroline. It is also costly for Caroline, whose identification with the innocence of childhood is contingent on her knowing nothing about the violence of apartheid. Through this exchange, Caroline's lack of knowledge about the real events of Sharpeville is also shown to be a choice. When Alice, a new girl at school, accuses Lily's parents of being communists, Lily asks herself, 'Was it best to remain silent?', before speaking to insult Alice (43-44). Lily's final act of speech provides the implicit answer to this question, whilst also costing her any chance of finding friendship among her peers. This text does not equate speech with agency, but suggests that for children in limited social circumstances, both speech and silence are agential choices with high costs attached.

In her 2021 interview with Julia Hope, Naidoo draws a comparison between 'One Day, Lily, One Day' and her own experiences. In her final year of school when Sharpeville

happened, Naidoo describes seeing the nuns run to shut the school gates: 'Black people were coming to *attack* us. It was only a year later that I actually learned how what happened was the very reverse of that' (Hope, 'In Conversation' 74). Having been 'totally oblivious at the time' Naidoo learned the truth through her university friends, who showed her pictures of the massacre, and in this sense Sharpeville marked a turning point for Naidoo in her own awakening to the horrors around her (69). Naidoo has clearly framed 'One Day, Lily, One Day' as a response to her own memories of Sharpeville, and in this sense the story can be read as a revision of her own teenage experiences. Whilst she uses 'The Dare' to explore the white complacency with which she was imbued as a child, as I have discussed in Chapter 3, 'One Day, Lily, One Day' can be read as Naidoo's reimagining of her own childhood if she had possessed the political awareness that she only gained as a young adult. In this way, Naidoo uses this story to insist upon the political nature of childhood, in that she burdens her child characters with the political knowledge that was denied to her. However, as I have shown, this entails a centring of the white child's perspective in ways that de-emphasise the impact of apartheid of Black South Africans. In exploring the cost of parents' activism for their children, 'One Day, Lily, One Day' also dramatises the complex agency of children in such circumstances. Through the character of Lily, this text illustrates that agency can be found in both resisting and performing the scripts of one's social context, and that both choices come with a cost.

4.4.2 'The Typewriter': intergenerational solidarity

Whilst the previous story shows the cost to children of their parent's activism, 'The Typewriter' dramatises the importance of intergenerational communities of resistance as a conduit for agency. Attention to such depictions of intergenerational solidarity 'contributes to deconstructing the restrictive view of young readers as only passive consumers of children's books' (Joosen, 'Building Bridges' 206) by offering opportunities to explore kinship models of agency. Both centring on key anti-apartheid protests involving children and youth, 'The Typewriter' can be read as an answer to 'One Day, Lily, One Day'. 'One Day, Lily, One Day' centres the perspective of a white child on the Sharpeville massacre, in a way that distances readers from the Black protesters, but 'The Typewriter' centres the activism of

Black youth, focusing on the events of the Soweto uprising in 1976. 'The Typewriter' is set some time after the initial uprising. The story opens as protagonist Nandi sneaks out to take part in a march to the cemetery, where the funerals of several people killed in an earlier protest are due to take place. The march descends into chaos when police push back the crowds with tear gas and gunfire. Nandi escapes unharmed, and reflects on her earlier role as a lookout, when her older cousin Esther would hold meetings and create leaflets in preparation for the uprising. Esther lives with the girls' grandmother Khulu, and when Esther is in trouble with the police for her role in the funeral march, she asks Nandi to help hide the typewriter used to write leaflets. Nandi attempts to do so, but Khulu intervenes to help her, and Nandi witnesses Khulu being arrested as she attempts to hide the typewriter. Drawing on real documents that anchor the story in a sense of historical realism, this story normalises youth protest, representing activism as the natural domain of the child. Whilst the story shows instances of intergenerational conflict over the effectiveness of protest, the text ultimately presents a view of agency that is grounded in intergenerational communities of solidarity.

The story is bookended by extracts from other documents, beginning with a leaflet asking parents to strike in solidarity with protesting children, and ending with a newspaper reporting on Khulu's arrest. The leaflet found in the story is Naidoo's adaptation of a real leaflet that was circulated in Soweto, calling for parents to strike:

> Parents, you should rejoice that you have given birth to this type of child. […] A child who prefers to die from a bullet than to swallow a poisonous education which relegates him and his parents to a position of perpetual insubordination. Aren't you proud of the soldiers of liberation that you have given birth to? If you are proud support them. DO NOT GO TO WORK ON MONDAY. ('A copy of the letter circulated in Soweto')

The exact origin of this leaflet is unclear. There were many such leaflets, with different wording, circulated around Soweto from 1976-78. It has similarities with a leaflet reproduced by Hirson, which he links to the Soweto Students' Representative Council, the crucial instigators of the Soweto uprising of 1976 (256). By beginning with the leaflet,

Naidoo foregrounds the idea that these protests were inherently child-centred. The leaflet positions children as activist leaders, from whom adults can take their example: 'parents, you should be proud to have children who prefer to die from bullets than swallow the poison in our schools' (46). This is one of the more explicit examples of the politicisation of children in Naidoo's work, and is positioned as taking its lead from the real language of the movement used at the time. Bookending it in this way also anchors the story in a sense of realism, and lends it an authenticity. For the child characters in this story, there is no sense that politics and protest do not belong to the realm of childhood, and they are conscious of their collective power. They sing during the funeral march: ''We are the young people, // We will not be broken!'' (48). The 'we' of their protest songs illustrates a sense of togetherness, as Nandi hears her 'voice mingled with the rest. At least their voices were free' (48). The freedom, and the power, offered by her voice is in her capacity to join with others, in a way that Nandi feels to be 'electric' (47). This self-conscious declaration of the strength and resilience of youth normalises the presence of children within this political movement. Nandi's involvement in activism nonetheless involves a deliberate performance of childhood innocence. When Esther and her friends meet, the younger Nandi is tasked to 'play outside, but if she saw anyone strange enter the road she had to warn Esther' (50). Nandi's young age gives her a vital role, as the adults passing by will overlook the innocent sight of a child playing in the street. As is the case in 'The Playground', as discussed in Chapter 3, the performance of childhood innocence becomes the site of political change. The text not only suggests that activism can be inherently child-centred, but also that children can use the social scripts of childhood as the tools of their activism. Nandi's agency in this story is rooted in her identity as a child, but also in her belonging to a community. The sense of shared agency that this story communicates is summarised by her final thoughts: 'the police had taken her friends, and now her granny. Her cousin Esther might have escaped, perhaps to carry on fighting… Well she was proud of them!' (59). Considering the price that her friends and family have paid for their activism galvanises Nandi, as she feels able to walk in their footsteps. Even as a Black South African, Nandi comes across as more empowered than Lily in the previous story discussed, and I would suggest that this is because she belongs to community of resistance, wherein she and her peers act together in solidarity.

The second core theme of this story that the leaflet foregrounds is intergenerational solidarity. Whilst children are presented as activist leaders, adults are invited to follow their example. As the story opens, Nandi feels a resistance from the older generations towards the children's protests. She must sneak out to the funeral protest without her mother knowing, and on her way she witnesses how, as the march went past, 'little children ran out shouting before being pulled back by firm elderly hands' (48). They nonetheless receive support from some quarters, as 'another old man, struggling off a chair in his front yard, raised up an arm and fist' with a cry of ''*Amandla!*'' (48). The text represents the older generations as divided on their opinions of the youth protests, and records Nandi's surprise at Khulu's quick action when she is told to hide the typewriter. Nandi recalls that Khulu had remained largely silent during Esther's meetings, only once commenting: ''You children always expect things to happen so quickly! You think you are the first to fight… and that it's easy!'' (57). This remark represents Khulu as wise yet cautious, beaten down by many years of living under apartheid. Nandi's surprise comes from the fact that although Khulu is jaded, she is also experienced in hiding from the police. When she is called upon to help her granddaughters, she refuses to discard the typewriter, saying ''how can I throw it away when the children will still need it?'' (57). Khulu is galvanised by her granddaughters' activism, and by the need to protect both them and their cause. Khulu's role in this story suggests that children require greater protection than adults, but it also demonstrates the importance of solidarity. This is a learning experience for Nandi, who had previously believed that being an activist had to entail disobeying her parents. From sneaking around at the story's beginning, she realises that 'it was no longer a problem what to say, or how to cover up', and resolves to give her mother the leaflet urging parents to go on strike (59). By taking Nandi on this trajectory, the text invites readers to resist viewing agency as synonymous with rebellion against adult authority, instead suggesting that agency in the context of protest is found within intergenerational communities of solidarity. In doing so, this text also makes recourse to the rhetorical power of the innocent child, by suggesting these protests are the more powerful because they are child-led, therefore stemming from purer motives.

4.4.3 'The Gun': agency as desperation

Whilst 'One Day, Lily, One Day' and 'The Typewriter' focus on key moments of protest in apartheid history in which children played a central role, 'The Gun' focuses on the impact of prolonged protest and anti-apartheid militancy, and the government's response to it. 'The Gun' is set in 1985, and Naidoo's timeline at the end of *Out of Bounds* indicates that its events coincide with the 1985 State of Emergency, in which curfews, house arrests and media controls were put in place to militarise every aspect of social life. Enforced in response to the upsurge of resistance faced by the government in the 1980s, the State of Emergency is seen with hindsight to signal the beginning of the end for the regime against a backdrop of strong resistance and growing international condemnation (Deegan). 'The Gun' is the story of Esi, a Black boy who has grown up on the game reserve of a white landowner, Mackay, for whom Esi's father works as gamekeeper. Esi and his father live in relative comfort, but Esi has also experienced life with family in Mapoteng, a nearby town within one of the 'homelands'. Residents of Mapoteng live in poverty, and often venture into Mackay's game farm to poach from his herds. As a result, many despise Esi's father as 'simply another detested policeman, protecting the white man's land and source of food they sorely needed' (64). Esi is curious about the 'MKs' (65), shorthand for uMkhonto we Sizwe, but fear of them is spreading among the white landowners. Mackay employs his son-in-law, Williams, to supervise the farm when he is away. When patrolling the game reserve with Esi, Williams gets injured and Esi refuses to help him, instead stealing his gun and running off in search of the South African border so that he can join the MKs. This story is less optimistic about the agency of children than 'The Typewriter', narrating the narrowing of agency for forcibly removed and oppressed Black South Africans, equating choice with desperation. As Maddy and MacCann argue, apartheid 'placed children in situations where there were no winning options' (136). However, it also illustrates the great impact of the choices made by the protagonist, depicting desperation as a powerful driver of resistance.

'The Gun' opens with a reflection on the nature of choice in challenging circumstances. Thinking about the gun kept in Mackay's hut, Esi recalls a tale told by his father in which a leopard approached Mackay, who shot it dead when it ignored his warning shots: 'the […] shot brought the famished beast crashing, almost at Mackay's feet. 'Such is the desperation of hunger…' was how Papa would always end' (61). Naidoo often embeds proverbs or cautionary tales within her stories, and in this case, beginning the story with this

anecdote sets the tone, suggesting that the story that follows will be a reflection on the extreme measures that people are driven to when they are desperate for food or freedom. In the broader context of the story, the leopard anecdote can be read as an explanation for the poaching carried out by the starving residents of Mapoteng. 'The Gun' narrates Esi's evolution towards sympathy for the Mapoteng residents. He initially perceives his father's expertise in finding poachers as a form of heroism, as his father would face the poachers with 'only […] his short cutting-knife' (63). However, when he is sent to Mapoteng for school, his view of the poachers as dangerous criminals is altered: 'here in this unknown place the government called their 'home', […] they found hunger. In desperation, some sought food in forbidden places' (64). This story includes a criticism of the practice of forced removal, which is presented as a perversion of the idea of home, sending Black people to land that is uninhabitable. Agency becomes narrowed by their circumstances, forcing these people to choose between danger and starvation. Naidoo solidifies the analogy with the leopard story at the end of the text, when Esi has fled with Mackay's gun: 'He didn't want to be like Papa […] catching poachers, black people like themselves, only starving. 'Such is the desperation of hunger…'' (75). Cementing the link between the leopard and the people of Mapoteng, this re-use of the phrase also suggests that Papa's and Esi's choices are also the result of desperation. In the oppressive context, agency is reduced to desperation, as Black people must choose between limited options for survival.

The gun itself is central to the plot, coming to represent agency for Esi, and equating agency with the capacity to do violence rather than being the victim of it. From its wall-mounted position, Esi admires 'the gun's silence and its power' (61), and fantasises about using it himself: 'what would it feel like to let his finger curl gently around the strong metal of the trigger?' (61-2). The gun is an object of desire for Esi, standing in for the control that the white masters have over his family's lives. His fantasies represent his coming of age into his own masculinity accompanied by his desire to have control over his life. Papa remarks that 'those with guns can do what they please. You had better be very careful before you say "No" to a man with a gun' (66). Whilst the agency of the Black characters is narrowed to accommodate nothing but desperation, the gun signposts the lack of limits on the autonomy of white South Africans. As shown in my analysis of 'The Dare' in Chapter 3, whiteness in the context of apartheid possesses the complacency to move in and out of any

space, but in this instance that freedom is attached to the capacity to do violence to another. Esi chafes against this restriction, and particularly against the choices that his father has made so that 'in return the family got land, water, food' (66). Whilst Papa's choice to work for a white man can be understood in the context of the limited choices available to him, Esi begins 'to dread the day when the poachers would be people he knew' (66). He perceives his condition as being in a trap, forced to imitate his father's choices. However, in wrestling with this condition, Esi attempts to fight for a sense of agency: 'he didn't want to be like Papa, powerless, accepting the trap just so they could all keep on living – in the trap' (75). For Esi, the MKs represent the alternative choice. The text represents these activists positively, albeit shrouded in mystery. Esi learns that 'these MKs were people like themselves. But they had resisted the trap of being pushed around and now lived outside of the white man's law, prepared to fight to be free of it' (65). The MKs are an attractive choice for Esi because 'they had arms. […] At least they had a chance' (75). But whilst agency within this text is initially linked to a capacity to wield power through violence, Esi's final act of agency is an act of refusal. Williams misfires the gun, shooting himself in the leg, and when he leans on Esi to help him out of the bush, 'Esi suddenly let himself go limp… No. He was not going to help this man' (74). This final act of agency is enacted by Esi's body before he has time to weigh the cost in his mind. He picks up the gun 'without thinking' and runs away (74). Just like Naledi's choice to become a protester in *Chain of Fire,* this is an affective choice made pre-consciously by his body, setting in motion an irreversible chain of events. Rather than illustrate Esi's lack of agency, this moment is demonstrative of a type of affective agency that recurs in Naidoo's work, whereby children are shown to listen to their bodies. Sitting alone in the game reserve and contemplating his options, Esi realises that 'he had made his choice. He had made it at the moment he had let his body go limp, refusing to support Williams. There was no going back now' (75-76). This representation of child agency is powerful, not in spite of but because of Esi's limited options. The choices that the characters possess are severely limited, but these choices are therefore powerful, setting in motion chains of events that cannot be reversed.

When read together, a dialogue forms between the three short stories discussed here. All three normalise the presence and leadership of children and young people within the resistance to apartheid. But by doing so for protagonists in differing social

circumstances, these stories illustrate the ways that agency emerges in negotiation with these social circumstances, and therefore looks very different for each protagonist. Lily in 'One Day, Lily, One Day' feels her agency to be limited by the context of her parent's activism, while nonetheless supporting their anti-apartheid cause. Nandi in 'The Typewriter' finds a sense of agency in communities of other solidarity, within which she is able to use the perceived innocence of childhood as a tool of resistance. Esi in 'The Gun' also feels his agency to be curtailed by his father's choices. This story illustrates the ways that racist oppression narrows agency, but also that choices made under such circumstances have great impact. *Out of Bounds* has a clear anti-apartheid ethic, but being published in 2001, well after the end of apartheid, this text cannot be read as a straightforward anti-apartheid protest text. It rather invites an interpretation as a set of historical fictions that write children's perspectives into apartheid history, and position children as potential activists and instigators of political change, in ways that ask to be extrapolated on to other social situations.

4.5 Conclusion: the agential child reader

A reading of these texts together in this chapter allows a coherent picture of the vision of the political child in Naidoo's work to emerge. For Sade in *The Other Side of Truth,* agency is constructed from a negotiation with the values and tools inherited from her parents, and by taking ownership of her story and using it to effect social change. *Chain of Fire* offers readers a model of child activism that positions children as leaders of protest movements. In illustrating the affects of resistance, the text suggests that effective activism consists of experiencing and channelling agency towards collective action. Published whilst the atrocities of forced removal it depicts were commonplace, *Chain of Fire* resists a happy ending. However, it is also the text with the clearest vision of childhood agency, perhaps because it is the only text discussed in this chapter that can be explicitly read as a protest novel, and would have held a clearer imperative to galvanise its readers to social action. *No Turning Back* narrates the negotiation between freedom and safety for protagonist Sipho. The text is optimistic about the ability of certain educational institutions to facilitate rather than limit child agency, by allowing children the right to be dependent and cared for. The

novel depicts children as agential, in that they are central to the peacemaking process in South Africa, but also illustrates that such an exercise of agency in the pursuit of peace will be costly. In depicting children negotiating agency within the oppressive and racist context of apartheid South Africa, *Out of Bounds* positions children as political actors and the agents of social change in South Africa. However, the agency depicted in the three short stories discussed is not a fixed possession of certain individuals but is negotiated through the choices that the child protagonists make. In each story, these choices are shown to be costly, and agency is shown to flourish in communities of solidarity and resistance. Throughout each of these texts, there is a suggestion that a form of affective agency is crucial to Naidoo's vision of political reading, whereby embodied action is shown to be the result of pre-conscious, bodily experience. This also suggests a model of reading in which readers listen to their affective, instinctual, and bodily reactions to the knowledge communicated by each text, a model that I will explore further in Chapter 6. Naidoo's construct of the political child rests on a refusal to make a tidy association between agency and rebellion, instead showing the ways that agency emerges as a negotiation with the options available from one's social context. The choices that Naidoo's characters make are shown to be impactful, for good or ill, and children are positioned as the leaders of political change. This depiction of children throughout her work is a core part of her vision for the political potential of childhood reading, inviting readers to share in the political values within each text.

To conclude, and to turn to the real children who make up Naidoo's readers and collaborators, I would like to briefly consider what the activist texts discussed in this chapter ask of their readers. As I have also suggested in Chapter 3, the child readers constructed by these texts are 'mighty' children, in that they embody the fulfilment of adult hopes for the future (Beauvais). This is an empowered implied reader, but also in one sense an obedient one, who is able to do what the text requires of them. Considering how such works position their readers, Sands-O'Connor asks: 'when activists use their voice by writing for children, is it the adult's politics or the benefit to the child reader that is of utmost importance?' (*Black British Activists* 9). There is a sense in which, in depicting children engaged in acts of defiance and civil disobedience, radical children's literature may paradoxically coerce readers into complying with the ideology of the text. However, as discussed in the

Introduction, an important aspect of the didactic mode in which Naidoo operates is a letting go of control over the outcomes of any given reading experience. Arguing that children 'don't have a huge amount of agency' in society, Naidoo has stated her belief that reading 'widens the possibility of their agency' by getting 'them to know a little bit more about themselves and about the world', and by offering a space for an ethical engagement with that world (Personal interview. 24 Feb 2022). As well as neatly summarising her vision for the political potential of childhood reading, this is an acknowledgement that the agency of readers gives no guarantee that this vision will be realised. In the following two chapters, I will turn to the real children who populate Naidoo's archive, exploring the ways that their agency is also a complex negotiation between individual, text, and context.

Chapter 5. Expert children

Naidoo's methodology for adult-child collaboration

> No one thinks about what children would like to say. I think if children ruled the world it would be better. I know for a fact that there wouldn't be any killing. (Tyaliti)

Brian Alderson has noted that 'almost every book is a collaboration' (3). Naidoo's work is no exception; her working relationship with Ethel de Keyser during the development of *Journey to Jo'burg* offers a key example, as I have discussed in Chapter 2. In this chapter, I turn to Naidoo's collaborations with children, looking to her archive to reveal the unique methodology for child collaboration that she developed whilst writing *No Turning Back* and *Web of Lies.* In Chapter 2 I explored the various ways in which Naidoo uses text and peritext to construct a sense of the authenticity of her representations of African children. Whilst being genuinely informative, Naidoo's collaboration with children is also another aspect of this construction of authenticity, lending further credibility to her representations. However, her choice to collaborate with children has further significance, as it demonstrates the ways in which Naidoo views children as sources of creative wisdom and authority on their own life experiences. Furthermore, the evidence of these collaborations in her archive provides important evidence of children as co-producers of children's literature, and my analysis of this archive of collaboration lays the ground for future explorations of child-adult collaborations in the archives of children's literature. These collaborations point not only to an emphasis on the creative agency of children, but on their political agency, as encapsulated in the quote above. Pakama was a student at the Collegiate School for Girls, in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, whose class Naidoo visited in 1993. In letters written to Naidoo a few days after her visit, the students expressed some of their hopes for the future of South Africa, considering how they would resolve violent tensions in the run-up to the 1994 elections. Pakama used her letter to comment on the lack of political agency she attributed to herself as a child, but also to state a belief in her capacity and that of her peers to do better than the adults in power. As this chapter will show, Naidoo's workshops with her young collaborators were often political in tone, discussing the future of South Africa, the role of children in political decision-making processes, and the impact of racism in the UK. Considering, as I have argued throughout, that Naidoo's work positions itself as having a

real-world, political impact, then her invitation for children to collaborate in creating that work is also an invitation into political life. These collaborations are therefore a crucial aspect of her vision of the political potential of childhood reading, giving children a crucial role in the construction of her radical literature. I will explore the methodology for collaboration that Naidoo developed in 1993 whilst working on *No Turning Back,* whereby she invited young people to don the 'mantle of the expert' (Bolton) in informing the direction of her work. Having examined her process in developing *No Turning Back,* I turn to *Web of Lies,* illustrating the evolution of her methodology, and mapping the impact of her young collaborators on the published text. In reading these texts alongside their relevant archival materials, I reveal a model of childhood in which children are the co-producers of children's literature.

5.1 Naidoo's collaborative methodology

Naidoo's main adult collaborator in the context of this chapter is British Nigerian theatre director Olusola Oyeleye. Oyeleye was the first Black staff director of the English National Opera, and has directed plays across Europe, Africa and the US, including *The Playground,* Naidoo's adaptation of her short story by the same name. She has worked extensively in education throughout her career, developing theatre productions with young people, and using drama as an educational tool in the classroom ('Interview: Olusola Oyeleye'). Collaboration is a core part of Oyeleye's practice, and she accompanied Naidoo in her classroom-based PhD research, as well as providing context for *The Other Side of Truth.* In 2007, she described her work with Naidoo in South Africa for *No Turning Back* as the collaboration she was most 'enthusiastic' about (*BBC World Service: African Performance).* Indeed, Oyeleye's input, in particular her expertise as a drama practitioner, underpins all the collaborative work with children discussed in this chapter. Whilst Naidoo's collaboration with adults may not be unusual, her archive reveals a unique research methodology for child-adult creative collaboration. This methodology is a type of participatory research that draws on Naidoo's experience as both a reader-response researcher and an educator. I use the term 'collaboration', rather than 'participation' to describe Naidoo's work with children in the development of these two novels since these children are given the same status as

her adult editors and advisers. Naidoo's methodology nonetheless owes much to the types of participatory research methods that she would be familiar with as a reader-response researcher and educator. Involving children as co-researchers is common within the humanities and social sciences, from education studies to psychology to sociology (Groundwater-Smith et al.; Kemmis et al.; Greene and Hogan; Pattman). In their recent review of participatory research methodologies with children, Montreuil et al. examine the benefits and the ethical implications of such research, arguing that 'by involving children within the research process, children's views can be interpreted through child-centred outlooks, instead of solely through adults' views of their experiences, as has largely been the norm' (1). Corinne Fowler's recent Colonial Countrysides project, a child-led exploration of the colonial history of several British National Trust properties, demonstrates the potential of this sort of research to disrupt dominant narratives of history and place children at the centre of the new narratives that emerge (Fowler).

This sort of participatory approach is becoming more popular in children's literary studies (Chawar et al.; Joosen, 'Children's Literature in Translation'), and Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak argues that participatory research methodologies in combination with literary criticism enable 'children to become peer researchers whose contribution to generating knowledge about what they read has an intrinsic value similar to insights offered by adult readers' (216). These approaches are becoming recognised as both enriching to the research and empowering to child participants. Alongside this, there are a developing number of scholars who are studying the writing of children as literature (Moruzi et al.; Cumming; Fish). As with the types of participatory, child-centred research discussed here, analysing child-produced texts as literature requires that adults 'recognize their agency, respect their productions, and acknowledge that young people bring unique perspectives' (Conrad 198). Scholarship on author collaborations with children has thus far been limited, but there are two key examples that I build on in my own research in this area. In her exploration of adult-child literary collaborations from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Victoria Ford Smith draws on the work of Gubar and Bernstein to suggest that real children influenced the child figures found in many Golden Age texts. Ford Smith suggests that producers of Golden Age children's literature and scholars of the field have glossed over the presence of child collaborators because their ambiguous presence complicates common assumptions about

the ‘adult authority’ behind the classics (9). The second example comes from Dawn Heinecken, who explores the extent to which Jill Krementz’s participatory work with children in the creation of her photobooks can be seen to exemplify Gubar’s kinship model. Whilst the type of adult-child literary collaborations I explore here may be more common than current scholarship suggests, records of them and the methodologies underpinning them, such as can be found in Naidoo’s archive, are rare, if not unique. Her archive therefore provides an invaluable opportunity for a ‘recuperation of the tradition of adult-child collaborations’ (Ford Smith 18), which will in turn open up space for other similar research into the working relationships between authors and their child collaborators.

The most succinct summary of Naidoo’s participatory research methodology, whereby she engages her child collaborators, is given in a report written by Naidoo and Oyeleye of their 1993 trip to South Africa, during which they developed many of the themes for the novel that would become *No Turning Back*. Writing for the British Council, from whom they received funding for their trip, Oyeleye and Naidoo reported using ‘reader-response, creative writing, improvisation, role-play, forum theatre [and] hot-seating’ as ways of ‘opening up sensitive issues which affect the lives of young people’ (Naidoo and Oyeleye 1). This methodology came to inform not only the development of *No Turning Back,* but of all Naidoo’s subsequent middle-grade fiction, for which she drew on some degree of input from child collaborators. The combination of the methods described in 1993 can therefore be equally applied to describe the collaborative methodology used in developing *Web of Lies.* Naidoo and Oyeleye’s report for the British Council evaluates the effectiveness of their methodology at exploring issues of justice and equality, gathering pieces for a proposed anthology of young South African voices, and sowing the initial seeds of anti-racist teaching practices in the schools which hosted them. Naidoo’s intention to produce a novel is never mentioned in the report, even though she had been planning a new novel set in South Africa as early as February 1993, five months before her visit. Producing a novel as the outcome for such a trip may not have fulfilled the funding criteria for the British Council, but the methodology developed for her 1993 trip to South Africa was clearly developed with the new novel in mind. A key feature of this methodology is that the research took place in institutional, group settings. Naidoo and Oyeleye never interviewed children individually, and the research outcomes were therefore shaped both by these institutional settings and

by the dynamics of each group. Sharing a background in education, Naidoo's and Oyeleye's approach signals a respect for educational institutions. Working with children in schools and youth centres provided the most convenient way to access their perspectives, and these group settings proved essential for the drama component of the workshops.

In their British Council report, Naidoo and Oyeleye described using 'Drama-in-Education' (DiE), an approach originating with Dorothy Heathcote in the 1960s. Forum theatre, which Naidoo and Oyeleye also reference in their report, makes space for participants to rehearse solutions to real-life problems, and was developed by Augusto Boal as part of his 'theatre of the oppressed'. DiE is a method of drama education that 'explores issues through suitable theatrical techniques and enhances understanding through reflection sessions' (Papavassiliou-Alexiou and Zourna 768). This method focuses on process rather than outcome, activating knowledge and unlocking emotions in relation to a given issue, rather than imparting knowledge or technique to participants (Papaioannou and Kondoyianni). As an educational tool, DiE aims to develop the 'natural understanding' of participants (Bolton 156), which can be understood as the development of participants' capacity to relate to others and to the world in which they live. Most of the literature on DiE focuses on its use as an educational tool, which is also how it is framed by Naidoo and Oyeleye in their report. However, the archive reveals that their use of DiE produces shared knowledge that is not just retained by the participants but transferred to Naidoo and Oyeleye as facilitators and utilised by Naidoo in her writing. In relation to Naidoo's development of her novels, DiE serves two purposes. The method equips participants to find solutions to certain issues, for example: should Papa remarry in *Web of Lies*? Secondly, the method unlocks emotions relating to these issues: how would these young people feel if one parent were to remarry following the death of the other? These drama sessions therefore equipped Naidoo with possible solutions to problems of plot and characterisation and give her access to the emotions surrounding these problems. This use of drama is productive for the sort of affective agency that Naidoo's texts model for readers, as discussed in Chapter 4. DiE allows Naidoo to construct what I call 'affective authenticity', whereby she attempts to capture the emotions offered by the drama participants in her writing. Furthermore, this allows Naidoo to mobilise the idea of child-adult collaboration to give her work a sense of factual credibility.

The participatory methodology developed for Naidoo's child collaborations is not free from the power dynamics that structure all adult-child interactions. Rob Pattman outlines the risks of reinscribing these power dynamics in participatory research with children, which nonetheless have the potential to '"invert power" relations and engage with learners as figures of authority in research' (81). Naidoo positions her child collaborators as such sources of authority, but in converting the words of her child collaborators into the text of her novels, Naidoo is speaking for her child characters from a position of adult power. Naidoo's status as a white author intensifies this power dynamic, as her collaborators are mostly Black children, like her characters. Roderick McGillis raises this concern in his discussion of postcolonial children's literature: 'do we steal the voices of others in the very act of providing a medium for those voices?' (xxii). Furthermore, Naidoo's child collaborators appear as an 'incomplete presence' in the archive (Fish 71). The children's perspectives revealed by Naidoo's archive are all mediated by adults: by the teachers accompanying the workshops, and by Naidoo herself. The relationships with children that emerge from Naidoo's archive are author-led, 'hierarchical collaborations' (Lunsford and Ede 133). Paralleling Beauvais's assessment of the future-oriented power of the implied reader of didactic children's literature, Ford Smith argues that child-adult literary collaborations often position children as 'future agents in the public sphere' (29). However, Naidoo's collaborations construct children not as future agents, but as agents in their current childhood state. Their presence is transformative for Naidoo's work, and reading for the partial or incomplete presence of the child in the archive 'stretches the bounds of expectation for how child agency may look and feel' (Fish 71). This chapter, and this thesis, require two truths to be held in tension. Naidoo's child collaborators are real, and their real voices are preserved by her archive. The examples of child collaborations that emerge in this chapter show that children's contributions to children's literature and culture can proceed from positions of creative and political authority, even as they are mediated by adult power. At the same time, the child collaborator in this chapter is also a rhetorical figure, used by Naidoo to lend a sense of authenticity to her work, and to advance her vision of childhood as politically and socially saturated. This is a valuable illustration of the intersection between the real and rhetorical child, and of the importance of this intersection to Naidoo's vision for the political potential of childhood reading.

5.2 One approach, two contexts

As I have already suggested, Naidoo drew on the expertise of child collaborators to different degrees for all her middle-grade work after *No Turning Back.* I have chosen to draw on the archival materials pertaining to *No Turning Back* and *Web of Lies* for two reasons. The first and most practical is that these collaborations were more extensive, and the archive contains detailed records of the collaborations that shaped the development of these two novels in ways that it does not for *The Other Side of Truth* or *Burn My Heart.* The second reason is that both novels, although set in different contexts and published nine years apart, engage with stories of young Black boys struggling to survive in contexts where childhood is considered to be in crisis, be it on the streets of Johannesburg or London. As I have discussed in the previous two chapters, both Sipho and Femi are struggling to find a sense of belonging outside of traditional social structures, and both feel the continued threat of violence. In relation to both novels, Naidoo's choice to collaborate with young people seems to have stemmed from a desire to represent these contexts in a credible and authentic way. The second reason for Naidoo's research with South African children for her development of *No Turning Back* was her new-found freedom to do so. Naidoo has described being excited to return to South Africa after a long exile: 'I could now include these young people as potential future readers. Furthermore, I would be free to collect my own material' ('I'm Committed to Peace, Are You?'). Her approach to *No Turning Back* was in large part born out of this long-awaited opportunity to return to the country of her birth. The collaborative work that she continued when developing her future work can therefore be seen as the serendipitous outcome of this opportunity.

Several reviews of *No Turning Back* allude to Naidoo's research with South African children, with one describing it as 'believable' ('Six Minor Miracles'). Freeman et al. note that Sipho's experiences are 'based on actual stories of young blacks in South Africa' ('Contemporary Living' 431), whilst Devereaux and Roback describe Naidoo's 'evident knowledge of her subject' (60). For another reviewer from *Kirkus Reviews*, however, the novel is bland in spite of Naidoo's research methodology:

> Naidoo, with the acknowledged help of a corps of contemporary observers, effectively captures the mixed feelings with which South Africans are viewing the

> changes rapidly taking place in their country, but the story lacks the fire that made Journey to Jo'burg (1985) so compelling. ('No Turning Back')

The implication here is that Naidoo has used her collaborations to lend a credibility to the narrative, at the neglect of dramatic tension. Both positive and critical reviews recognise that *No Turning Back* translates real-life stories into fiction in order to offer lessons to readers, showing the effectiveness of Naidoo's mobilisation of her child collaborations to offer her work some credibility. In the rest of this chapter I construct 'composition narratives' for *No Turning Back* and *Web of Lies.* I look to Naidoo's archive for the voices of her child collaborations, in order to narrate the development of each novel, and I trace the impact of these collaborations on each published text. This analysis also suggests that the increasing complexity of Naidoo's fiction that I have noted in Chapter 2 might be ascribed the increasing input of children and young people into her development process. I approach the corresponding archive differently in relation to the two novels I discuss, as the evidence of Naidoo's collaborations appears differently in respect to each. As the archival materials pertaining to *No Turning Back* are a mix of reports, workshop plans, correspondence with South African educators, and a few written responses from young people, my discussion of *No Turning Back* focuses chiefly on Naidoo's process and motivation for collaboration, with some analysis of these young people's words. In relation to *Web of Lies,* the archive holds transcripts of several workshops with young people, and so my analysis focuses more on their words and their impact on the published text.

5.3 *No Turning Back*: laying the groundwork

As discussed in Chapter 2, peritexts invite readers to read in a certain way, and in the case of *No Turning Back,* the Acknowledgements, placed at the front of the novel, foreground the various educational institutions and young people with whom Naidoo collaborated while reading. The text invites readers to see it as the fruit of much collaborative work, grounded in the real experiences of a number of real South African children. This positions the novel as an authentic representation of life on the streets of Johannesburg and gives authority to children as Naidoo's co-producers. In this chapter I

explore Naidoo's archival records of these collaborations. These records shed light on Naidoo's collaborative process, whilst positioning children as the co-producers of her work. Naidoo has noted that *No Turning Back* 'was quite different from my previous South African work written under conditions of exile', since she was able to return to her country of birth to do primary research ('I'm Committed to Peace, Are You?'). As discussed, Naidoo's participatory research methodology was developed during her work on *No Turning Back,* and her archive reveals the ways that this methodology shaped the published text. Naidoo has described this process of visiting South Africa for research and development as a 'credibility check' (Personal interview. 18 May 2021), equipping her with the accurate context needed to create a believable narrative. This ethic of credibility is crucial to Naidoo's vision of childhood reading, providing the grounding for the political potential that the text invites readers to explore.

No Turning Back was shaped by three visits to South Africa between 1991 and 1994. Since leaving in 1965, Naidoo had only made one brief return to South Africa in 1983. In 1991, she was able to use her visit to do work that would not have been permitted before, visiting schools and projects to '[listen] to the voices of young South Africans' ('I'm Committed to Peace, Are You?'). It was another two years before she began to develop her new South Africa novel, returning to South Africa in 1993 for research, and in again 1994 with a working draft. Naidoo visited numerous groups of young people over these three occasions, of which I focus on three examples to analyse how this research with children and young people shaped the novel: the SPEAK Barefoot Teacher Training Programme in Alexandra, Johannesburg; the Street-Wise shelter and educational centre for street children in Johannesburg; and the Collegiate School for Girls in Port Elizabeth. Naidoo has emphasised the ways that these visits lent a complexity to her knowledge of the lives of South African young people. In a letter to Martha Mogkoko, director of the SPEAK Barefoot Teacher Training Programme, sent shortly after returning from her first visit in 1991, Naidoo wrote: 'my mind […] is refusing to tidy up all the images I have brought back with me, despite trying to give one-minute-nutshell answers to the many people who ask "What was it like?"' (Letter to Martha Mogkoko. 13 September 19). Although *No Turning Back* was not conceived of in 1991, the novel reflects this resistance to easy, tidy answers to the problems

facing the young people of South Africa in the early 1990s. Naidoo reflected on this further in a 1994 article:

> while many young people in the West believe that all is well now that President Mandela is at the helm, I hope my readers will begin to ask questions about how the social fabric of broken families can be mended so that all children can live in peace and safety. ('The flowers of Alexandra').

A key aim for *No Turning Back* was to dispel the idea that South Africa's social and political problems dissolved with the end of apartheid. As discussed in Chapter 4, the novel sets itself up as a lesson both in the lasting legacy of apartheid, and also in the central role that children and young people have in healing the country from that legacy.

5.3.1 The SPEAK Barefoot Teacher Training Programme

Naidoo visited the SPEAK Barefoot Teacher Training Programme in Alexandra on each of her visits to South Africa in 1991, 1993, and 1994. On the outskirts of Johannesburg, Alexandra was and still is one of the poorest urban areas in South Africa. The site of sustained resistance to apartheid in the 1980s, in the early 1990s it became a hotspot for clashes 'between Inkatha-supporting hostel dwellers and the largely pro-ANC community' ('The flowers of Alexandra'). Along with Pippa Stein from the educational department at the University of Witwatersrand, educator Martha Mogkoko established SPEAK in 1985 as an English teaching programme. The programme evolved with the needs of the community, equipping young activists in the late 1980s and empowering young people to become educators after Mandela's release. Young local people aged 18-25 trained with Mogkoko, using drama to prepare lessons before being placed in local primary schools to deliver their material. Naidoo has compiled photographs from her three visits to SPEAK, along with two *TES* articles reflecting on her visit, and workshop plans by Mogkoko, into a scrapbook which is held in the Seven Stories archive (see Fig. 4). Naidoo's creation of this scrapbook presents her various interactions with SPEAK as a single coherent narrative of the impact of SPEAK and Mogkoko on her work. Whilst the words of the children involved in this collaboration are not preserved, Naidoo's work with SPEAK reveals a pattern of collaboration that is

Figure 4: One of the photos taken by Naidoo for her SPEAK scrapbook, documenting her and Oyeleye's visits to the SPEAK Barefoot Teaching Programme in 1991, 1993, and 1994. This image shows a chalkboard welcoming Naidoo and Oyeleye (Naidoo, Photo: 'SPEAK welcomes Bev and Sola').

embedded in educational institutions and values the political and radical functions of education.

In 1991 Naidoo was invited to a workshop at SPEAK in which Mogkoko used *Journey to Jo'burg* to develop lessons with her trainee teachers. Naidoo described this as 'one of the most exhilarating educational experiences I can recall for many years' ('Short-changed in Johannesburg'), and seeing her novel reworked and debated over by these trainee teachers and their young pupils gave her insights into the hopes and concerns of her potential future South African readers. The earliest dated plan for *No Turning Back* is from February 1993, outlining the first 8 chapters of a 'New SA novel' ('Notes for a New SA Novel'). The plot of this draft is significantly different from *No Turning Back*; it features a boy and his mother who move from a rural area to a squatter camp in the Alexandra region of Johannesburg to look for his missing father. By the time Naidoo returned to South Africa in 1993 with Oyeleye, funded by the British Council for a packed itinerary of educational visits, the narrative of *No Turning Back* had crystallised into a form recognisable in the published text. During this 1993 trip, Naidoo returned to Mogkoko and her Barefoot Teachers with Oyeleye, with a plan to 'listen in to the voices of young people so that I can represent them and their concerns as validly as possible within my writing' (Naidoo, Beverley. Letter to Martha Mogkoko. 6 April 1993). Credibility is presented as the core motive for her visit, both in the sense of representing her subjects fairly and in creating a convincing narrative for her readers. In this same letter, Naidoo reflected on the impact of the workshop on *Journey to Jo'burg*:

> the way you workshopped *Journey to Jo'burg* before the students had actually read the book was so creative and educationally informative that I was wondering if you might agree to do something similar with this new work, although it will be at an earlier stage. (Letter to Martha Mogkoko. 6 April 1993)

Having witnessed Mogkoko using drama as a creative way to teach about using a novel in 1991, Naidoo seems to have seen an opportunity to do similar work as a way of developing her new novel. Naidoo also proposed that they discuss 'questions around schooling, street children, violence, children who feel they have some prospects in the new South Africa, those who don't, etc.' (Letter to Martha Mogkoko. 6 April 1993). Mogkoko was seemingly amenable to Naidoo's request, as photographs from the SPEAK scrapbook show a workshop

led by Mogkoko, in which the students used drama to enact a debate between the new government and the inhabitants of a community such as their own. Naidoo has inserted cuttings from the workshop plan alongside the photos to indicate the instructions that were given to the participants:

> You are community people. Some of you have children who roam the streets because you can no longer afford to educate them. You have lost your jobs and you are now dying everyday. Your houses are squashed and too small to accommodate your families. The 27th April 1994, you will have a new government. Work out how you will present your case to this government. (SPEAK scrapbook)

As an example of DiE designed to draw out the specific knowledge of people living in a township, this task provided Naidoo and Oyeleye with insights into participants' attitudes towards the new South Africa. This is evidence of the ways that Naidoo valued the input of these young teachers and their pupils in their ability to enrich her writing.

Naidoo visited South Africa for a third time in 1994 with a draft of *No Turning Back,* which at this stage was still untitled. Again visiting Mogkoko and her SPEAK Barefoot Teachers in Alexandra, Naidoo described the process of workshopping the novel in her scrapbook:

> 1st day: opening chapter workshops amongst Barefoot Teachers
>
> 2nd day: Barefoot Teachers conduct own workshops with primary school children and return to Oliver Tambo Centre to discuss. (SPEAK scrapbook)

This plan corresponded to the usual process by which the trainee teachers would prepare material before taking it to their primary school pupils. Photographs in Naidoo's SPEAK scrapbook show Standard Fours (aged 11-12) at Dr Knak Combined School in Alexandra acting out a scene in which a street child begs for money from another child, who refuses to give it. Once again, drama was central to the workshopping of the novel, since it allowed for the effects of a particular scene to be tested out. Whilst the scrapbook indicates that Naidoo's observation of these primary school pupils was a central part of her development of *No Turning Back,* their impact can only be inferred, as no records of their voices exist in the archive. Naidoo's work with SPEAK is a prime illustration of her process of collaboration,

which first involves establishing a relationship of trust with an educational institution, before observing and perhaps interacting with the children it serves. Whilst the specific impact on *No Turning Back* is hard to measure, as the voices of participants remain hidden, Naidoo's work with SPEAK illustrates her desire to position these children and young teachers as authorities on the politics of their country. I can also infer much from this collaboration with SPEAK, an educational institution with a history of radical action and a belief in young people as the agents of change, about Naidoo's continued belief in the political value of liiterature education.

5.3.2 Street-Wise and Webster Nhlanhla Nxele

During their 1993 visit, Naidoo and Oyeleye visited Street-Wise, an educational and skills centre for street children in Johannesburg. Street-Wise was at the time the only national programme for street children in South Africa (Swart-Kruger. '"Street-Wise", not "Drop-Outs": Street Children in NGO Programmes in Johannesburg, South Africa'), taking in children as young as 3 (Wren). It was also the model for the Themba Shelter in *No Turning Back,* where Sipho is housed and begins his education towards the end of the novel. As is the case with the SPEAK archive, the archive holds no record of the voices of the children at Street-Wise with whom Naidoo and Oyeleye worked. Since the children in the shelter had varying degrees of literacy, the majority of the work that Naidoo and Oyeleye did with them used drama and conversation, of which there is little archival record (Personal interview. 18 May 2021). Naidoo's collaboration with Street-Wise was facilitated by Jill Swart-Kruger, anthropologist of South Africa's street children and co-founder of Street-Wise. In a letter from August 1994, Swart-Kruger offered feedback on Naidoo's representations of glue-sniffing and interactions with the police in a draft of *No Turning Back*, as well as noting: 'I have shuddered over many scripts about street children. I didn't know what to expect from you and it was with relief first, and pleasure subsequently, that I read the script' (Swart-Kruger. Letter to Beverley Naidoo). Knox Mogashoa, Branch Co-ordinator at Street-Wise, was similarly glowing in his assessment of the accuracy of Naidoo's representations, stating that Sipho's reasons for running away are 'typically parallel to those of the streetkids from urban and rural areas who try to escape from problems at home' (Mogashoa). As I have

suggested, Naidoo's collaborations with adult and child experts were a way of ensuring the accuracy and credibility of her work, and this feedback from Swart-Kruger and Mogoshoa seems to have validated that impulse.

Although the voices of the children of Street-Wise are not present in Naidoo's archive, her representations of street children were clearly informed by her interactions with Webster Nhlanhla Nxele, Assistant Care-Worker at Street-Wise and a former street child. In documenting their correspondence and using one of his poems as a peritextual opening to *No Turning Back,* Naidoo invokes the idea of the street child's voice, even as this voice is a reconstruction from Nxele's vantage point as a young adult. Nxele was in his early twenties at the time of Naidoo and Oyeleye's 1993 visit. He appears in photographs of boys from Street-Wise that Naidoo preserved for her archive, and her records show that he assisted Naidoo and Oyeleye with a workshop in Port Elizabeth in August 1993. Below his poem, entitled 'A Gift from God: Being a Street Child', as reprinted in the opening pages of *No Turning Back,* Naidoo identifies Webster as a former street child, who now works 'as an Assistant Care-worker at the Street-Wise shelter for homeless children in Johannesburg' (xii). Naidoo and Nxele corresponded in 1994 about the use of his poem for her novel. The archive only contains Naidoo's half of their correspondence, but she makes reference to a letter from him in her postscript to the 2016 edition of *No Turning Back*: 'Tragically, Nhlanhla drowned during a survival course in July 2000. […] In his last letter to me, he wrote: '*When days are dark, I light a candle*.'' (xii). Nxele's poem can be read as an appeal to readers' empathy, and as a reflection on his own childhood experience. The poem addresses readers, speaking in the voice of a concerned observer, guiding them towards knowledge of and solidarity with the homeless child who is the poem's subject. Naming the homeless child as 'this gift', the speaker draws a cruel juxtaposition between the preciousness of the child subject and his lack of access to basic necessities. The speaker also assumes that readers are comfortable and lack knowledge of life on the street. The second stanza offers a rhetorical question: 'what future does his life on the street have for him?' inviting readers to admit their lack of knowledge, and the lack of an imagined future for this homeless child. In the last stanza, the speaker moves from addressing readers as 'you' to including the reader within a collective 'us': 'these children are people like us. Let us help them' (*No Turning Back,* xii). This repositions readers, inviting them into a shared responsibility, having first

been offered new knowledge about the daily life of a homeless child in Johannesburg. Naidoo's use of Nxele's words, both in the poem and in this latter quote, position him an as expert voice, not only on the experience of being a street child, but also on the sense of hope for the future of South Africa that the novel endeavours to conjure. Beginning with his words also gives the novel a sense of authenticity, inviting readers to explore the parallels between Sipho and Nxele.

The influence of Nxele and his poem on the novel are apparent in both text and archive. In a letter to Stones, who was Naidoo's editor at Puffin at the time, Naidoo notes that 'it was Webster's poem that gave me the idea of calling my main character Sipho which means 'gift'' (Letter to Rosemary Stones). Naidoo borrows from Nxele's language to inform her own representations of street children, and Sipho's name is only the first example of this. The idea of 'the dream' is repeated in the second stanza of Nxele's poem:

> This child has a dream but because
> he is on the street
> he cannot make his dream come true. (xi)

Naidoo expands on the idea of 'the dream' in the final pages of *No Turning Back,* at which point Sipho is in the Themba Shelter: 'Ma had her dreams and so did he. […] But if her dreams didn't come true then perhaps his would. If he did well in school, one day he would get a job and a house' (187). The dream of safety, security, family, and being integrated into society, all of which are implied in Nxele's poem, are fleshed out in the novel's final sentences. As discussed in Chapter 4, Naidoo positions education as the key to the realisation of these dreams. The influence of Nxele's poem can also be seen in Naidoo's representation of the coping strategies of the Sipho's peers. The poem describes how the street child

> […] must drug himself
> so that he can pretend he is inside the house
> like you
> going to sleep on his bed with warm blankets. (xi)

This description can be seen to be reflected in the character of Joseph, who is dependent on sniffing glue and offers Sipho his first taste of the drug. Describing his experience on the drug, Joseph says 'I'm having a good time. I have a nice, nice garden with lots of flowers. It's sunny… and hot… and I can sleep the whole day' (42). Like the child of Nxele's poem, Joseph uses drugs to create a fantasy for himself of a warm, comfortable life. Naidoo's understanding of drug use, and of the aspirations and inner life of a street child are clearly informed by Nxele's words. By placing this poem at the start of the novel, Naidoo invites readers to map this influence. Knowing that Nxele had been a street child himself reinforces the novel's credibility, and positions Naidoo as someone who values the perspectives of real street children.

5.3.3 The Collegiate School for Girls, Port Elizabeth

Alongside Street-Wise and the SPEAK Barefoot teacher training programme, Naidoo and Oyeleye also visited several schools during their 1993 trip to South Africa. The best documented in the archive is their visit to the Collegiate School for Girls, Port Elizabeth. This school had begun to integrate before this became a legal requirement in 1994, educating pupils from Black and Coloured communities (Naidoo, Personal interview. 18 May 2021). Naidoo corresponded with Lesley Foster, a teacher at the school, from 1992, as Foster had first contacted Naidoo after reading *Through Whose Eyes* (Foster. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 4 August 1993). It was agreed that Naidoo and Oyeleye would deliver two workshops on 24th August 1993, one to a group of 20 Standard Five pupils (aged 12-13) at the Collegiate School, and a second to a group of 25-30 staff at the local Teachers' Centre (Foster. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 17 June 1993). Responses written during the former workshop are the clearest examples of the voices of Naidoo's child collaborators that emerge in the archival material pertaining to *No Turning Back*. It is these responses, and the feedback on Naidoo's draft from a second group of young people at the Collegiate School, that I will focus on for the remainder of my discussion of *No Turning Back.*

Naidoo and Oyeleye's workshop was designed to prompt participants to reflect on their perception of South Africa, and to articulate what they felt they needed from their country as young people. A handwritten plan shows the structure of the workshop,

including a discussion of children's needs and expectations of a fully integrated school, written and verbal responses to various poems, and the composition of a poem to reflect on the session (Workshop outline: 'Collegiate School for Girls, PE'). Naidoo's archive holds letters addressed to her and Oyeleye, composed a few days after their workshop. Participants expressed anxiety about the future of the country; Kulthoom stated her hope that 'peace will brake [sic] out soon and my only worry is that next year when the election takes place all the democratic parties wont [sic] start a war because then we would definitely have to flee the country' (Kulthoom Hendricks. Letter to Beverley Naidoo and Olusola Oyeleye), while Cindy wrote: 'day by day people are dying because of the stupid violence. I wish there was just a little place in the world were [sic] I could hide with my family and friend until everything is over' (Cindy Hendricks). Cindy and Kulthoom shared the hope for peace that is depicted in the peace marches, as discussed in Chapter 4. They also shared an ambivalence towards their home country, wishing for peace but also contemplating a future in which it would be safer to leave.

Naidoo and Oyeleye structured part of the workshop around 'If Someone Were To Ask Me…', a collection of three poems written by fourteen-year-old Manelisi (a pseudonym) after a visit to South Africa, and published in *Free As I Know* (1987). In the workshop, Naidoo and Oyeleye used the third of Manelisi's poems, entitled 'South Africa', alongside other poems written by British children to draw out reflections from the participants. This choice to bring the words of young people into a classroom dialogue with other young people is demonstrative of Naidoo and Oyeleye's desire to foreground the perspectives and voices of children, rather than offering an adult perspective. 'South Africa' begins 'If someone were to ask me what / it's like to visit South Africa', juxtaposing the 'rolling green mountains of / the Transkei' with

> the tiny
> huts which contain one or two
> families, in which no one is a wage
> earner. ('If Someone Were to Ask Me' 106)

The speaker is authoritative; the title, which recurs as a refrain throughout, suggests valuable insight. The speaker portrays a South Africa riven by contradictions and injustice,

and stakes his claim as a trustworthy commentator due both to his connections with the country and his affective solidarity with those suffering there. Students were asked to write a letter to Manelisi, offering their thoughts on how South Africa had changed since his visit in the 1980s. There is much contrast among their views. Kulthoom remarked that things are changing 'step by step' (Kulthoom Hendricks. Letter to Manelisi), whilst another unnamed participant remarked that 'South Africa has changed and I believe there will be another change' (Letter to Manelisi from unnamed participant). Whilst some of the participants remarked that nothing had changed, Ivana's view was more complex: South Africa 'has become better in some ways and worse in others', on the grounds that there was more freedom but also more violence (Ivana). Several described interracial and political violence as their main concern, whilst others cited pollution and poverty: 'South Africa is becoming so violent that eventually there will be no peace in this country. There are people that sit in the streets begging for some money or something to eat' (O'Connor). After describing the divisions and pollution that affect South Africa, Diane emphasised the pride she felt towards her country nonetheless: 'South Africa is a beautiful place and I love living here' (Diane Williams). The hope expressed by the young people at the Collegiate School, in combination with their scepticism about the ease of the peace process, is reflected in Sipho's attitude in the novel when he hears 'a voice in his head saying that he didn't believe these words' in songs that tell of hope for the future of South Africa (175). The words of these young people can be seen to have informed Naidoo's construction of her child characters in *No Turning Back,* who like the girls at the Collegiate School, see themselves as authorities on the needs and future of their country.

In 1994, Naidoo sent a draft of *No Turning Back* to Lesley Foster, asking for feedback from her students. The students in Foster's class emerge as authorities on the literature that matters to them, with valuable critical perspectives to share. In response to one of Naidoo's questions about whether the students found the book to be realistic, Katherine responded that

> Everything in this story is true, making it true is even better than made up stories, because you can relate to the things in the story. […] The only thing I dislike about this book is the police! But they make the story true. (Hansford)

She appreciated that the story related to things she could recognise from real life and was willing to endure the parts of the story she disliked, in this case the details of police violence, in order for the story to more closely reflect the world that she knew. The impact of this feedback on Naidoo's drafting process is hard to measure from the information in the archive, but in asking the students to review her draft, it is made clear that Naidoo places a highly value on the opinions of her readers and demonstrates a willingness to modify her outsider's perspective with insights from expert child insiders. Naidoo's return to South Africa in 1991 allowed her to imagine a new readership for her work from inside South Africa, and to reinforce the authenticity of her future novels. In structuring her collaborations through educational institutions, Naidoo has signalled the sort of education that she values – one that offers structure but respects and gives authority to young people to speak about their own lives. This collaborative work provided a structure that shaped the development of all her subsequent novels, in particular *Web of Lies.* In positioning children as the co-producers rather than simply the recipients of her work, Naidoo makes a statement about the political potential of children in their ability to inform radical children's fiction. She also invokes the idea of the child collaborator to embellish the political quality of her work, which is positioned as giving voice to children.

5.4 *Web of Lies*: consulting the experts

Whilst the records of the voices of Naidoo's child collaborators are scant in the archive pertaining to *No Turning Back,* that pertaining to *Web of Lies* contains generous records of the, albeit mediated, voices of the young people with whom Naidoo workshopped this later novel. As in *No Turning Back,* Naidoo uses her Acknowledgements in *Web of Lies* to thank 'the many young people who spoke so honestly and openly' (Acknowledgements). These young people make up several groups from London, and one from Bristol, most of whom are Black British, British Asian, or recent immigrants from different African countries. Using conversation and drama in a series of workshops between July 2001 and February 2002, Naidoo introduced key themes, scenarios and questions in order to gain insight into the perspectives of these young people. Once again, Oyeleye was involved at key points during this process, lending her drama expertise to these

collaborations. As with all the sources I use in this chapter, the voices of Naidoo's young collaborators in the archive are mediated by adults in various ways. The workshops were structured within educational settings and led by adults. Furthermore, the transcripts of these workshops created by Naidoo are not a verbatim record. They are lengthy, but there are signs that certain passages have been summarised, abbreviated, or left out entirely, whilst other passages have been highlighted by Naidoo. My analysis of the children's voices in the archive is therefore influenced by Naidoo's mediation. I have used Naidoo's questions during the workshops and her use of highlighters on the written transcripts to gauge which of the insights of her collaborators she found the most useful; I also read the finished text for traces of these insights. Even given this partial archival evidence, it is clear that Naidoo's collaboration with young people was seen by her as essential both to the specific development of *Web of Lies,* and to the development of her vision of childhood as a site of political and creative agency.

The first pieces of draft work on *Web of Lies* held in Naidoo's archive are from May 2001, a year after *The Other Side of Truth* was published. These notes begin: 'Femi now in same school as Sade… from September 97' (Naidoo. 'Draft outline notes'). Moving the narrative on by two years, these notes show the beginning of an interest in how Femi's character developed over this time. Naidoo's first collaboration took place at in July 2001 at Charles Edward Brooke School in Camberwell, South London, with a group of Year Sevens (aged 11-12): Vwarhe, Monisola, Cherish, and Donna. These Year Sevens were later joined by six Year Tens (aged 14-15), who considered their memories of Year Seven, and added their insights to those of the younger girls. Naidoo returned to the school in September 2001 to interview the same group of older girls, now all in Year Eleven (aged 15-16), along with a few others who did not participate in the previous workshop. That same week, Naidoo returned to the school accompanied by Olusola Oyeleye, for a drama workshop with Vwarhe, Monisola, Cherish, Donna, and four other Year Eights (aged 12-13). On the same day, Naidoo and Oyeleye led a workshop at the From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation, also in Camberwell. Naidoo's final collaboration took place a few months later, but the ground for it was laid in August 2001, when Naidoo interviewed Ruth Symister, a teacher at Whitefield Fishponds School in Bristol. Naidoo went on to visit Whitefield Fishponds in February 2002, to interview a group of Year Eights. Of the young people with whom Naidoo

collaborated on *Web of Lies*, only Monisola, Cherish, Donna and Vwarhe are mentioned by name in the novel's Acknowledgements. As well as workshopping ideas in 2001, these four students from Charles Edward Brooke School also read a draft of the novel and offered Naidoo their comments in a workshop with her in July 2003. There is no archival record of this final collaboration other than a letter from Naidoo detailing the plans for this final workshop, so their place in the Acknowledgements is the only evidence that their feedback on Naidoo's draft was influential. This archival record, as I have outlined it here, illustrates that collaboration with young people was embedded into each stage of Naidoo's development process. Naidoo clearly considered this to be an essential part of creating a novel that was both credible and attractive to teenage readers. In the following discussion, I separate the insights from Naidoo's three categories: participants' views on certain issues and experiences that were introduced by Naidoo and pertain to *Web of Lies*, including racism, gang culture, migrancy and gender; specific insights into the characters in *The Other Side of Truth* and their trajectory into the sequel; and a sense of themselves and their agency as young people, both in relation to their peers and to adults. Reading the archival record of Naidoo's collaborations alongside the published text, I trace their influence on *Web of Lies,* illustrating their integral role in shaping the novel.

5.4.1 Race, gender, and belonging

Naidoo and Oyeleye structured all of their workshops around certain key themes or issues of plot that they wished to explore. Whilst developing *Web of Lies,* Naidoo used these workshops to gain insights from her collaborators on Nigerian identity, the impact of racism and sexism in their lives, and the factors that might lead them to join a gang. All of the educational institutions Naidoo chose for her workshops were in diverse, urban areas, much like that in which Sade and Femi would be growing up. A key part of Naidoo's process was choosing collaborators that could shed light on experiences with which she was unfamiliar. For this reason, many of Naidoo's collaborators were first-generation British Nigerians, or had migrated from Nigeria themselves. Oyeleye took particular care to draw out the insights from these participants, who were best placed to identify with Sade and Femi. At Charles Edward Brooke School in July 2001, Monisola and Vwarhe were prompted to discuss their

relationship to their Nigerian culture and comment on whether Sade and Femi would change their speech or behaviour during their time in the UK:

> V: Femi will still have that – like Damilola Taylor – that Nigerian person in him you know.
>
> M: Not really because DT stayed here for only 4 months.
>
> V: Even though F here for 2 years he'll still have it in him because I have mine in me. ('Discussion with Monisola, Vwarhe, Donna and Cherish' 3)

In this transcript, Naidoo has highlighted Vwarhe's remark about Damilola Taylor; as discussed in Chapter 3, the parallel between him and Femi is one that Naidoo repeatedly drew on, anchoring her story in real events. In this discussion, Vwarhe expressed a pride in retaining a sense of her Nigerian identity even as she lives in the UK, as well as positioning herself as an authority on Femi's characters based on her own first-hand knowledge. However, both Vwarhe and Monisola also expressed an ambivalence towards the values inherited from their parents, describing 'the culture in Nigeria' whereby 'you're not free to talk to your parents. You are scared' ('Discussion with Monisola, Vwarhe, Donna and Cherish' 5). When they met again in September 2001, Monisola and Vwarhe elaborated on their desire to differentiate themselves from the culture of their parents:

> Vwarhe: Can I say something. It doesn't matter where your parents are from because I disagree with my mom when she says where you parents are from that's where you're from, ok. […]
>
> Monisola: I know I'm in Nigeria but I can never act like a Nigerian because that's just not me. My mom's telling me I must marry a Nigerian man but she cannot choose my love and like I'm not going to marry a Nigerian person because that's just not me ('Charles Edward Brooke Y8 drama' 7).

For both girls, their Nigerian culture was also associated with the authority of their parents, and distancing themselves from their parents' values seemed to include a re-evaluation of their Nigerian identity.

Naidoo did not project Monisola's and Vwarhe's rejection of certain aspects of Nigerian culture on to *Web of Lies,* but she does imbue both Sade and Femi with a sense of

ambivalence regarding the values inherited from their Nigerian father. Femi becomes conflicted when he recognises that he has abandoned some of the values belonging to his Nigerian upbringing by lashing out in anger: 'He had behaved terribly. In Nigeria, most of his school friends had fathers who beat them whenever they stepped out of line. Femi had been the only one whose father had never hit him' (166). Femi respects his father's values, but at the same time distances him from the strictness of other Nigerian parents, and this presents Papa as a sympathetic figure despite the familial conflict that emerges in *Web of Lies.* For Sade, the cultural differences between Nigeria and the UK cause her to feel that she is losing some of her values. Berating herself for not telling Papa what she knew about Femi's gang involvement, Sade remarks that 'in Nigeria, it would have been expected of her. Her natural duty. Everything had been so much clearer at home. But here, in England, she no longer knew how to behave' (183). For Sade, parental authority is something she both resists and relies upon to attain a sense of morality. The clash of cultures she experiences in their move to the UK causes her values to fracture, making her unsure of her identity. Naidoo borrowed from the pride and ambivalence that Monisola and Vwarhe expressed towards their Nigerian identity, but rather than using it to illustrate the sort of individuation undergone by her young collaborators, Naidoo used this ambivalence to illustrate the feelings of loss that have accompanied Sade and Femi's displacement. I would also suggest that, as an outsider to the culture, Naidoo may have avoided mimicking Monisola's and Vwarhe's critiques of their inherited Nigerian values.

In her workshop at Charles Edward Brooke School in July 2001, Naidoo guided the discussion towards an exploration of the racism that the girls may have faced. For Vwarhe and Cherish, racism stemmed from a focus on difference and an impulse to divide people according to skin colour:

> C: The people that come from other countries to England or any other European country, they come from their country with problems and they're trying to get away from it. And they face a lot of problems here. Why this racism? Why can't we just be together and that.
>
> V: We're all the same. It's just the colour of skin. I don't know why the colour of skin affects people. It's like some mental thing, like racism, like sexism. I don't know why

> we can't just come together and live as one because we are one at the end of the day. ('Discussion with Monisola, Vwarhe, Donna and Cherish')

I do not interpret Cherish's questions, and Vwarhe's repetition of 'I don't know', as expressions of their lack of understanding, but of their outrage. Their words express a shared understanding of racism as nonsensical and damaging. In her conversation with the Year Elevens in September 2001, Naidoo's collaborators began to unpack the specific impacts of racism on them individually. Misha described being stereotyped as a Muslim, whilst Kerry argued that 'people stereotype a black person as being more rowdy than a white person' (6). This discussion of race resulted in some disagreement, as the African girls described being stereotyped by their Caribbean peers, remarks which Kerryann and Yasmin, who had Jamaican heritage, challenged. Their discussion of the negative stereotyping of Africans evolved into a discussion of what Jean called 'black on black' racism:

> B[everley]: what you're talking about is the internalisation of racism.
>
> Y: Yeah. […] It's racism but it's from blacks onto blacks.
>
> J: That makes me sick to my stomach. (laughter)
>
> K: It's even worse when you're mixed of some kind. It's terrible because people don't know how to take you or put you into one set of category. ('Charles Edward Brooke Yr 11 Reading Group' 9)

The girls did not reject Naidoo's use of term 'internalised racism', but neither did they particularly engage with it, instead preferring to use their own language that described their own lived experience. Naidoo has highlighted much from this discussion among her Year Eleven collaborators, indicating its influence on her thinking. As discussed in Chapter 3, Naidoo seems to have used this collaborative work to inform the anti-African racism that Sade experiences in school. As I have already suggested, Sade's experiences reflect what Back et al. call 'new hierarchies of belonging', whereby racist systems cause different minoritised groups to be divided against each other. I suggest that Naidoo was able to include more explicit instances of racism in *Web of Lies* than she did in *The Other Side of Truth* because of the impact of her collaborators on her ability to depict these things.

In my discussion of racism in Chapter 3, I also argued that the sexual harassment that Sade experiences in school is connected to this anti-African racism. The gender dynamics at work in *Web of Lies*, whereby Errol fetishises Sade as a potential conquest, also clearly have their roots in Naidoo's collaborative work. The groups from the From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation (FBMF) and Charles Edward Brooke School agreed that there are perceived to be two 'types' of girls: in the words of the boys at the FBMF, there are 'decent' and 'bad' girls ('From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation Drama Workshop' 7). This is a dichotomy offered by Naidoo and Oyeleye, rather than arising spontaneously from their discussions with the students, but the insights that the participants offered show that, for two of the groups at least, the concept rang true. During the workshop at FBMF, Ed remarked that 'decent girls are hard to get' (6), whilst Dwight said that 'a bad girl is the wrong type of girl to get because one, they sleep around too much. Two, they smoke, do whatever yeah' (7). The dichotomy seems to relate to sexual availability, something which is echoed by the discussions among the Charles Edward Brooke girls. Naidoo raised the topic there too:

> B: the person in Bristol was saying it was the same boys who were valuing girls differently and the one they wanted to be their 'queen' or 'princess', they would not put on her the same pressure.
>
> Y: And that's partly because of how the girl portrays herself.
>
> K: Yeah, her reputation. Because there are some girls known as 'skets' and some as 'decent'. […] But it seems like boys are more attracted to the 'skets' because they're easier. ('Charles Edward Brooke Yr 11 Reading Group' 5)

For Yasmin and Kerry, although it is the boys who were naming this misogynistic dichotomy, it is determined by the behaviour of the girl in question. Whether a girl can be labelled a 'sket', a slang term for a woman who is perceived to be too sexually available, is seen to be determined by her reputation, rather than by a set of misogynistic standards. There is a double bind at play here which robs girls of sexual agency, whereby girls are both desired by boys and stand to lose social capital by responding to those desires.

At Whitefield School in 2002, a similar discussion revealed some of the contradictions in this good girl/bad girl dichotomy, alongside some of its violent subtext. Naidoo asked these girls if they experienced any pressure to be sexually active. This was of

course a leading question; Naidoo did not ask if and when the girls *wanted* to be sexually active, but Ibti's answer is telling: 'There's a girl in my class who always gets sexually bullied. She's not a tart, I know her in Years 7 and 8 but they find her like a target and they use her' ('Conversation at Whitefield School' 2). Ibti stated that her classmate was the victim of sexual bullying despite not being a 'tart'. Even though she was seen to have a good reputation, Ibti's classmate was not protected from this sort of sexual assault. In *Web of Lies,* Naidoo does not repeat the misogynistic slurs that her young collaborators use, nor does she explicitly refer to the dichotomy explored here. However, she does represent the ways in which the sexual politics of the school environment negatively impacts girls, whether or not they choose to be sexually active, through Sade's encounters with Errol. Whilst they attempted to probe the sexism of this gendered dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' girls, the archival record shows no evidence of Naidoo and Oyeleye directly challenging this worldview. As they were there to listen and learn rather than to educate, they may have felt that it was not their place to do so. However, there is a moral quality in Naidoo's approach to the gender dynamics of the novel that is not present in her discussions with her collaborators. Naidoo goes a step further than her collaborators did in condemning these dynamics by positioning Errol unequivocally as the villain of the novel. She also allows Sade to challenge the sexist attitudes that Femi begins to adopt from his peers, when the siblings fight about the prospect of Papa getting into a new relationship:

> "You're just jealous, Sade. Typical woman!" Femi grinned. "Papa's a man. He can do what he likes, you know."
>
> The words were out before he even thought about them. His sister's face wrinkled in disgust.
>
> "I don't know where you've been picking up this sexist stuff, Femi Solaja! You think that if Papa is busy with a girlfriend, he won't see what you get up to! (*Web of Lies* 96)

In allowing Sade to respond to Femi's comment, explicitly describing it as sexist, the text also indicates that such an attitude is not typical for Femi, but is the result of his new associations with the gang that he becomes part of. Naidoo's depiction of this sexism was

clearly informed by her collaborators, but it is overlaid with her adult's perspective, from which she makes a clearer moral statement about it than her young collaborators did.

The final insight offered by Naidoo's collaborators that I discuss in this chapter is their perspectives on gangs. At the July 2001 workshop at Charles Edward Brooke School, Yasmin stated:

> when you're younger you want to fit in and be with the older ones to feel safe and if they're offering something to you and you're like 'Wow! They're actually taking an interest in me.' What it is you want to fit in with them and you feel blessed, what have I done to deserve the attention. ('Charles Edward Brooke Discussion with Y10s and Y7s' 3)

For Yasmin, the enticement of a gang is about belonging and feeling wanted. This translates clearly into the motivating factors that are ascribed to Femi in *Web of Lies*. Feeling isolated from his family and still processing the trauma of being displaced from Nigeria, Femi is an easy target. At the novel's end, he broods on the circumstances that led to his becoming embroiled in drug-dealing: 'he had been scared, then flattered. It felt good being called 'little brother'… being given twenty pounds' (198). This nickname 'little brother' is repeated to Femi throughout the novel, drawing him into a sense of fraternal duty. Being groomed by James and Errol makes him 'feel blessed' in the way that Yasmin described. However, the boys at FBMF described the draw of a gang somewhat differently:

> Marvin: I tell you why the reason why there are so much gangs, is people don't join because they like it, most people join for protection. They feel more safe in groups. ('From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation Drama Workshop' 12)

For Marvin, joining a gang is also about belonging to something, but for reasons of safety. This sense of needing to be part of a gang for safety reasons is reflected less strongly in the character of Femi, but there is evidence that Naidoo has modelled Femi's experiences of grooming on those of Dwight from FBMF. The boys debated over the typical age at which someone would join a gang, and Dwight described being invited into a gang in Year Seven: 'the second day I went to secondary school I was told 'do you want to be a ghetto--- and I was 'What?'' (15) Naidoo was clearly interested in this episode, returning to Dwight with further questions:

> Bev: Dwight, you mentioned that on the second day in school someone asked you if you wanted to become part of a gang, what year student was that?
>
> Dwight: Year Nine
>
> Bev: So someone a bit older than you. (17)

This episode maps on to Femi's first encounter with James, who approaches him when he has 'only been two days at Avon High' (*Web of Lies* 6). Whilst the language that James uses is different, the timing of the encounter, as well as the age gap between James and Femi, seems to be drawn directly from Dwight's testimony. Reading *Web of Lies* alongside its archive reveals the deep impact of Naidoo's collaborative work on the published text, informing her about the complexities of British Nigerian identity, the intersections of racism and misogyny, and the attraction of gangs. Whilst Naidoo did not always directly translate the perspectives of her collaborators on to her characters, many of her choices are clearly shown to be either a use of or a reaction against the insights of her collaborators.

5.4.2 Drama-in-Education for character development

As well as relying on her young collaborators to inform the key themes in *Web of Lies,* Naidoo drew on their expertise to inform her character development. Drawing on the principles of DiE Naidoo and Oyeleye used discussion and drama to explore the emotions and reactions of Sade and Femi at key points in the novel. My analysis shows that Naidoo used the input of her collaborators to inform her characterisation, and to drive tension between the characters. When Naidoo introduced the character of Sade into her workshops with her young collaborators, some felt an affinity with her and related to her experiences of migration back to their own. Bunty, a Nigerian girl at Whitefield School, recalled that

> when my family was in Nigeria, we could move out nights, no problem. So we had freedom but when we got here it was kind of hard. My brother, even he can't go out, because they're scared they may lose him. ('Conversation at Whitefield School' 7)

Hearing Naidoo's description of Sade prompted Bunty's own reflection on coming to the UK and feeling unsafe on the streets as a young Black woman. Marilyn offered Naidoo

questions that Sade might be asking herself when she is immersed in British culture: 'How will I dress, what will I wear? Will I have to change my culture, my style because of where I am' (7). *Web of Lies* is interspersed with Sade's diary entries, which narrate Sade's inner life and are the ideal place for Sade to wrestle with these questions. The text does not draw on Marilyn's specific questions about style and culture, but Sade does reflect on the impact that being displaced to the UK has had on her identity: 'maybe I've changed more than I want to admit. Mariam says that I'm a lot tougher than I used to be' (110). Naidoo can be seen to have used the suggestions of her collaborators to reflect on Sade's resilience as she adapts to a new culture, but also on the loss of aspects of her old self through her displacement and her maturation.

A key aspect of plot development that Naidoo explored with her child collaborators was Femi's gang experience. When Naidoo asked the Year Sevens at Charles Edward Brooke in July 2001 if they think Femi would be under any pressure, Monisola and Vwarhe offered their opinions:

> M: gang of boys who want to thief stuff. Make him go into a shop and thieve something for them. He gets caught and they act like they don't even know him.
>
> V: I think F will be a bit closer to his sister because his mom gone. When he's got into trouble with the police, he will listen to her because that's what happened with me and I had to learn the hard way… in primary school, these girls wanted me to join their gang and start bullying my best friend. I said no.
>
> B: if gang into drugs, how would they use Femi. To carry packets?
>
> Yeah. Because he's young. ('Discussion with Monisola, Vwarhe, Donna and Cherish' 4)

Monisola offered a hypothetical scenario which Naidoo seems to have drawn on in writing the episode in *Web of Lies* in which Femi is challenged to steal from a shop while the other gang members create a distraction. It is clear, however, that Vwarhe's insights into this situation were based on her personal experience. This is an illustration of the ways in which these workshops accessed the specific expertise of Naidoo's child collaborators. In their workshop with the FBMF, Oyeleye and Naidoo used roleplay to explore the perspectives

both of Femi and the boys who invite him into their gang. Oyeleye's approach was to ask the boys to act out a certain scenario and then freeze at key moments and narrate the thoughts of their character in that moment. In the instance below, Jason roleplayed smoking alone in the playground and being approached by two others, Dwight and Marvin, who invited him into their gang. Oyeleye then invited the other workshop participants, who were observing, to ask the characters questions:

> Rahim: Was you scared Jason?
>
> Jason: I was kind of scared yeah cause like my first day at school I was jamming with my friends, me and my friends standing in the playground and all of a sudden this big boy come --- coming to ask us if we want to be in this gang --- . ('From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation Drama Workshop' 18)

Naidoo has not transcribed all of the drama, as she seemed to be more interested in the inner thoughts of the characters, as interpreted by the workshop participants. What these collaborations seemed to offer Naidoo was not just inspiration for the novel's events, but, perhaps more importantly, ways for her to enrich the inner lives of her characters. Whilst Naidoo is the expert when it comes to writing fiction, these young people are experts on the themes her novels explore, and her recognition of that is also an effort to improve her writing by working with these young experts.

The other plot point to which Naidoo and Oyeleye gave significant attention in their workshops is the question of Papa's new love interest, who appears in the novel as Cynthie Wallace, a fellow activist and journalist from Sierra Leone. The character of Mrs Wallace, or Mami Cynthie as she is often known, allows for Naidoo to explore a new humanitarian conflict: the civil war in Sierra Leone in which many children were forced to fight. It also allows Naidoo to show the evolving dynamics between the members of the family, and draw out new facets of their characters when this dynamic is disturbed. Naidoo first raised the topic with the girls from Charles Edward Brooke School when she visited them in July 2001. The girls disagreed on how Sade would react to her father's new girlfriend:

> M: I don't think Sade would be happy. The new woman would try and change stuff. This is the way my mother had it and you're not going to try and change it. If someone is in your head, they're going to be there forever.

Donna: I think it's good for him and Sade would want him to be happy. ('Discussion with Monisola, Vwarhe, Donna and Cherish' 4)

Naidoo chose to use Monisola's interpretation of Sade's character, perhaps as Sade's resistance to Papa's new relationship creates more dramatic tension. The same group continued this debate in September 2001 when they met with Naidoo and Oyeleye:

Sola: […] do you think the father is going to stay by himself all the time.

Mon: I think he should. No if my husband died, I'm not going to marry someone else.

V: oh you could not stay by yourself. Can I say something Miss. Monisola you can not be in mourning for the rest of your life. ('Charles Edward Brooke Y8 drama' 14).

This debate continues for another page of the transcript, with each of the girls offering their opinion. That this caused such debate among the participants is perhaps why Oyeleye chose to develop a roleplay around the scenario, but also why it makes up such a crucial part of *Web of Lies,* offering an opportunity to engage readers with strong opinions on the topic. When this group roleplayed Sade and Femi (called Maxwell for this piece of drama) meeting their Papa's new girlfriend, the participants exaggerated the comedy and the drama of the scene, clearly enjoying the strong emotions that the scenario evoked:

Sade: A woman! Don't you know that our mother is dead!

Max: I know she's dead.

Sade: Don't you think it's too soon?

Max: It's only another wife.

Sade: It's not another wife. I will stop them. They're not getting married.

[…]

Sade [to Papa]: I don't want you to be lonely but can't you understand it's too soon.

Maxwell: No it's not too soon.

Sade: Maxwell. You're too young to listen to this. Go to your room. ('Charles Edward Brooke Y8 drama' 22)

The participants used questions about the new girlfriend to draw out a conflict between the siblings, and Naidoo capitalises on this in her novel, as seen in the extract used above in which Sade rebukes Femi for his sexism. This moment of conflict exposes Sade's anger and continued grief from the loss of her mother, whilst exposing how Femi has changed as a result of spending time with the gang. Through this use of drama, Naidoo was able to access possible emotional responses to certain scenarios. Drawing on these strong emotions, Naidoo can be seen to use the expertise of her collaborators to add depth to her characters and tension to her narrative.

5.4.3 Reflections on child agency

Alongside their insights into key issues and characters, Naidoo's child collaborators offered a sense of how they perceived their own agency. Their comments on their own agency offer crucial insights into the negotiation of agency in relation to social context. As her final question of her session with the Charles Edward Brooke girls in September 2001, Naidoo asked: 'what power do you feel young people have?' ('Charles Edward Brooke Y8 Drama' 28). This is an essential question that runs through all of Naidoo's work. The ways that the participants interpreted and answered this question shows that most of them viewed their power in relation to the structures around them, particular those of school and home. Some perceived their power in relation to that of their parents. For Samilia, young people 'have the power to make our parents suffer a lot', and Mel commented that 'your parents take what you say. They sort of want to know how you feel before they do something' (28). Donna was more pessimistic, seeing the structures around her as more powerful than she was: 'if this school wanted to change, we wouldn't get our voices heard' (28). Some of the group saw their power as situated in their future-oriented potential. For Cherish, 'children are our future', and Vwarhe stated: 'we are the gift of life'. She argued that 'adults should start to listen to us', as children hold the keys to solve difficult problems. The power Vwarhe described is not a current power, but power contained in her potential to make change. Monisola's comments concurred with this: 'It's the saying, if the mother can't do it, the daughter will do it. People have children so they can carry on in their footsteps'. Vwarhe was similarly outspoken in the earlier July session, when she pushed

back against the parental view that she should not date since she was too young to have sex. Vwarhe, echoed by some of the other participants, was clear that she was not actually interested in sex:

> V: I told my mom: Mom, everything comes in its own time and when it needs doing, our PSE teacher says, when it needs doing, we will do it yeah. We will learn when we want to do it but now just want to live our childhood because soon yeah, our childhood is gonna be gone. ('Discussion with Monisola, Vwarhe, Donna and Cherish' 6)

Vwarhe expressed a strong sense of inner knowledge, and an acute awareness of her stage of life, and what she wanted (or did not want) from it. As in the case of the other girls, she understood her own agency and power in relation to the adult structures around her, but with the added sense that her sense of agency was specific to childhood with its particular capabilities and dependencies.

Rather than seeing agency as constructed in opposition to external social forces, as many of the girls from Charles Edward Brooke did, Naidoo's other collaborators expressed a sense of their power as embedded and determined by their social circles. Warda, a student at Whitefield, had a pessimistic perspective of Sade's ability to retain her sense of identity as a Nigerian in her pressured school environment: 'sometimes (even if you're strong) you just lose it and you can't be strong' ('Conversation at Whitefield School' 8). Ed, a participant at the From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation, saw his agency as similarly determined by his peer group, but with more positive potential. In her workshop at the Foundation, Oyeleye discussed the pull of gang culture, and asked how the boys tried to resist this pull:

> Sola: how do you bring yourself out though? […]
>
> Ed: you need better influence, like friends yeah. They influence you most of the times anyway. You need to have better friends. To read up about yourself, know your culture, know where you're coming from and that. It's like people go to prison before they find out this is wrong and that yeah. See that it's taken them in a circle. No-one wants to go in a circle, they want to go in a straight line. ('From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation Drama Workshop' 14)

For Ed, agency is enabled by one's peer group and one's education. Furthermore, Ed understood that knowing about one's history and heritage could be a source of power, providing a sense of belonging to counter that provided by being part of a gang. In all of these examples, agency was understood by the participants to be socially embedded, negotiated in relation to the important others in their lives and the institutions to which they belong. As I have discussed throughout, questions of child agency are central within Naidoo's middle-grade work. In asking children about their own power and agency, Naidoo illustrates how she values these questions, and how her representations of child agency throughout her work can be seen to be influenced by her interactions with real young people. As I have suggested, these are hierarchical collaborations. At points Naidoo can be seen to have directly used the words or experiences of her collaborators, and at others she has imposed her adult's perspective on their insights in order to maintain the integrity of her political messaging. Yet in both instances, Naidoo's collaboration with young people had a profound impact on the development of *Web of Lies,* in terms of the development of key themes and characters. It also forms a crucial part of the relationship with reality that the text establishes for itself, creating a structure of authenticity that adds legitimacy to Naidoo's authorial voice.

5.5 Conclusion: authoritative children

Whilst Naidoo's methodology and its archival record are unique, her work points to the many ways in which children may be found to inform ostensibly adult-authored texts, if only scholars are willing to look. Naidoo's methodology for collaboration, informed by DiE and her background in education, and structured through her working relationship with Oyeleye, offers an insight into the ways that pedagogical practices may be repurposed as creative tools for developing children's literature. Naidoo's work with the SPEAK Barefoot Teachers, the Street-Wise programme, and the girls at the Collegiate School whilst developing *No Turning Back* show Naidoo's trust in the political value of education, and its capacity to provide a structure for creativity. This can be seen to inform the way that education is represented in the novel, as I have discussed in Chapter 4, whereby 'good' educational institutions serve to facilitate children's agency. In my analysis of the archive

relating to *Web of Lies,* I have suggested that Naidoo's collaborations equipped her to handle the difficult themes of racism, sexual assault, and gang culture in ways that she would otherwise have been ill-equipped to do. Whilst Naidoo can often be seen to impose her adult's perspective on to theirs in the published text, her young collaborators nonetheless emerge from the archive as experts, with a sense of their own authority as children to speak about what matters in their own lives. In relation to both novels, Naidoo's child collaborators are valued as experts, but the idea of collaboration is also mobilised by her to lend further authenticity to her work. The idea of the child-as-collaborator and the very real child collaborators are entangled and are of equal importance in contributing to Naidoo's vision of the political potential of childhood reading.

Chapter 6. Reading Children

Anti-racist engagement in reader responses to *Journey to Jo'burg*

> Today my eight year old daughter, Nuhaa, brought home "journey to Jo'Burg" she was over excited to bring it to me and show me which parts she wanted me to read. She is blown away by the story. (Nur Heitz)
>
> I love your books becose my mummy is from cape town. So I am upsest afrikan tales I love journy to jo"burg. (Nuhaa Heitz)

In the previous four chapters, I have outlined the key facets of Naidoo's vision for the political potential of childhood reading as they emerges from her fiction and archive. In Chapter 2, I illustrated how Naidoo's use of a realist mode and focalising protagonists invites readers to comprehend the political messaging of her novels through identification with the protagonist. In Chapters Two and Three, I argued that Naidoo constructs childhood as a political state of being, by positioning her child characters at the borders of nations and segregated lands, and by representing them as political actors. In Chapter 5, I turned from these rhetorical children to the real children in Naidoo's archive, exploring how Naidoo's methodology for child-adult collaboration positions children as the co-producers of political children's literature. In this final chapter, I will investigate to what extent this vision of childhood reading as a site of political awakening is realised in responses from Naidoo's readers. Naidoo's archive contains large quantities of letters, creative writing, and artwork in response to all of her work, most of which has been created in educational settings. In this chapter, I use the responses to *Journey to Jo'burg* as a case study to explore one facet of her political vision of childhood reading, asking whether classroom reading of the novel produces anti-racist reader responses. I employ the framework of Antiracist Pedagogy to measure children's engagement with ideas of race and racism in written reader responses to classroom reading of *Journey to Jo'burg* from 1986-2014. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the impact of context upon these responses, observing how children locate their agency as readers in the negotiation between text and context. Drawing once again on the work of Bernstein and Sánchez-Eppler, I highlight the partial and contingent agency of child readers, who both comply with and resist the socialising forces of text and context. The above quotes, from a South African mother and daughter living in Germany, illustrate the importance of taking a reader's context into account. Nuhaa's reading of *Journey to Jo'burg*

was structured by her school environment and yet her personal response was also shaped by her unique cultural and family context: she was 'obsessed' with African stories because they provide a connection to her heritage. Whilst the archive seems to offer direct access to Nuhaa's voice, it is important to remember that her response was mediated by her mother. All of the children's voices explored in this chapter are subject to different sorts of adult mediation but are nevertheless valuable sources of insight into the ways that readers of *Journey to Jo'burg* engage with the text's indictment of racism. Through my analysis of these reader responses, I show how readers approach the anti-racist ideology of the text through a negotiation with their own contexts, claiming authority to discuss racism, and conceiving of anti-racist literature as important for themselves and their fellow children. In doing so, I argue that Naidoo's vision for the political potential of childhood reading is realised in the moments when readers show an engagement with the anti-racist ideology of *Journey to Jo'burg,* and that this vision is also exceeded and confounded by readers who responded in ways that neither Naidoo nor I would have anticipated.

6.1 Literature as a tool for anti-racist education

In the Introduction and Chapter 2 of this thesis, I outlined the context into which *Journey to Jo'burg* emerged. Naidoo's decision to write *Journey to Jo'burg* as her first children's book was the result of her anti-apartheid work with the AAM and the BDAF. The book was also written against a backdrop of increased interest in multicultural education in the UK, with calls led by Black British activists for better representations of children of colour in children's books. In Chapter 2, I argued that the ending of *Journey to Jo'burg,* in which Naledi reflects on the ways that her education is disadvantaging her, is an invitation to readers to share in the knowledge that she has gained over the course of her journey. The scripts of behaviour that she is being taught to repeat, signing letters off with 'Yours obediently' (*Journey to Jo'burg*. HarperCollins, 2016. 88), form part of her socialisation as a Black South African child under apartheid. These scripts are designed to rob Naledi of intellectual and economic autonomy and illustrate how education can be used as an instrument for oppression or for liberation. In depicting Naledi's realisation and inviting readers to share in it, *Journey to Jo'burg* implicitly suggests itself as a tool for a different sort of education. Naidoo had a clear interest in the ways that apartheid was taught in schools.

Her research for *Censoring Reality* investigated the ways that South Africa was represented in non-fiction books available for children, most of which would have been accessed through school libraries. Naidoo also had an interest in how *Journey to Jo'burg* was read in the classroom, illustrated by the examples of teaching programmes using *Journey to Jo'burg* that she preserved in her archive. One such example is a workbook produced by the ILEA, designed to accompany the reading of *Journey to Jo'burg* (Workbook: 'ILEA school (through Maggie)'. As discussed in the Introduction, the ILEA was an influential local education authority that led the way nationally in introducing some anti-racist literature teaching. This educational context in London was highly influential for Naidoo, and she had partnered with the ILEA for a number of projects whilst working with the BDAF, including the publication of *Censoring Reality*. Although not dated, this workbook for *Journey to Jo'burg* predates the abolition of the ILEA in 1990, and would therefore have addressed apartheid as a current reality. With space to annotate passages from the novel explaining what each passage teaches readers about apartheid, the workbook suggests that students could 'start a petition' or 'boycott products' as a response to this new knowledge. This workbook invites school students to read *Journey to Jo'burg* as an explicitly anti-racist text, and to convert knowledge into anti-racist action. This workbook is an example of the educational milieu in which Naidoo was embedded as a writer, and her inclusion of it in her archive, as well as her choice to first publish *Journey to Jo'burg* with an educational publisher, indicates Naidoo's profound interest in the specific ways that her novel would be read in the classroom. This raises the question of whether *Journey to Jo'burg* was as effective an anti-racist teaching tool as this workbook suggests, something that my analysis of the reader responses will shed light on.

Naidoo's interest in the anti-racist potential of literature unites her educational, literary, and academic work. Her book *Through Whose Eyes? – Exploring Racism: Reader, Text and Context* (1992) records the outcomes of her reader-response research into the effects of anti-racist literature education, using data gathered during her PhD at the University of Southampton. In 1999, Michael Benton cited this research as 'the most sophisticated use of reader-response criticism and practice' within the field of multicultural education (91). Beginning her research in 1987, two years after the publication of *Journey to Jo'burg*, Naidoo spent one academic year in English classes with a group of Year Nines (13-

14 years old) at a 'predominantly white and relatively affluent' school (27). The aim was to discover the effects of anti-racist literature education on participants' attitudes towards race. This was measured through the assessment of three outcomes: 'the extension of empathy, the challenging of racist concepts and perceptions, and the development of critical thinking about our society' (135). Naidoo developed the teaching programme in collaboration with the class teacher and was present during the lessons to observe and make tape recordings. She also read reading journals that were regularly updated by the students. Naidoo chose a selection of texts that strongly indicted racism, which were explored using discussion, writing, and drama. Among these were *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* (1976) by Mildred D. Taylor, about a year in the life of the Black Logan family in Depression-era Mississippi, and *Friedrich* (1961)*,* Hans Peter Richter's semi-autobiographical novel about the friendship between a Jewish and a non-Jewish boy during Hitler's rise to power. The programme's effectiveness was assessed through Naidoo's analysis of the tape recordings and reading journals, and through a 'Racist Perceptions Survey', which was administered to the whole year group at the beginning and end of the academic year, providing a control group against which Naidoo's 30 participants could be assessed (30). Using Louise Rosenblatt's 'transactional model' of reader-response, Naidoo emphasises that: 'while individual readings or 'evocations' are in one sense unique, they will, however, also reflect certain common cultural assumptions on the basis of common frames of reference' (17). For her research, racist cultural attitudes were the most pertinent contextual feature shaping these assumptions.

The results of this research were mixed. From the 'Racist Perceptions Survey', she notes an increase in racist attitudes among the year group as whole between the start and end of the academic year, which was not present in her target class, leading her to tentatively conclude that 'the course provided some form of deterrent or buffer against a general trend towards an average increase in explicit racism' (32). Naidoo reported a gendered difference in the use of empathy, arguing that this was more obvious in her female participants, but reported instances of success in increasing empathy and challenging racist assumptions. Describing the difficulty of measuring this latter outcome, she called for classrooms in which 'reflection and flexibility of mind are given status' (140). Regarding the development of critical thinking about society, Naidoo notes that this

outcome was both the hardest to achieve and to measure, leading to some defensive responses. She ascribes these limited results to the difficult relationship with the class teacher; his style was 'largely didactic and authority-centred' (29) and her discussions with him were 'constrained at a surface level consideration of racism' (30). This caused her to conclude that for anti-racist education to be effective, white teachers need to 'acknowledge themselves as co-learners in the process of reperception' (148). She noted the impact of school-wide attitudes towards race and racism, concluding that for anti-racist literature education to be effective, a 'moral framework' of anti-racism in both the classroom and school context is crucial. The conclusions of *Through Whose Eyes* complicate the idea, which is central to the aims of *Journey to Jo'burg,* that literature is an effective anti-racist teaching tool.

This is further complicated by accounts of teaching *Journey to Jo'burg* that Naidoo has preserved in her archive. These include an article from educator-researcher Shahana Mirza exploring the use of literature as 'one way in which students can be introduced to multicultural and anti-racist issues', written in the early 1990s (Mirza 83). Using a mix of drama and creative writing with her majority white class, Mirza recorded some increase in empathy after their study of the novel. However, she also noted that some students felt 'that black people were victims and needed our help' and wanted to launch a fundraiser (87). Although this showed concern, Mirza also argues that 'the discussion needed to go further' and that 'pity would only undermine black people and imply that they were incapable of helping themselves' (87). This classroom reading of *Journey to Jo'burg* seems to have produced an impulse towards some sort of action, but this is limited to a paternalistic approach, rather than an explicitly anti-racist one. A second example of the use of *Journey to Jo'burg* in the classroom came from teacher Ghee Bowman. In a 1998 letter to Naidoo which accompanies her scheme of work for teaching *Journey to Jo'burg* at an Exeter school*,* Bowman addressed some of the successes and challenges of teaching the novel in her 'volatile' Year 8 class (Bowman). Explaining the challenges of classroom management and limited resources, Bowman noted that while 'some pupils expressed racist attitudes', others were able to question their own viewpoints through learning about another culture. While the text guided some of her students towards an anti-racist understanding, this was not common to all. In her reply, Naidoo remarked that by this time, anti-racist literature

education was 'off the agenda for many local authorities', creating another barrier to the effectiveness of such teaching (Letter to Ghee Bowman). Bowman was teaching a decade after the establishment of 'a National Curriculum that was not interested in minority voices', leaving less freedom for schools and local authorities to incorporate anti-racist teaching into their literature modules (Sands-O'Connor, *Children's Publishing* 108). As Naidoo argues in *Through Whose Eyes,* Bowman's example is indicative of the challenges of teaching anti-racist literature in an unsupportive educational context. Whilst Naidoo and her collaborators in the BDAF were optimistic about the anti-racist potential of *Journey to Jo'burg,* Naidoo's own reader-response research, and these accounts with teachers who had used it their classrooms, are more cautious about the anti-racist educational potential of a single text. From these accounts, the anti-racist potential of literature emerges as hard to measure, and subject to various contextual forces. I acknowledge both of these realities in my analysis of reader responses to *Journey to Jo'burg*, considering the ways that Naidoo's readers have negotiated both textual meaning and agency as readers, through a negotiation between text and context.

6.2 Reader-response criticism and the agency of the child reader

The majority of reader-response criticism, including Naidoo's, owes its understanding of reading to Louise Rosenblatt's 'transactional model', first outlined in *Literature as Exploration* (1938): 'reading is a constructive, selective process over time in a particular context. The relation between reader and signs on the page proceeds in a to-and-fro spiral, in which each is continually being affected by what the other has contributed' (26). Rosenblatt's theory posits that reading is an encounter between reader and text that emerges in a specific context, and has shaped the field of reader-response criticism that emerged in the late 1960s. In 1999, seven years after Naidoo's publication of *Through Whose Eyes,* Lawrence Sipe suggested that 'focus on various types of sociocultural contexts seems to represent a trend for more comprehensive investigation in the future' of the field (120). This has proved true, as more recent reader-response studies have developed Rosenblatt's model in various ways to describe how it functions in specific contexts. Robin Hoffman (2010) has explored online responses to literary conventions in her analysis of the

Spaghetti Book Club website, a US-based book review site. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Amy Stornaiuolo (2016) explore 'racebending' in online fan fiction, whereby the racial identity of a character is changed from that which appears in the source text, to explore how readers bring their own identities into their creative responses (323). Julia Hope has explored the use of refugee narratives in the classroom, analysing the outcomes of this sort of literature in classrooms containing some students with their own experiences of displacement (""The Soldiers Came to the House"").

Whilst each of these studies uses contextual analysis of readers' responses to showcase the critical abilities of child readers, none investigates the question of the agency of the child reader that is raised by this emphasis on context. In most of the examples from Naidoo's archive, the act of reader-response on the part of the child is an adult-ordered activity in the classroom. My access to these responses has been mediated by other adults – by the teachers whose letters accompany the responses, by Naidoo in preserving and annotating certain responses, and by the archivist who catalogued them, and my own use of these responses for my academic work is an additional form of adult mediation. Whilst it is impossible to read these responses for clear access to the voice of the autonomous reading child, the responses explored here both comply with and resist the various adult imperatives of reader-response, making it similarly impossible to read adult authority and context as fully determining of child reader-response. Sánchez-Eppler proposes ways of writing about child-authored materials that take them seriously and on their own terms, whilst acknowledging the multiple contextual influences at work. In a key example from *Dependent States* on child diarists of the nineteenth-century, Sánchez-Eppler explores how 'even as the literacy training proffered by diary keeping seeks to inscribe these children in a network of temporal, moral, and literary habits, the children themselves remain capable of using these pages in quite other ways as well' (*Dependent States* 39). These 'patterns of compliance and autonomy' (66) are also visible in the responses to Naidoo's *Journey to Jo'burg.* Even as Naidoo's readers appear in her archive as 'objects of socialization' in their interactions with this text, subject to lessons on literacy, letter writing, anti-racism, and empathy, they also inhabit, negotiate with, and resist these lessons in heterogeneous ways (xv). This can be understood in terms of Bernstein's 'scriptive things', through which a script is regarded as 'a dynamic substance that deeply influences but does not entirely determine

live performances, which vary according to agential individuals' visions, impulses, resistances, revisions, and management of unexpected disruptions' (*Racial Innocence* 71). The diverse contexts of Naidoo's readers constitute such 'dynamic substances', which, although never fully visible in the archive, can be traced through their fragments in the readers' responses. The agency of these readers is neither absent, nor fixed, but 'emerges through a constant engagement with the stuff of [their] lives' (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 12). The child readers in this chapter are partial subjects who negotiate agency in the play between text and context.

6.3 Overview of responses to *Journey to Jo'burg*

As discussed in the Introduction, Naidoo's archive shows signs of her careful curation. The majority of the responses to *Journey to Jo'burg* are from school groups and have been kept together and ordered roughly by the date received. Two folders of responses are not organised in this way, containing responses from a variety of areas and time periods, including photocopies of letters duplicated elsewhere, originals mounted onto card, and typed sheets of quotes. Many of these responses, contained in what I will call the 'highlight folders', have also been annotated and highlighted by Naidoo. Naidoo has drawn on many of these responses in presentations, talks and articles over the years, as well as using them to initiate conversations about racism in her work as an adviser for cultural diversity for the English Advisory Team in Dorset from 1988 (Naidoo, 'Re: Questions re Journey to Jo'burg chapter'). Naidoo has always been interested in the impact of her work on her readers, and has used responses from her readers to investigate this impact, as well as in the construction of her public persona as an author of radical children's literature. As with all of the archival analysis I undertake in this thesis, I am also in dialogue with Naidoo's own interpretations of her archive.

Naidoo's archive contains a huge number of responses to *Journey to Jo'burg*; I surveyed 2,754 responses for the purposes of this chapter. Almost all are from readers who read the novel in school, and comprise collections of responses from 116 schools and numerous responses not belonging to a particular class or group. Within this latter category,

most show signs that they have been prompted by a task from a class teacher, either in response to a visit from Naidoo or as part of a class project. However, 35 out of the 2,754 responses gathered, or 1.3%, show no signs of teacher prompting. These responses are from readers who have either read the novel in school but responded of their own accord, or who read the novel outside of school. Most of the written responses are letters, and there are also reviews, creative prose, and poetry. Visual responses include reader artwork depicting scenes from the book, self-portraits, and portraits of Naidoo. A full analysis of the visual responses is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I do make brief mention of a few examples, especially where the written responses also contain visual elements. The responses surveyed are from 8 different countries. 66% are from the UK, with a significant minority – 18.7% – from the US (see *Tab. 1*).[7] Although initially published in the UK, the novel was quickly taken up by US publishers J. B. Lippincott in 1987, which explains its popularity there. While there is a very small number of individual letters from South African children, none of the classroom responses in Naidoo's archive comes from South Africa. This is unsurprising, as the book was banned in South Africa until 1991, but also because, as discussed in Chapter 2, *Journey to Jo'burg* was written with a British audience in mind. There is evidence, however, that the novel was read by children at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania during the apartheid years ("We were fortunate').

Readers range from 6-16 years of age, the largest proportion of which fall into the 9-11 years-old bracket (see *Tab. 2*). Although originally marketed by Longman for reluctant readers aged 11-16, the 9-11 age bracket is closer to Naidoo's intended audience, indicating a congruence between Naidoo's intention for the text and its actual use. The number of responses received and preserved by Naidoo has increased over each 5-year period since 1985, with 69% of responses received after 2000 (see *Graph 1*). This could be due to an increase in Naidoo's fame after she won the Carnegie Medal for *The Other Side of Truth* in 2000. Naidoo herself has suggested that after apartheid was over, *Journey to Jo'burg* may have been seen as 'a good news story', making it easier to teach ('Re: Questions re Journey to Jo'burg chapter'). She has also suggested that a 2008 Harper Collins edition, including a

[7] This presentation of data is intended to show the scale of the responses to *Journey to Jo'burg* held in Naidoo's archive, and to indicate some general trends. Data on country of origin, age of respondent, and date written was gathered for whole classes, rather than for individual letters. Therefore, the category 'unknown' includes those letters which did not include the required information, and those which were received by Naidoo individually.

copy of the banning letter from South African customs and a foreword from Michael Rosen, may have raised the novel's visibility. The reality is likely to be a combination of these factors, causing the novel's popularity to climb steadily since its publication.

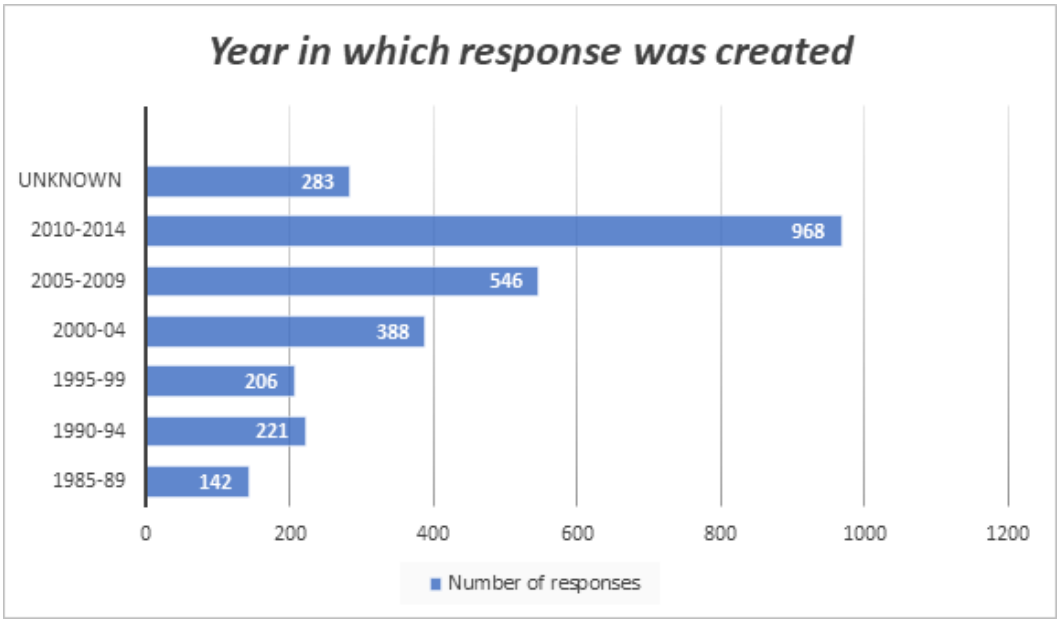
Country of origin	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
UK	1,819	66%
US	516	18.7%
Rest of world	182	6.6%
Unknown	237	8.6%
Total	2,754	100%

Tab. 1: Country of origin of reader responses

Age	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
6-8 yrs	197	7.2%
9-11 yrs	1,635	59.4%
12-16 yrs[8]	479	17.4%
Unknown	443	16.1%
Total	2,754	100%

Tab. 2: Age of respondents at time of responding[9]

[8] This category is composed entirely of readers aged 12-14, apart from one set of readers aged 15-16.
[9] Since classes often include children of different ages, classes have been grouped into each stated age bracket according to the oldest children in that class.



Graph 1: year in which response was created

In this chapter, I focus only on those responses emerging from a classroom reading of *Journey to Jo'burg*, in part because these make up the majority of the archived responses. The fact that only 1.3% of these responses are from outside the classroom is not indicative of the percentage of readers who read the novel independently, but of the difference between reading practices inside and outside the classroom. Creative responses and letter writing are common in the use of a novel in the English classroom, and correspondence with the author is almost always teacher-initiated. Responses produced outside the classroom are harder to measure since they are seldom captured or sent to the author. Whilst classroom responses are of course mediated by an adult, I do not consider responses from outside the classroom to be more indicative of the 'authentic voice' of the child reader. All acts of reading and response occur in a social context, and readers both in and outside of the classroom rehearse the scripts of reader-response learnt from teachers, parents, and the text itself. The other reason that I focus only on responses to classroom reading is because I am interested in the ways that the classroom functions as a reading context, and the ways that an anti-racist literature education might be structured through this context. In this classroom context, reader-response can be seen as a both an individual and a collective act. Rather than seeing the dynamics of the class as a limitation on the agency of original responses, I explore these dynamics in light of Aidan Chambers' concept of 'booktalk'. Chambers argues that 'booktalk' in the classroom creates space for

understanding of a text 'that far exceeds what any one member of the group could possibly have achieved alone' (Chambers, 143). Naidoo herself has suggested a similar idea, stating that 'it's a collective enterprise, knowledge. Very different to how it was presented to me at school' (Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022). For this reason, she has described this collective reading space as 'a creative space', in which readers are free to bring their own experiences and contexts to bear on a text in dialogue with each other. Classroom reading in particular is a potentially fruitful site for anti-racist engagement within Naidoo's vision of political childhood reading, and the volume of classroom responses in her archive provide ideal ground for testing whether her work bears this out.

6.4 Anti-racist pedagogy

As I have already discussed here and in Chapter 2, *Journey to Jo'burg* was written with the aim of educating British readers about apartheid. The anti-racist ethic of the text is twofold. At the time of publication it functioned as an anti-apartheid text, but since 1994 it has taken on the secondary quality of a historical novel, and its anti-racist ethic can be extrapolated to a broader range of contexts. Naidoo herself suggested this in her introduction to the 25th anniversary celebration of *Journey to Jo'burg*, held at SOAS in 2010, remarking that the novel has 'shifted from being a contemporary tale into history and a more universal story of children whose spirit won't let injustice crush them' (Leaflet: 'Learning Through Literature'). However, as I have illustrated above, the reality of using a text as an anti-racist tool in the classroom is complicated by various contextual factors, and it is not a given that this anti-racist potential will be realised. Naidoo herself raised this question in a 1995 article in which she discussed some of the responses to *Journey to Jo'burg* she had received: 'having empathised and had some perceptions challenged, how many young readers will actually shift from the fiction to reality to engage critically with related issues within their own society?' (Crossing Boundaries' 12). Sands-O'Connor is not optimistic about the possibility of such critical engagement, arguing that the book 'takes an anti-racist stance, but it is one that (perhaps inadvertently) discourages readers from considering their own racism or that of their government', by depicting racism as something belonging to another place and time (*Black British Activists* 145). In contrast,

Naidoo has expressed her hope that this distance between readers and subject matter may provide 'a way in' to discussing racism in their own context: 'hopefully it leads them closer to talking about things closer to home' (Personal interview. 22 Feb 2022). In my analysis of reader responses to *Journey to Jo'burg*, I will explore whether Naidoo's readers are indeed able to move beyond a critique of apartheid to a more overtly anti-racist engagement with their own social contexts.

It is therefore important to consider what constitutes an anti-racist engagement with the text. Arguing that the reader responses in Naidoo's archive emerge in negotiation with their context, I employ the framework of Antiracist Pedagogy to explore how readers engage with themes of race and racism in *Journey to Jo'burg.* Deriving from Critical Race Theory, a framework in US legal studies for understanding structural racism (Delgado et al.), and the educational theories of Paolo Freire and bell hooks, Antiracist Pedagogy integrates an awareness of how race and racism operate at structural and individual levels within all aspects of education (Kishimoto). Alda Blakeney defines the outcomes of Antiracist Pedagogy as

> the development of consciousness related to how society operates with regard to race. Development of this consciousness is the result of an in-depth comprehension of the impact of racism and the experiences of racism. This also allows for the development of a voice for expressing the impact of racism, which in turn allows analysis of racism. (121)

Drawing on Freire, Blakeney argues that this development of consciousness compels one to transform the world through reflection and action, aims which are echoed by many authors of radical children's literature like Naidoo. Blakeney's outcomes provide a framework for my analysis of the archived reader responses to *Journey to Jo'burg,* prompting me to ask the following questions: through their reading, do readers understand more of the individual actions and social structures that produce racism? Do they develop a voice for expressing the impact of racism on themselves or their peers? And are they compelled to act? My intention in using this framework is not to assess the classrooms in question for their adherence or otherwise to the framework, but to use the outcomes outlined by Blakeney to assess whether *Journey to Jo'burg* is operating as an anti-racist text in the classrooms represented by the following reader responses.

6.5 A kinship analysis of reader responses

In my analysis I have drawn on only a fraction of the responses in Naidoo's archive, focusing on responses from eleven different schools, in addition to one from a reader who responded to her classroom reading independently. The examples I have chosen give a representative sense of the breadth and variety of responses in the archive in terms of time written, age and location of readers, and types of response seen. I have categorised these responses into five types of response: affect, identification, exploration, resistance, and critical literacy. Whilst I highlight how one type of response may dominate in a certain group, many of the responses explored here engage with several of these patterns of response at the same time. As far as possible from the information provided by the archive, I also explore the impact of context on the types of responses offered by readers. In the majority of the cases explored here, an anti-racist engagement with the text extends only as far as a broad condemnation of apartheid and racism in general. However, some readers seem to have used their reading to develop a language for expressing the impact of racism on themselves or their peers, and a few apply the anti-racist ideology to their own contexts. As discussed, these responses are all mediated by various adult forces visible and invisible, and can also be read as signs of compliance to the scripts of classroom reader-response. In my kinship approach to these responses, I argue that all responses to a text, whether written by adults or children, are moderated by social scripts and mediated by the voices of others in contextually specific ways. I therefore consider it crucial to take the responses of Naidoo's readers on their own terms, as seriously as I would any literary critic, while never ignoring the socially structured nature of their perspectives.

6.5.1 Affect

As I have suggested in Chapter 4, a core part of Naidoo's vision for political reading is the invitation into an affective reading of her work, through which readers are asked to trust their bodies and listen to their instincts. Responses from two London schools engage with the racism depicted in *Journey to Jo'burg* through grief and anger, revealing affect to be a valuable tool for developing a critical anti-racist voice. The two groups of readers explored

in this section represent the youngest and oldest readers among those that I have surveyed for this chapter. Both groups wrote their responses in the late 1980s, responding to apartheid as a current reality, and both are from schools within the remit of the ILEA. The nature of their affective engagement is shaped by their age, their temporal proximity to apartheid, and the nature of their learning environments. Creative responses from fifth-years (15-16 years old) at Haggerston School, London represent the oldest readers among those I have surveyed for this chapter. Written in 1987, these responses are also some of the earliest represented by this sample, and engage with apartheid as an ongoing reality. In 1987, South Africa was in a State of Emergency, and the Non-Stop Picket outside the South African embassy in London, in which many young people were involved, had just begun. Haggerston was a comprehensive school in the London borough of Hackney. Students at this multicultural inner London school would have been used to engaging with other races, cultures and languages, and may well also have been aware of the anti-apartheid activism happening in their own city. These students from Haggerston are much older than the average reader represented by these responses. First writing to Naidoo in 1986 with a summary of some of her students' questions, class teacher Vanessa Hayes commented that 'the large print of the book suggested that it was aimed at younger children, but they thought the issues were perhaps too complex for a younger age group' (Hayes). In 1986, the readers from Haggerston would have read the Longman Knockouts edition, the only version in print at that time, marketed for reluctant older readers. In her reply, Naidoo described her dislike of books that 'talk down' to their readers, and that she 'wanted the book to be accessible to as many people as possible' (Letter to Vanessa Hayes).

Hayes wrote again in January 1987 to introduce a selection of poems inspired by *Journey to Jo'burg.* She suggested in this letter that sending these poems had been the students' idea, presenting them as active and agential readers. Their poetry was clearly guided by a prompt, as all five poems sent to Naidoo engage with the same moment in the novel, which takes place in the hospital that treats Dineo's fever. Dineo's prognosis is good, but they see another mother taking her baby to see the same doctor:

> In a very little time the young woman came out of the doctor's room, clutching a plastic bag. Her whole body was shaking and a man close to the door caught her just as her legs gave way.

> "My baby, my baby... he's dead, he's dead!" (*Journey to Jo'burg,* HarperCollins, 2016, 80)

All five students borrowed the mother's words in different ways, taking up her voice to express grief and anger. As responses located primarily in these affects, these poems are also critiques of apartheid, calling for justice in solidarity with Black South Africans. The poet of 'Oh My Baby', a title that is also the first line of each stanza, writes in the voice of the grieving mother:

> Oh my baby!
> If only the government
> Was kind to us
> Then you would have now been
> Laughing in my eyes
> If only the government supplied medicine. ('Oh My Baby')

The first four stanzas use such 'if' statements to describe the baby's death as avoidable, calling the government to account. The last two stanzas move away from dwelling on this ideal scenario towards the reality of the baby's death:

> The grave yard is coming close
> Where there are other babies
> Sleeping in rows

The poet has borrowed from the language at the start of the novel in which protagonist Naledi describes 'the place of graves' (1). The word 'sleeping' contrasts peaceful images of sleeping babies with harrowing ones of children's graves. This is an affective, imaginative engagement with the mother's grief, and an example of a reader using their reading to find a language to explore the impact of racism on Black South Africans.

Another poem from a student named Shamima, entitled 'Babies are dying', makes the most overt anti-racist statement. She prefaced her poem: 'this is a poem about my feelings and what others like me feel about the goings on in South Africa' (Shamima). Foregrounding her affective response to the novel, Shamima positioned herself as

authoritative, asserting her right to speak out against apartheid on behalf of her peers. Describing poverty as 'the heart of the problem', the speaker of her poem points to the inequality underpinning the deaths of Black children:

> White children are treated nicely,
> Black children are dirt,
> If their colour of skin is brown
> They are servants of the whites
>
> The blacks want,
> Equality,
> Freedom
> And revenge. (Shamima)

Unlike the speaker of 'Oh My Baby', the speaker of this poem remains detached, assuming authority to represent the desires of Black South Africans more broadly. The three desires – equality, freedom and revenge – are emphasised by the staggered line breaks, and this change in form from the regular four or five-line stanzas of the rest of the poem causes these abstract nouns to stand out as a rallying cry against racism. Positioning her own response as both affective and authoritative, Shamima used her poem to test out an anti-apartheid voice. For each of the five poems sent to Naidoo, Hayes has written feedback. On 'Mothers ask what the matter is' she has written: 'very good indeed – tightly controlled rhythms. Are you going to enter this for the ILEA competition?' ('Mothers Ask What the Matter Is'). This indicates an educational context, informed both by the classroom and the local authority, in which both poetry writing and an engagement with anti-racist ideology were celebrated and encouraged. The context may have added power to the lament and the critique of apartheid in these poems, enabling students to test out an affective, anti-apartheid voice.

The second set of responses that I address as primarily located in affect are from a school in London in 1988. Whilst the school itself is not named in the archive, Naidoo recalled that these responses were from an infants' class taught by her sister-in-law, at a school in Battersea in the London borough of Wandsworth (Personal interview. 24 Feb

2022). From readers aged 5-6, the responses comprise a mixture of letters and drawings, the former explaining what the children liked and how the story made them feel, and the latter depicting certain scenes from the novel. Their engagement with racism is an affective one, located in their expressions of sadness at the unfairness with which Naledi and Tiro are treated. The young age of these readers is clear in the quality of their handwriting and the expressions they use, but the teacher affirmed that they surprised her with the maturity of their political understanding: 'I was not aware just how socially and politically aware they are. The depth of their discussions were impressive [sic]' (Samantha). Despite a willingness to discuss political themes with her infants, the teacher had her expectations of their political literacy challenged by her use of *Journey to Jo'burg.* This would suggest the need for literature teaching contexts that take account of children's age but do not make general assumptions solely on this basis.

Like those from Haggerston, several of the letters from Battersea reflected on the same episode in *Journey to Jo'burg* in which Naledi witnesses a mother grieving for her baby in the hospital (see Fig. 5). Nicola wrote: 'the story ist funy when the baby dies it is sad ist it and when the mum has to go to Jo'burg it ist right [sic]' (Nicola). The phrases 'it ist right' and 'it is not fair', repeat throughout her letter, connecting her expression of sadness to her understanding of the unfairness of apartheid. Her classmate, Sanjay, responded with a combination of image and text that can similarly be described as an affective response. He illustrated the scene from the novel in which Naledi and Tiro arrive at their mother's place of work, the household of a white family where she is employed as a maid. Despite informing her employer that her youngest child is dangerously ill, Mama is refused permission to leave until the next day. Sanjay's drawing shows a table holding a flower in a vase, flanked by the white mistress on the left and Naledi, Tiro and their mother on the right. The text is brief to provide context - 'I must go to baby' - but the emotion of Sanjay's response is communicated through the images (Sanjay). With the table between them, the divide between the figures is obvious. Whilst the white woman wears neat clothes, the Black characters wear ripped and dirty garments. But the most notable difference between the characters is their facial expressions. Whilst the white woman is impassive, the Black characters have obvious downturned mouths. Sanjay's artistic response can be read as an interpretation of the affects of this scene, drawn from his understanding of its injustice.

Whilst the letters from the Battersea infants indicate that affect may be a valuable tool for reader-response when using anti-racist literature with very young readers, the responses from Haggerston illustrate that affective response is not limited to a certain age of reader and can be a useful way of developing an anti-racist voice for any age. Both sets of students clearly belonged to classroom environments in which both affective responses and anti-racist readings were encouraged. Their affective responses to *Journey to Jo'burg* have also given them a voice for describing the causes and impacts of racially inequality in South Africa.

6.5.2 Identification

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, identification as a tool for reader-response is a vexed issue within children's literary studies. I also argued in that chapter that *Journey to Jo'burg* invites this sort of reading, proposing that readers identify with the focalising protagonist. The following examples illustrate that many of readers of *Journey to Jo'burg* do indeed identify with the narrative, but in a variety of different ways that exceeds the type of identification that I outlined in Chapter 2. Wanda Brooks and Susan Browne's 'homeplace' model of reader-response is useful for an understanding of reader identification. The 'homeplace' is the reading perspective shaped by 'various multi-layered aspects of one's culture' and is divided by Brooks and Browne into four intersecting positions from which readers respond to a text: ethnic group, community, family and peers (78). I would also include the classroom environment as a further position. This model is useful for an understanding of identification that may go beyond a straightforward identification with the focalising protagonist, providing a concrete way of describing how the transactions between text and reader 'are often mediated by the space one occupies in the world' (Brooks and Browne, 83). Keeping this homeplace model in mind, in this section I explore responses from readers who relate their reading to their own experiences in some way, either by writing themselves into the story, or by using their reading to reflect on racism or injustice that they may have experienced. Some of the examples I use also illustrate the limits of identification,

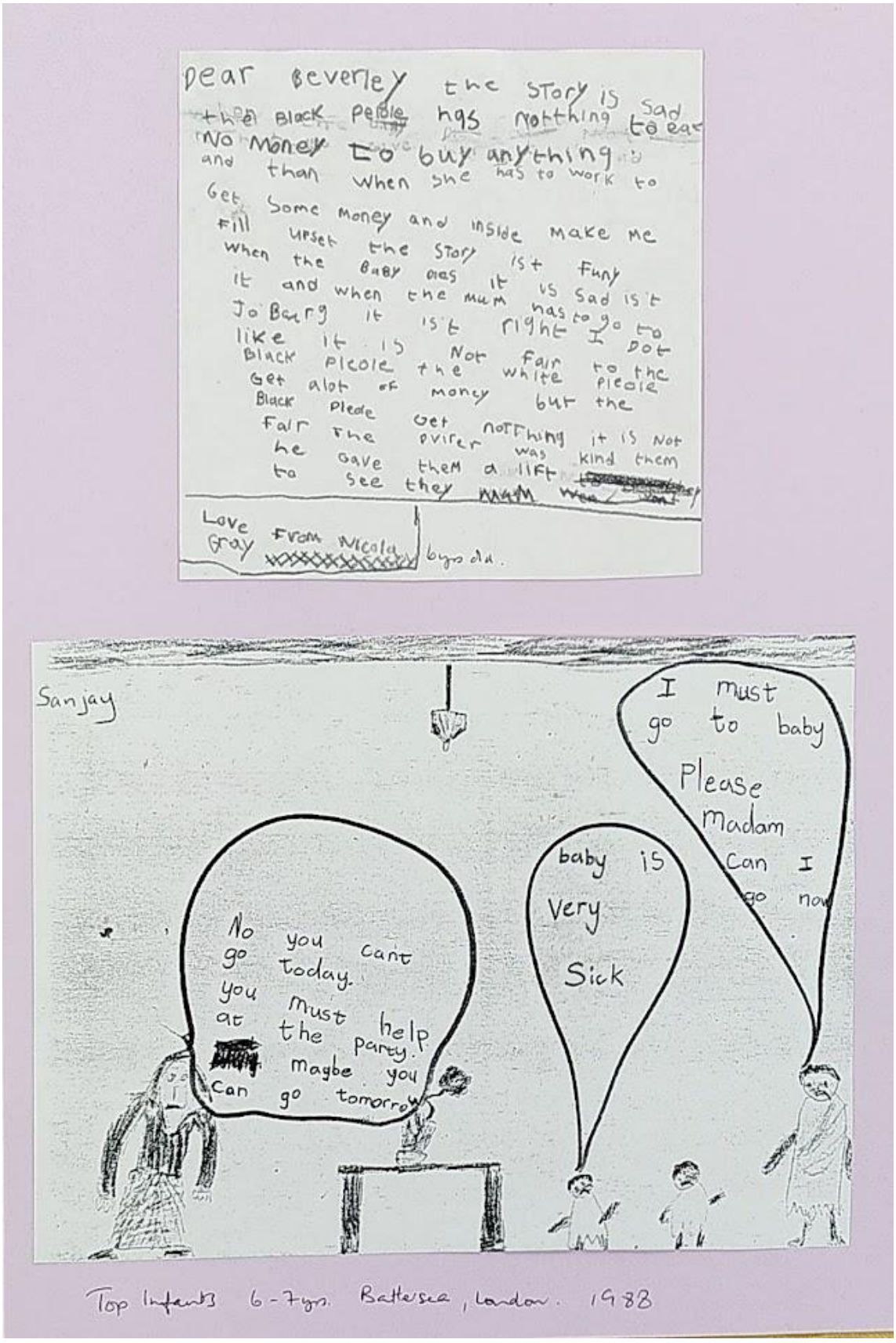


Figure 5: Responses to Journey to Jo'burg from Nicola and Sanjay, sent from a primary school in Battersea, London in 1988.

leading me to argue that identification should be used as one reading tool among many within anti-racist literature education.

Creative writing from Year Sixes (aged 10-11) from Cumnor Primary School in 2001 shows examples of readers writing themselves into *Journey to Jo'burg,* extending the narrative to include different subject positions. Located in the village of Cumnor just outside Oxford, Cumnor Primary is a small Church of England School, and likely to be less culturally diverse than the two London schools discussed in the section above, given its semi-rural setting. I describe these responses as an example of identification because they show a primary understanding of the story through the life experiences and subject positions of the readers. Showing signs of the guidance of the class teacher, most of the stories written by these students are first-person narratives that show white protagonists challenging their peers, rebelling against their racist parents, or rescuing Black children. Although the stories unanimously condemn apartheid and racism, they also understand apartheid as a past event, and centre white perspectives, often adding elements of white saviourism to the narrative of *Journey to Jo'burg.* In one example of this, Charlotte's story is written in the first person from the viewpoint of white protagonist Nadi. Nadi says that 'as a white South African, I am very lucky' but that any mention she makes of the racism she sees around her 'gives me a whole day of punishments' (Charlotte). This white protagonist is positioned as the sole voice against racism in the story, a heroic figure who must struggle against opposition from her family. When a Black boy comes to her seeking help, Nadi hides him in her house and feeds and clothes him. The Black child appears as a 'thin shaking boy […] covered with cuts and bruises'; he is an object of Nadi's pity and is never named. He is shocked at the extravagance of her house and her bedroom with its large bed and toys, and tells her that his brother was shot trying to get on to a train. He goes on his way, and the story ends with a growth in Nadi's awareness that mirrors Naledi's in *Journey to Jo'burg*: 'the boy was happy now, he was clean, fed and had some new clothes! I now realized that racism was even worse than I thought it was. Time passed and I became the 'president of the rasim [sic] charity'. Charlotte's story seems to have entailed an insertion of herself into the narrative, through which she could experience a broadening of her awareness of racism. Whilst Charlotte imaginatively constructed herself as an anti-racist activist, she did so as a heroic white saviour figure, for whom Black characters were simply the means for

developing her own awareness. Many of the stories from this school follow a similar pattern, indicating the limits of a reading approach that promotes identification without a critical analysis of the readers' subject position.

There are a few variations of this pattern of white saviour narratives in the responses from Cumnor. Suzannah's story is narrated in the third person, imagining Beverley Naidoo as a child, as the protagonist in her own story, among a cast of characters including Naledi, Tiro, Dineo, Grace, and Mary, the childhood maid to whom Naidoo dedicated *Journey to Jo'burg.* In Suzannah's story, Naidoo is 'a young girl who always had her head in the clouds [and] had a dream that she would become a famous story writer' (Suzannah). She is taken into captivity with the rest of the characters, where they are forced to work as slaves in a white household. Young Beverley engineers an escape for all of the characters and the story ends: '20 years later Beverley Naidoo had become a famous story writer'. Suzannah's story creates an association between anti-apartheid fiction and anti-apartheid action, but also displays a confused knowledge of the historical specificity of apartheid, indicating that Suzannah's understanding of racism may have been anchored in prior knowledge of the transatlantic slave trade. This is common among the responses that I read for this chapter, with a number of references to slavery as a facet of apartheid. Imagining Naidoo as a character in her own story reflects a desire for an origin story that explains Naidoo's adult writing. Like Charlotte's story, Suzannah's looks at apartheid with hindsight, from a future in which young Beverley has grown up into the adult author and apartheid is over. This sense of resolution, and the association of anti-apartheid action with heroism, are a product of these students reading *Journey to Jo'burg* as a historical novel. Both stories place white narratives at the centre of these stories of anti-racist action. Whilst this places the responsibility on white people to confront racism, the approach also victimises the Black characters. By creating heroic child protagonists with agency, these students may have been empowering themselves as an antidote to the disempowering effect of learning about large-scale racial injustice. These stories are therefore an illustration of the ways that identification is a powerful yet sometimes limited reading tool.

Letters from Milton, US sent in 1992 illustrate that white readers may attempt to find points of identification between the text and their own lives. Milton is a small town in the state of Vermont, whose population is nearly 95% white ('U.S. Census Bureau

QuickFacts: Milton town, Chittenden County, Vermont'). Chris wrote: 'I enjoyed the book even though I didn't understand some parts of it. It's hard sometimes to understand life for people in South Africa when you are a white person in Vermont' (Chris). Chris recognised that his cultural context and his racial identity were barriers to his understanding of *Journey to Jo'burg.* However, for Chris this was not a barrier to enjoyment, nor to the tentative anti-apartheid sentiment that he finishes with: 'I hope someday Black people won't have to use a pass any more'. Chris's letter is not only evidence of the impact of cultural context on reader-response, but also an example of a reader reflecting on his own capacity to respond in light of this context. Although this class perceived themselves as having little means to identify with the characters in *Journey to Jo'burg,* many understood that 'we are reading [*Journey to Jo'burg*] because Ms. Mzamane is our student teacher. (She's nice.) She is from South Africa' (Jowana). Their teacher's South African identify seemed to provide a key point of identification for these students' understanding of the novel. Sean wrote: 'I hope South Africa changes and White people stop killing Black people because they are very nice people like Ms. Mzamane' (Sean). The hope for change that Sean expressed was echoed in many of the responses from this school, indicating that the students were encouraged to take up an anti-racist moral position in their written responses. Sean's reference to Ms. Mzamane indicates that she may have been one of the few Black African people he had had contact with in his community, and he based his anti-racist statements on his knowledge of her as a 'nice' person. This is an indication that it might be easier for readers to engage with anti-racist ideas when they can associate them with an individual that they know and respect. As a South African, Mzamane would have been able to supplement the text with her own first-hand experiences. Furthermore, as indicated by Sean's comment, being taught by a Black South African helped to humanise the suffering of Black people in South Africa, preventing the students from viewing apartheid as a distant issue of no concern to them.

There is a visible contrast in the responses between readers who recognised the differences between South Africa and their own culture, and those who responded in solidarity with Black South Africans through shared frames of reference. Leon, a student at Quintin Kynaston School, North London wrote: 'For one reason I am black and to hear of things, it distresses me. […] For me as a black person watching this happen to my black brothers grieves me' (Leon). Quintin Kynaston School was a large secondary comprehensive

with an ethnically diverse student body. Situated in the wealthy neighbourhood of St John's Wood in the City of Westminster, it drew most of its students from the more deprived areas of this borough and the neighbouring borough of Camden ('Superhead to the rescue'). Leon's school context seems to have been vital in assisting him in developing this awareness of race, as evident from his own description: 'in the school I go to, there is an anti-racist policy, and we have a lot of discussions on this topic'. In the 1980's Quintin Kynaston School developed an identity as an 'equal opportunities school', illustrated by a statement produced in 1982 that set out policies for tackling racism and sexism. Examples of the former include 'People at Q.K. are glad that it is a multicultural school' and 'You'll also find out and discuss why people are prejudiced against other people' ('Quintin Kynaston - Equal Opportunity School'). From this statement, it is clear that students were taught not only to reject racist behaviours but also taught about the societies and structures that allow those behaviours to develop, both practices encouraged by Antiracist Pedagogy. Writing from this diverse school context that encouraged an anti-racist ethic, Leon stated his Blackness as the primary position from which he responded to *Journey to Jo'burg.* His anti-racist response combined affect and identification, expressing grief at injustice and solidarity with those suffering, and drawing on his own cultural position as a reader of African descent.

Letters from sixth graders (aged 11-12) at Pierce Middle School, US in 2010 show signs that the class teacher had encouraged students to identify with texts, and illustrate both the potential and the limitations of this way of responding. Pierce Middle School is a public school in Hillsborough County, Florida, US. Naidoo clearly found these letters to be significant, as she has written: 'amazing set of letters! Many Cuban children' across the top of the accompanying letter from the teacher (Lazala). In her reply she applauded the students relating of the novel to their own experiences, and 'the strength of your feelings about the injustice of racism' ('Re: Dear Mr Lazala'). These letters seem to have fulfilled some of her hopes for her novel, showing readers identifying with the characters and learning to condemn racism. Florida is home to around 70% of the US Cuban population, a large proportion of whom are recent immigrants fleeing poverty (Mastropasqua). Kathryn Borman et al. comment that 'the Hillsborough County school district, once heralded as a model of successful desegregation, [has seen] the largest increases in school segregation during the past decade', with resources disproportionately concentrated in white majority

schools and areas (614). This context is reflected in the students' letters, with high proportions of the children identifying themselves as African American or Cuban and showing a fluency with concepts of racial difference and wealth disparity. The class studied the book as part of their geography lessons on South Africa, rather than in English lessons as with most of the examples used in this chapter. The emphasis on gleaning information is clear from the responses, in which students recite dates of key events, and details about segregated buses and toilets, and the 1976 Soweto uprising. However, the teacher also seems to have provided his class with the language to discuss racism and encouraged them to respond with their opinions on the apartheid state.

Several readers condemned apartheid and racism, with some making connections to colonialism and American racism. Josué wrote that 'apartheid is not fair to blacks because we are all humans', advocating for equality on the grounds of shared humanity (Josué). José's approach was more personal, considering how he would respond in the position of the characters in *Journey to Jo'burg*: 'it's wrong because I am white and I have colored friends. If they separate us we are not going to like it' (José). Josué and José went as far as stating their belief that apartheid was wrong, showing a basic anti-racist understanding of the text, but Tejpaul went a step further, explaining a connection between South Africa and America: 'there were races also similar [sic] here too' (Tejpaul). Tejpaul may have used his reading to observe the racist history of his own country, and the ongoing racial segregation in his own state. Many of the readers at Pierce Middle School related the story to their own experiences of poverty, racism, or separation from parents. Leandro wrote: 'I remember when I was in Cuba it was dangerous to think and speak against many think [sic]' (Leandro). Franceso related to Tiro in particular: 'because I once lived in a country that was under a dictatorship, it was the island of Cuba. While I was in Cuba I would steal from different farms in order to have enough food to eat' (Francesco). Many of the Cuban students shared this ambivalence towards their country of birth, and their context seems to have given them a political literacy enabling them to connect to the structural issues described in *Journey to Jo'burg.*

Others used their reading to describe the impact of racism on them personally. Melissa, who described herself as Latina, wrote: 'most Americans in school and everywhere I go tells me bad things and treat me bad because of my assent [sic]' (Melissa). Nhat, a

recent immigrant from Vietnam, wrote: 'I see that some one that is not welcome me and sometime I want to get up and back to Vietnam [sic]' (Nhat). Reading and responding to *Journey to Jo'burg* seems to have given these students the language for narrating their own experiences of racism and its impact. However, not all of the students felt able to relate the story to their own lives in the way they were being asked to. Angeli witnessed the tears of classmates in responding to the book, but wrote: 'this book doesn't relate to me' (Angeli). Angeli's letter suggests that she has been led to believe that the purpose of books about human rights or racism is to produce a personal emotional reaction. Since she did not relate personally to the story, she was prevented from applying the issues of racism and discrimination to her own context, illustrating the limitations of a teaching approach that only emphasises a personal identification with a text based on cultural background. Hope argues that 'teachers play a key role in filtering a text' ('"The Soldiers Came to the House"' 319), and these letters from Florida offer an insight into the impact of a teaching approach that guides students to identify with a text.

In letters from the Karachi American School, Pakistan in 2009, it is similarly clear that the class teacher encouraged the students to relate the events of *Journey to Jo'burg* to their own society. The Karachi American School is a selective, fee-paying school, with most of the student body made up of American ex-patriates and Pakistani nationals ('Karachi American School'). The biggest city in Pakistan, Karachi is diverse, both in the economic status and ethnic background of its residents. These students at the Karachi American School would have travelled globally at a young age, whilst also living very wealthy and comfortable lives. There is some engagement with anti-racist ideology in their widespread condemnation of apartheid, but in applying the novel's message to their own context, both the teacher and several students use the novel to critique class-based, rather that racial inequality. The South African born teacher of this class of eleven-year-olds from the Karachi American School, Donovan Dorning, used his own childhood experience to introduce *Journey to Jo'burg* to his students, going to 'great lengths to describe the pain and anguish that apartheid brought to bear on the country as a whole' (Dorning). Dorning suggested that this approach had an impact on the reception of the text, as his students listened 'intently' and shared their thoughts with 'enthusiasm'. Dorning also remarked that the 'kids began to see the economic apartheid that is prevalent in Pakistan'. This teacher is 'filtering' the text, as

Hope describes, through his own experiences and political views, encouraging a critique of the economics of Pakistan. However, the letters from the students reveal that their engagement with this idea of 'economic apartheid' was not as uniform as Dorning's letter suggests. A few students compared Mma in *Journey to Jo'burg* to their own maids, who also spent much time away from their families. Erum stated that 'apartheid still exists between the poor and the rich people here in Karachi' (Erum). However, Nabeel remarked: 'how lucky I am living in a society where there is no discrimination' (Nabeel). Both Erum and Nabeel's comments were echoed in several letters from their peers, revealing a divide between those who apply the novel's message to their own context, and those who located inequality only within other societies. This is indicative of the diversity of response that can occur within a single class even when guided to read in a certain way, revealing patterns of compliance with and resistance to the teacher's influence.

The final example of identification as a tool for reader-response comes from 11-year-old readers at George Hicks High School, Grand Cayman in 1992. In his accompanying letter with the responses from his class of eleven-year-olds, teacher Andrew Robinson suggested that Naidoo 'might be interested in seeing how the book comes across in what is still a British colony in the Caribbean' (Robinson). A British Overseas Territory, the Cayman Islands are a popular tourist destination and a tax haven, with the highest GDP of any Caribbean territory. The population comprises mixed-race, white European, Black African, and a significant number of expatriate people from a variety of nations. This racially mixed group of students engaged enthusiastically with the subject of race in relation to *Journey to Jo'burg* and to their own lives. Neil remarked that there was no racism in the Cayman Islands 'because everybody has equal rights and everyone is respected regardless of the job they do […] in my school we have different nationalities and backgrounds and all work and play in harmony.' (Neil). Whether this is the reality or simply Neil's perception, he was keen to differentiate his society from that depicted in *Journey to Jo'burg.* Dorothy suggested that the reality might be more complex than Neil stated, and that *Journey to Jo'burg* had offered her a new understanding of race:

> your book has taught me a lot on racism. I knew what racism is about and had a good idea of how it felt to be hated or thought less of because I am black. Yet, when

> I read the passage when Naledi and Tiro were about to enter the white Parktown bus and the driver told them off, I felt my cheeks tingle with embarrassment for Naledi Tiro *and* the black bus driver (Dorothy).

Whilst Neil's racial identity is unclear from his letter, Dorothy related her response to the novel to her own Blackness, indicating that she may have perceived the racial dynamics of her own society differently from some of her white peers. Dorothy suggested that her reading produced a deepening understanding of the impact of racism, that she located in her body through this physical feeling of embarrassment. Whether as an accurate report of the moment of reading or not, she chose to communicate her bodily identification with the Black characters in the novel. Her embarrassment suggests a new understanding of the complexities of structural racism in apartheid South Africa, during which some Black people were required to be complicit in their own oppression. Dorothy arrived at this new understanding by bringing her lived experience to the text, but also by recognising the limits of it. As with several of the examples I have used here, identification is shown to be a useful tool for developing language to discuss the impact of racism. But as is also the case with many of the other responses in this chapter, it seems to be most effective at producing an anti-racist reading when readers are able to recognise the limits of identification, and use it as one tool among many in their reading toolkit.

6.5.3 Exploration

A number of the respondents to *Journey to Jo'burg* in Naidoo's archive use their reading to test out new ideas and experiment with language and identity, in a mode of reading that I term exploration. This mode of reading is particularly significant for *Journey to Jo'burg,* since it is a novel explicitly written for children outside of the context that it depicts. All the readers featured in this chapter are outsiders to the text in different ways, and it is worth paying attention to the ways that these readers explore ideas that may be new to them. In some instances, this type of reading is very teacher-led, as is the case in letters sent in 2000 from two sixth grade (aged 11-12) classes at Minnetonka Middle School, Minnesota, US. Minnetonka is a small city, which in 2000 had a white population of 94% ('U.S. Census

Bureau QuickFacts: Minnetonka city, Minnesota'). There are two sets of responses in Naidoo's archive from different classes led by reading teacher Laura Ludvigson, who explained in her second accompanying letter in November 2000 that 'at this age they hate being noticed or different, but with a gentle and persuasive touch I manage to get them to address their reading issue. Your short but adult-like- [sic] themes are perfect for them' (Ludvigson. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 27 November 2000). As American readers, this class would have most likely read the Lippincott trade edition, rather than the Longman Knockouts edition marketed for reluctant readers, but the book nonetheless appealed to Ludvigson as the combination of simple language and political, 'adult' themes helped make reading 'less painful' (Ludvigson. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. Jan 2000). Clearly directed by Ludvigson, her first class in January 2000 wrote letters to Naledi describing what freedom meant to them. In their letter, Kelly and Alysia asked and answered the question: 'what does freedom mean at school? Freedom means when your walking down the hall at school people should never be judged by the color of there skin. […] Everyone should be counted equal [sic]' (Kelly and Alysia). In encouraging her students to explore the ideas introduced in *Journey to Jo'burg,* Ludvigson enabled some of them to produce tentative anti-racist statements in condemnation of apartheid, although few used their reading to apply their critiques to their own culture.

There is one instance among the responses surveyed for this chapter of multiple sets of responses from the same class teacher over a number of years, offering further insight into the effect of the teacher on reader-response. Each year between 1992 and 1998, Naidoo received letters from Susan Renard and the third grade (aged 8-9) class that she taught at Public School Six in New York City, US. Of these seven sets of letters, five are preserved in Naidoo's archive. There is a gap from 1994-1995, although a handwritten comment from Naidoo suggests that Renard also sent letters during these years. The letters from 1992 show signs of affective readings: Chelsea described the book as 'very emotional' (Chelsea), and Nazlie described her reading experience as 'a little painful' (Nazlie). The most marked change between the subsequent sets of letters occurs between 1992 and 1993, as the students asked more questions, and this is perhaps an indication of a development of Renard's teaching practice. The letters from 1996 to 1998 follow a similar format to those of 1993, with some small differences: students in 1996 mentioned that they had been learning

about Africa and about memoir writing, and many asked if Naidoo was going to write a memoir. The 1997 letters contain several questions about *Chain of Fire,* whereas the 1998 students were interested in Naidoo's writing itself, complimenting her on her writing and asking her questions about her life as a writer. The similarities between the letters from a single year, and the differences from year to year, provide compelling evidence that the discussion of the book in class influenced the themes that readers addressed in their written responses. Although this can be read as a sign of Renard's influence, it also suggests a collective understanding of the text arising from classroom discussion, or 'booktalk'. As regards the use of the novel to engage with themes of race and racism, the letters from 1996 stand out. This could be due to Renard's approach; students mentioned that *Journey to Jo'burg* had been incorporated into lessons about Africa, explaining their deeper engagement with racism. The responses of these students at Public School Six range from pity - 'Are you black? If you are, I feel sorry for you.' (Victoria) - to professions of a belief in the importance of equality: 'everything should be 50% 50% black and white people' (Slaveya). Zach signed off his letter with the words 'your obedient slave (just kidding)', in imitation of Naledi's letter-writing in school in *Journey to Jo'burg*. Recognising a similarity between Naledi's letter-writing lessons and his own, this is an example of a reader testing out the language given to him by the text. Zach's 'just kidding' perhaps indicates his intention to be subversive, or an attempt to reconsider the appropriateness of his use of this phrase as a joke.

A further example of the ways that teachers can be seen to guide their students towards exploring new ideas comes from Culloden Primary School in London. In 1987, 1st and 2nd Juniors (aged 7-9) at the school put on a play based on *Journey to Jo'burg,* writing to Naidoo to ask for more information, and inviting her to attend. Situated in Poplar, a historically poor but ethnically diverse district of East London, Culloden Primary had a similarly ethnically diverse student body. In a letter from October 1987, student teacher Sally Yendell requested Naidoo's advice on gaining background knowledge about South Africa and developing their staging, in order that their production be 'as authentic as possible' (Yendell). This letter was accompanied by a few from her students, who echoed her request for 'ideas and information' (Coote). This indicates Yendell's intention to create an immersive educational experience that would instil an appreciation for a different

culture, beyond a surface-level identification with the story and characters. Naidoo obliged, recommending the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF) as a source of photographs for the students' research, a resource that had been used for the photographs in the first edition of *Journey to Jo'burg*. In their second batch of letters, the students thanked Naidoo for this help and invited her to attend their play. Whilst most simply echoed this invitation, there is one letter that differs from the others in its engagement with the topic of race, which is largely absent from the other letters. Tanya wrote that 'I think a lot about the way black people are treated in South Africa' and adding in a postscript: 'I am half black and half white' (Tanya). Without being asked to, Tanya seems to have considered it important to tell Naidoo that the novel had made her think deeply about the racial injustice of apartheid. She also considered it important to explain that she was mixed-race, making it clear that her reading of the novel emerged from her specific subject position. Photos taken by Naidoo show that Naidoo attended the play and saw a selection of the students' work on 11 December 1987. She has mounted, dated, and annotated these photos, as the visit seems to have been a meaningful experience for her, and perhaps something that she could use in the future. One photo shows a list of 'demands for the people of South Africa' (see Fig. 6), including 'all colours in the same schools' and 'give everybody the vote' (Photos: Children from Culloden School). This piece alone shows that the lessons surrounding *Journey to Jo'burg* at Culloden School included a thoughtful engagement with the demands of the anti-apartheid movement, indicating a school ethos that encouraged students to engage with political issues and discussions of race and racism. As these readers were responding whilst apartheid was still ongoing, their use and display of these demands, as well as their use of IDAF resources for their research, demonstrates an overlap between education and activism, as these students tapped into resources created by activists in order to explore the new ideas offered by the novel.

The final example of an exploratory response to *Journey to Jo'burg* differs from those discussed previously in that it was not structured by a classroom reader-response exercise. Asma, who was 11 or 12 at the time, sent a book review and a letter to Naidoo in 1987. She had read the book in school, but her letter indicates that she wrote her letter from home of her own volition. She explained in her letter that reading the novel

Figure 6: One of the photos taken by Naidoo during her visit to Culloden School, London in 1987. This images show some of the classwork done around Journey to Jo'burg, specifically depicting a poster of 'Demands for the people in South Africa' (Naidoo, Photos: Children from Culloden School).

made me feel guilty in a way because I hadn't know [sic] such horrible things were happening in this world around me. I had thought, slavery and racism is something that happened in the past, but to think that while I'm in a good home, having a big meal everyday and free education, black people in South Africa are treated like animals. (Asma. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 13 May 1987) Writing during the apartheid years, Asma's encounter with apartheid through her reading was also an encounter with her own privilege. Her words suggest that she had not encountered information about apartheid before, and that her reading caused her to question her own place in the world. In 1990, Naidoo wrote to Asma to request permission to use her words in Andrew Hart's *Understanding the Media: A Practical Guide.* Naidoo's use of Asma's words in this way is an example of her using her readers' words as evidence for her political vision of children's literature. Naidoo particularly valued Asma's 'thoughtful questions', and quoting from her letter allowed Naidoo to argue that this is what literature – and of course her own novels – allowed readers to do (Naidoo, Letter to Asma). Asma responded to Naidoo's 1990 letter giving her consent, but she also used her reply to reflect on herself of three years previously. Re-reading her original 1987 letter, she noted that 'it was hard for me to believe that it was me that wrote the letter. I don't think I do stuff like that anymore' (Asma. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 25 June 1990). She seemed to recognise a boldness in the act of writing to Naidoo that she possessed as a pre-teen but had since lost. However, her dialogue with Naidoo prompted a recollection of the lessons that she so boldly espoused in her first letter. She wrote:

> with the release of Nelson Mandela, my feelings about South Africa and apartheid has [sic] been renewed. I've got into the habit of saying to myself 'I'll do it later on' whenever I want to do something. […] I'm thinking of joining the 'Anti-Apartheid Movement' because I'd really like to know more about the situation in South Africa.

Whether she ever did join the AAM is impossible to know, and it may have been something that she felt she ought to say. However, it seems that contact with her reading self of three years previously caused her to reflect on the action that she could now take, as someone who was older and better equipped to do so. Asma's reading, and her correspondence with Naidoo, led her to explore her own privilege and place in an unjust world, as well as her own potential as an activist, whether or not she acted on that potential. Exploration as a mode of

reading comes the closest of all these modes facilitating what Blakeney calls 'the development of consciousness' regarding the ways that race operates. The responses analysed in this section show readers testing out the anti-racist ideology communicated in *Journey to Jo'burg* and connecting it to the potential of anti-racist action by raising their awareness of anti-apartheid activism.

6.5.4 Resistance

For Lawrence Sipe, 'engaged resistance' can manifest as a pattern of reading in which readers react to 'representations of racial injustice in the text by expressing their pain or anger at what was happening in the story' (123). The examples of affective engagement discussed in this chapter could be seen in this way. However, a smaller number of responses show resistance to the ideology of the text, the influence of the teacher, or the expectations of peers, as seen in responses from a Year 6 (aged 10-11) class in Portsmouth, UK. The letters themselves are not found in Naidoo's archive but quotes from the letters have been collated by her. Naidoo's annotations indicate that these letters were sent in 1992, following her visit to the class. Naidoo visited many of the classes whose responses appear in her archive, but this class is unique in its mixture of resistant and engaged readings of the novel. Mark explained that Naidoo's talk had 'changed the way I think': 'I think they should live together because there is nothing wrong with blacks. Although the apartheid has been abolished, blacks are still treated badly, because the whites were brought up that way' ('Responses to *Journey to Jo'burg'* 5). Mark communicated in his letter that reading *Journey to Jo'burg* had caused him to change his mind, and his mild condemnation of apartheid can be read as an experimentation with a form of anti-racist expression. Furthermore, Mark seemed to comprehend the impact of structural and social context on one's attitudes to race, suggesting that change at the level of government does not immediately produce a change in attitudes and behaviours. Mark's classmate Dallas took a different approach, explaining that apartheid is 'there [sic] problem and they've got to sort it out themselves' ('Responses to *Journey to Jo'burg' 5*). Dallas interpreted the novel as asking him to care about global events, and he resisted this interpretation, disavowing the impulse to care beyond his national borders. He continued: '[Naidoo] could still feel the same way but not

show it as much because in a way people will start to think that all the white people in South Africa are the same'. Dallas's resistance seems to have stemmed partly from his position as a white reader; he wanted to defend white people who he feared were being stereotyped by Naidoo. Given that she was invited to speak, this school seems to have exhibited some willingness to give a platform to anti-apartheid ideas, even though these ideas might have been new to the students. However, either the school or the wider community seems to have fostered a tolerance for racist views, given Mark's comment that the novel had changed his mind about racism. Whilst Dallas resisted the lessons of the text, Mark resisted that context, producing a tentative anti-racist reading.

Alongside these quoted excerpts from the Portsmouth response, Naidoo has archived a poem written by Richard, another student at the same school. Richard's poem seems to have been a response to issues raised in Naidoo's talk or in broader classroom discussion, since the poem addresses concepts of foreign aid and British responsibility that do not feature in *Journey to Jo'burg*. His opening stanza moves from contemplating the division of Africa by various European colonisers, to the role of foreign aid in addressing the problems that arise from division:

> Should we split Africa?
> Should we not?
> Should we give money? Little or lot?
> Is it our fault? What have we done?
> We can't help being better off!
> Should we be grateful? (Cogley)

This poem represents a troubled thought process: the rhyme scheme and metre are repeatedly established and then abandoned, as the questions expand the bounds set by these formal constrictions. The 'we' of the poem is ambiguous; it could refer to Westerners, to the British, to the poet and his classroom peers, or to the community of child readers that he may understand himself to be part of. Nevertheless, it is a 'we' that views Africa as 'the Other', and as a set of problems to be solved. A core affect of this poem is guilt, which shows itself in the phrases: 'what have we done? / We can't help being better off!' Through this question-and-answer pattern of the poem, the speaker defends himself against the

suggestion that Africa is a problem that is the responsibility of the West to solve, and yet is prompted to ask more questions. His questioning is never resolved, and the poem ends: 'should we leave the pains to the people there?' The lack of resolution is an invitation, from the poet to himself but perhaps also to his readers, to dwell on this question, and the larger questions of global responsibility that it evokes. Whilst Richard did not produce any sort of anti-racist reading of *Journey to Jo'burg*, he was willing to sit with the difficult questions proposed by Naidoo, resisting but also wrestling with the new ideas offered to him. Resistance readings such as these from the Portsmouth students are rare in Naidoo's archive. I would hesitate to suggest that this is because the anti-racist ideology of the text is so effective, but rather that this tells us something about classroom reader-response. It may be the case that teachers are less inclined to send readings of this nature on to Naidoo, but it may also be the case that readers more often produce condemnations of apartheid because they are being compliant with the scripts that their teachers and the offer them. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, this does not make these readers less agential, but means that they are making certain choices in their responses out of a desire to give their teachers what they believe they are asking for.

6.5.5 Critical literacy

Finally, I turn to several examples of readers who use critical literacy to explore the anti-racist ideology of *Journey to Jo'burg.* Hope describes critical literacy as 'viewing the text as an artefact, that is both authored and partial' ('"The Soldiers Came to the House"', 303). There are multiple ways of doing this, and Naidoo's archive shows examples of readers reflecting on the process of writing, on the identity of the author, on the effectiveness of her message, and the role of anti-racist literature in their own lives. The critically literate readers I go on to discuss assume authority to speak about the literature that matters to them and conceive of anti-racist literature as important for them and their fellow child readers. Gemma, a 12-year-old reader from Royal Manor School in Portland, UK, in 1991, stated in her letter: 'I think that children my age should be reading books like *Journey to Jo'burg,* so that they can realize how the other half of the world lives' ('Responses to *Journey to Jo'burg' 7*). Gemma viewed herself as an authority on the reading needs of her

peers and stated that reading radical children's literature should be an important part of their education. Alexa, a student at Pierce Middle School, Florida, wrote of *Journey to Jo'burg* that 'even though it was fiction is was also non fiction [sic]' (Alexa). Alexa understood the novel as fiction, but with a relationship to real life that makes it comparable to non-fiction. Asma, whose response I also used as an example of an exploratory reading, used her reading of *Journey to Jo'burg* to reflect on how and why children should read: 'kids our age only learn about the good things, but we never learn the facts. The quicker we learn the facts and forget about fiction, the more intelligent and strong willed we shall become' (Asma. Letter to Beverley Naidoo. 13 May 1987). Asma's attitude to literature was quietly political, as she rejected ways of reading that do not express truths about the world. The injunction to 'forget about fiction' echoes the view expressed by Alexa, that *Journey to Jo'burg* occupies a middle-ground between fiction and non-fiction. Asma implied that she had been let down by the books she had read, using her encounter with the novel to reflect on her own position as reader and assert her view of what literature should and should not do in the lives of child readers.

Other readers reflected on Naidoo's identity as author and on the aims of *Journey to Jo'burg.* Among the responses from Minnetonka Middle School, in the US, Shelby's was the only one to directly address the question of race, and she did so by reflecting on Naidoo's identity as a white author. She wrote: 'people think that you have dark skin because you wrote a book about some people with dark skin. I don't think that. I think that anyone could write about any color of skin' (Shelby). This response gestures to a debate that seems to have arisen in the classroom about whether authors should write about communities to which they are outsiders, and Shelby's understanding of her own authority as a child reader to comment upon the ethics of fiction about race and racism. Dorothy, a student from Cayman Islands Middle School whose response I have already discussed in relation to identification, noted a potential gap between the author's intentions and the reception of the text as an anti-racist tool. She asked: 'did you expect your readers whether black or white to respond to your message? Was there any controversy over *Journey to Jo'burg?* Do you think you have changed anyone's views of racism?' (Dorothy). Dorothy comprehended the anti-racist message of the text, whilst understanding that not every reader would read in the same way that she did. She implied that readers from different contexts might receive

this message differently, beginning to evaluate the potential of literature to change readers' views. In her reply to the school, Naidoo addressed Dorothy's questions, hoping that the book would 'raise questions for white children', while noting that 'it's something very difficult to measure and sometimes the results might only be seen years later! I think the way we talk about books (with teachers and friends) is an important part too of their effect' (Naidoo, Beverley. Letter to Dorothy and others). Naidoo did not fully answer Dorothy's question, but implied that 'booktalk' in the classroom is the ideal context for realising the anti-racist potential of a text. It is worth noting that, whilst I largely analysed all of the letters from a single class or school together for the majority of the chapter, all the examples of critically literate responses are stand-alone letters, or unique amongst those from their group for producing such a response. This indicates that this sort of response was not, in any of these cases, guided by peers or the class teacher, but is an interpretation that these readers came to more independently. Within each of these responses employing critical literacy, it is clear that these readers saw themselves as authorities on the sorts of literature that they and their peers should be reading, viewing political, anti-racist literature as essential reading.

6.6 Conclusion: trusting the message to the readers

Through these five modes of response, Naidoo's readers engaged with the anti-racist ideology of the text in a variety of ways specific to their social context. Their affective responses show solidarity with Black South Africans, and provided the basis for an anti-apartheid awareness. Through identification with the text, and exploration of the ideas that the text introduces, readers have been able to test out an anti-racist voice. Some readers recognised the anti-racist ideology of the text and resisted it, whilst others addressed the text as a constructed artefact, probing the anti-racist potential of literature in general. Whilst these responses illustrate a compliance with the scripts of classroom reader-response, they also show Naidoo's readers claiming authority to critically assess the anti-racist ideology of texts, and to decide what sort of books they and their peers should read. These responses show some readers developing a political awareness in the ways that Naidoo may have hoped, but other responses resist or even exceed her vision for the

political potential of childhood reading. The archival record of reader responses also reveals moments when Naidoo has used the words of her readers in articles and talks, in order to make statements about the political value of her fiction and children's fiction in general. Her readers can be seen as both real children who contribute to Naidoo's authorial vision, and as rhetorical constructs mobilised by her. My analysis of reader responses to *Journey to Jo'burg* has shown that readers comply with, resist, and reinterpret the text in ways that far exceed the receptive implied reader constructed by her work. It would seem then that there is a paradox at the heart of Naidoo's vision of the political potential of childhood, which constructs childhood as a time of agency, and yet asks readers to comply to its political messaging. And yet, it is this contradiction at the heart of Naidoo's vision for the political potential of childhood reading that allows it to hang together. Whilst Naidoo at points has mobilised the idea of the political reader to strengthen her vision for political reading, the final piece of her vision that this chapter reveals must be an act of letting go, trusting to the messy, always-in-negotiation, socially contingent agency of her real readers.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

> 'Teaching, for me, is like having an extra set of lungs. I am almost certain that you feel the same way about writing.' (Rankin)

Throughout this thesis I have argued that radical children's literature is a conduit for agency, in that it constructs children as agential, and has the potential to facilitate their agency both as readers and as literary co-producers. In this case study of Naidoo's middle-grade fiction, I have explored the multiple facets of her vision for the political potential of childhood reading, as embodied by her fictional children and the real child collaborators and readers whose voices can be found in her archive. In doing so, this thesis has made a significant intervention into current scholarship on childhood agency, illustrating important examples of the ways that real children interact with their representations in literature as both critics and collaborators. In this concluding chapter, I will reiterate how the vision of political reading that has emerged in this thesis makes a contribution to the field. I will then suggest some ways in which the evolution of this vision sheds light on changes in children's publishing over the past four decades, as well as on the ways that Naidoo continues to negotiate her own position within this market. As the above quote from South African teacher Fiona Rankin, sent to Naidoo in 2005 suggests, for the past four decades writing for children has been an essential vocation for Naidoo. It remains so, but the nature of this vocation and the vision of childhood reading that emerges from it continues to evolve. As it evolves, so do the possibilities for a continued consideration of the complex, socially embedded, partial agency of children as the subjects, constructs, co-producers, and readers of her work.

The agency of children, both as rhetorical constructs and as the real readers, critics, and co-producers of children's literature, has been central to this thesis. Taking heed of the work of Sánchez-Eppler, Bernstein, and Gubar, my critical stance throughout this thesis has required me to pay attention to the ways that real children appear in Naidoo's archive as her collaborators, readers, and interlocutors. It is of course important to emphasise that no archive can provided direct access to the unmediated 'child's voice'. Children are socially

embedded, and their voices within archives of children's literature such as Naidoo's are packaged within layers of adult mediation. Moreover, these real children can be seen to perform and subvert the rhetorical values of childhood offered to them in the texts they read, in turn shaping these values as they participate in the production of children's literature and culture. As Bernstein argues, real and rhetorical children are therefore not constructed in opposition to one another, but simultaneously and mutually construct one another. This endeavour of paying attention to the intersections between real and rhetorical children in Naidoo's work has therefore required a robust conception of children's agency. As Gleason argues, binaristic conceptions of agency that set up an opposition between adult and child, or take a zero-sum approach to children's agency

> tend to downplay, for example, the messier 'in between' of more nuanced and negotiated exchanges between and among children (e.g. with friends, siblings, cousins, team mates, room mates, neighbours), in intergenerational alliances (between children and parents, and children and grandparents), as well as relationships outside the nuclear family (e.g. with storekeepers, librarians, bus drivers, neighbours, teachers, unrelated caregivers). (448)

Naidoo's fiction and the archival records of her interactions with real children are full of such negotiated exchanges, and my research has required a close attention to the ways that agency is constructed through these exchanges. As I have argued in Chapter 4 in relation to Naidoo's representations of activism, and in my analysis of reader responses in Chapter 6, many of these negotiations take place within networks of interdependence. These real and represented children are 'partial subject[s]' whose right to dependency and care does not undermine their roles as political and creative actors (Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States* xxv). Taking heed of this, throughout this thesis I have adopted what Gubar has called a 'kinship' approach to agency. Without ignoring the power differentials that often structure adult-child relations, I conceive of agency as fluid rather than fixed, and constantly in negotiation within networks of interdependence, for both children and adults. This conception of agency is central to the vision of the political potential of childhood reading that has emerged through my analysis of Naidoo's work and archive.

In my Introduction, I have argued that Naidoo's choice to begin writing for children was the culmination of two decades of involvement in education and anti-apartheid activism. This choice has also been framed by Naidoo as a response to her own 'blinkered' childhood, and to the centrality of reading to her own political awakening as a young adult. Over my five chapters I have outlined the several facets of Naidoo's vision of the political potential of childhood reading, as constructed through her implied child readers, her creative collaboration with young people, and the responses from her readers to her representations of racism. The first facet of this vision that I have explored in Chapter 2: Political Children is her construction of a politicised implied reader, for whom reading is a process of political awakening. This politicisation is undertaken through a realist mode, underpinned by a peritext that reinforces a connection between the text and reality, and an invitation to identify with the focalising protagonist(s). Tracing Naidoo's development of *Journey to Jo'burg, The Other Side of Truth,* and *Burn My Heart* using her archive has also illuminated the evolution of her style towards a more complex literary mode in which the subject position of the implied reader is more ambivalent. Whilst her political messaging has become more oblique over the course of her career, this evolution has led to the construction of a more agential implied reader. By inviting readers to scrutinise their own subject positions, Naidoo's more recent novels invite readers into a political reading experience, over and above asking them to comprehend a political message. In Chapters 3 and 4 I explored the second facet of Naidoo's vision for political childhood reading through an analysis of her politicisation of childhood itself. In Chapter 3: Border Children I have argued that Naidoo's work can be seen as a re-politicisation of the concept of childhood innocence, a concept that traditionally serves to rid childhood of the concerns of labour, and racial and sexual difference. Through my analysis of *Out of Bounds, The Other Side of Truth* and *Web of Lies,* I have shown how these texts each represent how childhood innocence is mobilised in the construction of the borders of nations and apartheid segregation. Each of these texts perform a re-politicisation of childhood by interrogating this mobilisation of innocence, whilst also making recourse to the rhetorical power of childhood innocence in order to generate sympathy for the characters. In Chapter 4: Disobedient Children, I have demonstrated that Naidoo continues this deconstruction of innocence and re-politicisation of childhood by representing her characters in *Chain of Fire, No Turning Back, The Other Side of Truth,* and *Out of Bounds* as potential activists. This chapter analyses Naidoo's

conception of child agency as contextually situated and negotiated, presenting a kinship view of adult-child relations. In doing so, I argue that Naidoo presents the political potential of children as ready to be unlocked by dialogue with others, and by reading itself.

Having explored Naidoo's politicisation of rhetorical children and childhood in these first three chapters, in Chapters 5 and 6 I turned my attention to the real children whose voices can be found in Naidoo's archive. In Chapter 5: Expert Children, I outlined Naidoo's unique methodology for adult-child creative collaboration, first developed for *No Turning Back* and honed during the writing of *Web of Lies.* Through my analysis of the archival records, I argued in this chapter that the third crucial facet of Naidoo's vision of political childhood reading is the positioning of children as co-producers of radical children's literature. These collaborations became a central part of this vision as it evolved, positioning children as experts on the political content of her novels and bolstering the political messaging of these texts with a sense of authenticity. The final facet of Naidoo's political vision – her dialogue with her readers – has been explored in Chapter 6: Reading Children. This chapter put the effectiveness of her vision to the test by exploring one example of political reading, through an analysis of anti-racist engagement in archived reader response to *Journey to Jo'burg.* In this chapter I illustrated that readers derived their agency from a negotiation with text and context, both resisting and exceeding Naidoo's vision for the political potential of her work. In doing so, I argued that Naidoo's vision for the political potential of childhood reading hangs on a contradiction, inviting readers into political life, whilst ultimately abdicating control over the outcomes of the reading experience. Taken together, these multiple facets of Naidoo's vision of political childhood reading demonstrate the importance of a robust understanding of child agency for the study of contemporary children's literature. This case study of Naidoo's work has offered an understanding of children as both rhetorical figures within and the real co-producers and readers of children's literature, mutually informing and shaping one another. This has allowed me to argue throughout this thesis that childhood reading is a conduit for agency, not through a presentation of straightforward models of resistance and rebellion, but in suggesting new political possibilities for child readers, and inviting them to see themselves as both political actors and literary co-producers.

Whilst being unique in its approach as a single-author study of Naidoo's work and archive, the most significant contribution of this thesis to the field of children's literature is in the use of Naidoo's archive to explore the roles of her child collaborators and readers. Building on Gubar's kinship model of childhood, I have demonstrated that in collaborating with young people, Naidoo's work offers important examples of children as co-producers of children's literature and culture. As well as being socially embedded, partial subjects, these collaborators are creative agents with important political insights that have enriched Naidoo's work. The political insights of Naidoo's readers have in turn influenced her vision for children's literature, as well as shaping the direction of this thesis. Within a nuanced understanding of child agency that acknowledges a dependence on adults and the impact of adult mediation, I would like to therefore suggest that the voices of real children in children's literature archives be considered as important critical perspectives that adult scholars should take heed of. Whilst the field of children's literature of course will and should continue to speak for and about children, this thesis has made room for a consideration of children as contributors to, rather than simply the subjects of this field. There is room for further study of the political ethics of Naidoo's picture books and educational publications for younger readers, but I would like to highlight two key areas of scholarship which are opened up by this thesis. Firstly, whilst Naidoo's methodology for collaboration is unique to her, child-adult collaboration in the creation of children's literature is not, and the field stands to benefit from future explorations of the ways that authors of contemporary children's literature draw on the expertise of the children and young people in their writing. Secondly, as I have touched on in Chapter 6, Naidoo has at points entered into a dialogue with her readers, allowing their insights to shape the way she viewed both her past and future work. This therefore creates room for further scholarship on the relationships between authors and their readers, both in their face-to-face interactions, and in the ways that archived responses are mobilised.

Naidoo's work has served as an ideal case study for this investigation of agency within radical children's literature, partly due to the nature of her archive as a rich source of children's voices, but also due to the nature of her career. Naidoo's continued success over the past four decades offers snapshots into the changing landscape of children's publishing in this time, but also into the evolution of the discourses around race and diversity in

children's books. Naidoo has remained in a position of relative success since the first publication of *Journey to Jo'burg* in 1985, and her novels are consistently in print. Her early novels were welcomed as resources for anti-racist and multicultural education in the 1980s, and Naidoo herself has remarked that established publishers such as Collins made enough profit from their popular publications to enable progressive editors such as Stones to take risks on more political books from unknown authors, such as *Journey to Jo'burg*. She has described this early context into which she was writing as 'in some ways, the halcyon days' of children's publishing (Personal interview. 24 Feb 2022). Moving into the 1990s, the rise of Naidoo's career coincided with the increased commercialisation of the children's book market. Reynolds wrote in 1993 that 'children's book publishers (many of which are now part of multi-national corporations) are seen to be spending a great deal of time and money promoting what their marketing managers regard as products (rather than books) to young readers' ('Consuming Fictions' 50). This commercialisation and globalisation of the market persisted. In 2006, Nadia Crandall reported on an 'explosion of almost Cambrian proportions in the children's books business' over the previous decade (1). Alongside the increase in multi-national publishing conglomerates noted by Reynolds, the 2000s onwards has also seen an increase in children's literature prizes and independent publishers (Crandall). This explosion in the market in all directions, alongside a decline in public funding for libraries, has further contributed to the sense of children's books as products, with the most popular accompanied by merchandise, and film and television rights. Naidoo herself has remarked upon this increase in commercialisation, saying that children's publishers are now 'at the mercy of global publishing, global commercialisation' (Personal interview. 24 February 2022). Whilst she has described feeling the pressure of this acceleration of the market and the need to do more self-promotion on social media, her work has nevertheless remained popular throughout these changing times. Winning the 2000 Carnegie Medal for *The Other Side of Truth* whilst maintaining longstanding relationships with Harper Collins and Penguin, two of the 'Big Five' anglophone publishing companies, has cemented her reputation as an author of literary children's fiction with political themes, allowing her to weather the decline of libraries whilst not being negatively impacted by the increased commercialisation of the market.

The trajectory of Naidoo's career also offers insights into the waning and waxing of calls for diverse books in this period, and the ways that the discourse around diversity has evolved. As discussed in the Introduction, Naidoo published her first children's book at a time when there was an increases appetite for diverse and anti-racist children's books, driven by Black British publishers Bogle L'Ouverture and Beacon Press and figures such as Rosemary Stones and Dorothy Kuya. These efforts have been renewed in the last decade, driven more by social media and transatlantic dialogue. Influenced by US-based social media campaigns such as #OwnVoices and #WeNeedDiverseBooks, the diversity work done in the UK in recent years has been more data-driven than that of the 1970s and 80s. The CLPE *Reflecting Realities* reports have recorded the paucity of representations of children of colour in British children's books, whilst measuring slight increases year to year. Ramdarshan Bold's work has reported that only 1.5% of YA novels published in the UK between 2006-2016 were written by British authors of colour ('The Eight Percent Problem'). As well as calling for more diverse representations within books, there are calls from critics like Ramdarshan Bold for more diversity amongst writers and publishers, and questions asked about who should be able to write about whom. As an author with a sustained commitment to interrogating the impacts of racism on displaced and colonised children in her fiction, Naidoo's position as a white author is nevertheless complicated by these questions. Indeed, Naidoo's whiteness must be factored in to her sustained success, especially when considering that she approaches racism in ways that may be deemed palatable for a broad literary market. Naidoo herself has suggested that her work offers an entry point into teaching about race and humanitarian issues, without being too challenging for sensitive readers, allowing her work to persist as a popular choice among teachers and librarians.

Whilst weathering these changes in children's publishing, Naidoo has continued to renegotiate her position within this market as her vision for the political potential of children's literature has evolved. As I have shown most clearly in Chapter 2, Naidoo's writing has changed from the clear political messaging offered by her earlier protest fiction, moving towards greater ambiguity in her later work. Later novels such *The Other Side of Truth* and *Burn My Heart* still have a clear political ethics, but invite readers into more ambivalent subject positions, asking them to explore the limits of their own perspectives. Naidoo's own

reader response research for *Through Whose Eyes* may have affected this evolution. This research tempered the early optimism of Naidoo's vision of political transformation through reading, indicating the impact of learning environments and reading contexts on the effectiveness of anti-racist literature education. The prioritisation of a political reading experience over the communication of a political message in her later novels was accompanied by a more immersive approach to research and development. Naidoo's process also evolved to invite the collaborative input of children and young people, as illustrated in Chapter 5. As Naidoo's fiction became more ambiguous and subtle in its messaging, it also began to pay greater attention to the potential of children to act as its co-producers. This evolution is indicative of the ways that Naidoo has continued to negotiate and renegotiate her position in relation to the subjects of her novels. A large part of this is a negotiation of her capacity to write about experiences and contexts to which she is an outsider. As discussed above, Naidoo's identity as a white author is an important consideration when exploring her success as an author, and as I have shown in Chapter 2, many aspects of her research and writing process can be seen as strategies to augment the limits of her specific perspective. Her immersive research process and construction of a realist mode through the peritexts of her novels serves both to create a legitimate portrayal of the displaced and colonised Black children her novels represent, and to lend a sense of legitimacy to Naidoo's choice to write about such children. The other key part of Naidoo's negotiation of her positionality as an author seems to relate simply to her position as an adult writing about children. Her increased attention to the agency of children in their roles as her readers and co-creators as her vision for childhood reading has evolved is indicative of a continued negotiation of her relationship as an adult to the children who make up her characters, readers, and collaborators.

This renegotiation, and the further evolution of Naidoo's vision for political childhood reading is evident in her latest novel, *Children of the Stone City*, published in October 2022. Whilst Naidoo has published several picture books since the publication of *Burn My Heart* in 2007, this is her first middle-grade novel in 15 years. *Children of the Stone City* is an allegorical story depicting a segregated society made up of 'Permitteds' and 'Nons'. It is the story of Adam and Leila, Non siblings who stand to lose their permit to live in the Stone City with their mother after their father passes away. When the siblings, along

with their friend Zak, are involved in a confrontation with some Permitted boys, Zak and Adam are both arrested and coerced into signing false confessions. Whilst Adam refuses and is released, Zak confesses and is sent to prison. Both siblings are enthusiastic musicians, who use music as both a refuge from their difficult contexts and the tools of protest. In many ways, this novel follows the narrative patterns of Naidoo's previous works. Written in the third person, the narrative is focalised from the alternating perspectives of Adam and Leila, inviting an identification with these protagonists. The narrative politicises children by showing how they are affected by and implicated in the construction of political and social borders. It depicts children being abused by police, and children using the tools at their disposal to stage acts of protest. And as is common to all of the texts discussed in this thesis, the novel resists a happy ending, but depicts its child protagonists as defiant and hopeful in spite of this. Where this novel departs from her previous work is in its allegorical form. To readers with any knowledge of current events in the region, the links to Israel/Palestine are palpable. However, this connection to real events is not foregrounded. The Author's Note and Acknowledgements come at the end of novel, whereas in her previous work these are often found at the start of a text. In these peritextual additions, Naidoo explains that this novel was written in response to questions from Palestinian children during her visit to the UNRWA'S Al Nuzha School for Girls in a refugee camp in Jordan in 2001. Naidoo also cites the numerous experts she consulted, including NGOs and academics working in the region. However, any geographical and cultural specificities have been avoided, as have most references to religion. Whilst it is political in a general sense, *Children of the Stone City* lacks the political specificity of her earlier works in the removal of these elements of context. It does not ask to be read as a protest novel in the same way as *Chain of Fire,* for instance, but instead as a more general allegory on the dangers of inequality and segregation, and the importance of children's rights.

Whilst this is a recognisable departure from her previous middle grade fiction, Naidoo's turn to allegory in *Children of the Stone City* is also continuous with her more recent picture books for younger readers, many of which are illustrated retellings of well-known folk tales. In my interview with her in February 2022, Naidoo explained that having previously seen these retellings as 'light relief' from her more overt political writing, she has come to see them as also rich with political potential. For her, fairy tales and folk tales are

concerned with overcoming terror and suggesting to readers 'the possibility of hope and survival' in oppressive circumstances (Personal interview. 22 February 2022). This turn to allegory can be seen as the further renegotiation of her own position in relation to the subjects of her novels. In *Children of the Stone City*, Naidoo has placed a greater distance between herself and the novel's subject matter. In a divergence from her authorial stance in her previous works, she is not claiming any authority to write about Israel and Palestine. Her turn to allegory can be seen as the further development of the evolution of her vision of political reading, in which offering a political reading experience is more important than communicating a political message. As she has explained: 'I'm saying here's a journey […] I'm not representing. This is me imagining, trying to explore' (Personal interview. 24 February 2022). This distancing from any representative authority can be seen as attempt to forestall criticism of the novel's legitimacy, but it is perhaps also an admission that Naidoo is not equipped to write a novel about Israel/Palestine, and so must make recourse to allegory. Yet this statement also encapsulates the evolution of Naidoo's vision of childhood reading. Having been eager to represent reality in *Journey to Jo'burg*, Naidoo now seems to be reflecting on her own lack of capacity to do so whilst holding the political messaging of her work more lightly. Her statement suggests that as her vision for the political potential of childhood reading has evolved, the reader constructed by this vision has become more agential, and less bound by the demands of the text.

In 1991, the same year that *Journey to Jo'burg* was permitted for the first time in South African schools, libraries, and bookshops, Margaret, a reader of the novel from Johannesburg, wrote her response in a letter to Naidoo. Alongside telling Naidoo her favourite parts of the book, Margaret expressed an interest in becoming a writer herself: 'I would also like to have some advice of how I can write a book, or maybe I could become a publisher, when I grow' (Matsetela). This is suggestive of a particular type of political reading: through Naidoo's book, this South African child seems to have been inspired to write herself. In her reply, Naidoo advised Margaret to 'start with life around you – the funny, interesting, sad things that you know about from your own experience' as well as suggesting that she submit her work to *Upbeat,* a South African young people's magazine (Letter to Margaret Matsetela). This correspondence is indicative of the ways that the relationship between children and adult authors may be a mutual exchange, rather than the

straightforward bestowal of knowledge upon children by adults. Furthermore, this dialogue encapsulates a central claim of this thesis, which is that children should be considered experts on writing about their own lives, and potential creative agents in their own right. In response to Margaret's suggestion that she get into publishing when she is 'grown', Naidoo advised her to start immediately and consider ways that she could publish legitimate, readable creative work as a child. This illustrates one of the many ways in which radical children's literature can act as a conduit for agency in ways that exceed the bounds established by the texts themselves, facilitating the agency of children as readers and as literary co-producers. Children are already performing the roles of writers, co-creators, and critics in their interactions with literature, interactions that are embedded in interdependent relationships. For adult authors and critics, all that remains is to start paying attention.

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