A Part of and Apart From:
The Immigrant's Unadoptability and Re-Adoption in Marianne Thamm's *Hitler, Verwoerd, Mandela and Me*
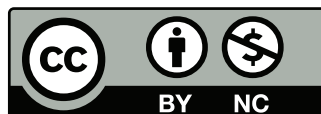
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Abstract

Marianne Thamm's memoir *Hitler, Verwoerd, Mandela and Me* (2016) provides an interesting take on adoption: the adoption of an immigrant by a destination country. This article investigates Thamm's navigation of geographic, social, and linguistic spaces as an immigrant in Apartheid-era South Africa. To do so, the cognitive-affective map of being adopted by a country is applied in two ways. Thamm meaningfully engages in two narrative strands often found in adoption memoirs. These strands focus on the adoptee as being unadoptable, and later as being part of a 'new beginnings' narrative. Regarding the first strand, Thamm reflects on immigrants' 'unadoptability' in their new country, revealing normative prejudices, injustices, and ideologies in the process. Further, she uses her agency as a journalist to expose how this 'unadoptability' extends to the Black population in Apartheid South Africa. As for the second strand, her representation of herself as the country's adoptee enables her to take part in a 'new beginnings' narrative, and to show how she takes agency and admits culpability in the need for this narrative to be created. In other words, Thamm admits that her passive resistance to the Apartheid regime does not make her innocent to the injustices committed against the oppressed; as a white person, albeit a marginalized immigrant, she enjoys the privilege that accompanies her race during the regime. Finally, she reflects on how, after Apartheid, South Africa adopted back those whom it rejected under the regime.

About the author

Hanta Henning is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of the Free State. Her research focuses on South African adoption narratives, and specifically on representations of the adoption triad in these narratives and the narrative burden in them. A further focus is on the intersection between representations of the adoption triad in fictional narratives and memoir. She explores the cult of gratitude, trauma, and kinship bonds within the adoption triangle. She situates these within the fraught socio-political and socio-economic contexts of colonial, Apartheid, and post-Apartheid South Africa.

Introduction

The term 'adoption narrative' conjures the notion of texts dealing with the causes, processes, and outcomes of a child's adoption. It is also expected that such a narrative would allude to the adoption triad: the first parent(s), the adoptive parent(s), and the adoptee (hereafter 'the triad'). Therefore, it may seem strange that I analyse Marianne Thamm's memoir *Hitler, Verwoerd, Mandela and Me* (2016) in terms of such a framework. The memoir sketches the life of Marianne Thamm, a child of European immigrants who came to South Africa during the Apartheid era. It is true that this memoir discusses Thamm and her partner's adoption of two children after the fall of Apartheid; however, these adoptions are not the focal point of Thamm's memoir. Rather, she devotes the bulk of this text to commenting on the socio-political setting of Apartheid South Africa and her experiences as an immigrant in this setting. She also comments on how these experiences evolved as the country made its radical shift to post-Apartheid democracy. I argue that, in this text, adoption is a metaphor for the immigrant's experience of living in a receiving country. Thamm presents semantic, cognitive-affective, and cultural maps to present the immigrant's or adoptee's unadoptability in the eyes of South Africa as adopter. Referring to Singley's (2011) work on adoption narratives, I show how the adoptee (immigrant) is initially considered unadoptable by the receiving country (adopter) for various reasons. However, the adoptee/adopter relationship evolves continuously in Thamm's memoir, culminating in South Africa's re-adoption not only of immigrants, but also of the native populace it considered unadoptable for centuries.

There are several parallels between the adoption process and Thamm's construction of the immigrant adoptee with South Africa as adopter, specifically as it pertains to the context of Apartheid South Africa. While adoption is defined as the legal severance between a child and their first parent(s), Homans (2018) pos-its that the process is more involved than that. It is the movement of a child or infant from one location to another, between or within kin groups or not. It includes severance from old, and assimilation of new, cultures, ethnicities, religions, classes, and even nations. Homans (2018, 1) argues that, in this way, adoption functions as a transnational process of family creation, with adoptive families becoming "hybrids, uncanny assemblages" of different peoples . If one reads adoption in this way, it is not beyond the realms of possibility for the triad to be reconstructed to place the sending country, receiving country, and immigrant in the positions of first parents, adopters, and adoptees respectively. Indeed, Singley (2011) posits that adoption narratives speak not only to the formation of new families, but also, sometimes, to evolving nationhood.

Adoption narratives typify binary oppositions between exclusion and inclusion, Self and Other, dependence and independence, as well as mourning lost origins and celebrating new beginnings (Singley 2011). Speaking purely about the adoption triad, these issues are framed within two narrative strands. First, the adoptee is saved from often desperate circumstances, but is considered unadoptable due to cultural, lingual, or religious differences. However, in the second strand, as the adoptee adapts, they become part of a fresh beginning for the adoptive family (Singley 2011). These binary oppositions also apply to individuals who relocate from one country to another. Immigrants may experience these same oppositional forces in their receiving countries (see, e.g., Sadeghi 2018; Heizmann and Böhnke 2018; Gatwiri and Anderson 2021).

In adoption narratives, adoption is often used as a metaphor or plot device, habitually intertwined with "developing national (…) culture" (Singley 2011, 12). This observation is what leads Singley to identify two narrative strands that subtly underlie some adoption narratives. The first thematic strain depicts the immigrant as an adoptee, and the receiving country as adopter, with the immigrant's adop-

tion described as an act of salvation. However, due to cultural and other differences, the immigrant is initially deemed unadoptable. The second strand renders the immigrant/adoptee "free of genealogical constraints" (Singley 2011, 12) in a narrative of new beginnings. In this strand, the immigrant often symbolizes a national or political fresh start, indicative of a country's acceptance of the Other as its own. Before elaborating further on this argument, I present a brief synopsis of Thamm's memoir.

Thamm's German father, Georg, was initially a member of the Hitler Youth, and later took part in Adolf Hitler's ethnic war. As a prisoner of war after WWII, he was imprisoned in the UK. After his release, he met Barbara, a Portuguese woman, similarly displaced by the war and now working in the UK. After Georg was offered a job in South Africa, the Thamms immigrated and settled in an immigrant neighbourhood in Pretoria. It is revealed later in the memoir that Georg had been recruited by H.F. Verwoerd, the architect of Apartheid, to work as an engineer on the design of a new South African military rifle – the same rifle that would be used in the Angolan war and in police actions during Black protests in South Africa. Georg had chosen not once, but twice, to adopt an ideology based on the intended destruction of ethnic groups: the Jews under Hitler's regime, and South Africa's Black population under Verwoerd. Despite this, the Thamms created new bonds of extended community and non-genetic kinship in their receiving country, a pattern Thamm would repeat later in her life by adopting her children. Along with these non-consanguineal bonds, Thamm provides paradigm shifts surrounding the thinking on family, community, kinship, and belonging. Throughout the early chapters, Thamm describes her friends, especially the expatriate neighbours and school friends, as a close-knit community which functions like a family. This family does not, however, escape conflict with the white Afrikaans community, who, throughout much of the memoir, remain the main antagonists.

In Thamm's memoir, construing the immigrant as adoptee and South Africa as adopter is possible when adoption is considered as a metaphor, as Singley (2011) suggests. Yet one element that seems to be missing from the reconceptualized triad is the position of the first parent(s). One would expect that the Thamms' country of origin would fit this description. However, Thamm's mother was born in Portugal, her father in Germany, and both found themselves in the United Kingdom before immigrating to South Africa. In the memoir, Thamm states that she feels no sense of kinship with any of these European countries; she does not express a sense of belonging to these 'first parents'. In an article for the *Daily Maverick*, Thamm (2018) reiterates this by saying: "The country of my birth is not the country of my heart and soul. That belongs to South Africa where I have lived for most of my adult life apart from the first two hazy years". It is not uncommon in adoption narratives for the voice of the first parent(s) to be silenced (see, e.g., Jones 2006; Gair and Moloney 2013; Das 2017), as in this memoir. This silencing may be the result of adoption outsiders'[1] disinterest in the first parent(s') version of events; other reasons, such as shame, guilt, or fear of prejudice may also contribute to such silencing. Based on Thamm's statement cited above, one could posit that she does not include her European first parents, if they can be called such, as she had no concrete memories of having lived in Europe. Further, she expresses little yearning for these first parents. As such, the metaphorical triad is, in this memoir, without first parent(s). This does not mean that the position in the triad is void, but rather that it is silenced in favour of discussing the adoptee and adopter. Through the adoption metaphor, the reframing of the triad, as previously suggested, becomes possible. Relating to the memoir in question, South Africa, as an adopter, has qualms about the suitability of the

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[1] Individuals not involved in adoption or the adoption process.

immigrant as an adoptee, based mainly on linguistic and cultural differences.

I argue that Thamm's navigation of the geographic, social, and linguistic spaces in her new country of residence aids in the creation of her cognitive-affective map. At the same time, the cognitive-affective map of adapting to a new country is applied twice. Firstly, Thamm's aforementioned mapmaking allows her to meaningfully engage in the two narrative memoir strands identified by Singley (2011). Regarding the first strand, Thamm reflects on the unadoptability of immigrants in their new country, exposing normative prejudices, injustices, and ideologies in the process. Further, she uses her agency as a journalist in an effort to expose how this unadoptability extended to the Black population in Apartheid South Africa. As for the second strand, her representation of herself as the country's adoptee enables her to take part in a 'new beginnings' narrative, and to show how she takes agency and admits culpability in the need for this narrative to be created. In other words, Thamm admits that her passive resistance to the Apartheid regime does not make her innocent to the injustices committed against the oppressed; as a white person, albeit a marginalized immigrant, she enjoys the privilege that accompanies her race during the regime.

In essence, Thamm engages in problematizing the normativity of unadoptability, navigating the terrain of Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa. This unadoptability is strongly premised not only on racial prejudice, but also on linguistic barriers and cultural differences. It is important to understand the role the Afrikaner identity and Afrikaans language have played in rendering the Other unworthy of adoption. I elaborate on the concept of unadoptability and the 'new beginnings' narrative by situating immigrants' language barriers, as well as the concept of bordering and ordering, in the context of Apartheid South Africa, as typified in the memoir. First, however, I provide a brief synopsis of immigration during Apartheid.

Criteria for unadoptability

During Apartheid in South Africa, immigration and migration took place according to what Segatti and Landau (2011) call a two-gate policy. The 'front gate' admitted immigrants or migrants who were white, desirable to the country, and who did not threaten the 'European culture' the country strived to emulate (Segatti and Landau 2011, 34). Indeed, South Africa welcomed white immigrants from European countries, as well as from neighbouring African states, to increase the local white minority populace (Maharaj 2004). Admissions through the 'back gate' allowed Black migrants, usually from neighbouring countries, to enter the country temporarily and often clandestinely as labourers. This enabled South Africa to amass a "cheap and relatively docile" workforce (Segatti and Landau 2011, 34) for whom deportation served as a constant reminder to toe the line. According to Segatti and Landau, this system permitted a blurring of lines regarding who the country's citizens were – specifically, who comprised the country's indigenous population – and who were considered foreigners. The system is an example of coercive migration policies and the stereotyping of foreigners, depending on whether they came from neighbouring countries or from Europe (2011, 35). It was in 1961 that a "proactive white immigration policy" was instituted, with the then-ruling National Party using white immigrants to address the country's lack of skilled white labourers (Segatti and Landau 2011, 36). The state made subsidies available to enable mainly European immigrants to enter and settle in the country (Segatti and Landau 2011, 36). Klotz (2000, 831) notes that the Apartheid government "actively sought white settlers", and calls these immigration policies an example of identity politics, where a clear distinction was created between immigrants (skilled white labourers) and refugees (unskilled Black labourers). Despite this distinction, both groups comprise immigrants, which enables one to identify le-

gal 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in the country's social makeup.

It is against the backdrop of this inequality, of the indigenous white Self vs. the immigrant white Other, that Thamm's memoir should be read. As the child of immigrants, Thamm describes the insidious white-against-white discrimination of the time. This discrimination was rooted, firstly, in the exclusionary Afrikaner identity, of which the Afrikaans language formed an integral part. Secondly, cultural differences rendered the immigrant/adoptee unadoptable. The former is best understood by briefly considering South Africa's colonization by the British. Around 1852, the British invaded South Africa; to attain their dominance over the country, Britain conducted a guerrilla war which saw thousands of Afrikaner children and women incarcerated in concentration camps, where many died. This legacy of British/Afrikaner conflict provides insight into the Afrikaner identity still prevalent in South Africa today. Afrikaners believe themselves to be those who fought heroically against the forces of imperialism. Seeing themselves as victims of imperialism "accounts for much of the non-compromising self-righteousness that is the hallmark of Afrikaner nationalism" (Dubow 2022). When the British came into power in South Africa circa 1910, attempts were made to install English as the sole language of education and law. This did not sit well with Afrikaners, who considered English the 'language of the enemy' (Silva 1997, 1). Language differences created a divide between the Afrikaners and the British – even their racial similarities were not enough to bridge this chasm. This 'linguistic apartheid' (Reagan 1987, 299) also served as grounds for covert discrimination towards English speakers and, specifically, English-speaking immigrants. The Afrikaner identity, and the belief that the Afrikaner identity and heritage were partially rooted in language, rendered language a battlefield, a basis for inter- and intraracial prejudice. Afrikaans became the language preferred by the govern-ment in 1948. English was the language of the Other, and, for many, of the skilled immigrant. Allowing foreigners who spoke mainly English, but also their native tongues, into the country, exacerbated the discrimination against the immigrants of the time. Not speaking Afrikaans was a clear indicator that the individual had not been Afrikanerized or, for that matter, Afrikaans-erized. Afrikanerization and Afrikaans-erization are saliently employed to show how the immigrant – the adoptee – albeit white, was considered, in Singley's (2011) terms, unadoptable by the adopter, South Africa. Thamm highlights not only the animosity of the Afrikaans whites towards the non-Afrikaans whites, but also how language was used as a tool of Afrikaner propaganda to secure a racially segregated state.

Secondly, the immigrant/adoptee is considered unadoptable due to cultural differences. This is evidenced in Thamm's descriptions of her family and herself in contrast to the Afrikaner ideals espoused at the time by bodies such as the Afrikaner Broederbond.[2] She shows the adoptee navigating South African places earmarked for the preservation of Afrikaner culture; her rebellion against the political regime also serves to make her more Other. Thamm's semantic and cognitive-affective maps allow the reader to navigate the terrain of her adoption by South Africa. Further, she makes use of cultural and spatial maps to underscore the immigrant's Otherness in Apartheid South Africa. Reading the memoir through the lens of Singley's (2011) narrative strands, Thamm shows a progression from the first strand – the adoptee as unadoptable – to the second, where the adoptee becomes adoptable as a harbinger of new national beginnings. She focuses specifically on former president Nelson Mandela's release from prison, and how the new political regime, though flawed, allowed formerly

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[2] Literally 'Bond of Brothers'; a secretive, exclusive Afrikaner nationalist organization that promoted the cultural, political, and economic interests of the white Afrikaner.

unadoptable individuals to be adopted, or re-adopted, by South Africa.

Adoptability, Afrikanerization, and Afrikaans

Afrikaans was the primary language of Apartheid South Africa. The language was (and mostly remains) the chief symbol of the Afrikaners' cultural distinctness, ingrained in Afrikaner ideology and identity. From 1948 until 1994, Afrikaners were the dominant force in South African politics. With Apartheid came the institutionalization of Afrikaner culture and language; speaking English became grounds for discrimination. The Afrikaner nationalist hegemony succeeded in creating the myth that only they spoke for the Afrikaner, and their worldview was a substantial expression of what it meant to be an Afrikaans-speaking citizen. Afrikaans was employed by these "nationalist culture brokers" to suppress "oppositional and alternative thought within the Afrikaner community" (Willemse 2017). English was very much a language that signified liberalism, oppositional thinking, and Black unity. This was exacerbated by English being adopted as the language of instruction in many South African 'independent homelands' and pervading as the language of instruction in most Black educational institutions (Silva 1997, 4). Integration, and thus the assimilation of the new country's language, traditions, and social mores, is the envisioned end stage of the immigration process. Indeed, as Motti-Stefanidi states (2018, 219), "culturally competent immigrants are able to communicate effectively in (…) national languages (and can) code switch between language(s) as necessary".

In Thamm's memoir, it becomes apparent that her father, Georg, could, to some extent, meet these criteria, while her mother, Barbara, could not. Georg received English instruction while in prison after WWII. Barbara had little to no grasp of the English language;

even after their relocation to South Africa, she struggled to master English. However, neither of them acquired Afrikaans as a language. For Thamm and her brother, Albert, the situation was different. Though they both attended English schools, Afrikaans was a compulsory school subject. Thamm notes that she acquired the language not only because of her aptitude for languages, but also because she found that it was a language she liked – caveated by the statement "I just didn't like the people who claimed it as uniquely their own" (2016, 47). Indeed, the tension between Afrikaans and English was not merely seated in the languages, but in the Afrikaner and English identities.

In the following exchange between Thamm and an Afrikaans man cruising their neighbourhood, we see Thamm's assimilation of the Afrikaans language, and how she incorporates it into her English vernacular. For context, Proes Street is a well-known street in Pretoria. It is a humorous name, as *proes* is akin to *poes*, the Afrikaans equivalent of 'cunt' (2016, 76).

> "Ag man, excuse me. Do you know where we can find Proes Street?" he asked (…)
>
> "Ja, I think I can help you out. You turn left when you get to Piel (dick) Street, take a quick right at Hol (arsehole) Road and then immediately left again into Bal (scrotum) Street," I replied.
>
> They drove off, disappointed. (2016, 76–77)

This and many other examples indicate that Thamm uses language as a shield. Instead of rejecting the language of the oppressor, she adopts it as her own and uses it to empower herself. Yet she was still conflicted between her love of the language and her disdain for those who had forced it on her and others, who used it as a tool of oppression and suppression.

Though Thamm's semantic map does

include Afrikaans, the language, when quoted or referred to, serves rather as societal commentary than as examples of how the language is spoken. In other words, Thamm succeeds in showing that, as Hayakawa (1991, 29–30) states, "(t)he symbol is NOT the thing symbolized; the word is NOT the thing; the map is NOT the territory it stands for". As Korzybski (2000, xvii) notes, "maps are self-reflexive". Thus, we use semantic maps to refer to parts of the territory, which become reflexive of other parts of the map at varying levels of abstraction; in essence, we make maps of maps. Furthermore, this implies that the semantic map is only part of the territory, and not the entire territory itself. Afrikaans, therefore, is not the territory of the language only, but becomes a map describing the territory of the Afrikaner mindset, beliefs, and ideologies.

Indeed, Thamm often uses 'Afrikaans' as an adjective (Afrikaans families, Afrikaans children, Afrikaans newspaper) rather than as a proper noun referring to the language itself. Her description of Afrikaans families is that they are overtly hostile to immigrants and English speakers. Speaking English allows her to distance herself, at least mentally, from Apartheid atrocities; it becomes a show of resistance to the Apartheid regime. It is, to her, the language of truth, the language in which the grim reality of Apartheid is exposed and critiqued. When interviewed for a position as a journalist at the English *Cape Times* newspaper, she said that she wanted to be a journalist because she wanted to tell the truth (2016, 105). In intention, if not yet in practice, Thamm aims to change the nationalist, denialist discourse by shaping new maps that represent the reality of the socio-political situation under the Apartheid regime. However, Thamm later notes that, in her reporter's notebook, what she wrote became a distraction from reality instead of a reflection thereof (2016, 113). Again, language becomes a shield, but instead of empowering her, it insulates her. This is because the institutionalized Afrikaner culture, enforced through the Afrikaans language, taught her that speaking out about injustice led to isolation and prejudice.

Thamm's semantic map is moulded through both Afrikaans and English. Though Thamm becomes proficient in and even embraces Afrikaans, she continues to use it as a symbol that signifies oppression and injustice in South Africa and as an adjectival marker for Afrikaner culture and its ingrained prejudices. Immigrants may internalize semantic maps perpetuated in society around them, which "illuminate human biases and stereotypes that perpetuate social inequalities" against immigrants (Gillani and Levy 2019, 1). This links to Hayakawa's (1991) position that semantic maps are acquired by individuals as they are advanced by others. For Thamm, language becomes a navigational tool she uses to shield herself from the realities of her adopted country, but which she realizes she could use to oppose and expose the political and racial injustices of the country, thus embodying Singley's (2011) concept of national narratives of new beginnings.

Being adopted

The Thamm family immigrated to South Africa in 1963, and Thamm describes them as being "marooned in Pretoria" (2016, 31). She immediately segues into the construction of a cognitive-affective map of not only the neighbourhood where the family settled, but of South Africa as a whole. South Africa, she says, is ruled by "an authoritarian, white, separatist Nationalist regime and (…) Hendrik Verwoerd, (…) one of the architects of Apartheid" (2016, 31). Their neighbourhood was one "filled with new immigrants (…) artisans like my father who had been lured to South Africa by the Nationalist government because they were white and had skills the country needed" (2016, 32). She further explains that this neighbourhood was "surrounded by a hostile laager of working and newly middle-class Afrikaner families" (2016, 35) who viewed

the immigrants with "suspicion, hostility and contempt" (2016, 35). Indeed, just because these immigrants chose to adopt South Africa as their new homeland, it did not automatically mean acceptance into their new communities and country: on the contrary, immigrants had to be "'Afrikanerised'" (2016, 32), an opinion espoused by the Afrikaner Broederbond.

The Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) is a secretive and highly exclusive Afrikaner nationalist organization. Along with the National Party, they largely steered South Africa's political development in a way that promoted the political, economic, and cultural interests of the Afrikaner. The AB encouraged the incorporation of white immigrant families into white Afrikaans communities. This again speaks to Singley's (2011) second narrative strand: the adoptee (immigrant) could take part in the formation of new cultural maps and narratives of new national beginnings – provided they assimilated to the Afrikaner culture. Wilkins and Strydom state: "Members or women's organizations are invited to visit immigrant wives, arrange church services in the immigrants' languages, organize youth evenings and ask immigrant families into their homes" (2012, 153). The Broederbond was "not prepared to sacrifice our traditional way of life, language and culture", but it felt "obliged (…) to accept large-scale immigration as one of the most important aids in our struggle". In this way, the Broederbond hoped that "'Unassimilable elements' will be kept out of South Africa, [would] not become a threat to the Afrikaner's future, [and that] immigrants would not deprive our people of jobs". These concerns, however, remained initially removed from Thamm's cognitive-affective map of her neighbourhood, where she describes immigrant families as a community, forming close bonds despite being "severed from their families and homelands" (2016, 33) – they were a part of their neighbourhood, yet apart from their neighbourhood; a part of South Africa, yet apart from South Africa. In this way, one could argue that some of the same struggles

which applied to Blacks under Apartheid rule applied to immigrants – being a part of a country from which they were apart. This selective assimilation is perhaps best seen in Thamm's description of her family's visit to the "giant fascist wedding cake" (2016, 33) of the Voortrekker Monument[3]:

> We must have been an odd apparition. My mother with her jet black hair and lurid crimson dress would have been completely out of place among those who were clothed more discreetly (and possibly respectfully) to visit this austere monument to Afrikanerdom. My father posed us in front of a huge bronze statue of a heroic Afrikaner mother protecting her children and took a photograph. We did not look like we were going to integrate successfully. (2016, 37)

Thamm describes her unconscious resistance to assimilation in various ways. One such example is her friendship with a young domestic worker, Sophia, whom Thamm would visit "in her 'quarters' at the back of the house" (2016, 40). When Thamm's mother finds out about this friendship, she says: "'You canta let the people see you sitting with servants (…) Why you keepa doing it?'" (2016, 40), showing that Barbara had already internalized the Apartheid regime's rule of whom one could and could not associate with. In this same instance, we already see the budding of Thamm's questioning of the status quo and her resistance against the institutionalized racism rife in the community.

The neighbourhood where she lived, says Thamm, comprised "two groupings of delinquents – ourselves, the English-speaking kids, and a pack of rough Afrikaners" (2016, 45). Through the rough play, smoking, drinking, and interaction with neighbourhood friends, a

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[3] The Voortrekker Monument was "built to commemorate the Voortrekkers who left the Cape colony between 1835 and 1854" (SAH 2019).

cognitive-affective map of belonging starts to develop, despite the Thamms living on what is essentially the fringes of acceptability in Apartheid South Africa. Thamm describes how, playing at the Apies River, the threat of bilharzia was "one of the curses of moving to the 'third world' (…) We can deal with segregation and racism but not, in heaven's name, bilharzia" (2016, 46). This was also the place where "white children would be stalked and their warm little hearts cut out by crazed witch doctors" (2016, 46). It would seem, then, that the cognitive-affective map of these immigrant families had started to assimilate the realities and perceived threats of Apartheid South Africa successfully.

As she grew older, Thamm's disillusionment with the South African political status quo grew, despite the curated stream of Afrikaner nationalism piped into communities by the media. Her growing awareness of the unjust treatment of Black South Africans was indelibly marked by the realization that this injustice had become acceptable, has faded to background noise (2016, 56). She wonders how, as a white person, willingly or unwillingly benefitting from an unjust regime, one finds a moral or political compass. She notes that "pathogenic historical currents" roiled beneath the appearance of order; in the race of life, white children "were at a starting line way ahead of everyone else – swept along wearing the running spikes of white affirmative action" (2016, 55–56). Unmaking this "constructed fraud" (2016, 56) became Thamm's lifelong task. It was when Thamm started working as a journalist in Cape Town years later that she came face-to-face with this constructed fraud. As a journalist working the court beat, she saw, on a daily basis, the social injustice inflicted on the Black community through the cruel South African legal system (2016, 109). She was exposed to the violence of policing at the time, to death and injury, to township lockdowns, and other "unspeakable state transgressions" (2016, 113). Thamm's physical surroundings changed when she started

working as a journalist. She moved to Cape Town and, as a journalist, was allowed to enter Black townships, where she was confronted with physical attacks on Black people by the police, the forced removal of inhabitants, tear gas and rubber bullet attacks, and other practices that fell under the label of white governmental population control.

However, Thamm never considered leaving the country, with its highly charged and problematic socio-political troubles. Due to her parents' nationalities, she could easily have applied for British, Portuguese, or German citizenship. Thamm notes that many immigrants, like herself, "form a fervent attachment to their new homelands" (2016, 98). Saliently, Thamm uses the word 'adopted' in her explanation as to why this occurs:

> Like religious converts, we desire to prove our loyalty and create for ourselves *collective identities* embedded in our *adopted geographical space*. My entire *mental, political and spiritual architecture*, no matter how problematic, had been shaped through having grown up a white child in South Africa. I understood the country (…) It was part of me and I of it (…) its music moved me to dance, its perverse politics had burned itself into my being. (2016, 98; italics added)

The italicized words in this excerpt are especially salient to the topic under investigation. The word 'adopted' is pertinent here. What Thamm indicates is that the immigrant/adoptee works hard to assimilate to their origin country, to become adoptable. One might suggest that, to do so, the adoptee almost becomes the adopter, and the receiving country the adoptee. However, since Thamm states that she never felt the need to adopt South Africa (2018), this excerpt could be construed as an indication that the immigrant/adoptee and receiving country/adopter are liminal constructs. Inasmuch as the country had adopted

her (though she is, in essence, unadoptable due to her immigrant status), she had also, in a sense, adopted the country. If we relate this phenomenon back to adoption studies, precedents for this liminality in adoption are found in the literature. For example, the process during which the adoptee 'adopts' the adoptive parents is called attachment (Palacios and Brodzinsky 2010). Though positive adoption experiences for adoptees lead to higher levels of attachment, even emotionally fraught adoptions see adoptees creating attachment relationships with adoptive parents (Steele et al. 2009). Thamm is afraid to leave South Africa to travel, afraid to lose her sense of self as a South African, of being "unmoored, unhinged" (2016, 99). It can be posited that Thamm does form an attachment relationship with South Africa, and that she inhabits a liminal space between adoptee and adopter. Further, though familiar with each other, the adoptee and adopter have a fraught relationship in this context, though each one, at least in part, accepts the other.

Returning to Singley's (2011) second adoption narrative strand, which refers to adoptees being able to take part in discourses of national new beginnings, I now turn to Thamm's narration of the end of Apartheid. She tells of P.W. Botha, then still president of South Africa, meeting the prisoner Nelson Mandela for tea at the presidential manor. Unbeknownst to her and most South Africans, the plan to free Nelson Mandela, which would end the Apartheid regime, and to allow marginalized peoples to vote in a referendum with the hopes of getting Mandela elected as president, was already underway at this time (Stemmet and De Villiers 2020). This was followed by the overturning of the prison sentences of many ANC members, F.W. de Klerk being elected president, and political prisoners such as Walter Sisulu and Elias Motsoaledi being released from prison. In 1990, F.W. de Klerk announced Mandela's release from prison and the unbanning of the ANC and all other political organizations (2016, 114–115). Up to that

point, Thamm had regarded the journey of cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin as "a personal lodestar" (2016, 20), stating that she wished she could attach herself to the Vostok to escape the oppressive South African regime and the "dumbfuck twentieth century" (2016, 32). With De Klerk's announcement, Thamm could, for the first time, see into the future, the 21st century, devoid of Apartheid and with the promise of new freedoms. At this moment, Apartheid died. To Thamm, it was a feeling of "finding oneself part of a massive and, until then, unthinkable historic moment – a bit like the moon landing" (2016, 115). This is a salient remark, as, earlier in the memoir, Thamm noted that South Africans were not part of the global phenomenon that was the 1969 moon landing. Televisions would only become available in the country after 1976, and South African radio broadcasts provided scant coverage of the event. South Africa was isolated from global events by its political regime, a pariah country whose management sought to control the information its citizens were allowed to access. This announcement by De Klerk seemed to signify that, at last, South Africa could join the global community.

As an adoptee of South Africa, Thamm was able to be part of this momentous new beginning, not just in terms of the abolition of an oppressive regime, but also in terms of her adoptive parent's reentry into the global fold. However, she acknowledges that such new beginnings are not without worry, noting that the country was still cloaked in a miasma of the threat of violence. Die-hard Apartheid supporters spoke of civil war, and many stockpiled provisions in fear of imagined 'revenge killings' of whites that would be perpetrated by Blacks after Mandela's release: "back in 1990, (we) knew this was the beginning. Of what we were not yet quite sure" (2016, 115). Even upon Mandela's release, when whites and Blacks stood shoulder to shoulder, "forming Archbishop Desmund Tutu's 'rainbow nation'" (2016, 118), Thamm realized that the concept of camaraderie playing out around

her was merely a necessary form of fiction to temporarily distract citizens from the ingrained racial and cultural rifts that continue to plague South Africa to this day. However, Mandela's release was a new national beginning, and Thamm became ever more hopeful as he found his own political voice.

Reunion, reconciliation, re-adoption

It seems ironic, therefore, that Thamm decided to leave South Africa at this critical juncture. She notes that she needed to find a neutral space where she could process her recent losses – resigning from her job, separating from her lover – as well as her gains in terms of an Apartheid-free country with burgeoning opportunities and freedoms. She decided to return to Europe, noting that she had "never internalized any roadmap" for her life (2016, 120) and that, at the time, despite promising developments in South Africa, being a female journalist promised no career trajectory, same-sex marriage was still taboo, and becoming a mother would be impossible without artificial means. Filled with disenfranchised grief, she escaped from her adopter and returned to Europe, where she was born.

Had Thamm's memoir allowed for Europe to be read as her first parent metaphorically, I might suggest that Thamm's travels signify an adoption reunion journey. However, Thamm herself makes it clear that she does not consider any European countries her own (2018). Instead of this journey being one where the goal is reunion with the first parent, it is concerned more with Thamm's search for purpose and identity. Blake et al. (2011, 8) refer to the "no-man's land" of adoption, where the adoptee feels as if they belong nowhere. As South Africa's adoptee, Thamm felt the need to escape the confines of her adoptive parent. No-man's land, of course, refers to a space between two armies where no one is safe. However, as this space is fluid and hybrid, it allows the adoptee to move beyond the boundaries of being 'born to' a family, and 'born as if to' a family. The adoptee can then transcend the 'born to' and 'born as if to' boundaries, allowing for the creation of a "diverse, multiple and fluid adopted identity" (Blake et al. 2011, 8).

In Thamm's case, her journey through no-man's land started out at the Hotel Rasheed. She took part in the renovation of the building, which allowed her to escape from her disenfranchised grief through physical labour. The systematic labour and "freeing the (…) bricks and mortar" (2016, 123) symbolize Thamm's internal process of deconstructing and reconstructing her sense of self. After a few months living and working in the Hotel Rasheed, she notes "the blocks (of her life) slotting into place"; the physical and mental "renovation/implosion" (2016, 123) allowing her to rediscover her urge to move on, leading her back to South Africa. Thamm, the adoptee, first had to sever ties with her adopter, South Africa, in order to reformulate her sense of identity. Though her journey may not have included a search for her birth origins, it does carry with it the sense of release and relief, with "the fog of uncertainty (beginning) to lift" (2016, 125).

Thamm's return to South Africa was followed by a true harbinger of national new beginnings: the country's first democratic election, during which Nelson Mandela would be elected president. Thamm notes that Nelson Mandela's release and presidency were not only the impetuses behind the new constitution but that, to her, he was also a symbol of healing, both in South Africa and within herself:

> Adolf Hitler and Hendrik Verwoerd might have stood as silent conductors of the discordant music of our souls, (…) but it was Mandela and all he represented (…) who pointed the way out. [He was] the symbol, the embodiment of [the realization] that, at times, what hurts us can also come to heal us. (2016, 188)

Not only does this observation speak again to national narratives of new beginnings (Singley 2011), but also to a new beginning for Thamm, who would now be able to become a mother. Indeed, Thamm notes that Nelson Mandela was someone who, to her, "came to represent, in many ways, the freedom I [now] enjoy" (2016, 205). Thamm acknowledges that the country, its democracy, and its constitution are not without flaws but that, even with these flaws, there is the promise of freedoms previously not afforded to her. With Mandela's election as president, she also came to terms with her identity as an adoptee of South Africa:

> Nationalist leaders (…) had shaped my internal architecture [and that of] everyone with whom I shared this geographical space during that period of history. Without (…) these dour men, there was no me, or at least a version of me. And then Mandela appeared (…) [and] allowed, for the first time, the rudiments of a new dream and the possibility of a life to take shape (…) the possibility of fashioning a life not always in opposition to intrusive external forces. (2016, 131)

These new freedoms and possibilities indicate that South Africa no longer considers Thamm as unadoptable, as in Singley's (2011) first narrative strand. With these new national beginnings, Thamm, other immigrants, and South Africa's previously marginalized Black citizens, are welcomed into the fold of the New South Africa.

Conclusion

In Thamm's memoir, the immigrant is depicted as being a part of, yet apart from, South Africa and its minority rule. To a large extent, I believe that Georg's skills, honed under Hitler's regime and later sought by Verwoerd, rendered his family adoptable enough for Apartheid

South Africa, with the proviso that the family would integrate and assimilate. In the same breath, this fact is what, for a long time, prevented Thamm from fully accepting the country as her adopter. Here, Thamm notes, she realizes that she is karmically doomed. Not only were there six degrees of separation between her and Adolf Hitler, but also between her and Hendrik Verwoerd. This is perhaps also the reason why her reunion journey to Europe did not grant her the feeling of acceptance she thought she would gain. She was a part of both Europe and South Africa, yet she was also apart from them. It was only with Nelson Mandela's release from prison that Thamm started to feel she could reconcile herself with the country that initially deemed her unadoptable, and that she struggled to adopt.

Culminating in a new beginnings narrative, the post-Apartheid regime signifies that South Africa will adopt back those it rejected under Apartheid, and opens new possibilities for immigrants and the Black populace to reciprocally adopt or re-adopt the country. The unadoptable becomes imminently adoptable, and Singley's first narrative memoir strand gives way to the second. Through a long and fraught navigation of cultural and spatial maps, which shaped her cognitive-affective and semantic maps, Thamm finally came to be adopted by South Africa. Yet she is aware that even the most well-adjusted adoptive relationships are not perfect. Though "the twentieth century and all it represented, all I had found loathsome and oppressive (…) became (…) less stark, less jagged and dangerous", she also notes that "the remnants of history lurk all around us" (2016, 322). Whereas many fictionalized adoption narratives present us with an essentialist view – adoption being hellish or being a fairy tale – Thamm provides a more nuanced take on the lived experience of adoption, even in this extended form of adoption and the adoption triad.

By highlighting that immigrant/country adoption has been and always will be mired in adoptability and unadoptability, Thamm fore-

grounds both past and present normativity in this adoption modus. Saliently, she engages in problematizing the normativity of 'unadopt-ability' by navigating the terrain of Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa. She does not subscribe to the idea that the country's re-adoption of its indigenous and immigrant populace is without problems and can ever redress the injustices of the past. Rather, she opens the door to discussions on how the post-Apartheid era can, for these parties, become an adoption reunion journey of their own.

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