

## PHANTOM OF HYSTERIA



### LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | CRITICAL ESSAY

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# Phantoms of hysteria—Novelistic phantasmagoria in Lesego Rampolokeng's *whiteheart: Prologue to Hysteria*

Ibrahim Wachira<sup>1</sup>, Kimani Kaigai<sup>1\*</sup> and Mugo Muhia<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This article examines how the narrator in Lesego Rampolokeng's *Whiteheart: Prologue to Hysteria* (hereafter designated as *W/H*) deploys spectres of hysteria as a novelistic phantasmagoria to challenge the subject in the fictive post-apartheid South Africa and re-examine how spectres of Apartheid devour the country through veiled repressive juridical structures. The novel is written in paragraphs/sections which appear to be disjointed, and this forms a problematic of reading and interpreting it as a concrete whole. Subsequently, the critical purview of novelistic phantasmagoria is proposed as the fabric that unites the, otherwise, fragmented paragraphs into an articulate work of literature. Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic idea of the "khora" enables this essay to examine how the "mother" pulsating under the symbolic eventually evolves from a nurturer to a devourer. Jacques Lacan's idea of



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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ibrahim Wachira, (PhD, ongoing), co-authors the article with Kimani Kaigai (PhD) and Mugo Muhia (PhD), of Kenyatta University. The article conciliates with the critical examination of the literary trope employed by Lesego Rampolokeng in his poetic and novelistic writing about post-apartheid South Africa, in particular, and humanity, in general.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Rampolokeng's novel bears a unique title, *Whiteheart: prologue to Hysteria*. Through the unusual compound word, "Whiteheart," which forms the first part of the title, the author appears to suggest a literary trope for examining the distinctive governmentality which characterizes the fictionalized transitional (post)apartheid South African cosmos in the novel. By "white," the author, arguably, refers to the contestation of power in a polity, as in a game of chess where the white piece always moves first, that always appear to privilege white people over black people. Interestingly, the author appears to use "heart" to mean feelings and emotions which are normally considered as part of a person's character. Viewed as a nominal compound, then, "whiteheart" implies the character formed by the perpetual privileging of white over black people. The second part, "prologue to hysteria," seems to propose the character, emergent from privileging of the white people, as a herald to hysteria. Subsequently, the essay critically examines the literary trope used by Rampolokeng to communicate the character of hysteria in the (post)apartheid novelistic space. Of great interest, for this article, would be to find out how the working of hysteria in the novel resonates with the historical materiality that defines the polity of post-apartheid South Africa, especially during the period between 1992 and 1997, when the novel was written.

the “paternal metaphor” aids this article to show how the symbolic (the structural order of the society) may become articulately repressive that the nurturer/mother dialectic (the intricate relationship that makes a people a nation) is blurred. Melaine Klein’s psychoanalytic theory of Projective Identification enables this essay to examine how the narrator in *W/H* is able to project the phobic object from the khora pulsating below the symbolic into the psyche in order to warn the post-apartheid South African subject against perpetuating oppressive laws that had pitched the country/mother into repression during the apartheid era. Through textual analysis, the essay hopes to validate the assumption that the author deploys novelistic phantasmagoria as a unique imaginative pathway for unlocking a potentially therapeutic space with literary efficacy for freeing South Africa from the disarticulating repressed phobic colonial and apartheid objects of subjugation.

**Subjects:** African Literature; Feminist Literature & Theory; Psychoanalytical Theory

**Keywords:** phantasmagoria; spectres of hysteria; literary slide; projection; *W/H—Whiteheart (Prologue to Hysteria); Lesego Rampolokeng*

### 1. Formation of hysteria in (post)apartheid South Africa

The purpose of the article is to examine how the narrator in Rampolokeng’s (2005) *Whiteheart: Prologue to Hysteria* uses spectres of hysteria drawn from the fictionalized (post)apartheid phobic object as a literary trope for communicating the brutal social realities which appear to repudiate the euphoria of the ban of apartheid and the subsequent South African multiracial National Elections of 1994. To achieve this purpose, a brief literary history about formation of hysteria in post-apartheid South Africa is essential. Hysteria is a manic condition brought about by infantile experience which is either incomprehensible or traumatic but is retained by memory unconsciously and reactivated at a later time and space in a different capricious context eliciting novel meanings whose polity is race and racism, inclusion and exclusion, and power contestation and its subversion. While insanity is inaugurated by the phobic fear of the emptiness of the signifier, hysteria is initiated not by the emptiness but by the filling of that emptiness with the repressed phobic object.

In the (post)apartheid South African context, hysteria comes into being through a long period of racial oppression and suppression. In “The Fantasia and the Post-Apartheid Imagination: History and Narration in Andre Brink’s *Devil’s Valley*, Osita Ezeliara (n.d.) [speaks of] double colonization seen in the external invasion by the British in the nineteenth Century and later internal ‘colonization’ by the Afrikaner-instituted apartheid” (p. 84). Ezeliara’s assertion suggests that South Africa is categorized by a unique identity bedevilled with polity of diverse repressed phobic objects from both colonialism and apartheid. The black people, who form the majority in South Africa, were marginalized by the eras of colonialism and apartheid. However, the black people had hoped that the abolition of apartheid in the early 1990s and the subsequent National Election of 1994, which saw ANC ascend to power under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, would translate into better living standards and equitable distribution of wealth. In *From Apartheid to Neoliberalism—A Study of the Economic Development in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Thomas Bakken (n.d.) “[P]romised to provide a welfare State to the historically marginalized” (p. 1) black people.

However, as Patrick Bond (2000) observes, in *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa*, “peculiarities [of inequalities] associated with formal racial segregation [...] were exacerbated in the years immediately preceding and following the 1994 election” (p. 127) thereby creating disillusionment for the marginalized black people. Subsequently, the new forms of subjugation in

post-apartheid South Africa reactivate traumatic tropes, such as displacement of the poor, housing problems, crime, poor living standards, from the disarticulating oppressive culture of apartheid. The filling of emptiness, which the black people had suffered during Apartheid, with new forms of oppression makes the black people to experience hysteria. Further, Bond observes that in “Transitional South Africa [inequality was] worse [as it marginalized] more [black] people than during the harshest years of apartheid oppression [and] overlaid by neoliberalism, fiscal policies [...] slowly but surely strangled the potential for realizing the benefits” (p. 127) expected from the euphoric post-apartheid economic and political new dispensation.

In “A New Apartheid? Urban Spatiality (Fear of) Crime, and Segregation in Cape Town South Africa,” Charlotte Spinks (2001) observes that in the Apartheid concept “of ‘separate development,’ [...] ‘separate’ was synonymous with ‘uneven,’ and thus South Africa’s key handle to Post-Apartheid development is a prevalence of ‘plenty amidst poverty’ while ‘plenty’ is socially located amongst whites,” (p. 3) who appear to control most of the wealth in the country. The marginalized black people experience a sense of loss and detachment from their country. Viewed from Jacques Lacan’s idea of *objet petit a*, the separation of the black people and their subsequent marginalization could be equated to the object of loss experienced by the infant on learning that the mother belongs to the Other (father), and not to the self. For Lacan, the mother–infant dyad is broken when the infant learns to speak since “[his/her] use of language in general, in fact, implies a loss, a lack, because [he/she] wouldn’t need words as stand-ins for things if [he/she] still felt that [he/she] was an inseparable part of those things,” (Tyson, 2006, p. 29), which bind him/her to the mother. In South Africa, the marginalized black people are made to experience a traumatic separation from their mother (country) due to perennial subjection to both colonial and (post)apartheid inequalities.

In “The Social Formation of Post-Apartheid South Africa,” Robert Rotich notes that “In the Post-Apartheid [space] new forms of socio-economic and spatial inequalities continue to emerge [...] markedly show[ing] the changing socio-economic, cultural and political realities of modern day South Africa” (p. 148). At the psychological level, Rotich’s observation implies that for the subject there are definitely logical gaps between the old tropes of subjugation and the new ones. In tandem with Melaine Klein’s Projective Identification theory, the post-apartheid marginalized black people feel that they do “not deserve” the anguish of inequality, and, as a coping mechanism, the anguish “is attributed to something else [which] is [, then,] split off from the [the black people’s harsh realities] and put into the object” (Spillius & O’Shaughnessy, 2011, p. 16) of frenzy and mania. It follows, then, that the black people’s emotional logic for interpreting these new forms of social inequality which privileges whiteness and structural racism is hysteria. Undoubtedly, the repressed colonial-apartheid phobic object is galvanized by the dialectic of the new forms of social oppression. In this oppressive context, the black people are incapable of making the connection between the present actualities of subjugation and the repressed one. Subsequently, the resultant emotional lucidity for the black people becomes hysteria. As Rotich, revealingly observes, South African writers, such as “Duiker in *The Quiet Violence* and Mpe [...] in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2002), tellingly explore these pathologies of the ‘New’ South Africa” (p. 146). Hysteria could be considered as a pathological (re) action since its emotional locale is not reason and it cannot be somatically controlled by the subject.

Gilbert Tarka Fai (2014) observes that in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Duiker “[I]nterprets escalating violence in post-apartheid South Africa not as a strange phenomenon but a logical maturation of the pressures of long years of racial segregation as well as the precipitated expectations of the post-apartheid era” (p. 155). Fai’s observation seems to collaborate the assumption that frenzy and mania characterize the black people in post-apartheid South Africa due to a long history of repression occasioned by colonial and apartheid sociopolitical subjugation. In “Reconciling Racial Revelations in Post-Apartheid South African Literature,” Marzia Milazzo (2016) observes that Mongane Wally Serote’s novel *Revelations* collates the argument that “Post-apartheid literature is not only ‘racially marked,’ but also continues to produce knowledge on racial inequality, racial ideology, and resistance,” (p. 129) to white privilege and structured racism.

Besides, Milazzo avers that “In South Africa, crime cannot be explained without considering poverty which predominantly affects black people, and poverty cannot be understood without considering wealth, which whites disproportionately control despite the growth of the black middle class” (p. 131). While doing Milazzo’s bidding by addressing racial inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa, Rampolokeng’s novels, *Blackheart* and *Whiteheart*, as well as his most recent one *Bird-Monk Seding*, radically move away from the stark realism that characterizes South African fiction in general, and fiction by most African writers in particular. The narrator(s) in the three novels go by the name Bavino. In *Interpretations in Transition: Literature and Political Transition in Malawi and South Africa in the 1990s*, Fiona Johnson Chalamanda (2002) observes that Bavino is “a township term for ‘everyman’ and that Rampolokeng employs it to refer to the underprivileged,” (p. 83) black people in post-apartheid South Africa.

In “Neither History nor Freedom will Absolve us: on the Ethical Dimensions of the Poetry of Lesego Rampolokeng,” Kwezi Mkhize (2011) observes that Rampolokeng’s writing, “has been one of a relentless questioning of the meaning of freedom and the impact of violence on human agency” (p. 179). While, here, Mkhize interrogates Rampolokeng’s poetry, his avowal is also true of the three novels. *Blackheart* (2004) tells a story of the insanity that is initiated by black people’s perennial subjugation through colonialism and institutionalized racism. In *Whiteheart*, Bavino recounts, in what appears to be disjointed sections/paragraphs, how crime, ranging from domestic violence, rape, political banditry and other visible social ills, appear to emanate from the repressed fear of white supremacy and its bigotry. *Bird-Monk Seding* tells the story of life in a rural township about 20 years into South Africa’s democracy. The narrator, Bavino Sekete, narrates a story of the desperation of black people at the deprivation they still experience long after the ban of apartheid and democratization of South Africa. The marginalized black people occasionally engage in crimes and violent activities which seems to emanate from hysteria initiated by repressed traumatic experience inflicted by white supremacy and structured racism.

Andile Mngxitama (2009) explains in “Why blacks Can’t be Racist” that “racism” must include the ability of one group to subjugate another and that since black people have never had the social, economic or political power to subjugate white people, they cannot be racist. Black people are, therefore, victims of racism, while white people are the beneficiaries. Marzia Milazzo points out that black people continue to be at the receiving end of racism. In “The Rhetorics of Racial Power: Enforcing Colorblindness in Post-Apartheid Scholarship,” Milazzo (2015) posits that “In August 2012 police opened fire on a group of striking [black] workers [...] killing 34 and injuring 78 [and that] the event at the Lonmin platinum mine in Mariakana starkly resembles the 1960 Sharpeville massacre” (p. 7) and confirms the continuities between white supremacy and its bigotry in the apartheid past and the democratic present circumstances.

## 2. Rampolokeng’s use of phantasmagoric Hysteria in *Whiteheart*

In Rampolokeng’s *Whiteheart: Prologue to Hysteria*, Bavino, the narrator, is a black male character. He lucidly narrates his ordeal at the familial level where power and its contestation revolve around the oppressive patriarchal structure. In this context, subjugation appears to emanate from the paternal metaphor and its metonymic dialectic of exercising symbolic control over the maternal and her relations. As the narrator interacts with other social systems away from the family, he realizes that the familial subjugation spirals out into the wider government structures, like state-operated religion, which are used to draconically administrate the (post)apartheid society. Subsequently, in a way that could be considered novelistic phantasmagoria, he uses phantoms of hysteria to dissent against the sanitized oppression in the fictional (post)apartheid South Africa perpetuated against the black people through white supremacy that is entrenched in the state apparatuses.

Phantasmagoria could be traced historically to the age of renaissance and it is associated with Robertson who used a magical lantern to project phantoms designed to challenge what new-found scientific knowledge considered ecclesiastical bigotry. In his phantasmagoria, as Gunning (2013) observes, “Robertson promised apparitions of the ‘dead and absent’ would appear” (p. 3). Gunning’s

observation implies that Robertson was promising reactivation of the traumatic and incomprehensible in order to subject his audience to the phobic object with the hope of inaugurating a critical psychic re-examination of their existence.

While Robertson used concealed magical lantern to project abject images from diverse slides, the narrator in *W/H* appears to use fragmentations of the text as literary slides from which he projects phobic objects from the hysterical (post)apartheid dialectic. Successively, Bavino projects the first spectre of hysteria as whirling haze which envelops the black person blurring their vision. “i got out of it in a haze,” the narrator observes, “ a mist both whirling outside me and in. i blinked in the sun. i stopped from a stagger & sat down hard in a mud patch. the walls closed me in. out of them” (p. 7). Here, the narrator appears to project the euphoria felt by the marginalized black people in South Africa after the abolition of apartheid and ascension to power of ANC in the 1994 Election. For the narrator says that he got out of it in a haze which appears to suggest that, as a subject of apartheid, he had become immersed in the object of perennial racial oppression. Following Klein’s argument about Projective Identification, when the narrator pronounces the words “i got out of it,” he implies the splitting of the subject (self) from the object of oppression. Then, getting out of it “in a haze, a mist whirling outside [the self] and in,” (p. 7), means that the narrator associates the “self” with a different object, that of euphoria of breaking free from the object of oppression.

Subsequently, the object of oppression dissolves in a phantasmagoric trope and it keeps changing in form and locale. The narrator observes that the haze was then and now a transitional phase which was personal and at the same time national but he woke out of it like a dream, euphoria swirling around and in him (p. 7). The narrator appears to allude to the 1990s transition period, in which the multiracial South Africans were trying to find ways of defeating the separatist legacy of apartheid. Perceived against Lacan’s theorization of objet petit a, the euphoria could be said to be projected as a kind of relieve (displacement) which supposedly removes black people from their harsh social realities of Apartheid. The narrator momentarily recovers the object of desire lost through the separatist and marginalizing culture of colonialism and apartheid. However, the recovery of the object is hardly concrete. It is a mist which unfolds like a euphoric dream. The euphoria swings from personal, present actualities, “it is personal,” to national, historical actualities, “it was national.” However, the ecstatic euphoria soon crumbles down into disillusionment as black people realize that they are engulfed in a more portent form of social inequality engendered by the furtherance of white supremacy and structured racism in post-apartheid South Africa.

Bavino uses the spectre of whirling haze to challenge the transitional (post)apartheid political space to stop creating new forms of social inequalities which pitch the marginalized subject into harsher realities of oppression. There is a gap in the reality constructed for the marginalized subject. The narrator appears to imply that disillusionment walled off the euphoria of a rainbow nation, with equitable distribution of wealth. The narrator observes “the doors closed behind my time and now open on that which was made unmine,” (p. 7). By “unmine,” the narrator appears to express marginalization of black people, what Lacan, in psychoanalytic diction, refers to as objet petit a. Homer notes that “the objet a [...] is the left-over of the real; it is that which escapes symbolization and is beyond representation” (p. 88). Homer’s observation implies that for the marginalized black people in post-Apartheid South Africa, the lost object of desire is what escapes symbolization from the euphoria of expectation experienced in the transition period and the subsequent disillusionment on account of new harsher forms of social inequality overlaid by neoliberal economic policies adopted by the ANC government after assuming power in the 1994 Election. The first section/paragraph of the novel, therefore, seems to serve the purpose of projecting a background of the fictionalized hysteria in post-apartheid South Africa. The narrator seems to use the subsequent sections to mount “slides” of phobic objects from apartheid in order to critically invite the reader to reflect on the psychological reverberations of social inequalities.

The literary slide the narrator puts next displays the spectre of hysteria that touches on the personal. Here, the object of hysteria is somatically perceived through the ears as a repulsive fracture of

bone and then through the eyes as a blow splitting the lip of the narrator's mother. Bavino notes, "i heard a sickening crack of bone and saw the blow split my mother's lip and throw her against the wall" (p. 7). The child narrator is overwhelmed by phobic anxiety of the mother being hurt but through Klein's projective identification he splits the wall upon which his mother is thrown into his psyche and it becomes a defence mechanism sheltering him from realizing the full psychic impact of the phallic violence meted out on the mother. The child is thrown into disarray when he notes the phallic pleasure on the face of the father represented as a grin. The screaming from his sister in the next room crumbles the narrator's defence mechanism and the full impact of the violence against his mother came down hard inside his head. In "Reliance or Maternal Eroticism," Kristeva (2014) notes that there is a unique space existing between the mother and the child before the child is born into the symbolic order: "khora, as [Plato] calls it, is a space before space, a nurturer-and-devourer at once, prior to the One, the Father, the word, even the syllable" (p. 72). Kristeva's observation implies that at the psychic level the splitting of the mother's lip is the sickening splitting of the vagina during birth and the eventual phobic separation of the child from the amniotic reliance. The separated child may need a smack to shake it into the new reality away from the amniotic cushion. It is also plausible to argue that the narrator's sister screamed the walls down because the splitting of the mother's lip registered in her psyche as her own splitting as she could see herself reflected in the mother.

Bavino uses the spectre of hysteria involving domestic violence to sensitize the (post)apartheid South African authorities that if they do not find ways of stemming social inequalities, the phobic object of separation (discrimination) residing in the kernel of black people will soon come rushing out as hysterical insurgence. Rampolokeng creatively uses an incident about domestic violence to portray the social inequalities that continue to reverberate in South Africa. Other South African writers also use the "ordinary" or "personal" happenings to interrogate white supremacy and structural racism. In *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa*, Njabulo Ndebele (1984) notes that "Coffee for the Road," a story by Alex La Guma, makes visible white supremacy through the ordeal of "An Indian woman and her children driving through the Koroo on a long tiring journey to Cape Town," with no chance of rest "along the way for all the hotels were for the whites only [and] the towns along the way were inhabited by whites" (p. 35). Nonetheless, for Rampolokeng, black people engage in domestic violence due to deprivation caused by white supremacy and structured racism.

Bavino communicates the violence of the hysterical dissidence expected in (post)apartheid South Africa if the authorities fail to wake up to the call of their amniotic obligation to all South Africans irrespective of their colour as distant sounds of gunshot and a lonesome scream. The narrator observes, "we heard gunshots in the distance & a scream. lonesome. so tired" (p. 7). The narrator's observation implies that the phobic object of the violent revolution witnessed in South Africa as the black people fought against apartheid would come rushing into the symbolic order and its target would be the man who has been bashing the mother. The lonesome scream in the midst of gunshots communicates the singularity of the oppressed blacks' resistance as well as the violence hitting the loathsome target. The child and the mother rediscover the mother-infant dyad which now gains new reverberations insurgent to the symbolic order. Writing of the narrator and his mother Bavino observes, "my mother's hand clutched mine. tight" (pp. 7-8). For Kristeva, Homer (2005) notes, "The khora is not a fixed place, however, but an endless movement and pulsations beneath the symbolic" (p. 118). It could then be conceivably argued that the amniotic (nurturer) resounds to momentarily bridge the rapture of the mother-infant dyad which is represented somatically as the tight clutching of hands between mother and child. At the same time the khora as a devourer finds new pulsations not for ejecting the child from the amniotic but to devour the symbolic.

In another literary slide, the narrator projects the sickening-crack-of-bone phantom of hysteria dissolving into a widening stomach-turning crack in the mother's face in temporal space as perceived by the child: "mother your face cracks against my every minute," the narrator notes, "when hunger's heat grows i go out to the abattoir to scavenge for the skins they tear off the chickens &

throw out. bring them to mama [...]" (p. 8). The narrator's observation implies that the child is trying to repair the mother's split lip but he cannot find anything with which to successively mend the rapture. When the child comes back home with some chickens' skins, the mother goes out to scavenge for tomato and onions but her going out could be interpreted as repulsion at the sight of the skin split from her lip and its awful substitution with that of chicken. The repulsion wells from the phobic object of the splitting of the mother's vagina during child bearing. "Mama" is a word used in (post) apartheid South Africa to refer to the county and the attachment the black people have for her. Subsequently, Bavino is talking about the splitting of (post)apartheid South Africa into fragments by white supremacy and structured racism meted out on the marginalized black people. For the narrator, the marginalized endeavour to repair the rapture on the face of their country by trying to eke out a living against all odds in a skewed economy that favours the white people at the expense of the black people. Bavino observes that when the narrator child is crawling in the abattoir collecting stray chickens' skins he is kicked by one of the people working there which makes the narrator mad. The narrator notes, "[...] someone held me back when I wanted to slice him like he did the chickens" (p. 8). The message Bavino seems to be communicating to the (post)apartheid South African Government is that the marginalized are becoming pitched into hysteria due to the country's harsh realities of social inequalities. Consequently, the rate of crimes, such as murder, might increase.

The narrator indicates that the child feels a sharp sense of powerlessness when he realizes that he cannot repair the mother's broken lip. Therefore, the child goes looking for the mother in girls in the streets. However, he manages to see not the united but the split mother in the girls. In one of the literary slides, the narrator projects the child narrator stabbing another boy with a knife for breaking a bottle on his girlfriend's face: "her cries had made [the narrator] go dig out the old knife" (p. 10). The split in the mother's face continues to widen as the child tries to mend it. In the next slide, the mother's split dissolve into rape in which the narrator's girlfriend is gang-raped by the police officers who had apprehended the narrator together with his girlfriend. "i could hear her moans. still do. coming down the passage of my mind," the narrator observes, "then they let us go [...]" in the light i saw the goo slide down her legs" (p. 10). Later, the narrator screamed alone as he saw the night as a phantom engulfing him with tentacles around his neck. The stench of defilement stuck to the girl and then seemed to invade the psychic space of the narrator so much that he developed phobia of nights. The narrator learns that the girl had already been defiled long before by her father. The narrator relays his disappointment thus: "she told me in the rain about how she woke up to boys after her father had introduced her to what they had between their legs" (p. 11). Worse still for the narrator the girl told him how her father had murderously made her to sit on a hot stove after discovering she was going out with boys. The girl's genitals were charred. Bavino observes, "the more she tried to wriggle off the stove the more she got burnt in other places than her buttocks & she felt the fire shooting up her vagina. slicing across memory time & place" (p. 11). The narrator experiences repulsion at the dehumanization of the girl. It could be believably argued that the narrator's search for the mother both in the past and the future becomes futile since his attempt to reconstruct his split mother is fruitless and at the same time the girl in whom he hopes to find the mother is already deformed. The trembling of the girl makes the narrator's nerves to shudder. The mother-infant dyad is once more momentarily regained: "i held her hand tighter than anytime else" (p. 11). However, after releasing the girl's hand the narrator experiences a sharp feeling of castration as though time has locked him out of life in the highly structured society.

The phantom of hysteria is further projected as a psychopathic vibrator moving up in the Sangoma, a South African traditional healer or herbalist. The narrator is taken to a sangoma by his mother in order to heal him of his phobic fear of nights. The sangoma makes incisions on the body of the narrator with a dirty dusty razor. She then rubs snuff and some other stuff in the little wounds she had made on the narrator and forces him to drink a lot of water. On her order the narrator sticks two fingers deep into his mouth and he vomits. The sangoma then moves on to read the life of the narrator from the vomit: "she saw stories of early death & foreboding times for me in my vomit" (p. 12). The narrator sees in the exorcism of his demons a sexual character more potent than frenzy. The narrator accordingly observes, "somewhat perversely the tension rose past hormonal riot level. it



was a weird version of sexual frenzy. she was hissing orgasmic. wriggling her body on the reed-mat first slowly then accelerating as possession took over her torso” (p. 12). The eroticism of the sangoma charges the air with a sexual frenzy that hits the narrator’s hard giving him an erection that he cannot hide from the healer. It could be argued that the gyrating sangoma is represented in the psyche of the narrator as his erotic mother whom he desires sexually unconsciously but has been snatched from him by the symbolic order. He experiences repulsion at his erection because deep in him he inhabits the phobic fear of rejection by the erotic mother.

Indeed, when the sangoma slaughters two chickens and smears the blood over the narrator he says he does not lose consciousness but he has been doing it ever since. The narrator experiences hysteria at the sight of blood. The narrator’s frantic search for the mother is further thrown into disarray by the phantom of his mother as the gyrating sangoma and the chickens’ blood smeared over him which seems to be represented in his mind as the floods of menstrual cycle—denying him the very amniotic space that he yearns for. The narrator notes that the sangoma “was moving like she had a psychopathic vibrator going up her” (p. 12). Bavino uses the phantom of hysteria involving the psychopathic sangoma to challenge the sanitized oppression of the marginalized (post) apartheid South African subject by pointing out to the authorities that continued oppression is going to cause pulsations of the devourer inherent in the khora and hence kill the rebirth of the country.

The violence inherent in the psychopathic vibrator resounds in the narrator as sexual promiscuity and masochism. The narrator inserts another literary slide to project this violent character attained from the psychopathic vibrator. Subsequently, the child narrator announces to the reader, “i’m always taking girls off into the long grass & the toilets & sticking my penis inside them. like this one here, she’s always getting boys to go with her” (p. 13). The narrator seems to harbour pleasure in causing the girls untold pain and he, therefore, apparently perceives his penis as a knife with which he repeatedly stabs the girls’ vagina. The narrator’s arrogant masochistic stance seems to be built on his futile attempt to find the mother. It is tenable to argue that the narrator sees in the girls the unattainable erotic mother whom he must now devour for rejecting his labour meant to seal her split lip and suffocating him in a blood bath during her periods. The child narrator also feels repulsion at the mother’s apparent masochistic character because it is a reflection of himself. The child narrator expresses his repulsion of the girl thus: “always running her hands on [boys’] pants-front i think she’s a little weird. & she’s a montage of burn marks. especially around her vagina. that i think is what excites about her” (p. 13). The narrator cannot stand the sight of the girl’s deformed vagina which is represented in his psyche as the image of his deformed mother whom he is trying to wipe out of his existence for she stands for what was taken away from him and is now unattainable. The narrator employs the phantom of hysteria with the child repeatedly trying to kill the deformed mother in order to make the white supremacists wake up to the realities of social oppression and how they create a spiral of self-defeatist hysterical tendencies represented in the metaphors of murder and rape.

The literary slide projecting the spectre of the child repeatedly trying to murder his deformed mother ends with the girl being snatched from the narrator and then recurrently raped by a gang of boys. The narrator reports, “but once i was deep inside the girl when i felt a cold metal object poke into my ribs. i looked up into the smiling faces of some boys i was sweet with. but they were not being nice, told me to get finished so they could have a go” (p. 13). The narrator’s words suggest that he had momentarily found the absent mother but before he could establish a firm relation with her some violent boys whom before then he counted as his friends forcefully took her away from him and gang raped her—deforming her even further. The narrator experiences an overwhelming sense of castration as he helplessly watches the gang rape his girlfriend. The narrator gives the details thus: “i tried to talk to them but one kicked me in the face & it threw me off. they had me pinned down with a knife at my neck while they took turns. five of them. she had an insane grin on her face throughout” (p. 13). The implication of the narrator’s situation is that he is caught in a jamb of pain which seems to freeze him in time as he mourns the defiling of his girl. The narrator apparently sees himself in the insane grin on the face of the girl.

In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Sigmund Freud (1984) notes that in the act of “mourning it is the world which becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (p. 254). Freud’s observation implies that, in the above case, for the narrator the world becomes poor since he has lost both his girlfriend and the boys he was sweet with. At the same time his ego is deflated which pitches the narrator into melancholia. He therefore considers the girl as insane and experiences repulsion at her sight. Arguably, the message the narrator is communicating is that social oppression is slowly but surely pitching the marginalized black people into crime and insurgence. Bavino is undoubtedly sounding a warning that the subjugation of (post)apartheid South Africa through white supremacy is bound to reduce the country into an insane society. The repercussion of raping the country through oppressive channels whose phantom comes in the next literary slide is pre-announced by the narrator at the end of this slide thus: “i heard later when she’d grown up a bit she killed her father near blind father & was taken to the mental asylum. but i didn’t see her there when i went” (p. 13). The narrator’s observation implies that the daughter who could be perceived as the rebirth of the mother has been reduced into an empty signifier. In the context of (post)apartheid South Africa, it means that the rebirth of the country from her painful history of apartheid is being threatened by sanitized oppression of the perpetually marginalized groups.

The narrator’s “absent” girlfriend has gone through a lot of suffering in the hands of the father. Homer observes that for Lacan the symbolic order is “governed by the paternal metaphor and the imposition of paternal law” (p. 58). It then follows that when the girl kills her father she is in essence rising against the symbolic law. “the father was epileptic,” the narrator explains, “& as was the fashion he was always creeping into her. rushing jumping her all the way into her teenage years” (p. 13). Following Lacan’s argument about the father being the symbol of law, the narrator’s observation implies that the (post)apartheid South African law is executed in a way which is oppressive. The hysteria that is initiated by perennial oppression may burst out in fatal bolts of violence directed at the apparent source of oppression. In the case of the girl in the current literary slide as projected here, the narrator notes, “she thought at first he was in particularly intense coming mode. but she then got terrified scared to shredded nerves. realizing he’d conked cold inside her. all the while gushing out thrashing about her. way up inside her folds” (p. 13). The sudden death of the father as he rapes his daughter is apparently the end of the girl’s oppression. The narrator’s observation, nonetheless, projects the dead father still gushing ejaculatory waste into the girl’s receptacle.

The spectre of the dead sneaking up the living throws the girl into a succession of manic violent activities directed at the dead father. She rolls him off after he stops thrashing inside her and then goes to the kitchen for the axe. She chops at him and bits of bone fly all over the place together with the blood and the gore from the torn brain ligaments. The observation from the narrator that “much of it we have seen already, stepped over it & kept walking without glancing over the shoulder. walking to far sunsets. us born at world’s end” implies the filth in the (post)apartheid South African law which throttle freedoms hoped for by the marginalized in the rebirth of the country has made some black South Africans to migrate to other countries where humanity is upheld by the law (p. 14). The earnest attempt to dissect the body of the dead father in order to identify the core of evil which makes him so heartless to his own daughter, is a futile exercise as the father was dead even when he was alive and is now alive as a phobic object even in death. The narrator observes, “she couldn’t stop chopping at him. couldn’t break him down to finer particles. she said later she wanted to get at the core of his dirt. to smash the essence of his being. to touch the heat of his evil” (p. 14). The narrator’s observation implies that the enraged girl is trying to identify the core of evil in her monstrous father in order to destroy it. The narrator is indubitably sensitizing the (post)apartheid South African subject that the country is bound to break into chaos if the inequalities blanketed in official policies is not addressed the country might dissolve into hysterical destruction of familial bonds which hold a society together. The hopping mad girl, for example, “cooked the genitals in a different pot because she relished them the most” when she decides to cook her father’s mutilated body (p. 15). The narrator is therefore rising insurgence against the pounding phallic element in (post)apartheid South Africa which reduces black people into smithereens while uplifting the whites to gloating economic heights.

Bavino does not seem to run dry of literary slides. He projects another slide in which a man called Bobby cuts off the phallus of another man he accuses of raping his girlfriend. The narrator observes, “well his girlfriend was raped by her uncle, a man from up the street” (p. 20). When Bobby learns of his girlfriend’s rape the narrator notes that he loses his sanity and in a manic frenzy takes a knife and forces the rapist to drop his pants. Then, “he slowly & carefully drew his butcher knife out & sharpened it on the concrete floor. the noise grated against my nerves but it drove the man’s eyes straight to the groin. then it was bobby proceeded to slice the man’s phallus off” (p. 20). Bavino is emphasizing the point that the (post)apartheid South African Government needs to stem white supremacy inherent in the country’s law before it dissolves into death and chaos in a backlash. Racial oppression is also projected as the main cause of crime in (post)apartheid South Africa. The narrator observes of Bobby, “he walked around with bullets in his body over the years. from licenced guns & illegally owned ones. thugs & policemen alike shoved missiles into his body” (p. 21). The narrator’s observation indicates that the marginalized groups seem to be plunging into crime as they try to come to terms with perennial subjugation under colonial and apartheid bigotry.

The phantoms of hysteria continue to pop into the darkroom of the reader’s psyche. A particularly intriguing one is that of girls on the rampage. When the narrator comes across one of the girls she is quite a sight: “& there was muddy brown liquid running down her legs. & dried grey,” and she tells the narrator, “you know bavino those stupid little horny cowards thought they were doing me down ... but they didn’t know they were actually doing me a fucking favour” (p. 28). The girl is on the rampage to conquer the phallic tide. She is full of resentment at the phallus and her mission seems to spite it by locking it out of her somatic feelings. The girl tells Bavino, “it’s just a pity i couldn’t even feel them. not one. not once you know i knew they were swimming around there trying to hit the bottom ... but man, they should have got bigger brothers to do it you know” (pp. 28–29). For the girl on the rampage the men do not satisfy her irrespective of their number. The narrator is definitely cautioning the (post)apartheid South African Government that social inequalities are eroding the moral standing of the country and her people.

The narrator observes that the girl on the rampage joined others and they formed a gang meant to knock men out of their pedestal of phallic power: “quite a few guys walking around toting restless phalluses fell under the bite” (p. 29). The girls lay a trap for men by sending out one of their beautiful girls out in the streets and as it is wont to happen some man or other becomes attracted to the girl and when she accepts his advances he thinks he is quite lucky. However, the man is led into the den of the girls and forced to go with all of them in turns until he is almost dead. After they crash his phallus they throw him into the streets as a warning to other men harbouring restless phallic motives against women. Bavino observes of the man’s horrific experience in the hands of the girls, “the man would plead for mercy scream shout & crawl around & get laughed at when not being made to eat clits & buttocks & get rubbed up around the mouth of the vagina. all of them. there were numerous such cases” (p. 29). Bavino’s observation implies that the phallic hysteria which makes man desire to manically stick their phalluses into women meets its match when women come together – in tandem with Hélène Cixous’ the cry of the Medusa – and turn the phallic tide against man in a sexual frenzy. In *Medusa and the Mother/Bear: The Performance Text of Hélène Cixous’s L’Indiade Ou L’Inde de Leurs Rêves*, Judith G. Miller (1989) observes that “as fashioned by Cixous, the Medusa’s laugh becomes the rallying cry of the liberated female creator” (p. 135). The narrator is unquestionably presaging the (post)apartheid South African Government to reconsider their position on the oppression of black people before they could gang up and revert the oppressive phallic stream against the government. Bavino projects a spectre of “a man down the street who used to draw respect from out of the flesh of people with a knife-blade,” and points out, “well he gets no such anymore since the sharks took chunks of his flesh off him until he was a shrivelled up worm dragging himself down the street crabwise” (pp. 29–30). The phantom of hysteria projected showing the bully of a man being castrated by a couple of irate girls is meant to shock the (post)apartheid South African subject into realizing what could happen if hysteria-related crimes, such as gang rape, were used as a tool to try and crush the presumed source of social oppression.

For the narrator, the apparent rebirth of (post)apartheid South Africa is another death for the marginalized black people because the baby could not allow himself/herself to be born properly. In the literary slide containing this spectre of a monstrous baby, Bavino observes, “the child turned in the mid-wife’s hand took a big bite of her fleshy neck tore through the sweat dried into salt & got to vein. slashing through. shitting the distance between vulva & cot dead” (p. 40). Bavino’s observation implies that in the context of (post)apartheid South Africa the ANC leaders who took over after the 1994 General Elections did not live to the dreams they were championing during the liberation struggle against apartheid. The freedoms fought for and hoped for by black people did not materialize since the law governing the country still supports white supremacy. The oppression that reduced the blacks into scatological has not faded away but seems to bite even harder. The narrator observes that the atrocious baby, “splashed in the red & faeces waded to the shore of a window ledge. bursting free. the half-monkey from africa navy blue against flaming vagina chewing through melon shaped breast the mother thrashing around the doctor dead” (p. 40). The narrator’s observation implies that the (post)apartheid South African leaders continued the oppression of the blacks instead of stopping it. The baby born “splashed in red and faeces” implies a dirty child who is violent and corrupt. The baby kills his mother as he is being born. It could be argued that like the baby the (post)apartheid leaders kill the dreams for the country when they allow corruption and oppression of the blacks to continue. Instead of nurturing the country, the new dispensation devours (post) apartheid South Africa by perpetuating white supremacy. The birth of the baby becomes like rape on the mother leading to a lot of bloodletting and flow of excrement. Bavino notes, “the skull’s grip came loose. it shattered hitting reality caved in squashed. the worms cut through the stomach of the hydra & the spit & amniotic fluid & green-yellow mixed with red splashed out” (p. 40). The baby breaks the womb and the amniotic fluid flows out together with blood. The amniotic fluid normally cushions the baby from external pressures and enables him/her to live safely deep in the mother. However, the spilling of the amniotic means that the nurturer has been killed and the baby cannot survive.

In an earlier literary slide the narrator projects the phantom of hysteria in which a man kills his grandmother, mutilates her in order to remove her ovaries which he keeps preserved in a jug on the mantelpiece. His mother’s last wishes had been that he should never forget where he comes from and it seemed quite clear in his mind that he had come from the womb “so he’d slashed the beloved old woman up on her death-bed. the film of her eyes had cleared as rummaged down there. she’d tried to raise her head. that messed up the operation somewhat. but he’d smashed the stupid wrinkled face up with a one-two perfected over a decade of street hustling” (p. 38). The man then proceeded to submerge the ovaries into his mother’s amniotic fluid which she had kept when he was born. The spectre being described here is of an exceedingly selfish person bent on preserving their own life at the expense of those who nurtured them into maturity. The mother had not lived for long weighed down by the birth of the child. However, “she’d kept singing that stupid song all the time” that her son should never forget his cradle (p. 39). Now the man is in a frenzy because of a rat which has attacked the ovaries in the jug. There is also the snake eating the ovaries and then the cat. The snake is a python smirking and winking like some whore conning a target. A neighbour lunges at the cat and the rat which collide and the man is on the death bed “wet stinking of his urine & faeces” (p. 39). Bavino is unquestionably challenging the transitional (post)apartheid South African Government against self-preserving tendencies like the ones witnessed during the apartheid regime. The narrator clearly projects the phantom of hysteria borne in self-preserving regimes and its attendant violence.

The death of the oppressive man, the one who had thought he could live forever by devouring his mother’s amniotic and his grandmother’s ovaries, is supposed to usher in the sun rise but instead “sunset scours the sky” (p. 39). The spectre of hysteria in the church comes into sight and “the wind howls again. cleaning the eye of the sacred cross. where the horned beast defecates. fornicates in its dream of blasphemy. masturbating itself against the polished gloss of the christ statue over church hillside” (p. 39). Here, Bavino is indicating the rot in the church and how it is stifling the blacks’ dreams of freedom in (post)apartheid South Africa. Like in Robertson’s phantasmagoria which

criticized the tyranny and hypocrisy witnessed in the old church, Bavino is challenging the oppression instigated by the church against the blacks in (post)apartheid South Africa. For the narrator, the rebirth in (post)apartheid South Africa is threatened by phallic hysteria which manifests itself as oppressive tendencies and clamour for material acquisition at the expense of others. The narrator observes of the celebratory mood in (post)apartheid South Africa, “in victory comrade, we burn in the voortrekkerhoogte monument the faces of tyranny on banknotes. Here some dope for the junkie hippie jan van riebeek” (p. 39). The narrator’s observation implies that the new leaders in transitional (post)apartheid South Africa are feverish with the thought of the material possession they could accumulate in the light of their ascension to political power.

Bavino projects the spectre of tyranny dissolving into a priest defiling a boy in the church and asking a deacon not to interfere: “deacon ... don’t please ...,” the narrator observes, “he’s pinning a little boy under his cudgel. pumping hard & fast. on the wall the crucifix shakes falls in orgasmic fervour” (p. 39). Bavino’s observation implies that the oppression perpetuated against the blacks through the church is sanitized as witnessed by the deacon’s complacency in the conspiracy against the faithful. The injustice being perpetrated against the little boy terrifyingly permeates into the air with the priest gloatingly intoning, “i’ll gut you ... little rot face ...” and the narrator explaining that “he’s trying to split the child up. from anus up” (p. 39). Irrefutably, the narrator employs the spectre as dissidence meant to unsettle the (post)apartheid South African Government from its sanitized oppression of the blacks. The phantom of the manic priest defiling a little boy transmutes into feverish applause ringing and rebounding on the fallen wall of Berlin in a cinema hall. Bavino observes of this cinematic spectre, “gather around everybody. we now introduce to you a real live flesh & blood victim of apartheid ... bah bah blacksheep for your viewing pleasure ...” (p. 39). The narrator’s observation implies that the plight of the marginalized during the apartheid era has been commercialized through the film industry and the applause of the audience as they watch fellow human beings being defiled attests to the masochist character of Apartheid’s oppressive tendencies.

For the narrator, the transitional (post)apartheid South Africa has been reduced into a public toilet with nauseating smell of human excreta. Everybody in the country seems to be holding an erection for which they line up in front of the toilet waiting for their turn to rump into some poor woman fallen in a drunken stupor inside the toilet. The spectre of hysteria is the very air that the people in the queue gulp down as they shout at each other to be done quickly lest their erections burst into violence. Writing of this impatience Bavino observes, “there’s a serpentine queue there turning around the corner. the head deep inside the dark door. the tail shuffling about in patience’s loss. asking: ‘hey maaan why don’t you fuckers finish in there we have work to do some of us’” (p. 57). Bavino’s observation implies that in (post)apartheid South Africa the political positions, especially the presidency have become like a pleasure-hole for which politicians line up to have their turn during General Elections. Those who unfortunately fail to make it into the government in a given term wait impatiently at the door of power and make a lot political noise calling for the end of term for the ones currently in government. When someone seems to be going ahead of the queue there is hysterical shouting, “hey fuck you there trying to sneak in front there we’ve all got erections don’t we? get your shit-arse-little-prick to the end of the line ...” (p. 57). At this point, the narrator is incontestably challenging the conspiracy characterizing the contestation of power in (post)apartheid South Africa with its attendant culture of corruption and intolerance.

The hysteria of the politicians dissolves into a frenzy which grips the information industry with reporters sanitizing the filth uttered or done by the (post)apartheid South African Government. Bavino observes about the manic character of the reporters, “pull apart the statement cut between the lines for the real shriek of sense said tattered nerves beat down to hysteria” (p. 86). Bavino’s observation indicates that the reporters try to look for sense from political statement even when it is clear that what the political authority has said is utter nonsense. The media houses raise the politicians into pedestals of absolute oppressive power: “the leader made the pillars shudder with mere force of thundervoice ...” (p. 86). The narrator notes that the press crew tremble in awe despite the fact that what the leader has said is pure nonsense. For the narrator, the (post)apartheid South

African leaders lack the substance needed to steer the country into celebrating humanity due to their turning the politics of their country into a vile religion lacking in any ethereal intervention but laden with rot and death for the black people. Bavino observes that (post)apartheid South African politics comprises “expressions of recognition’s sweat in the place where a dead sun-religion was revealed in blood drip down to dust otherside of the street going nowhere but down” (p. 86). Bavino’s observation implies that the (post)apartheid South African politics flap on the wings of the oppression of the black people.

### 3. Conclusion

Rampolokeng’s novel communicates brutally realistic social realities of hysteria in the transitional post-apartheid South Africa. The narrator employs phantoms of hysteria involving dehumanization of women and children by the pounding white supremacy. Fictionalized sex-related offences, such as gang rape, genital mutilation and paedophilia become metaphors of the subjugation of black people in post-apartheid South Africa. The phobic objects from Apartheid, such as lack of proper housing, poverty, militarized oppression and separate development for different racial groups, become re-activated in new forms of oppression occasioned by official policies, like, neoliberalism, which aggravate the traumatic experience of the marginalized black people. Bavino seems to perceive post-apartheid South Africa as a mother for all South Africans and mourns her defilement by self-serving politicians who are bent on enriching themselves at the expense of the marginalized. From the discussion in the essay, it is clear that hysteria in Rampolokeng’s novelistic world is initiated by white supremacy and structured racism which permeate every aspect of black people’s lives. The nurturer, represented in *W/H* by the grandmother, mother and daughter, is pushed under by the paternal metaphor and imposition of paternal law but she continues to pulse. Through projective identification, the narrator envisages the fragmentations in *W/H* as literary slides animated against the psyche of white and black people in the fictive post-apartheid South Africa. By projecting the spectres of hysteria on the psyche, the narrator is offering the post-apartheid South Africans a literary trope against which her racially structured people can re-examine themselves in order to have a fuller understanding of how perpetration of social inequalities may throw a country onto the path of hysteria.

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