South African fiction produced between the end of apartheid and the turn of the century was categorized as ‘transitional,’ a mode characterized by the confessional narrative, either fictionalized or presented as autobiography or memoir.\(^1\) According to Emily Davis, in the post-transitional phase, a movement away from this dominant type gave way to an emphasis on difference and the diversity of experience, and on the complexity of identities modeled not only on issues connected to race and national politics but also on gender, sexuality, and, importantly, in Davis’s words, “new forms of politics and sociality, particularly transnational ones.”\(^2\) For this scholar, transnational connections are paramount in the post-transitional phase, so much so that she brands it the era of the transnational turn, “because of the increasingly global nature of the topics represented in fiction.”\(^3\)

*Boundaries*, Farida Karodia’s latest novel to date, was published precisely at the turn of the century, in 2000, the year which marks the divide between one mood—the memoir or autobiography connecting the past to the present—and the other: namely, the transnational turn.\(^4\) *Boundaries* can be seen to encompass both tendencies. On the one hand, it is concerned with past injustices and present legacies of apartheid, and with the necessity to face and overcome them; on the other, the novel recounts the opening of South Africa to a new era of transnational realities. In this polyphonic narrative, the novelties brought

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\(^3\) Davis, “New Directions in Post-Apartheid South African Fiction and Scholarship,” 801.

\(^4\) Davis is quick to note, however, that “such designations function more as scholarly conveniences than neat chronological divisions” (Davis, “New Directions,” 801).
about by the incorporation of the nation into the ranks of transnationalism and globalization are seen to affect the life of a very traditional place in South Africa, in a passage-into-modernity tale that, again, needs to be read metonymically as the incorporation of the modern, post-apartheid nation in the global scene.

However, when it comes to political transitions, change is not as abrupt in the social and economic realms as the new political configuration would suggest. Such is the case in South Africa. *Boundaries* is set quite a few years after the first democratic elections held in the country. Yet from the opening pages the novel gives access to a world where not much has changed in the new post-apartheid era. The setting is the traditional South African town of Vlenterhoek, located somewhere in the Eastern Cape. Vlenterhoek works as a prototypical chronotope of the situation of the country at that time. It is a small provincial town where the relations between blacks and whites have not yet been normalized: significantly, we read, early in the text, that “the main street was part of the national road. It was twelve blocks long and formed the boundary between the whites and the blacks.” 5 The situation in this Afrikaner stronghold thus remains anchored to a past which, unfortunately, is still not so distant. Although at present children of all skin colors are allowed to attend the local school together, there is still a great divide in the population, and black pupils tend to be abused by white ones, who are in the majority, since they are the ones who can afford an education. Nothing has changed much here in spite of the spinning of the world around:

In spite of changes elsewhere in the country since the first democratic elections, and changes in the world at large—like the Berlin Wall coming down, which they had seen on television, and Nelson Mandela walking out of prison to international acclaim—transformation had not yet reached the small town.

*Boundaries*, 7

After this disheartening opening, *Boundaries* portrays, precisely, the story of a transformation. This transformation reads in two different ways. On the one hand, the topical change from modernity to tradition becomes in this story a change from mores still tethered to the politics of apartheid to the mindset of a more veritably democratic and egalitarian regime. And in order for this to happen, a previous healing process needs to take place—such as the one embodied, on a national scale, in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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