

## **Distance**

The Gods of Africa regard me  
From the edge of my suburban lawn.  
They have the tall thick legs of tree-trunks,  
And tiny white faces of the stars.

I do not grovel at their sprouting toes,  
But stand in my Euclidian door  
And hope the centuries of grass  
Are far too wide to leap across.

– Anthony Delius

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the original white colonisers' or settlers' position and experience in Africa and South Africa during the transitional period between 1998 and 2011, as represented by English white male protagonists who feature in *The Lostness of Alice* (1998) by John Conyngham, *The Good Doctor* (2003) by Damon Galgut, and *Lost Ground* (2011) by Michiel Heyns. The analysis of the selected novels illustrates that the legacy of colonisation and apartheid still influences the settler descendants' perception of self and the other. The analysis focuses specifically on the males' experience of space and place in the construction of identity, and the awareness that the expansion of space and place through the transgression of physical and psychological boundaries contributes towards a more balanced personality.

After the dissolution of apartheid, contemporary white South African men, as exemplified by the three protagonists, have become aware of their minority status and tend to dissociate themselves from the country as home. As borderline figures, they contend with feelings of marginalisation and isolation. Increasingly conscious of their contradictory non-African identity, the protagonists undertake journeys during which they acquire insight into themselves as well as an altered perception of the other.

Although the former settlers' experience of alienation and ambivalence about colonisation and apartheid has been depicted in various novels, the significance of this experience relating to white South African male identity has not yet been fully explored in a comparative study of Conyngham's, Galgut's and Heyns's works with reference to the authors' place within a postcolonial paradigm, their implementation of the detective narrative frame and the role of intertextuality and irony that can be seen to define the novels and suggest other interpretative possibilities. The novels are critically analysed in terms of the concepts of space and place, the presence, transgression and transcendence of boundaries, and the influence of these paradigms on the characters' sense of self and their relationship with others and society at large. The novels' narrative frame and strategies in relation to the myths of Africa are also investigated.

The thesis argues that the apprehension articulated by representatives of European settlers regarding the consequences of colonisation and apartheid has become more prominent during the post-liberation dispensation. The acceptance of responsibility for the past and for others, as well as intense self-appraisal, should enable the three protagonists to achieve a more expansive sense of self and a meaningful existence.

**Key words/concepts:** novels, colonisation, coloniser/colonised, white settlers, South/Africa, apartheid, postcolonialism, Conyngham, Galgut, Heyns, detective novel, intertextuality and irony, space and place, travel and boundaries, social awareness and identity

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie evalueer die voormalige setlaars se posisie en ervaring in Afrika en Suid-Afrika gedurende die oorgangsperiode tussen 1998 en 2011, soos verteenwoordig deur die Engelse wit manlike hoofkarakters wat figureer in *The Lostness of Alice* (1998) deur John Conyngham, *The Good Doctor* (2003) deur Damon Galgut, en *Lost Ground* (2011) deur Michiel Heyns. Die ontleding van die geselekteerde romans illustreer dat die nalatenskap van kolonisasie en apartheid nog steeds die afstammeling van die setlaars se begrip van self en die ander in die konstruksie van identiteit beïnvloed, en die bewustheid dat die uitbreiding van ruimte en plek deur die oorskryding van fisiese en psigiologiese grense tot 'n meer gebalanseerde persoonlikheid bydra.

Na die opheffing van apartheid besef hedendaagse blanke Suid-Afrikaanse mans, soos vergestalt deur die drie hoofkarakters, hul minderheidstatus en neig om hulle te dissosieer van die land as tuiste. As randfigure worstel hulle met gevoelens van marginalisering en isolasie. Toenemend bewus van hul teenstrydige identiteit as nie-Afrikane, begin hulle reise onderneem waartydens hulle insig in hulself asook 'n verskillende persepsie van die ander verkry.

Hoewel die voormalige setlaar se ervaring van vervreemding en ambivalensie oor die kolonisasie van Afrika en apartheid in Suid-Afrika uitgebeeld is in verskeie romans, is die betekenis van hierdie ervaring in verband met wit Suid-Afrikaanse manlike identiteit nog nie ten volle nagevors in 'n vergelykende studie van Conyngham, Galgut en Heyns se werke met verwysing na die skrywers se posisie in 'n postkolonialistiese paradigma, hulle impementasie van die speurvertellingsraamwerk en die rol van intertekstualiteit en ironie wat die romans definieer en ander interpretatiewe moontlikhede suggereer nie. Die romans is krities ontleed ooreenkomstig die begrippe van ruimte en plek, die teenwoordigheid, oorskryding en oorbrugging van grense, en die invloed van hierdie paradigmas op die karakters se sin van self en hul verhouding met andere en die samelewing in die algemeen. Die romans se narratiewe raamwerke en strategieë met betrekking tot die mites van Afrika word ook ondersoek.

Die proefskrif argumenteer dat die vrees soos uitgespreek deur die woordvoerders van die Europese setlaars oor die gevolge van kolonisering en apartheid meer opvallend geword het gedurende die post-bevrydingsbedeling. Die aanvaarding van verantwoordelikheid vir die verlede en vir andere, asook intense self-evaluering, behoort die drie hoofkarakters in staat te stel om 'n meer omvattende sin van die self en 'n sinvolle bestaan te verwerf.

**Sleutelwoorde/konsepte:** romans, kolonisering, koloniseerder/gekoloniseerde, blanke setlaars, Suid-/Afrika, apartheid, postkolonialisme, Conyngham, Galgut, Heyns, speurverhaal, intertekstualiteit en ironie, ruimte en plek, reis en grense, sosiale bewustheid en identiteit

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GD: *The Good Doctor*

HG: *Heart of Darkness*

LA: *The Lostness of Alice*

LG: *Lost Ground*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

This study will trace and evaluate the original white colonisers' or settlers' position and experience in South Africa and Africa during the transitional period from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, as represented by the white male English protagonists who feature in the novels *The Lostness of Alice* (1998) by John Conyngham, *The Good Doctor* (2003) by Damon Galgut, and *Lost Ground* (2011) by Michiel Heyns. It is proposed that the influence of colonisation and the harsh environment of the African continent have induced an awareness of alienation, marginalisation and uncertainty in the settler psyche, which has also found expression in South African literature that attempts to incorporate political consciousness in novels, but often at the cost of aesthetic practice.

Although the epoch of high imperialism officially came to an end after World War Two (1945) when France and Britain relinquished control of their dominions, “colonial discourse still haunts contemporary society” (McEwan, 1996:15). Edward Said (1993:269, 346) contends that the world today is still in the grip of a “pathology of power” (a term coined by Aijaz Ahmad [1981]), although of a different kind.<sup>1</sup> Bill Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:1) estimate that more than three-quarters of the world's current population have had their identities shaped by the experience of European expansionism, and its impact on South Africa today is undeniable. Although colonisation affected the colonised – who were displaced and denied basic human rights – the perpetrators of colonisation also suffered in that they had to adapt to an alien environment and come to terms with the exigencies of an African reality. What is more, because a racially-stratified society created the illusion of difference as a sign of

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<sup>1</sup> Said cites the dissemination of American culture by means of the media and technology as a case in point.

superior culture, cultural interaction and enrichment did not take place. As a result, colonisation had a detrimental influence on both the settlers and the indigenous population. As Bill McDonald (2009:7) points out: “In a society of masters and slaves, no one is free ....” It therefore seems inevitable that perspectives on colonisation and its aftermath would be present in various novels on and from Africa.

In literature, representatives of European settlers have evinced uncertainty about the practices of colonisation since the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, elements of unease were already present in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the prototype of eighteenth-century colonisation and cultural confrontation.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent critics have then also remarked upon Conrad’s awareness – expressed obliquely through his narrator, Marlow – of the forms of violence and destruction entrenched in a hegemonic ideology. One such critic, Andrea White (1993:194), comments that Conrad works towards a “deconstruction, a dismantling, of the imperial myth as formulated by ... fiction traditionally” due to his cultivation of an ambivalent mode of representation which recaptures ideological preoccupations while undermining and exposing them as prejudices. Linda Dryden (2000:82) corroborates this when she suggests that Conrad “uses the romantic genre of imperial literature to subvert” the ideological justifications of imperialist adventurers. In this fashion, the novelist succeeds in making metropolitan citizens interrogate their hypostatised, stereotypical assumptions about themselves and others, civilised and savage, and, ultimately the putatively impenetrable border between an enlightened Europe and a “dark” Africa (Sewlall, 2004:30). Conrad’s suspicious stance towards Western supremacy and the exploits of the colonising endeavour in the Belgian Congo anticipates the more overt scepticism expressed by settlers in South Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> Conrad’s narrative may be seen as a descendant of other canonical master texts of imperial discourse, specifically Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1623), Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726).

Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan (1996:53) distinguish five periods in South African literature. The first is the earlier frontier writing, noted for its artless pastoral fantasies which emphasise the exotic aspects of the wilderness. Rider Haggard wrote in this style. Included in the first period is late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literature, culminating in, for example, Olive Schreiner's settler narratives. In her novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), the characters struggle for physical and spiritual survival in an inhospitable and hostile land. Schreiner's novel not only poses pertinent questions about the Manichean binaries of "us" and "them", but also expresses certain thematic ambiguities that resurface in subsequent colonialist discourse by inter alia Alan Paton whose novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* was published in the year of the Nationalist election victory (1948). *Cry, the Beloved Country* articulates the hope that enlightened liberal whites, along with long-suffering blacks, would work together to improve political and social conditions in South Africa. However, this hope seemed to have dwindled with the passing of time and the inequitable conditions that accompanied the imposition of apartheid. Writers such as Richard Rive portray the pernicious consequences of apartheid on the national consciousness and the trauma of the struggle for liberation, while Mohanram and Rajan (1996:55) note that the literature becomes ever more expressive of dread and fear for the future – a dread and fear that seem to permeate Conyngham's *The Lostness of Alice* (although composed after the abrogation of apartheid). Nobel Prize-winner Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014), whose works saw the light before and after the Soweto School Uprising (16 June 1976) and the death in detention of Steve Biko (12 September 1977), focuses on the possible repercussions of past actions of appropriation, dispossession and domination. In her novels, Gordimer stresses the need for intense self-appraisal and a re-evaluation of the effects of hegemonic practices in history, as well as recompense and the resolution of white guilt. John M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) addresses similar issues while painting an inner landscape of psychological turmoil and guilt (Mohanram & Rajan, 1996:54). Since the abolition of the system of racial segregation, some authors, including Coetzee and André P. Brink, have felt the need in their respective autobiographies (Coetzee in *Youth* [2002] and Brink in *A Fork in the Path* [2009]) to reflect on their position as South

African citizens and artists and the choices they made in the past. In his “almost straightforwardly autobiographical” novel (Miller, 2004:144), *Free Fall or Flight*, Damon Galgut confirms that the descendants of the European colonisers have become increasingly conscious of their contradictory non-African identity and their perception of being invaders and interlopers who have displaced others. Now that the once-oppressed occupy the seat of political power, the former colonisers do not conceive of South Africa as their home any longer (Steyn, 2001:156). This accounts for their bleak and ironic outlook on society. A feeling of foreboding features in other narratives written since the transition, such as *Disgrace*. A number of authors have even contemplated exile and expatriation after the institution of a democratic constitution. Coetzee, in fact, has since emigrated.

Shortly after the 1994 watershed event in South African history, Judge Albie Sachs (who was imprisoned for his role in the freedom movement) urged South African artists not to become entrapped in either the past or the present but to orient themselves again in space, place and time, and take on a new and vital role in the “postcolonial process of rebuilding” the country (Gallagher, 1997:363) by suggesting ways to repair the rift between the races. Sophia Kostelac (2010:55) agrees that artists cannot distance themselves from the new South Africa’s socio-economic challenges. Especially in a country with a history of racial oppression, authors cannot lay claim to artistic autonomy (Jacobs, 2011:109). Notwithstanding this, the selected authors appear to consider political correctness a form of fascism, as Francois Smith (2003:6) notes concerning Galgut. In an interview with *The Star* (1998:16), Conyngham announces that

[p]olitics, because of our tragic history, has so much more power than it really should have. It intrudes everywhere in this country and there’s a big life going on there that doesn’t have to have politics in it. And that’s the real life with emotions and belonging and not belonging.

On this score, Conyngham, Galgut and Heyns could be regarded as independent intellectuals who, in Kostelac’s (2010:86) terms, do not “recognise nor wish to recognise any obligations other than the intrinsic demands of his creative object” and who do not use culture as a weapon of struggle. In their case, aesthetic texts take precedence over

political or committed texts. Instead of drawing on the “ready-made stories” supplied by the apartheid past, a “gift if you were looking for a big theme”, as Conyngham (quoted by Ken Barris, 1998:27) puts it, they resist the inhibitions that a regime of racial intolerance imposes on artists. Rather than heeding the imperative to report on the country’s socio-political circumstances, the novelists exercise their creative freedom and express the drama of individual and personal relations. Since “all the old moral signposts” (Miller, 2006:143) have been shattered after the inauguration of a black-majority government, Galgut contends that post-1994 writers traverse a territory of ambiguity and ambivalence and experience disquiet and distress. The works of white writers tend to foretell the downfall of the new dispensation by foregrounding the secrets and lies, deception and corruption that lurk beneath the surface. Though some critics may pronounce the three writers’ books bleak, the cynicism and ironic stance of the texts may parallel their creators’ personal view of life in a society in which political structures have been inverted. As such, the pessimism may be construed as a form of realism.

Before the overturn of political structures, the white South African male defined his place and identity within the country on the basis of land ownership and control of and dominance over the other (McEwan, 1996:2). On the periphery of a postcolonial and post-apartheid society and ideologically marginalised after the enfranchisement of the masses, he experiences a feeling of *Unheimlichkeit* (not-being-at-home) (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:73) and fears cultural erasure. Conyngham phrases it as follows:

It’s a sense of insecurity of being part of a minority culture, being a piece of the flotsam and jetsam of a former empire ... the society all around me is not my society, although it is perhaps more my society than an English society in England would be now. I’m conscious of the fact that I don’t really belong anywhere ... (quoted by Blair, 2003:75).

Psychologically – and in extreme cases also physically – uprooted, the white male protagonists in the novels have to make do with outdated mind-maps of the world. Struggling to adapt to society and locate their identity within the self-other division imposed by imperialism, they doubt whether they can play a meaningful role in the reconstruction and advancement of the new society. Hence, they use travel to gain

knowledge of other people (as in Conyngham's text), or as an expansion of horizons (Galgut) or to acquire social and self-awareness (Heyns) which allows them to evaluate and modify previously biased perceptions of others. It follows that not only are geographical borders crossed during these voyages, but social, cultural and mental ones are also transgressed and, in some instances, even transcended. Involving a displacement in time and space, travel broadens the parameters of experience and tends to produce insight (Van Coller, 1998:62, 43).<sup>3</sup> This quest culminates in the retrospective and self-searching explorations and sense of accountability that characterise novels by Elsa Joubert (*Die Reise van Isobelle*, 1995) and Coetzee (*Disgrace*, 1999), and are a feature of the postcolonial and postmodern paradigm.

In the three novels to be discussed in Chapters Three, Four and Five of the thesis, the male settler protagonists attempt to cross physical and psychological borders in a bid to transcend their historical identity and discover meaning outside conventional parameters. The ideas of self-examination and confrontation and the inversion of roles have figured in previous South African novels such as Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) and Galgut's *The Quarry* (1995). Several dissertations have also examined the dilemma of contemporary male personalities who find themselves in an in-between state of limbo and experience a crisis of identity. For example, the dissertations by Shaun Robinson (1992) and Shaun Athol McEwan (1996) perceive Conyngham's protagonists as representative of white liberals' marginalised position on the continent and in the country, and their inability to articulate their selfhood due to a divide-and-rule policy. In turn, Mark Frederick Wilmot (1995), with specific reference to Galgut, addresses the plight of the sensitive, feminised or homosexual male oppressed by patriarchal structures, while Matthys Lourens Crous (2005) concentrates on the concept of masculinity in post-apartheid novels.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This is the case with Conrad's Marlow who not only undertakes a physical journey but also a metaphysical one when he confronts the darkness in the European heart.

<sup>4</sup> No thesis has as yet been devoted to Heyns's oeuvre.

However, the significance of this ambivalence with regard to male identity has not yet been fully explored in a comparative study of Conyngham's, Galgut's and Heyns's works with regard to the authors' place within a postcolonial paradigm, their innovative implementation of narrative frames and the role of intertextual and ironical associations that define *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground*. This thesis will therefore contribute to McEwan's and Wilmot's studies (and to a lesser extent that of Robinson), by focusing on the postcolonial subject's concern with space and place, boundaries (space delimited) and travel (the expansion of boundaries) in an era of globalisation, as well as the concept of self and other in the construction of identity and the concomitant burden of social responsibility.

The white male characters in *The Lostness of Alice* and *The Good Doctor* struggle to achieve an enlarged sense of self founded on the inclusion of all rather than the exclusion of some (McEwan, 1996:69), since they are still very conscious of their European heritage, though they perhaps tend not to regard themselves as colonisers *per se* (Carusi, 1991:96). The original colonisers looked upon Europe as their locus of home and the source of what they held to be "culture" and "civilised" values. This idea is emphasised by Abdul JanMohamed (1988:106) who sardonically observes that for the early settlers, "life in the colonies [wa]s but a temporary exile in an outpost surrounded by savagery and barbarism". The colonisers framed their identity in opposition to the colonised, the indigenous African population, who was deemed the black other to the European colonisers' white self. Nevertheless, the three novelists' protagonists realise that their complicity in or indifference to the injustices of the past has left an imprint on the present. It is this awareness of responsibility towards the other and for the past that leads to the revaluation of their place and purpose in the world and the reconstitution of their consciousness. The three texts therefore form part of a bigger tapestry which could be unfolding in post-apartheid South African literature.

## 1.2 Literary contextualisation

*The Lostness of Alice* is Conyngham's third and most recent novel. Of the three novels, the first, *The Arrowing of the Cane* (1986), has met with the most success. It has won both the Olive Schreiner and Sanlam Awards and was joint winner of the AA Mutual/Ad Donker Vita Award. Conyngham's novels all conform to certain postmodern trends such as the focus on "I" and retrospective narration. They address certain postmodern aspects of identity formation such as difference and the other. All three novels also employ the postmodern strategies of intertextuality and irony to question narrative authority and the relationship between narrator and author. *The Arrowing of the Cane* reminisces on the Anglo-Zulu War, while the protagonist of *The Desecration of the Graves* (1991) writes a biography of a British General (Sir William Gatacre) who fought in the Anglo-Boer War.

Even though *The Arrowing of the Cane* and *The Desecration of the Graves* have separate story-lines and different protagonists, they both depict the predicament of the white English male in South Africa prior to the first democratic elections (1994). Conyngham designates these works as his Natal Trilogy – "Natal" being the name of the province he loves and the setting for at least part of the narrative action, and "natal" as signifying the rebirth of the country. The three novels are politically-engaged narratives, providing insight into colonisation, and the original colonisers' experience of marginalisation in Africa and a dichotomised South Africa. The central characters are white pseudo-liberals who use liberalism to ease their consciences. Claiming to have sympathy with the dispossessed others of colonialism's and apartheid's logic of difference, they do little to engage in others' life-world. Since the white protagonists' identities have not kept up with the changes in the country, they remain entrapped within the axes of similarity and difference, and demonstrate the constriction and obsolescence of a neo-colonial mentality in a postcolonial environment (McEwan, 1996:67). Gordimer, acclaimed "as the 'conscience' of the anti-apartheid struggle" (Viljoen, 2013:xl), avows that the colonial consciousness permits advantaged persons to "float on the surface of the society" and close their eyes to the fundamental social fact,

“which [is] the overwhelming presence of black people”. The Euro-Africans in the trilogy possess this consciousness. They retreat from political engagement and do not take responsibility for their actions or lack thereof. Critics, primarily those who fail to notice the ironic treatment of the protagonists, contend that John Conyngham shares more than his initials with his narrators. James Colville, Jeremy Cranwell and Christopher Jameson are all authors (albeit amateurs) and artists who take refuge in their art and fail to notice the world around them, and Conyngham has been slated for being out of touch with South Africa’s socio-economic and political realities in that he does not write literature in support of the Freedom Struggle. Yet his narrators have been so structured as to represent the typical, ostensibly liberal English male consciousness.

The characters in Conyngham’s three metanarratives commit themselves to their craft possibly to come to terms with the lostness of the human condition in a postcolonial and post-apartheid setting. The texts portray the emotional insecurity of the time after the electoral victory of the African National Congress. White South Africans decry the perceived “inefficiency of the black government, the lack of stability, the corruption, the poor economic prospects, the endemic violence” (Renders, 2005:133) and imagine a cataclysmic future. This, however, does not deter them from searching for belonging and identity in the present.

Intertextuality is one of the modalities within a postcolonial and postmodern discourse that investigates and rewrites the past from an alternative – often ironical or critical perspective – so as to reveal residual politics, usually of the colonial era. By transgressing textual and temporal boundaries to invoke earlier material, the counter-discursive technique of intertextuality engages with and contests colonialism’s discourses and power structures (Kruger, 2013:93). Historical or literary parallels in *The Arrowing of the Cane*, *The Desecration of the Graves* and *The Lostness of Alice* undercut or expand the meaning of the narratives. The allusions countervail absolute narrative authority and challenge the connection between narrator and reader, fiction and reality with the intention to dismantle the myth of the European imperialist ideology formulated in colonial texts.

*The Lostness of Alice* draws on Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's/Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) while recalling the white settler myth that white women are desired by black men and so become "lost" in Africa. In terms of these opposing interpretations that imply a fairy tale on the one hand and violent reality on the other, Conyngham ironically implies that "wonderland" could also be a perilous place that negates a fairy-tale ending. The intertextual reference to the children's story thus deconstructs the notion of life as a magical fable, or perhaps it is a tale with bad creatures (people) in it.

In *The Lostness of Alice*, Alice Walker appears to have dropped down a dark hole – a mythical metaphor for Africa which seemingly "swallows" Europeans. It is imagined that perhaps South Africa will become a part of the "real" Africa and fall into "darkness". The white characters rue the revocation of the previous regime and long for the time before African others have taken possession of the country. Many whites assume that they have become politically irrelevant. Neither Wonderland nor Africa are Gardens of Eden, and nor are they rational ordered worlds in which traditional (Western) norms apply. Instead, they may be conceived of as "metaphysical battlefield[s] devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril" (as Chinua Achebe (1977:788) describes Conrad's rendition of Africa in *Heart of Darkness*). References to death abound in Carroll's story, and Conyngham's narrator intimates that the prospect of violence and death is integral to an existence in Africa now that it has been abandoned by the imperial powers. Alice's lostness mirrors the original settler's position in Africa, and may prefigure the end of his stay here. In this manner, the utopian ideal cherished by Carroll's Alice Liddell and the early colonists is inverted and shattered. The novel also disabuses the white settlers' great expectations of *terra nullius* (unoccupied earth) and echoes Conrad's misgivings about colonisation as expressed by Marlow a hundred years earlier in his travels to the interior of the African continent and into the depths of the European psyche.

The events surrounding Alice's disappearance are related from the perspective of the white male narrator-protagonist, Christopher Jameson, who lives in a country bristling

with racial friction. As a white man, Chris is implicated in two centuries of racial subjugation and exploitation and is at variance with those around him and “rotten with fears” (Malan, 1990:412-413). Chris lives with his girlfriend, Sally, on her father’s dairy farm in KwaZulu-Natal. The farm may be figured as a microcosm of the country, its space associated with the white man’s conception of identity (Coetzee, 1988:69, 175; Viljoen & van der Merwe, 2004:10, and Petzold, 2006:143). A lack of land was perceived as detrimental to forming a sense of self and establishing the purpose of one’s existence (Viljoen, 2014:10). Since Chris does not own the farm, he cannot configure his consciousness in terms of a stable space which would lead him to question his connection with the country. Being a white man, he does not belong to Africa and his presence may only be suffered for a finite period. When his relationship with Sally founders, his tie to the land (both the farmland and the country) is severed, and, to draw on Crous’s words (2005:125), this absence of a sustaining attachment and affinity to another person and place precipitates psychological lostness and an existential crisis of identity.

Conyngnam employs the frame of the mystery/detective novel to structure the search for clues on identity formation and the meaning of existence. The narrator-protagonist becomes embroiled in the police investigations and searches for the lost Alice, but as with Marlow, the search becomes an inevitable quest for belonging and identity when Chris starts exploring strange spaces and questioning the familiar. The detective’s position as outsider, on the outskirts of society, bears similarities to that of the original settlers. As a detective, Chris probes different places in pursuit of clues to the girl’s disappearance in the same way as the colonisers travelled to other quarters to unearth the truth about themselves and their place in the world.

Although several writers (Van Coller, 1998:54, 62 and Wenzel, 1999:137) proclaim that travelling may act as a transformative experience since it expands a range of boundaries, in Chris’s case the navigation of geographical spaces, societies and cultures does not result in renewal (but it does create an awareness of his condition). Drifting from one strange space to another, he does not alter his perception of the other,

and his search for Alice and an integrated, coherent self in a disordered world remains fruitless. Wherever he goes, he remains a stranger, disconnected from his surroundings and society. He finds no place to settle down or a home to call his own. Similar to James Colville, in *The Arrowing of the Cane*, Chris cannot orientate himself in space and time and “lives an inconsequential life in a restless limbo” (1986:49). Chris eventually comes to rest at the very southern extremity of Europe, the Strait of Gibraltar, a peripheral place from where he can glimpse Africa in the distance. This location situates him literally and metaphorically between boundaries of different cultures and continents. It strikes him that he cannot sever his identity from an abiding awareness of his European extraction, and he realises that he does not belong to Africa. Yet the character still does not cross the European cultural and ideological border. His sense of displacement is reflected in his inability to articulate an objective and truthful perspective, this being captured in the novel’s open-ended conclusion, which implies that the white settler-reader faces the same ambivalence pertaining to his future as Chris and Alice do.

*The Good Doctor* (2003), like *The Lostness of Alice*, is also a politically engaged realist narrative. Despite receiving critical acclaim in South Africa, Galgut became known abroad only after *The Good Doctor*’s publication. The renowned author and academic, Brink (2003:18), hailed this literary dissection of a post-apartheid society as “one of the most profound and luminous testimonies to the transition between the old and the new South Africa”. The novel was one of six finalists for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, a feat which *In a Strange Room* (2010) repeated. In 2004 it was voted as the best book in the African region section of the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize Best Book Award. *The Good Doctor* was also nominated for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (1995) and the South African Sunday Times Prize. Galgut sold its translation and publication rights in ten countries. Since *The Good Doctor*’s success, all the author’s books have been republished internationally. His latest novel is *Arctic Summer* (2014), a novel whose title and the plot pay homage to E.M. Forster, who started his novel by the same name in 1909 but never completed it.

Locally Galgut achieved fame in 1982 with his first novel, *A Sinless Season*, a *Lord of the Flies* rendition of three friends' stay at a reformatory school. *A Small Circle of Beings*, a collection of one novella – based on the author's own childhood experience with illness – and four shorter stories, appeared in the bookshops in 1988. *The Quarry* (2004), when turned into a feature film, won prizes on the international film festival circuit. His travel narrative consists of three parts that were published as separate stories in *The Paris Review* (2008), and were collected in a novel entitled *In a Strange Room* (2010).

Similar to *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* also examines the consequences of colonisation and apartheid on the white male's sense of self after the dawn of the new democracy. Following in the wake of decolonisation comes the deterioration of the country. The two doctors embody the consciousness of the former colonisers and their responses to past crimes and present changes.

A run-down hospital in a former homeland of South Africa serves as the setting for *The Good Doctor*. The hospital and its staff may be considered a cameo of a post-apartheid and postcolonial society and a trope for post-liberation decline. The hospital, a remnant of the order of enforced segregation, is a place without function and future (Barris, 2005:25). Being a symbol of "cultured" Western space but surrounded by the African bush, this European edifice may be deemed a threshold place succumbing to the advance of the wilderness.

Galgut's novel reconceptualises Conrad's counter-narratorial critique of European expansionism<sup>5</sup> within a postcolonial and post-apartheid paradigm, so creating the impression of history repeating itself and a cyclical structure between past and present, Conrad and Galgut. The text, however, poses an ironical opposition to Conrad's narrative in that it affords alternative perspectives on the past, the present and the

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<sup>5</sup> Green and LeBihan (1996:277) note that *Heart of Darkness* has been the source of many reinterpretations, for example the film *Apocalypse Now* by Coppola, *Surfacing* by Atwood, Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and White's *A Fringe of Leaves*.

future. By juxtaposing the two doctors who have widely divergent backgrounds and opinions regarding their moral obligation to their patients (the other) and the milieu in which they find themselves, the work not only corroborates Conrad's ambivalent appraisal of the colonial drive as contingent on hypocrisy and deception but also seems to purport that European schemes of empire cannot succeed or even survive for long in Africa – as indicated in *Heart of Darkness*. *The Good Doctor* hints at a re-evaluation of African space; it echoes the atmosphere of decadence and neglect evoked in *Heart of Darkness*, but also adds a new element of evaluation – between self and other, white and black, civilisation and wilderness, and Europe and Africa – that diffuses boundaries of difference between these constructs.

In the novel, the characters attempt to come to terms with the transition from a white racial dispensation to a rainbow nation. The transfer of power from the oppressor to the oppressed causes emotions of shock and sorrow in the former, and is marked by upheaval and chaos (Isidore, 2007). Accordingly, the political turbulence of the time could account for Galgut's self-searching consciousness that finds expression in the choice his two protagonists have to make: to continue to be troubled by the inhumane ideology of the previous regime or to establish their selves by recognising the other (also in themselves) and working toward a non-exploitative future based on impartiality and cooperation.

Despite Dr Eloff's limitations, it would appear that the "imprimatur of truth" (Barris, 2005:26) is bestowed on his vision, since his young idealistic colleague, despite his good intentions, fails to make a lasting impression on his surroundings. Frank accepts that his actions toward others in the past have a bearing on the present and future. On this score, the reader is left undecided as to which of the two doctors the adjective "good" (of the title) applies. It is most likely that the title is ironic; that neither of the two doctors is good, and that only together they provide a balanced perspective on how to cope with culpability. By means of the two medical practitioners who are each other's alter ego, Galgut thus redefines the concept of "us" and "them" to suggest that confronting unresolved issues will allow one to face reality and attain meaning.

Heyns's protagonist, Peter Jacobs, in *Lost Ground*, also faces unresolved issues when he returns to South Africa after a 22-year absence. *Lost Ground* (2011) is Michiel Heyns's fifth novel. It won the Herman Charles Bosman Award for English Fiction, the Sunday Times Fiction and the Media 24 prizes; it was also shortlisted for the University of Johannesburg Prize and the M-Net Prize. The work's French translation, *Un passé en noir et blanc*<sup>6</sup> (*A past in black and white*) became available in 2013. Resembling *Lost Ground*, *The Children's Day* (2002), is a retrospective coming-of-age tale exploring the complexities and contradictions of adolescence and sexuality during the apartheid years (Kennedy, 2009). Novels following *The Children's Day* include *The Reluctant Passenger* (2003), showing the rainbow nation coming to chaos and confusion; *The Typewriter's Tale* (2005); and *Bodies Politic* (2008), for which Heyns received the Herman Charles Bosman Award. *Lost Ground* (2011) and *Invisible Furies* (2012) were published in quick succession and similarities can be discerned between the two novels. In both, the protagonist, who is also the narrator, returns to a place with which he is well-acquainted. While in these places, the protagonists contemplate the different avenues their lives could have taken, had they made other choices (Corrigall, 2012). Corrigall holds that since these novels bring metropolitan markers into play and feature characters who rise above their South African identities, they appeal to an international audience.

Unlike *Invisible Furies* which is set in Paris, France, *Lost Ground* provides a picture of post-apartheid South Africa. The novel intimates that South Africa is losing ground and regressing to become part of the rest of Africa (Manase, in "Imagining Post 2000 Zimbabwean Perceptions of Land and Notions of Identities in Catherine Buckle's *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions*" [2011], also testifies to this regression). Mostly the white people in *Lost Ground* envisage the ruination of an Africanised South Africa. The population of the Little Karoo *dorp* represents a microcosm of the national landscape, as does *The Good Doctor's* hospital with its enforced coexistence of mixed

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<sup>6</sup> Own translation. This title is significant as it touches on the crucial relationship between black and white.

moral and social standpoints. The characters vary from enlightened to narrow-minded people.

Heyns's narrative may be classified as metafiction. The narrator self-consciously and deliberately draws on a literary classic, *Othello* (1622), and rewrites it from a unique point of view by setting it in South Africa. In this way, the author illustrates that all forms of knowledge are ideologically circumscribed and that writing is revisionist and reconfigurative in nature. In addition to reworking the Shakespeare play, Heyns invokes disparate sub-genres of crime fiction to imbue his novel with an atmosphere of mystery and to underscore the theme of loss (whether through homicide, suicide, emigration or simply the passing of time) that pervades *Lost Ground*. The term "lost ground" could also imply losing ground in a contest – the implicit question being whether colonisation has gained any ground at all. Intertextuality and irony are strategies for working within existing discourses while contesting them (Hutcheon, 1989:133). Heyns, too, works within the genre of the detective novel but rewrites it in a different register to uncover its clichés (such as that the detective incarnates honesty and incorruptibility, protects the innocent and makes society safe again).

The narrator sets himself the task of detective by travelling to South Africa to investigate the identity of his cousin's murderer. He does not intuit that it is actually his own identity and place in the world that he seeks to locate by returning to his home town. Peter Jacobs's voyages, though, destabilise the relation between self and space and place, and he does not attain security and serenity. Even so, travel brings about a confrontation with the unexplored aspects of the self so that the consciousness evolves and the imagination awakens. The protagonist's journeys will, over time, probably yield a narrative as part of the writer's experience. During the course of the novel, Peter comes to understand that a story does not belong to one person and that each narrator may produce a different version of it, so that in the end no single story exists. Not unlike Peter's narrative, Heyns's *Lost Ground* eschews a simple resolution. The indecisiveness of *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground* allows for speculation as to what they may predict for the white male protagonists' future: a literary

prediction which, although it cannot be interpreted as a set of “realistic”, scientific, or psycho-statistical probabilities, nonetheless represents a central and imaginative response to the original white settlers’ experience and existence in a country where the other has repossessed the land.

### **1.3 Aims**

- 1.3.1 To assess the impact of colonisation and apartheid on the contemporary white South African male’s consciousness as represented in the three selected novels by Conyngham, Galgut and Heyns.
- 1.3.2 To illustrate the impact of space and place, travel and boundaries as represented in the three novels on the formation of identity.
- 1.3.3 To analyse and evaluate the male protagonists’ experience of South Africa and Africa in the selected novels in terms of cultural difference, the relationship between self and other and social responsibility.

### **1.4 Methodology**

*The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground* are critically analysed in terms of the concepts of space and place, the presence and transcendence of boundaries, and the influence of these paradigms on the characters’ sense of self and their relationship with others and society at large.

Chapter One introduces the framework for the thesis by addressing the myth of colonisation and the dynamics of the interaction between coloniser and colonised. The chapter illustrates that since the beginning of the twentieth century the process of colonisation and its possible outcomes have been questioned by some writers. Within this context, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* comes into consideration, as it has served as the matrix for Galgut’s *The Good Doctor*. The contributions made by South African writers such as Paton and Gordimer are also assessed. Chapter Two discusses the

theoretical underpinnings of space and place and the significance of boundaries pertaining to difference, the other and identity formation; frames and strategies (detective fiction, intertextuality and irony) to bear out the claim that the crossing or transcendence of boundaries (whether geographical, social or mental) leads to an understanding of self and society. Reference is made to other contemporary novels, for example Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* (1996) and *The Heart of Redness* (2000) (another rewriting of *Heart of Darkness*) to impart an African point of view. Chapters Three, Four and Five are devoted to critical analyses of *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground*, evaluating their position in the theoretical framework and discussing their narrative frames, intertexts and the myth of Africa as depicted in *Heart of Darkness* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as well as the concept of racism, or discrimination against the other, a theme that already appears in Shakespeare's *Othello*. In the conclusion, the three narratives are compared to point out common threads and to illustrate inherent tensions between the perspectives put forward in them. It is anticipated that the study will provide a platform for further investigation into the contemporary South African white male's experience as a former settler and his place in a postcolonial environment in view of his heritage of colonialism and apartheid.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL APPROACHES

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground*. The discussion in this chapter strives to elucidate how, in a broad sense, certain features of postmodernism, postcolonialism and globalisation inform the interpretation of the three selected novels. Within the above-mentioned paradigms, the significance of space and place (in particular Africa and Europe, the farm and the house), travel (space expanded) and borders (space delimited) in terms of identity formation are explored in all three novels. The specific representations of space and place in the respective novels unavoidably highlight the perceptions of self and other. In a literal and metaphorical sense, this contrast in perception functions within a detective framework by examining clues of a suspected crime/mystery but also by relating this evidence to a metaphysical level that poses questions about the relationship between self and other. The juxtaposition of past and present leads to the self-scrutiny of the respective protagonists. To emphasise the role of the past and its impact on the present, the narrative strategies of intertextuality and irony provide useful strategies for interpretation.

#### 2.2 Modernism and postmodernism

Modernism, as a precursor of postmodernism, has emerged as a philosophical, religious, economic, social, political and literary movement (Meyer & Olver, 2002:6) in response to the forces of modernity and modernisation, and is located primarily in the European consciousness of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century. Meyer and Olver posit that in philosophy modernism relates to the rejection of traditionalism – its predecessor – and the prominence given to instrumental rationality, and scientific and functional analysis in the hope of finding an explanation for the ambivalence and chaos of the world and render it (the world) analysable, predictable and controllable. The

concept of modernism applies to all fields of human endeavour: with respect to religion, it is rooted in Martin Luther's protestant revolution (starting 31 October 1517) which opposed the conventional Catholic view of the universe. As for economics, modernism is connected with the industrial and capitalist revolutions, the transition from an agricultural society to a technologically-driven and mechanised one (as illustrated by the threshing machine in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* [De Lange *et al.*, 2008:14]), and a monetarised exchange economy relying on mass production, commodification and consumerism. It also entails the bureaucratic regulation of the work force and the institution of an advanced banking system. Regarding society and politics, it pertains principally to European forms of history and progress, nationalism and democracy. It privileges the individual self by emancipating it and endowing it with subjective autonomy and human rights. Finally, literary modernism experiments with words and classical forms, and is linked to the rise of the novel. Though Conrad tends not to be conditioned by the otherwise all-embracing "discourse" of modernity, his *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is widely regarded as a central modernist text in its repudiation of Victorian morality and the Northern European conception of civilisation.

Modernism, in the main, is classified as a European aesthetic movement. The history, values and belief system of the European Enlightenment subject govern the grand narrative of the rest of the world (Meyer & Olver, 2002:3). This modern subject possessed Western bourgeois qualities that were deemed eternal. To preserve these qualities, an imaginary boundary was erected between the superior civilised self and the "savage" and "primitive" other. Modernism, thus, became commensurate with the cultural values of Western European civilisation. To disseminate these binary values to the other, of whom modernism was keenly aware,<sup>7</sup> and to "modernise" the other, governable territories or colonies were set up in other parts of the world. Julie

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<sup>7</sup> Witness Picasso's African masks and the Impressionist/Post-impressionist fascination with Japanese and Chinese art.

Frederikse (1990:139) phrases it as follows: “Modernism provided both a warrant and a means for world domination ....” According to Ashis Nandy (1983:xiv), colonialism was the “armed version” of modernism. It promoted the values of the coloniser by establishing “civilisations” in other parts of the world (Bruce, 1996:106). Frederikse (1990:139) opines that the colonial has been defined by the pursuit of modernism. In South Africa, apartheid – colonialism’s successor – functioned as a form of modernism and modernisation in that it compelled Africans to work as labourers for the purpose of urban advancement (136).

Although the socio-cultural phenomenon of modernism, on the whole, is considered Eurocentric in nature, Meyer and Olver (2002:5) argue that it has global reach, developing from dealings with the African colonies during the “scramble for Africa” from the 1880s to the 1890s when colonisers and settlers, missionaries and traders interacted with the local people (2), through, for instance, colonisation, conversion, the barter of possessions and property, and negotiation. African intellectuals also came to think of it as a historical process that involved them (9). It follows that modernism goes hand in hand with globalisation through which “places, people, goods and ideas [we]re increasingly linked to each other in various networks of communication, exchange, and distribution” (6). Because modernism could not fulfil its promises of emancipation, progress and wealth, as propagated by Western European theorists, it begot a loss of faith. Since it could not insure the equitable distribution of benefits and profits, and was noted for an inherent instability and indeterminacy as to the future, postmodernism replaced it.

Postmodernism (or avant-garde culture, art and theory) started in the middle of the twentieth century. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1991:341-342) explains that postmodernism “is a name for the rejection of that claim to exclusivity”. Appiah refers to modernism’s tendency to categorise and marginalise or exclude that which is different. Robert Young (1990:3) describes postmodernism as Western European culture’s

awareness that it was no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world, giving rise to a crisis of authority. Postmodernism denotes a departure from the Enlightenment belief in rationality and science and the fragmentation of modernism's "categorizing and exclusionary structures" (Steyn, 2001:xxvii), along with its grand bureaucratic master plan, instead emphasising emancipation and experimentation. Propagators of postmodernity deny the power of metanarratives that privileges one theoretical framework and explanation of meaning over another (Dear & Wassmansdorf, 1993:5). The postmodern movement fetishises difference and the other, the margin rather than the centre (Viljoen, 2013:xix), by challenging and undermining the hegemonic forces that postulate the centrality of the British literary canon within academic institutions (Adam & Tiffin, 1991:xv).

In broad terms, postmodern culture, art and theory may be perceived as a multi-disciplinary phenomenon that interacts with the past to interrogate rather than identify with the "incontestability of scientific or objective receptions of meaning, knowledge, truth, value and the notion of self" (Smit-Marais, 2012:100). Postmodernism uses and abuses, installs and subverts the conventions of established discourse, and proposes one of "difference, discontinuity and fragmentation" (Adam & Tiffin, 1991:xi). As a movement, postmodernism intersects with post-structuralism and Marxism. Postcolonialism, feminism and intertextuality can be regarded as emanations of postmodernism. Appiah fuses postmodernism and postcolonialism since both dispute a previous authority: postmodernism that of the modern and the rational, and postcolonialism the conviction that the divide-and-rule policy of colonialism is modern and rational and can be scientifically substantiated. In this sense, postcolonialism displays a decidedly political agenda.

The most important features or characteristics of postmodernism are discussed in the following paragraphs. These include the negation of factual history, reality and truth; deferred meaning and open-ended narration; the presence of multiple authors or voices; and diffused boundaries giving rise to a dynamic identity.

The postmodern premise calls into question the legitimacy of any single teleological interpretation of history, reality and the truth as empirically defined notions (Smit-Marais, 2012:53). By negating the modernist objective and rationalist understanding of history – that history reflects reality – postmodernism equates history with narrative discourse or fiction since it also depends on a subjective arrangement of stories or events. None of these stories or events can presume to be the ultimate truth (Smit-Marais, 2012:100). For example, in *Lost Ground*, Peter Jacobs comes to comprehend that each person composes his/her own story which gives significance to his/her existence. Although these stories contradict one another, a person cannot judge which story has more value because each of them makes equal sense to its creator and contains its own truth and moral. As such, any historical rendition of the past is biased and potentially flawed. Instead, the past should be viewed as an “indeterminate construct that is endlessly invented and re-invented” (Smit-Marais, 2012:97), and history – the textual representation of the past – as a mediation and manipulation of the past by omitting some parts (mostly the margin), while selecting and ordering others. The same holds true for reality as it relies on a particular and relativist viewpoint that attests to its mediated nature. Since Peter and every other individual construct their own version of reality, it can never be apprehended in its totality; “the more one tries to get a grip on it”, the more it recedes from one’s grasp (Lefebvre, 1991:253). So, postmodernism takes liberties with what people accept as fact because, like reality, truth is conditional and subjective, not absolute and universal. Truth hinges on contingency and ambivalence, while meaning is negotiated from the dialectical discourse between the centre and the margin or deferred (Frederikse, 1990:6).

Although humans construct narratives “in order to create a significant and orderly world, a world that is stable and predictable” (Steyn, 2001:188), postmodern texts like *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground* offer no resolution or closure but remain open-ended and ambiguous. Instead of a controlling authorial narrative voice appropriating both setting and characters, postmodernism questions the supremacy of one single author or speaking subject that dictates to the other to establish the self. Multiple authors and narrators emerge from behind the implied author and enter the

debate, giving an alternative representation of reality and the truth. *The Lostness of Alice*, for instance, opens with a third-person omniscient rendition of events before a character-narrator appears on the scene and takes over the narration. In *Lost Ground*, Peter's reconstruction of events does not correspond to Chrisna's, and in Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), Susan Barton focalises and relates her experiences in the first person before an external third person, the implied author, enters the text as a self-conscious character who comments on another storyteller's (Daniel Defoe's) representation of the past and the truth. In this way, the relationship between author and narrator is brought under scrutiny and narrative authority is curtailed, creating an ironic turn. To expose the limitations and bias inherent in memory and knowledge of the past and the absolutisms of one central meaning, authors rewrite the past from a different cultural, social and political viewpoint. Postmodernism thus blurs or dissolves and reconfigures textual boundaries between past and present, history and fiction, and the rational and the irrational (Smit-Marais, 2012:169). Postmodernism also destabilises the boundaries between third and first-person narrator, in the process alerting the reader to the capricious nature of narration and the unattainability of a one-dimensional and truthful representation. The literature also transgresses the realist novel's accepted criteria pertaining to genre, for example the demarcation between author, narrator and reader, with the latter being both the recipient and interpreter of the information.

A trait of postmodern literature, thus, is the permeability of boundaries. To "express the cacophonous voices of democracy", as Barris (2008:37) articulates, and create manifold centres, postmodernism literature gives prominence to voices from the margins (Steyn, 2001:163), the voices of difference. Whereas John Conyngham's narrator hardly takes note of black people, Heyns's protagonist establishes a reciprocal understanding with a black woman, Nonyameko, who expresses wisdom and reason in contrast to Peter's irrational speculations. As *Lost Ground* makes clear, postmodernism underlines the necessity to positively value marginality and difference rather than to place them on a hierarchical scale from superiority to inferiority. In the same vein, a postmodern context resists a one-dimensional and fixed interpretation of identity as it also queries a traditional and colonially-conceived conception of identity in relation to a "fixed" place.

As all three novels demonstrate, a postmodern identity finds itself poised between diverse places and cultures. With different narratives vying for legitimation, this identity is neither here nor there (Sewlall, 2004:170), nor one or the other. Having no steadfast essence but being “part of something ongoing and dynamic” (Casey, 1997:286), it may be deemed interstitial, indeterminate and unstable. In a world of tourists, migrants and exiles, a postmodern personality evinces a condition of existential isolation and anxiety – a crisis of identity which is further epitomised by fragmentation and hybridisation.

In summary, postmodernism is a multi-disciplinary movement that challenges and subverts the authority of Enlightenment and colonial metanarratives that posit an objective and scientifically-verifiable knowledge of the past, reality, the truth and individual and social subjectivity. These concepts are seen to be mediated through a relativist, partial perception and, as such, hinge on contingency and subjectivity. A postmodern context thus obscures lines of demarcation between fiction and history, reality and the truth, the irrational and the rational as well as past and present. Authors abandon absolute imperatives to experiment with genre. Multiple storytellers and viewpoints feature in narratives and there is no clear resolution.

### **2.3 Postcolonialism**

Like the postmodern novel, the postcolonial one also interrogates society but a different aspect of it: its colonial heritage. The “post” in the word postcolonial means “after” (colonialism), “because of” (colonialism) and “inclusive of” (colonialism). The term carries multiple meanings and taking cognisance of the various interpretations, this study will assume that the version of the word with a hyphen (post-colonialism) signifies periodicity; it is a historical marker of the temporal shift from the chronological moment in history when colonial rule came to an end (roughly between 1947 and 1964) and the global condition after official decolonisation commenced (Mongia, 1996:2). Without the hyphen, the term denotes a theoretical approach and intellectual framework to investigate in literary and literary-critical compositions the counter-hegemonic focus areas of, inter alia, language, gender, race, alterity and marginality (3). Postcolonial

discursive and representational practices have variously been labelled Emergent Literatures, New Literatures in English, Commonwealth Literature, Minority Literature and Third-World Studies. These “unfortunate neologisms” (Steven Slemon’s phrase, 1990:72) and others such as Non-Metropolitan Literature only tend to relegate postcolonial activities to the margin and designate them as somewhat backward. Since the 1980s, when postmodernity superseded the nationalism of the post-independent states, Third-World Literature with its politically-loaded and pejorative connotations has been rechristened postcolonial literature (Ahmad, 1995:276).

Postcolonial discourse refers to literature emanating from or focusing on countries and cultures that were previously subjected to colonial rule. The literature holds “a radical and contestatory content” (Mongia, 1996:75) in its denunciation of post-Enlightenment’s ideological hegemony and binary oppositions such as between coloniser and colonised, white and black, and us and them (Kruger, 2013:94). The political agenda of postcolonial literature entails dismantling “the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power” (Viljoen, 2013:xliv). Postcolonialism intersects with postmodernism at various levels. In fact, Ahmad (1995:284) argues that proper postcolonial “discourse must be *postmodern*, mainly of the deconstructive kind, so that only those intellectuals can be truly *postcolonial* who are also *postmodern*” (italics in original). Postcolonialism can be seen as postmodernism’s “progeny” (Dirlik, 1994:312), as both movements advocate resistance to and a radical revision of the traditional conception of the world. Trying to make sense of the political and social condition of a post-Enlightenment era, postcolonialism disputes the authorial metanarratives of modernism and decentres the established canon by revising and reconstructing the canonical texts through alternative reading practices (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:189), using such strategies as subversion through intertextuality and irony. The voices and subjectivities of the marginalised minorities are foregrounded to confront and denounce the dominant discourse. For instance, in Coetzee’s *Foe*, a novel that engages intertextually with *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) to highlight the inconsistencies and oversights of the narrative past (Smit-Marais, 2012:121), a woman is the focaliser-narrator for most of the text. In the eighteenth century, when *Robinson Crusoe* was

written, Susan Barton's perspective would have been of little value and her voice marginalised or suppressed.<sup>8</sup> Both Susan and Nonyameko (the black woman from Heyns's novel) refuse to be relegated to the margins and allow the man to take control of their stories. In this fashion, Coetzee and Heyns invert the literary conventions of a previously male-dominated world and dissolve boundaries between the binary oppositions of male and female.

Whereas postmodernism sets itself in opposition to modernist master narratives which reified the national and scientific ideal, the postcolonial paradigm interpellates Western colonial discourse with its assumptions of entitlement and superiority (xxiii). Preoccupied as it is with politics and the past, postcolonialism seeks to "dismantle hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create" mismatched power relations (Viljoen (2013:xliv)). In addition, as Haripersad Sewlall (2004:13, 120) stresses, postcolonialism countervails and deconstructs the imperial myth formulated by colonial fiction in terms of which colonised others are branded "primitives, infidels and degenerates". In resistance to colonialism's essentialisms, the concepts of manifold difference and duality, and alterity and ambivalence figure in narratives such as Coetzee's *Foe*.

As with postmodernism, questions of identity and place, difference, the other and othering are themes central to postcolonial literature. Postcolonial (and postmodern) societies delineate their distinctiveness in difference rather than in Eurocentric essence. Postmodern subjects such as Frank Eloff (*The Good Doctor*) and Peter Jacobs (*Lost Ground*) avail themselves of an assortment of identities which they continually revise and reconfigure to coincide with location. This is because the postcolony exists not in one public space but in numerous spheres and arenas (Werbner & Ranger, 1996:1). In a postcolonial era rooted in histories of migrancy, diasporic displacement and exile (Bhabha, 1994:172); the "normal unconscious", as Bachelard (1994:10) avers, knows "how to make itself at home everywhere". When people learn to live in in-between,

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<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, this is not the case with Defoe's eponymous focaliser, Roxana.

indeterminate spaces and accept difference without imposing a hierarchy of social status, their sense of self becomes hybridised. From this transitional position, the identity of a character assimilates and transfers elements from one culture to another. When people do not become accustomed to in-between states, their identities fragment and a crisis of identity ensues. Tjaart Cronje, from Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), experiences this condition because he is too rigidly set in his racist ways to adapt to a new government and be incorporated into society.

South Africa is perceived to be more postcolonial than the rest of the continent (Frederikse, 1990:139). Britain relinquished the Natal and the Cape colonies more than a century ago (1910), and other parts of the country were under imperial rule for less than a decade. Frederikse (1990:148) therefore reserves the label postcolonial for apartheid South Africa. Yet critics, notably Jacques Derrida (1985:291), Nicholas Visser (1997:79-94) and Laura Chrisman and Benita Parry (2000:10-11), dub apartheid with its essentialising categories a variant of colonialism. Arif Dirlik (1994:324) declares that the term *postcolonial* veils "the white settlers' colonialist and racial policies toward indigenous peoples not only before independence but also after the official break from the imperial center" (Shohat, 1992:101). These critics correctly submit that South Africa has made strides towards attaining true postcolonial status only after the abolition of apartheid.

The terms postcolonialism and postcolonial literature have been criticised for a number of reasons. Homi Bhabha maintains that the terms bear witness to "those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once-colonized Third World comes to be framed by the West" (Bhabha, 1961:63). This statement confirms that Bhabha, like the majority of First-World academia, regards postcolonial writing as the domain of the Third World, effectively excising literature from other postcolonial countries such as Canada and Australia from the field. Secondly, postcolonial literature privileges a style of writing which contests colonialism. In doing this, it reproduces and reinforces the centrality of colonial, First-World concerns, as becomes evident from an examination of the three texts. By implication, literature

originating from outside Europe and the United States is colonised; because postcolonial literature writes back to the colonial centre, colonialism's oppressive structures and totalising systems persist in the present. Said (1993:8) supports this supposition, stating that even though "direct colonialism has largely ended", "imperialism ... lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices". Various cultural and economic expansions have certainly continued well beyond the territorial appropriation associated with the colonial period. In addition, the term postcolonial suggests that intellectuals so designated live and speak from positions outside European and Northern American borders, as Gayatri Spivak (1993) notes. Ahmad (1995:4), in quite an opposite view, articulates that the postcolonial condition started when theorists from the Third World invaded the metropolitan centre. The fact that they now write from inside countries such as the United States of America, Britain and France, undercuts the effectiveness of their production. From his exclusivist point of view, postcolonialism only thrived when First-World intellectuals joined their Third-World counterparts in theorising about the Third World.

## **2.4 Globalisation**

Dirlik (1993:326) contends that "colonialism's economic, political and cultural traces" are present today in global geographies of power. Padmini Mongia is in agreement. Mongia's response to Ella Shohat's (1992:103) question in "Notes on the Post-Colonial", "When exactly ... does the 'post-colonial' begin?" is that postcolonialism started with the emergence of global capitalism. From this statement it follows that global capitalism and postcolonialism are interrelated subjects, the one being a condition of the other. Said (2000:180) defines globalisation or global cosmopolitanism (as it is also called) as a "spatial, geographical designation signifying the global reach of a powerful economic system" (such as the United States). On this score, global cosmopolitanism is often identified with America's structuring and manipulation of international relationships; it is also denounced for benefitting a particular class: the metropolitan elite rather than the general population. What is more, the internationalisation of capitalist production and

economy corresponds to colonialism as the Western centre invades the previously non-capitalist peripheries under the guise of globalising them but actually re-territorialises them. A new type of imperialist polity controls the periphery and its history is recentred around the rubric of a European-American tune (McClintock, 1992:86). Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004:14) contend that in South Africa many young black persons spurn non-capitalist modes of social organisation and their cultural myths, preferring a global culture.

Globalisation may thus be understood as the economic and political domination of the Rest by the West. Its internationalising ideologies obscure and erase local differences, and cause the crumbling of nation-states. Globalisation produces a flattening homogeneity; its tools to bring about this homogeneity are language, fashion, technology and weaponry (Williams & Chrisman, 1994:333). The most powerful instrument of homogenisation, however, is late capitalism or, as Mongia (1996:284) entitles it, the “global offensiveness of capital”. The new economy, an overlapping and disjunctive system, serves as globalisation’s structuring principle.

Borders were previously imbued with nationalist energy, yet in a cosmopolitan context they weaken as individuals and cultural groups cross them. The belief exists that all borders can be crossed and that the world itself is borderless. Hence, globalisation erodes the equation of identity and culture with space and place. People can realise their identities in manifold locations, as “members of the global village and “as citizens of the world” (Rutherford, 1990:89). The three speaking subjects of the novels, stripped of their identity as owner and master, also search for new subjectivities within inclusive global structures.

## **2.5 Space and place**

This section focuses on different aspects of space as “place” in terms of physical and mental orientation and social engagement to show how humans interact with their environment and how it affects them in turn, in particular the white settlers’ reaction to

the African wilderness and their attempts to exert control over it by mapping and naming it. Reference will also be made to the palimpsest of history and the power of the imagination and memory to recapture the past and to shape the experience of familiarity and belonging. These concerns are crucial to the analysis of the different novels, and will determine the reactions of their protagonists to society and their environment.

Space may be defined as a blank area, an openness or an infinite emptiness between points (Wilcox, 2003:543; Fincham, 2008:38). Space denotes an objective reality, an area that is without a person or object, a purpose or a name, but it does offer “the potential for occupation” (Wilcox, 2003:543). In literary terms, space can be conceptualised as an empty text upon which cultures and histories, human experiences and memories have not yet been inscribed. In essence, space lacks an emotional, ideological and literal meaning.

Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004:14) formulate the notion that space becomes a habitable and purposeful place when humans occupy it, imagine it, and have “embodied experiences” and social relations in it – as Chris (*LA*) has on the farm, Frank (*GD*) in the confines of the hospital room and Peter (*LG*) in the town of Alfredville. Put differently, human habitation shapes the apparently abstract infinite emptiness of space, endows it with value and transforms it into place. As Edward Relph (1976:1) avows: “To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and know your place.” To know place, people conceptualise, demarcate, describe and name it. People invest places with ideological significance through their histories, memories, imagination and the stories they live and tell. Though people feel neutral about spaces, they have an affective and emotional relationship with places. What is more, the human spirit may feel at home in places that are not considered nurturing by others. Frank feels he has come into his own in a “bare and clean and empty” (*GD*, 215) hospital room. In this uninviting setting he can shape himself anew. In Mda’s *Ways of Dying* (1995), Toloki transforms dreary and desolate spaces into desirable places (Gräbe, 2008:162) by using the gift of his creativity and resourcefulness. Remaining in the same position, Toloki imagines the burnt-down shack of his childhood

friend to be a beautiful, almost magical work of art, exuding life and joy. “Freed by the boundless realm of the imagination” (Wenzel, 2003:320), Toloki and Noria break free from and rise above their abject living conditions in the socio-political spaces of post-apartheid South Africa (De Lange *et al.*, 2008:xiii) and invent meaningful places for themselves to inhabit.

Places not only animate our imagination and feelings – as they do Frank’s and Toloki’s – and embody our ideas, but they are also points of orientation from which to view our position in the world (Wenzel, 2008:145); they are emotional ballasts that indicate where and with whom we belong. Once we start interacting with people, share events and experiences with them that create social and moral meaning, an *unerfüllter Raum* (unfilled, vacant space) – a space without humans, or with isolated and unrelated people in it – becomes an *erfüllter Raum* (a filled, occupied place) (Müller-Funk, 2007:75). In Gibraltar, Chris (*LA*) discovers that forging personal relationships with two women gives meaning to his experience. People’s location, based on their identity in an *erfüllter Raum*, is the foundation on which a common culture and knowledge are constructed (Williams, 2007:334). Because place is a collective phenomenon, people live their relationship to places in the company of other people. Place, thus, is the being-together of people in the same environment (Müller-Funk, 2007:78). The people in this environment produce their own spatial experiences. These “social connections”, though, are lacking in all three the protagonists; they tend to dissociate themselves from society and experience lostness in different ways.

As De Lange *et al.* (1997:174) explain, a particular locale may at first function as an objective background to a society and later acquire the qualities and characteristics of the people living there, reflecting their history and the particularities of their cultural beliefs. Newcomers to a place have to conform to social practices (such as government, family and law) and acknowledge ideological meanings or run the risk of being ostracised. One may contend that, while human intervention defines places, places also define humans; briefly put, a reciprocity exists between society and places (Wittenberg, 1997:129). Other than producing knowledge and culture, places may

determine a character's destiny (Gräbe, 2008:174). Mphahlele even speaks of "the tyranny of place" (Mohanram & Rajan, 1996:56). In Elsa Joubert's *Isobelle's Journey* (1995), Belle's life is irrevocably changed when she travels to Africa and experiences *Entgrenzung*, which Müller-Funk (2007:83) defines as the "more or less sudden disappearance of any inner and outer limitation". Outside the borders of South Africa and her stifling surroundings, Belle gains a new perspective on South Africa as well as Africa, and her patriotic views make way for a sense of objectivity and the dawning of a political consciousness. As a response to the provincialism and oppressiveness of a social milieu to which she can no longer adjust, she undertakes a journey into her own psyche and eventually "subsides into near-pathological withdrawal" (*Sunday Independent*, 2003:18). In *Lost Ground*, Desirée's endeavour to escape her environment also ends tragically: in her death.

As already stated, places encompass the characteristics, thoughts and experiences of their inhabitants, in other words, places are shaped and maintained by society. Casey (1997:286) posits that places are "part of something ongoing and dynamic". Bachelard (1994:53), Darian-Smith *et al.* (1996:3) and Barnard (2007:152) agree that places are not static entities but encompass dynamic concepts. To return to the metaphor of the teleological narrative of settlement and civilisation, modes of spatial praxis are "in constant flux, a discourse in process" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:391). In *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), a country that was once oppressive shows the possibility of becoming a beacon of democracy and freedom.

In a postcolonial era of cultural globalisation, immigrants and illegal residents tend to renounce prevailing norms of social spatialisation in favour of their own spatial presences and practices (Lefebvre, 1991:210). When these people imprint their own histories and cultures on places, and, in so doing, overwrite and obliterate previous inscriptions, places become multi-dimensional entities (Darian-Smith *et al.*, 1996:2). Despite the erasures, past vestiges of social and cultural inscriptions remain as traces in the present. For example, Alfredville in *Lost Ground* still displays traces of colonial rule in the names of the streets (Victoria, Milner) and that of the hotel (the Queen's

Hotel). After his friend's death Peter feels that "every street harbours some memory of Bennie, and he is everywhere and nowhere" (274). The accretion and erasures of the traces of "cultural memories and residues of past practices and knowledges" (Carter *et al.*, 1993:23) make up a record of change, called a palimpsest. Because a palimpsest has the potential to transport its audience (Wilcox, 2003:542) in time, the unravelling of the layers of history that comprise the palimpsest is critical to understanding the present. In *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), the farm acts as palimpsest onto which the anxieties and aspirations of the farm dwellers are etched (Smit, 2005:3). In the novel, the shape of a black giant buried on the *koppie* suggests the subliminal presence of other (African) cultures. Patrick in Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* recognises that his life and an entire civilisation are mere "imposition of order on something" (in this instance the palimpsest of the desert), that is beyond rules and chaos (1991:77). And the hospital in the homeland to which Frank (*GD*) retires to forget his previous life becomes the place where he forges a new identity.

The character of Laurence in *The Good Doctor* resembles the Victorian explorers in that he goes out into the bush to find an unmapped village where he can establish a Western clinic. The mid-Victorian era was the time of African exploration. To Victorians, sub-Saharan Africa was the real Africa (Northern Africa harked back to classical antiquity or belonged to the Arab Muslim world [Van Wyk Smith, 1997:12]). The blank spaces on early maps suggested that sub-Saharan Africa was an open and inviting virgin zone, an unoccupied and unhistoricised *terra nullius*, ready to be populated and exploited by the colonising country. In *Out of Africa*, Blixen (1937:3) conjures up the safari image of the continent when she speaks of a "pristine Africa marked by adventure, freedom, and power". Europeans (such as Blixen) looked upon Africa as a "lost civilisation and the elusive paradise" (Van Wyk Smith, 1978:12), a landscape of possibility and fantasy where imperialist romancers could escape the values of industrial civilisation and be liberated from society's constraints. Men could behave like boys and pursue adventure by pitting themselves "against a rugged and demanding nature" (Hutcheon, 1989:73). A boy could transform himself into a man or

even become the “Great African Explorer” (Lamb, 1999:27). Marlow (*HD*) recalls his own youthful passion for discovery and exploration:

I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all looked like that) I would put my finger on it and say, “When I grow up I will go there” (Conrad, 1899:70-71).

Marlow eventually goes to the Belgian Congo and finds that Africa is, amongst other things, “[e]xplorers, crocodiles, mysterious lakes”, as Christina Lamb (1999: xxv) puts it. Gore-Browne, the main character in Lamb’s novel, sees the continent as a “vast thrilling unknown, a place of wild beasts” (1999:8), wild hordes, and undiscovered treasures. Similar to Marlow, Gore-Browne “love[s] going off into the bush where perhaps no white man had ever trod, the feeling of being surrounded by unsuppressed nature, and travelling like a king” (Lamb, 1999:12). From this quotation it follows that the foreign continent is perceived to be a relic of a primal past, sometimes even possessed by “demonic darkness” (Carter *et al.*, 1993:71). Because the light of civilisation has not yet reached the recesses of this primeval place, Conrad, drawing on the Western conception of Africa, depicts it as the centre of evil, a place without social order (JanMohamed, 1988:3), and calls it the “heart of darkness” in his novella. Conyngham’s *The Lostness of Alice* makes repeated mention of the powers of darkness and evil that threaten to wipe out (white) civilisation. At the end of the last chapter the narrator directly equates Africa with sinister powers when he comments: “Across the straits Africa is lost in darkness.” (154)<sup>9</sup>

As for the landscape, it is inhospitable, harsh and hostile, difficult to negotiate, and does not easily yield sustenance to newcomers. Whereas the objects on Crusoe’s island attain their proper value only after he has worked on them, Gore-Browne finds that the fruit trees which he planted before the war have withered and died, and his crops fail

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<sup>9</sup> The last two lines of Roy Campbell’s poem, “Rounding the Cape” (2004):  
The land lies dark beneath the rising crescent,  
And Night, the Negro, murmurs in his sleep.  
also reflect this presentiment.

one after another in the poor soil. Unlike Crusoe, he is unable to regulate, frame and enclose nature (Wittenberg, 1997:140), and be “king and lord of all this country”. Gore-Brown concludes that Africa, the different and dangerous space of otherness (Bowker, 1989:60), is “clearly not to be dominated easily, even by an English gentleman” (Lamb, 1999:73). Before leaving her husband, Lorna Gore-Browne predicts: “Africa will always defeat you in the end!” What is more, prolonged exposure to tropical climes could have an injurious influence on European constitutions (Ching-Liang Low, 1996:28), giving rise to the idea of Africa as being the white man’s grave. Gore-Browne’s brother and his wife suffer from bouts of malaria. The couple cannot acclimatise to life in the tropics and return to London. They have discovered that the peaceful exterior of the North Rhodesian landscape masks a savage dystopia of

poisonous snakes that devoured infants, diseases which could turn urine black and fell a grown man in less than a day, insects which could wipe out cattle, and terrible beasts of prey with growls that could freeze a man’s blood (Lamb, 1999:113-114).

Colonists are not only prone to physical ailments, but their moral restraints and social graces also tend to disintegrate in frontier regions. Abandoned in the wilderness of Africa – the “home of the savage, fallen man” (Van Wyk Smith, 1979:17) – the white men are no longer subject to Western laws and norms. Left to follow their own moral compass, those who do not resist Africa’s and its females’ “primitive”, seductive lure but surrender themselves to debauchery, may be trapped and absorbed into otherness (Stott, 1989:77). The Africa-Europe, black-white union is not to be consummated. Haggard obviates the threat of the union by frequently having the African women killed. Chrisman (2000:56) proposes that Foulata’s death in *King Solomon’s Mines* death “neatly exchanges an imperial threat (miscegenation) for an affirmation (symbolic; eternal devotion of a submissive Africa to her master)”. Explorers who immerse themselves so deeply in the mysteries of the continent that they are incorporated into the “dark” and foreign corpus, may release a perilous and potentially deadly force within themselves (Stott, 1989:75). This happens to Conrad’s Kurtz, who, in the Congo jungle, regresses to a state of nature and unleashes all his “forgotten and brutal instincts” (Conrad, 1899:143). The “unspeakable” act he commits causes cultural disintegration

and the dissolution of self. Because “the wilderness ... pat[s] him on the head” (1899:121), Kurtz “goes native”. Having come into contact with his savage core, he cannot return to civilisation and dies in the wilderness, so becoming part of it.

In contrast to the African wilderness that ensnares Europeans with its insidious and seductive powers, the farm is conceptualised in the *plaasroman* or pastoral farm novel as a safe and stable space: a kind of idyllic pastoral paradise protecting people from nature’s forces. After a heroic struggle – to which Stewart Gore-Browne of the *Africa House* can testify<sup>10</sup> – the wilderness has been subjugated and the family can live in harmony with nature. For the settlers the farm, as an extension of family life, is a utopian setting, providing a sense of belonging and “a secure as well as a realistic, recognisable place of reference in the processing of physical and inter trauma” (Meyer, 2013:116). For a while *The Lostness of Alice*’s Chris also feels at home on the dairy farm with his pseudo-family. Filled with memories of the past, the pastoral farm provides a point of orientation in the quest for identity and meaning (Smit, 2005:3). The opening chapter of Blixen’s *Out of Africa* (1937) reveals how life on the farm has shaped her subjectivity. She writes: “I had a farm” and shortly thereafter proclaims: “Here I am, where I ought to be.” (1937:4) She attaches her existence to the place that defines *here*. “Where is here?” answers the question “Who am I?” The space of the farm thus symbolises her subjective purposefulness.

The farmstead further functions as the threshold between the African wilderness (nature and freedom) and European civilisation (culture and control). This threshold excludes outsiders and encloses and safeguards insiders from threats. (This explains why the other characters initially regard Napoleon in *The Story of an African Farm* and Peter Jacobs in *Lost Ground* with suspicion.) One such external threat that could also be regarded as a moral threat is the city, the site of modernity. Novels such as Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) and Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000) show the city

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<sup>10</sup> The lieutenant-colonel states that he is “wearied by the constant battle to keep the house and estate in order, bridges and roads repaired, roofs and foundations rebuilt because they [are] eaten away by white ants or destroyed by rains” (1999:330).

– the binary opposite of the farm or colonial periphery – to be a morally dubious site of inequity, injustice and corruption. In the metropolitan centre, the son of Paton’s Reverend Khumalo loses his moral bearings and murders a man, an act for which he pays with his own life. The city is also the setting for David Lurie’s (*Disgrace*) sexual transgression, and reverberates with his “morally dubious and ethically shallow” (Smit-Marais & Wenzel, 2013:212) nature. In Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, the pursuit of material possessions marks existence in the metropolis, whereas a rural way of life that upholds traditional values and customs (Gräbe, 2008:170) allows people to live freely and in harmony with nature (De Lange *et al.*, 2008:xxii). In Heyns’s *Lost Ground*, Peter Jacobs conceives of London as a morally bankrupt civilisation “sinking under the weight” of its sophisticated pretensions (238). Pure and wholesome places, like Alfredville (supposedly) and the space of the pastoral farm, keep the metaphoric wilderness of the city and the literal wilderness of nature at bay, and bestow on inhabitants a sense of belonging, meaning and identity. By extension, the farm acts as a symbolic borderland between the other and the self, them and us, the wild and the tame. In this interspace between two margins, imaginative reconstruction and transformation of the self can occur. Those who inhabit in-between spaces are able to imagine their world differently and transition to an alternative state. After having lived on his daughter’s farm, *Disgrace*’s (1999) David Lurie understands how his actions affect other people and he apologises to the family of the student he has seduced. The protagonist in *Lost Ground* arrives at a similar awareness in Alfredville and begs his friend’s widow for forgiveness.

The farm has a range of ideological significances in the South African context. In Van den Heever’s *Somer* (1935), the farm mirrors the national landscape, a milieu inscribed with Afrikaner values and characteristics. The farm is of central importance: not so much as property but because it epitomises a transcendental link between Afrikaner “national and numinous identity” (Smit, 2005:210). The interrelationship between identity, ideology and land in the South African context echoes the *Blut und Boden* theme of nineteenth-century German nationalism (Barnard, 2007:93). In contrast, when the farm novel is “recreated in a parodic postmodern and postcolonial guise” (Viljoen,

2013:xxv), it parodies and criticises an unjust system of patriarchal and colonial domination predicated on exploitative economic relations and unfair labour practices. Postcolonial novels patently illustrate that it is anything but natural to simply “have” a farm as part of an organic feudal order (as Blixen professes). Instead farm ownership is part of the greater undertaking of colonial occupation and capitalism, aimed at consolidating the imperial reign. The ideological representation of the farm has been repudiated by writers such as Schreiner (1883) who, in *The Story of an African Farm*, represents the farm as an “unnatural and arbitrary imposition on a doggedly ahistorical landscape” (Lewis, 1996:44); both Lyndall and Waldo strain to escape the stifling constraints of this classist, patriarchal and racist space. Anti-pastoral farm novels such as Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* (1974), Conyngham’s *The Arrowing of the Cane* (1986) and Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) evince that the farm is a capsule of the “racially and culturally exclusive myths and doctrines” (Van Wyk Smith, 2001:17) of the apartheid order.

In the traditional sense, the space of the house that has become a *Heim* (home) corresponds to that of the pastoral farm in that both present an image of colonial space. Houses and farms represent physical spaces transformed into places that serve as psychological and cultural locations of orientation; they offer their occupants refuge from the alienation and loneliness of the external world, and foster “security, fixity, stable meaning, [and] knowledge of what matters” (Engle, 1989:112). Pallasmaa (1995:135) interprets the concept of home as “a collection and concretization of personal images of protection and intimacy”, and Meyer (2013:124) compares a home to a shelter, “a place of comfort and security”. This perception is confirmed in *The Lostness of Alice*: Alice’s return to her family home on Gatacre Drive would ensure her safety.

In the cultural constructs of houses, family members form emotional attachments to one another. Houses as homes form the space of the family and enable human contact and personal and social attachments. In *Lost Ground*, Peter’s friend, Bennie, seems to envy Peter his home life and his affectionate parents. A home such as Peter’s symbolises attachment, intimacy and belonging; in it, Peter is at home, “comfortable in and familiar

with the everyday world in which [he] lives” (Meyer, 2013:127). Here he experiences a “rootedness” in place, grounded in the familiarity of knowing and being known in a particular place”, as Relph (1976:34) remarks. This is because homes contain the “memories and images, desires and fears” (Meyer, 2013:129) of a person’s childhood days. In memories, one can either cherish “the happiness of the past or reconstruct it as fictional dreams of happiness” (124).

Through memory, houses become associated with childhood homes, family members and relationships. The interpersonal dynamics of houses that have become homes through memory and acts of naming reflect the existence and identity of their inhabitants. Above all, the houses where we were born – our “first universe” (Bachelard, 1994:viii) – and lived in are part of who we are. Harboring memories of the past, domestic spaces anchor us in our places of origin and contribute to the creation of a safe and secure self.<sup>11</sup> Despite Gore-Browne’s mansion’s African name, Shiwa Ngandu looks from the outside “like something one might find in Surrey or Hampshire, belonging to a duke or a lord” (Lamb, 1999:xxiii). Inside are gilt-framed oil paintings of Victorian ancestors on the walls, Shiraz carpets on the floors and a Spode china tea service on the dining-room table, betraying the lieutenant’s ambition to be “lord of the manor” (1999:154), as well as his adherence to his European roots. In *The Good Doctor*, Dr Eloff’s room in the hospital contains only the bare essentials, this testifying to the character’s desire to merely exist, not to live and to feel. Colonel Moller’s room at Maria Mthembu’s place appears just as austere. Not one of the protagonists in the three selected novels has a place he can call home.

Whether farm or house, the places we are in determine who we are. As the poet Noël Arnaud (1950:137) puts it: “I am the space where I am”; by the same token, we are the spaces where we are. Spatial relations interact with the individual identity and shape

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<sup>11</sup> In Victorian times, young men often looked upon houses as a form of confinement (Carter *et al.*, 1993:47) and isolation from society. These men welcomed the opportunity to leave the restriction of their family homes and prove themselves on the open road or in other countries. In a postcolonial era, houses are not places of safety but status symbols, marking material prosperity and personal pride. Gore-Browne’s palatial house is certainly all this.

social subjectivity. We cannot be separated from our position in the world; we are able to think and act only through “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger’s phrase, 1971); that is, being located in place (Smit, 2005:15). Existence is a “context meshed of familiar experience, social relationships [and] patterns of activity in relation to environment” (Desmond, 1971:xvii). Blixen, in her memoirs, links her existence to the British East African landscape:

The chief feature of the landscape, and your life in it was the air .... Up in this high air you breathed easily, drawing in a vital assurance and lightness of heart. In the highland you woke up in the morning and thought: Here I am, where I ought to be (Dinesen, 1937:4).

The loss of an ideologically circumscribed place – a space that humans control by naming, mapping and representing it – and displacement – when the dividing line between home and world becomes indistinct (McClintock *et al.*, 1998:445) – chips away at the essence of our being. Colonisation and the diaspora experience bring in their wake cultural fragmentation, dislocation and exile (Wenzel, 2008:143). When settlers and the colonised are uprooted from their point of origin and orientation, places cease to support selfhood. Having their sense of place disrupted – as happens to Chris (*LA*), Frank (*GD*) and Peter (*LG*) when they depart from familiar quarters – the displaced may experience feelings of alienation and *Unheimlichkeit* (not-at-homeness) and a crisis of personal and social identity ensues. In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda conveys the view that a lost identity can be recuperated and reaffirmed by forging an identifying relationship with the new setting, as Camagu does in the Xhosa village of Qolorha-by-Sea.

## **2.6 Travel**

Travel, the crossing of literal or geographical borders, gives rise to a narrative which, in turn, constitutes the crossing of figurative borders (Kostelac, 2010:59). According to Paul Fussell (1980:38) in *Abroad*, travellers wrote novels of exploration and novels of travel and tourism to retain memories of experiences and to record extraordinary events. After the eighteenth century, writers mainly pursued the exploration area of

travelling. This genre flourished from the end of the nineteenth century until the end of World War I (Ching-Liang Low, 1996:2). Adventure stories (by Haggard, for example) sold newspapers, the vehicle for the publication of these narratives, and adventurers were seen as celebrities. In the stories, authors portray an intrepid hero who explores the “dark” and “hostile” places of the earth. The hero, who is often a disgraced son of the empire, is sent to the colonies to “sow his wild oats” there (Said, 1993:75), so that he can evolve into the model colonial subject. Out in the wilderness and on the outskirts of society, the adventurer enjoys freedom from social restraints and is in a position to challenge the boundaries of convention and to do improper things without appearing transgressive.

Haggard believed that the “urban sins” of over-cultivation, luxury, decadence and excessive consumption converted “maleness into effeminacy” (Ching-Liang Low, 1996:20), and destroyed the “virile energy” that was vital to the eminence of the English nation. Men could test themselves and recoup the traditional values of masculinity, patriotism and militancy by crossing the border to one of the colonies. Frontier civilisations were realms of possibility; they provided young idealists with opportunities for freedom, self-expression and adventure. On this score, Laurence (*GD*) chooses the desolate hospital far away from civilisation for his internship.

From a Freudian point of view, travellers asserted their masculinity, strength and virility when they penetrated the previously unexplored regions of Africa to possess them. While negotiating strange spaces, specifically the different and dangerous space of Africa, travellers journey into the otherness of the continent. With its underground passages and caverns, the continent of the other was looked upon as an enigmatic and erotically charged locale. Apart from being eroticised, the virgin space was also feminised. Associated with women, a “landscape of potential empire” doubled as a “landscape of pornographic fantasies” (Bunn, 1988:84). In *King Solomon’s Mines*, Haggard (1855:40) metonymically associates the African topography with a woman’s body: “at times the mists and shadows beneath them take the form of a recumbent woman, veiled mysteriously in sleep” (Ching-Liang Low, 1996:197). The author

describes the mountains as “shaped exactly like a woman’s breasts”. A character, the Portuguese refugee, Jose da Silvestra, leaves behind a map that instructs the explorers that come after him to “climb the snow of Sheba’s left breast till [they] come to the nipple” (1885:13). That adventure-heroes should explore the female body – albeit (initially) in the form of a continent – is ironic since one of the reasons for leaving the empire is to escape from women and participate in wholly male pleasures (Mills, 1993:77). Frank (*GD*), for one, leaves Johannesburg to get away from his wife and advance his career. In Victorian novels, sons of empire idealise friendships and prize intimacy with great men: the Russian “harlequin’s” unreciprocated devotion to, and Marlow’s initial admiration for Kurtz spring to mind. Even though there are no women on Crusoe’s island, an absence Jon Stratton (1990:155) describes as “pathological”, the island itself functions as the site of otherness, so replacing women. By the nineteenth century, writers such as Haggard more explicitly linked exploration with sexuality than during Defoe’s time. They made use of metaphors of virginity and penetration to describe adventurers’ relationship to women and to the land. Although exploration is still presented as a fundamentally masculine act (Bunn, 1988:7) in these works, the journey motif habitually figures as both imperial and sexual. The African earth is coextensive with the figure of a dark and disempoweringly dangerous woman who tempts the explorer to penetrate her interior. Both earth and women are passive, insidious and irrational forces of potential instability and chaos existing “on the margins of patriarchal knowledge” (Bunn, 1988:23). The native women and the feminised land provide the stage for males to act; women and land exist to be conquered and be inscribed with colonial masculine zeal. Conflated with the virgin space, the instinctual and libidinal African woman signifies raw and uninhibited sensuality (Fanon, 1963:125). Inviting and willing, she is the archetypal nineteenth-century *femme fatale* who strains for the virile imperialist romancer to penetrate and possess her. Kurtz’s “barbarous and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent” (Conrad, 1899:145) Congolese mistress, for one, radiates primal and instinctual energy and fecundity (Fincham, 1990:6-7), whereas his Intended is “a thing of black and white, of sickliness and death.

The final feature of exploratory novels is surveillance of the colonial space from an elevated vantage point (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:226). By being in a position of panoramic observation and distant from the landscape – as both Chris (*LA*) and Peter (*LG*) will be when they exchange Africa for Europe – the viewing subject performs a spatial ordering and considers himself monarch of all he surveys (228). Sight confers visual possession and power: “... the eye ‘commands’ what falls within its gaze” (Pratt, 1992:60). Sight also objectifies the others by pointing up their powerlessness. This ties in with the imperial notion that the country of origin (in most cases Britain) is superior to the colonised country.

Both the earlier texts of exploration and later travel novels reveal that travellers gain access to otherness when they transcend boundaries – not only geographical, but also social and cultural – and make connections with the outside world. Whereas in the earlier adventure narratives the dissimilarity between self and other is reassuring as it substantiates the superiority of the self, simultaneously constituting the other according to this perception, later texts portray travel as the trace of “productive difference” (Stratton, 1990:84): the encounter with others and their culture enlarges vision and results in the realisation that difference does not amount to inferiority. Peter (*LG*), for example, discerns that Alfredville’s citizens have a different outlook on life but are shrewder than him in some respects. Moreover, characters who cross boundaries and expand their horizons, as Peter does, spark off a confrontation with the unexplored aspects of the self. From a distance, they can observe more clearly and notice shortcomings – in others and themselves. Geographical and philosophical separation from familiar contexts facilitates self-analysis and insight. Francis Bacon puts it as follows: “Travel, in the younger sort, is part of education; in the elder, a part of experience.” (1906:54) In its ability to educate and broaden the parameters of experiences, the formative experience of travel is a source of potential insight and wisdom. The protagonists in Gordimer’s *A Sport of Nature* (Hillela), *Isobelle’s Journey* (Aunt Leonora) and *Lost Ground* (Peter) illustrate that travel may act as a transformative experience. The traversal of physical and mental borders opens the characters’ eyes to

South Africa's social and political inequities, culminating in a changed, more critical perspective on their country, self-revelation and spiritual renewal.

## 2.7 Boundaries

This part of the chapter looks at the various types of boundaries. Boundaries may generally be divided into physical and symbolic boundaries. Physical borders are territorial and topographical, and appear on maps or exist because of some feature of the landscape. Symbolic divisions pertain to mental and social barriers. These barriers protect the sense of self but also separate people from those who are different. In a postcolonial era, borders no longer act as boundaries *between*; that is, where things come to an end, but as boundaries *to*: bridges where new things begin.

The topographical borders of Africa were determined at the Berlin Summit in 1884-1885. In 1889, Rudyard Kipling wrote: "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." This statement may have been valid at the time, but is certainly disputable in a postcolonial age. Nevertheless, it does not detract from the fact that we live in a world of lines, compartments and categories, whether visible or not. What is more, there is "an intrinsic relation between *Raum* and *Grenze*, between space and border (Müller-Funk, 2007:75). *Grenzen* or borders refer to gates or barriers; they indicate edges, limits or frontiers, separating one area from another and producing difference (in culture and meaning) between them.

There are broadly two perspectives on physical borders. The dividing lines may indicate topographical or territorial differences. When natural phenomena – the sea, the course of a river, islands and mountains – demarcate cutting points or geographical divisions, borders act as barriers that indicate topographical or territorial differences between here and there, inside and outside. Frederikse (1990:148) states that in the past these divisions often depended on how far a surveyor could see or how far a horse could be ridden. Other theorists (Müller-Funk (2007:81), for instance) emphasise that natural frontiers do not exist; "[e]very border is non-natural, contingent and arbitrary".

The discourse of the ruling class superimposes borders on our consciousness and imbues them with ideological significance and political power. South Africa's geographies of power erected barriers between the citizens of the country. Formal representations of these boundaries and spaces in-between, for instance, maps, serve to organise and manage people and the places they are permitted to occupy. In Schreiner's novels, spaces that separate are imposed to control the inhabitants of the farm, thus reflecting the nature of power relations. The outer edges of the farm space exclude or marginalise (Lyndall and Waldo) and include (Tant' Sannie). The perception of barriers and the otherness and difference onto which they open is subject to a person's specific location in place and time. Borders, therefore, should not be seen as fixed phenomena but as dynamic processes evolving and changing over time (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2004:20), acquiring a history.

Borders have diverse functions and play a pivotal role in the effective functioning of society. Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004:134) affirm that we are all border subjects: "... no life could be lived without restrictions; there is no freedom without restrictions". Barriers impose control on chaos. They order society and enable people to organise themselves and their property on a personal and communal level. By controlling the nature of group membership and belonging, they comfort people in their national, social and cultural identity" (Viljoen, 2013:xi) and furnish a framework for existence. Barriers, furthermore, protect "civilised" and cultural essences against contamination (Rose, 1993:415) from that which is uncontained and wild. The anarchy and barbarism on the outside are often seen to originate from the global south, which the north construes as "the elsewhere, the otherwise and the foreign" (Viljoen (2013:xiii). Hence, borders play a part in all human (inter)actions and social norms and are illuminating in the discourse of identity formation within the self-other division. Rüdiger Görner (2007:63) affirms that we define ourselves by identifying, setting and describing boundaries that divide and distinguish ourselves from others, culture from nature. Without these limits that demarcate identity, our selfhood feels threatened by the "unsafe, barbaric and chaotic world" (Viljoen, 2013:xiii) that is at first glance the obverse of our own culture. Frank (GD) considers it an invasion of his privacy when Laurence moves into the hospital

room with him, so infiltrating the borders Frank has constructed around himself. Briefly put, the sum of borders makes up a person's identity and the meaning of his/her existence (Görner, 2007:74). One may therefore assume that just as there is an intrinsic relation between identity and space, so is there a correlation between identity and border(spaces).

People label terrain to control, define and express ownership and dominance over it. They commodify terrain as property with use and exchange value for the metropolitan centre (Wittenberg, 1997:140). The dynamic of naming – an act of linguistic and imaginative possession – re-enacts the process of territorial invasion and settlement. By appropriating, defining and capturing the place and its people in language, the metropolitan centre aims to subjugate and control the non-metropolitan periphery (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:182) and transform it into a colonial space. Succinctly put, spatiality and colonial discourse and domination go together. “I want to name the name”, Athol Fugard (quoted in Gussow, 1982:79) confesses. “It's a false attempt at an act of possession.” Because Crusoe, the representative of “Western, metropolitan, masculine and rational subjectivity” (Wittenberg, 1997:129), possesses the power of language to name his *Umwelt*, he asserts control and power over the island and marks this location as his dominion, as Lennard (1987:43) notes. Furthermore, Crusoe draws lines to separate one area from another and to stake out his power. The imperial landscape likewise came into being by the mapping and renaming of inhabited terrain, this constituting a literal act of hegemony and supremacy.

In the era of European expansionism, the act of mapping was often performed from the colonising country thousands of kilometres away from Africa; that is, markers were distant from the scene they were mapping. Galgut testifies to this in two of his novels: *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and *The Good Doctor*. In the former the protagonist points out that “the artificial lines marked out on maps” (1991:74) do not correspond to the continent's geographical and political formations, and in the latter novel Dr Frank Eloff muses that the town did not come into existence for the customary reasons: “a river in a dry area, say, or a discovery of gold, some kind of historical event”, but was in

all likelihood “planned on paper, by evil bureaucrats in a city far away, who had probably never been there” (2003:4). These bureaucrats organised and patterned space in “culturally specific ways” (Wittenberg, 2003:129) in order to control the spatial reality of people. In the colonial period, maps were generally part of the “territorial imperatives of a particular political system” (Harley, 1988:278), principally imperialism. Supposedly disinterested depictions of space were sprinkled with the cartographers’ “hidden agendas, partial truth and tacit prejudices” (Jacobs, 1996:225). Europe, as the source of “spatial and cultural meaning” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:91), appeared at the top centre of the map. Foreign spaces had no meaning or ideology to cartographers who dismissed these spaces as ahistorical, measurable and abstract concepts, ready for exploitation and domination because these spaces had not been discovered and named by a European. Hence, mapmakers charted foreign spaces as empty and drew boundaries following “methodical principles and rational logic” (Smit, 2005:21). The ruler-straight frontiers of colonised countries hardly ever replicated the environment. For example, the protagonist of *The Africa House* has an inkling that the King of Italy “simply ran his thumb across a map” to decide on a border between Northern Rhodesia and Angola. The colonial gaze of this mediating subject (Wittenberg, 1997:129) enacted a spatial ordering, with utter indifference to tribal lines of demarcation. Lieutenant-Colonel Gore-Browne adds that it “was, and still is, by no means unknown for half a tribe including the paramount chief to be on one side and an international border, with the rest of the tribe on the other side” (Lamb, 1999:11). Accordingly, boundaries did not reproduce the ethnic, social or linguistic divisions of the native inhabitants. Thus, the “perceived space’ (*le perçu*)” of everyday social life and commonsensical perception was often ignored in the professional, and theoretical ‘conceived space’ (*le conçu*)” (Lefebvre, 1991:210) with which the colonial gaze conquered and took possession of the space. Besides dividing and structuring the topography, maps textualised the spatial reality of non-Europeans by anglicising or corrupting place names or renaming places. Effectively, the cultural power of colonial discourse and representation overwrote the terrain.

The market capitalism of the “global village” has necessitated the “debordering” of the world and the diffusion of boundaries. Economic relations depend on dialogue between the centre and the periphery and the transgression of boundaries. Moreover, diasporas have relocated the other here and the self there (Mongia, 1996:312). In *The Lostness of Alice*, Chris, a South African citizen, travels to Europe, while a German immigrant farms in the Bushmansburg region and a black man wanders around the white suburbs. In a postcolonial period, dividing lines are no longer rooted in a specific location in place and time, but are dynamic processes evolving and changing. Whereas borders used to operate as boundaries *between*, i.e. barriers, they now become boundaries *to*, morphing into bridges and gates that invite transgression, communication and interaction (Newman, 2007:38). So borders are no longer places where things come to a stop, but rather where something new “begins its presencing” (Heidegger, 1971). Viljoen (2013:xliv) conceptualises borders as ambivalent entities, disconnecting and secluding, as well as connecting, desegregating and including. Steyn (2001:199) believes that postcoloniality is the stage characterised by border crossings. “[N]avigation occurs not despite but because of the boundary” (Clingman, 2009:21). Borders may even completely collapse: the razing of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union becoming a democracy are examples. Because different societies co-exist together after borders collapse, they have to learn to cooperate with one another. When this happens, a site of erstwhile antipathy could metamorphose into a place of exchange and communication, interaction and reconciliation (Newman, 2007:38). In a transition zone, difference is diluted, accepted and even prized. Yet, not all border crossings result in, what David Newman (2007:40) terms, a harmonious “hybridity milieu” of balance and resolution where people who were previously removed from one another make contact and cultivate lasting relations (Pratt, 1992:6), as they do in Mda’s *Ways of Dying*. After years and even decades of little contact with the other side, apprehension and distrust, a confrontation could be traumatic and unleash feelings of ill will and antagonism. The original inhabitants of a place may view the invaders as different and inferior others and attempt to push them to the threshold of society. In Joubert’s *Isobelle’s Journey*, the Van Velde uncles feel morally superior to black people

and spurn contact with them, even after the demise of apartheid. In *Lost Ground*, the white people of Alfredville resent the black policeman's promotion and his living with his white wife on the town's main street. As Karl Jaspers (*In Schimanski & Wolfe*, 2007:68) puts it, *Grenze* – with its connotations of frontier, limit and limitation – “drückt aus: es gibt ein anderes”; borders express: there is an other. This other, as constructed by the border, is not the same and does not belong. Border subjects inhabit the liminal zone. Mary Louise Pratt (1992:4) refers to liminal zones as contact zones, “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination”. Thus, colonial encounters take place in contact zones. These zones are characterised by a sense of marginality, ostracism, ambiguity and uncertainty (Viljoen & van der Merwe, 2004:5). Wholeness pivots on individuals discovering who they are in these ambivalent interspaces, so that the new self can begin its “presencing” (254). This also applies to the former colonisers, who supposedly do not have a legitimate claim to land they have appropriated from the indigenous inhabitants.

The liminal space is often occupied by the hybrid or liminal persona; liminality and hybridity therefore go hand in hand. Susan Smit-Marais (2012:4) defines hybridity as a “state of transition that involves the assimilation and transferral of one set of cultural elements – such as ethnicity, language, religion, beliefs and practices – to those of another”. The hybrid, according to Melissa Steyn (2001:138), is someone who has stepped off the “‘pure’ side of the binary pedestal artificially fixed by the Manichean allegory” (*Heart of Darkness's* Kurtz comes to mind), and does not fit in either at the centre or the periphery. In *Lost Ground*, Peter's friendship with a black woman is one of the reasons the white people of Alfredville do not consider him one of them. A hybrid such as Peter dwells in a third, transcultural space (Bhabha, 1994) of interaction where opposites meet; that is, the self encounters the other. Because the syncretised, cross-cultural identity formed in the interstitial realm exists beyond the centre and the periphery, it borrows elements from both and is held back by neither (Viljoen & van der Merwe, 2004:18). Liminal spaces occur beyond society's typical categories, and traditional rules do not govern them. For this reason, philosophers such as Bachelard

(1994:223) attribute sacred properties to intermediary states. The protagonist from Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991:66) avers that the border between South Africa and South West Africa "was a mythical site, where men did battle with guns. Beyond it, as in maps of old, was where monstrous and unknown things dwelled." Bhabha sees borders in a more positive light, observing that the in-between area of the border is an energising place of freedom where creative energies and the imagination's potential are released. In this in-between space of cultural interaction, transition and potentiality (Smit-Marais & Wenzel, 2013:211), the adaptation, reconstruction and transformation of the identity (Viljoen & van der Merwe, 2004:21) as well as the re-invention of the cultural centre can take place. Because the disruption and displacement of traditional suppositions of identity as located in a specific setting (Smit, 2005:13) characterise the liminal zone, it is here where the "genuinely human" comes into being, as Steyn (2001:13) mentions. Viljoen (2013:194) claims that this happens to David Lurie's daughter in *Disgrace*. After her rape, Lucy undergoes a symbolic death when she lets go of her established existence and experiments with an alternative life narrative in which she incorporates herself into "the new dominant narrative of the country" (Smit-Marais & Wenzel, 2013:219). Lucy transcends the inhibitions of her old life when she steps outside a self that has been shaped by the colonial past (213). She forgives her attackers and feels compassion for them (219).

## **2.8 Difference and the other**

On account of the colonisers' apparently advanced culture and world knowledge, they saw themselves as superior to the indigenous peoples of Africa. Christopher Gittings (1996:6-7) correctly claims that the Western European psyche was predicated on the assumption of the "white patriarchal construction of difference". The colonisers also assumed that they could exploit the "inferiority" of the natives by appropriating their land and introducing governmental structures to maintain control. Difference proved to be a political tool in the hands of the colonisers. As critics of colonial practices, Bhabha (1994) and Hall (1994:396) recognise that difference operated as the decisive factor

that separated the colonisers from the indigenous peoples and also ascribed another identity to them.

Colonisers justified the inscription of imperial discourse on the landscape and the erasure of pre-colonial places and people in several ways. Firstly, according to JanMohamed (1988:4, 7), the natives were seen as the epitome of evil, the enemy of values and “the negation of all human decencies”. This one-sided, inferior opinion of the black inhabitants was also shared by other white people: in 1771 a trader recorded that “negroes” were “naturally, constitutionally, and habitually sluggish, lazy, thoughtless, ignorant and bigoted” (Van Wyk Smith, 1979:17). In letters published in 1835, Mary Church mentioned that these people seemingly “ranked so far below the rest of the world in everything that raises man in the scale of creation” (27). Other descriptions are even more strident than Church’s: natives, “under the shape of man”, live like beasts in the woods (Watreman, 1812:286, 302). This negative perception of black people also finds its way into literature. In Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*, the Kukuanas led by Gagool desire to kill Ignosi and, in *She*, the Amahagger tribe tries to eat Mahomed before attacking the rest of the party. In *Out of Africa*, the limited articulation and linguistic “incompetence” Karen Blixen ascribes to Africans reduce them to farm animals. Conyngham portrays the homeless man skulking in the bush near Alice’s house (*LA*) as being similar to an animal, a part of the fauna or the land itself. In *The Africa House* by Lamb, Gore-Browne writes to his aunt Ethel that his Bemba workers “are like children in many ways” (58). The lieutenant-colonel complains that it is hard to uplift them “with their utter disregard for truth .... they are temperamentally lazy and easily led into bad ways” (95). In his estimation, the Bemba workers require authority, direction and control and have to be beaten into submission. The natives’ supposed irrationality, immorality and inferiority then also vindicate Europeans for subverting or silencing their history and culture and appropriating their land – as Gore-Browne does when he builds his mansion on Northern Rhodesian land. These “lesser people” are emptied out of spaces, either metaphorically or literally. In *Buckingham Palace, District Six*, Rive recalls the enforced removals of the non-white population under the policy of racist separatism and the sense of dispossession and dislocation

experienced by them. Heyns's novel shows this policy in practice: the Coloured people live in the townships, while the whites occupy the town.

Colonisers rationalised the overwriting and usurping of foreign terrain by presuming the non-literate indigenous inhabitants to be without linguistic competence, history and heritage. Because the indigenes could not describe and *inscribe* space by linguistic notation (Davis, 1987:68) in the same way as Europeans did, they could not own it. Wittenberg (1997:130) states that imperial power was figured discursively as the power to write, to imaginatively possess in words. In addition, the colonisers also believed that those who collected from the land – the unscientific exploiters of the land – did not agriculturally improve it to reclaim it from the wilderness:

a world where the law of nature reigned, a world over which the first act of culture, Adam's act of naming, had not been performed ... [and] a realm over which God's sway did not extend (Coetzee, 1988:49).

Industry constituted the conquest of the wilderness and nature, the repossession of the realm sundered from God (Coetzee, 1988:50). Consequently, those who sowed seeds and grew crops (the colonists) treated hunter-gatherers (the colonised) as part of the natural ecosystem, thus disqualifying them as owners. The seed-sowers and crop-growers were considered agents of civilisation. The land became the latter's by the logic of labour, production and utility (Frederikse, 1990:157) – this logic being construed as a prerequisite for land ownership. The colonists had an "inalienable moral right", indeed an imperative (Carter *et al.*, 1993:65), to usurp "wasted" resources and increase their output. The social reformer, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (1840:483), submitted that, apart from the Bible, the plough was the white man's tool used to lead Africa and Africans to "a higher level of existence". Labour served two purposes: it established land ownership and pre-eminence through the subjugation of the earth and those who dwelt on it, and it celebrated the life force of the white subject.

The perception of European superiority directly influenced the institution of the policy of apartheid in South Africa (1948-1994) that identified difference to be based on racial qualification and categorisation. Different others were deemed inferior and

marginalised. (This sheds light on the army troops' brutal treatment of the rastaman as well as white racists' mutilation of a black man in *The Lostness of Alice*.) The constructions of difference as inferiority also motivated and justified the colonisation process. Jonathan Rutherford (1990:10) notes that difference – “the effect of the other” – “was the repository of our fears and anxieties” about all that was alien, excessive and impossible to contain. Difference had the potential to unsettle and displace the centre. Since difference encloses traces of the word *déference*, as Derrida points out, difference implies that meaning is continuously deferred, never completed. And that which is incomprehensible “is also detestable. And it has a fascination too ... the fascination of the abomination ....” (Conrad, 1899:69)

The psychoanalyst and cultural theorist, Jacques Lacan (1968), distinguishes between the terms *other*, *Other* and *othering*. The other with the small “o” designates the other who resembles the self (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:170), and is associated with a range of adjectives that vary from emotional and feminine to inferior, savage and damned. The other is the outsider, the object and the slave. Included in the category of “other” are women and non-Europeans; both were viewed in the colonial context as an extension of nature (McEwan, 1996:73). Being other stands for all that is exotic, alien and antithetical to Western European civilisation and the colonial mind-set. *Othering*, a term coined by Spivak, describes the various ways by which the hegemonic strategies of empire supply the terms in which the colonised subject attains a sense of his/her self as somehow “other”, hence different and inferior (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:171). Marlow (*HD*), although critical of the imperial endeavour, employs a variety of othering mechanisms such as racial differentiation while on his journey through Africa, the different and dangerous space of otherness (Bowker, 1989:60):

I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs (1899:82).

Marlow also generalises about black people's apparent agelessness: “The man seemed young – almost a boy – but you know with them it's hard to tell.” (1899:82)

Furthermore, he refers to indigenes in the plural; they are not individuals but a collective.

Antithetical to the subordinate other is the Other with a capital “O”, the *grand autre*. Whereas the other is associated with emotion and femininity, the great Other (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:170) represents reason (intelligence) and masculinity (JanMohamed, 1988:4). The Other is superior, civilised and his goodness ensures salvation. From his position inside the centre (often inside town), the Other masters and marginalises the other (on the outskirts of society, for example in the townships). In a nutshell, the Other is the West, while the (lowercase) other is the Rest. The West relegated<sup>12</sup> the Rest – Africa, Africans and women – to a position of subordination by ascribing to them its worst attributes. The coloniser kept the colonised at a distance and observed them as through glass: what Paul Armstrong (1994:5) would term the “touristic misappropriation of otherness”. In addition to this, while the subject was speaking, the object was silent, or its voice was not heeded or understood, and if it were, it was denigrated. Since Conyngham’s protagonist, Chris, remains entrapped within the division between self and other, he pays scant attention to the existence of black people. Galgut’s speaking subject, Frank, submits that the silence between him and his African mistress suits him; he does not wish to connect with her on a person level. Spivak (1990:109) voices the predicament of the colonised peoples as follows: “... my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine, [is] a mere futility”. Demonstrations of such miscommunication may be found in *The Tempest* (1623), *Heart of Darkness* and Coetzee’s *Foe*. In Shakespeare’s play, the island functions as a site of otherness. In this other space the Europeans hear mysterious, magical noises which they are unable to interpret. When Marlow is in the “other” world (Africa), he and the “pilgrims” on the steamboat cannot tell whether the roll of drums coming from the shore means “war, peace or prayer” (Conrad, 1899:105). Cruso in *Foe* also does not comprehend his companion’s tongue. As a matter of fact, the master restricts and inhibits his slave’s voice by regulating Friday’s

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<sup>12</sup> Said and feminists would argue for the use of the present tense. In their opinion, this still happens today.

understanding of speech, so keeping a tight rein on him (De Lange *et al.*, 2008:122). Ironically, while everybody listens to Kurtz, they hear “little more than a voice (Conrad, 1899:120). What they hear is the sound of the wilderness echoing “loudly within him” (133).

In the colonial years, the centre did not pay attention to the voices from the periphery nor did it enter into their life-world because it had preconceived notions about what these voices would say. The centre circumscribed and controlled otherness without making allowances for response or revision. Dialogical and reciprocal engagement between the First World and the Third World did not take place; sexual relations imperilled the master’s identity and begot malaise and moral degeneration (Mohanram & Rajan, 1996:54). The “slaves” experience did not move the master; the master conceived of them as entities without individuality or history and recoiled from relations with them. Binary systems – such as the Manichean aesthetic and apartheid – are instances of that response to alterity which refuses to recognise the “full, equivalent subjectivity” (Cornwell, 1989:4) of others and validates their objectification and dehumanisation.

We define ourselves against others; we construct and realise the essence of our being in opposition to that which is different to and distant from us (McEwan, 1996:6). In apartheid South Africa, whites delimited their distinctiveness against the difference of the other races – the self’s whiteness against the other’s ostensible “wildness” (De Kock, 2006:176). Distance serves to confirm and compound the others’ foreign, fearful status and is a rationale for the other’s categorisation, marginalisation and displacement (Smit, 2005:90). Dissimilarity, furthermore, reassures the self. A resemblance to the other, such as Marlow (*HD*), experiences when he sees a chain-gang of imprisoned Africans, undermines the sense of self. Thus, the other provides a negative reference point for subjectivity, a kind of inverted self-image (Fleming, 1992:93). Steven Thiele (1991:184), in “Taking a sociological approach to Europeanness (whiteness) and aboriginality (blackness)”, proposes that “blackness and whiteness be understood as a pair .... European colonists became whites only in parallel with their identification of

those they colonised as blacks.” Steyn (2001:16) agrees: “... the purer white the identity, the more dependent it is on its black other”. It follows that the configuration of the other is contingent on the configuration of the self. Self and other are thus co-created; the other’s alleged lack of presence functions as the foil against which the self articulates itself as the “privileged site of presence” (Stratton, 1990:44). Put differently, the oppressor associates his/her sense of self with the alterity of the oppressed. In this way, the oppressed determines and dictates the identity of the oppressor. Seeing establishes difference and the look or glance from “the place of the other” fixes the centre (Fanon, 1986:109) and establishes its essence. This might explain why Marlow (who is not a typical colonialist) does not want to be ‘fixed’ by the helmsman’s dying glare: “I had to make an effort to free my eyes from his gaze and attend to the steering.” (Conrad, 1899:118)

Nevertheless, the shaping of self in contrast to another has damaging consequences for both. What affects the one affects the other. Jean-Paul Sartre (1965:28) submits that “the dehumanization of the oppressed ... becomes the alienation of the oppressor”. A consciousness that will not engage with others on equal ground remains encumbered by its own assumptions (McEwan, 1996:28). Such a consciousness stunts its own growth and limits its potential. According to Steyn (2001:161), the remedy is to re-evaluate past discourses about self and other, listen to others’ voices, look at them through different lenses and treat them as individuals. This becomes possible if one realises that we ourselves are others among others (Lewis, 2000:65) and that difference means difference, not inferiority. What is more, a democratic and unified society cannot be attained while denying dissimilarity. Those who are able to accept otherness on equal terms and establish a truly reciprocal understanding (Armstrong, 1994:3), will find their identities relieved of their historical constrictions and achieve an integrated selfhood.

## 2.9 Identity

*The Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary* (1996:669) describes identity as “the state or quality of being a specified person or thing, which embraces who or what a person is” or “individual characteristics by which a person or a thing can be identified”. *The Millennium World Book Dictionary* (2000:1048) puts it as follows: identity is “who a person ... is, which aspects form his/her individuality”. To summarise these definitions, identity denotes the characteristics and qualities, attitudes and attributes, beliefs and ideas combined with life experiences that contribute to a person or a group of people feeling different from others, in other words unique. These characteristics and life experiences form the basis of an assortment of narrative patterns that constitutes individuality and personality. The stories of subjectivity determine the negotiation of a person’s place in the world.

From the above definitions it emerges that identity is a social construct, a collective phenomenon (Viljoen & van der Merwe, 2004:177) founded on the premise of belonging to a certain group of people who live within the same *Umwelt* (environment) and share values and belief systems (for instance, apartheid morality). *Lost Ground’s* Nonyameko informs Peter that because humans are relational beings, they derive their identity from their friends and other people around them (96). Numerous factors such as language, customs and religion (Dent, 2007:5) govern the collective phenomenon of identity. As these factors evolve, so does the sense of self. On the other hand, self-definition depends on disassociation from those who function as objects. Women especially have been regarded as second-class citizens and even more so black women, as Mda illustrates in his novel, *The Madonna of Excelsior*. Black women suffer a double burden of race and gender as they are seen as objects instead of subjects. It is exactly this situation that Mda (1994) feels obliged to rectify in the above-mentioned novel, as he feels that previously in novels by white South African writers, black people “only appeared as objects in stories that presented as the subjects white liberal protagonists who bravely fought the dragon of apartheid on behalf of black people”. In the same novel, Mda also narrates how black women are treated as “quarry” by white men;

hence, debased as prey and animals to be caught and contained (Lockett, 1988:21). White women – like their husbands – humiliate and degrade black women, as Cornelia Cronje does when she forces her employee, Niki, to strip (Mda, 1996:41).

The features that people have in common with others provide them with a frame of reference and give meaning to their existence. Identity, therefore, “derives from a shared cultural remembering” (Rutherford, 1990:223) of mutual experiences and cultural codes. Cultural identity may be comprehended in two ways. Firstly, cultural identity is an immutable essence that presents people with “one true self” that transcends the fluctuations of time, place and history. Antonio Gramsci (1988:326) avers that we are a “*précis* of the past”: the past endows us with a secure sense of who we are. This quintessentially static notion of identity has been at the centre of cultural thinking during the imperialist period (De Lange *et al.*, 1995:39) and explains why Blik and Dolly (*LG*) decry their daughter’s desire to marry a black man. (Apartheid, too, made use of the same essentialising rhetoric.) In terms of this conception of identity, the discourse of self and other need not be evaluated, nor is it essential to appraise oneself and alter one’s perceptions.

In terms of the second interpretation, identity is in a dynamic and perpetual state of formation. As a consequence of “the globalising gesture” of the postmodern condition, individuals migrate and cross boundaries, so penetrating global spaces. These individuals may initially be prone to feelings of “alienation, ennui, the *unheimlich* and the sense of being an outsider” (De Lange *et al.*, 2008:xii). In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow’s position as master proscribes and precludes dialogue with his African crew. Having oriented himself in space and time to the best of his ability and re-evaluated his former conception of himself and others, the character discovers that he also does not belong in English society any longer and experiences exclusion. When individuals accept the others’ equal right to existence, interact and collaborate with them (something Marlow’s culture frowns upon) and recognise them as a different but still equal extension of the self – that is, when people discover the other in the self – they tend to make a psychological adjustment and reject the dualisms of the Manichean aesthetic on which

self-concept has formerly been founded. The old identity is reinterpreted or even deconstructed and a new cross-cultural subjectivity emerges. Belle, in Joubert's *Isobelle's Journey*, discards her white racial and cultural subjectivity after falling in love with an Indian man. In Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior*, the white lawyer makes a psychological adjustment and revises his previous generalisations that "all black people [a]re bad" (Mda, 2002:150). Adam de Vries successfully establishes cross-cultural communication with Viliki, once at the forefront of the people's revolution; this association symbolising the hybridisation of races and cultures on a personal level (Zulu, 2006).

Hence, the traditional view of identity as a fixed and static essence, an "already accomplished fact", according to Hall (1994:392), is superseded by that of identity as being in flux. David Lurie (*Disgrace*) is a respected university professor, a rapist and a concerned father at various points in his life. In *The Good Doctor*, Dr Frank Eloff's existence becomes connected to Laurence's (59), and he compares himself and the young doctor to two strands in a rope that are "twined together in a tension that united [them]" (170). Laurence, in turn, follows Frank around like a shadow (42), and soon it is Laurence, not Frank, who looks "old and tired and jaded" (92). Peter Jacobs, in *Lost Ground*, does not assume – like Frank and Laurence – another person's identity, but several personas within himself. Peter introduces himself as a journalist, but later emerges as a detective. When his false accusations induce his best friend to shoot himself, Peter, in effect, becomes a murderer. At the end of the novel, he plays the role of a child in need of comfort. These illustrations make clear that what we are is a matter of "being" – something already existing and part of the past – as well as of "becoming". Ali Shariati (1979:92-93) states that when we make choices our being migrates within ourselves. Geert Hofstede (1994) endorses this viewpoint when he avows that we learn culture and do not inherit it. Culture derives from a person's social environment, not from an individual's genetic makeup.

Being "subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power" (Sewlall, 2004:192), and a process of interaction with these contexts, a cultural consciousness depends on

shared memories of the past that are expressed in the present through the stories we tell, the myths we believe, the rituals we uphold and even the dreams we have (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2004:21). Chris (*LA*) and Peter (*LG*) are both storytellers: Chris, who persists in his South African apartheid identity, writes untrue letters to a South African newspaper; Peter, who sees himself as British, works as a journalist for an English newspaper. Elements of cultural subjectivity disclose their desires and fears, and have a bearing on social behaviour. These elements enable people to understand their place in the world, and satisfy their need for meaningful relationships with others (Viljoen & van der Merwe, 2004:89). Stories, myths, rituals and dreams thus explain the connection to other people and the past and are integral to our construction of a structured and purposeful identity and existence. Moreover, they inform future choices. Hall (1994:394) intimates that “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past”. Whether we are aware of this or not, the elements of identity, as well as our personal enactment of them, are scripted by hegemonic ideologies. For instance, after Hussein’s death, Belle effectively loses the essence of her being and becomes a synthesis of socially-constructed discourses. The discourse of dominance further has the power to create new heroes, new places, new histories and even new identities (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2004:20). (Consider South Africa’s current government’s renaming of places and relabeling apartheid’s “terrorists” as “struggle heroes”.) In this manner the discourse transmits the dominant frame of sense-making.

During the rule of the National Party (1948-94), the master narrative of colonialism and apartheid regulated politics and shaped selfhood, as it does Chris’s (*LA*) and the Van Blerks’ (*LG*). The dictatorial discourses of a white minority group turned whiteness into an ideological project on which to model a monologic racial and cultural identity. The readers of Sally’s newspaper (*LA*) and the Van Blerk couple confirm that whiteness was coterminous with superiority and only whites could occupy positions of privilege and power. The state enforced white supremacy on the grounds that whites purportedly brought civilisation, progress and development, in addition to Christianity, to Africa. The white population imagined themselves to be a chosen people – similar to the Biblical

Israelites (Steyn, 2001:29). On account of their being stewards of the new world, they were entitled to the land which they had improved and “civilised” (Wittenberg, 1997:141) and had divine sanction to “smite the heathen” (Steyn, 2001:29). In short, whites defined who they were in terms of ownership and dominance. As the *baas* or master, the white man was seen as intellectually and morally equipped to subordinate people of colour, as Robinson Crusoe does Friday. To safeguard their sovereignty and subjectivity, whites maintained a political-racial distinction. The indigenes were deemed an extension of nature; accordingly, the inverse of culture and civilisation. They were “named, described, labelled, stigmatized, marginalized and categorized” (Dent, 2007:152) as per the master narrative. In Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country*, a white man calls Reverend Stephen Kumalo a “good kaffir” (1948:31). Non-whites were denied a stable sense of self and continually ejected and displaced. Rive comments in *Buckingham Palace District Six* on the forceful removal of the residents of District Six from their homes and their relocation to the Cape Flats.

One may consider apartheid as the confirmation of a neo-colonial outlook that persisted in Africa. Since a Eurocentric worldview benefited Euro-Africans in the past, “it [wa]s relied upon to provide bearings for the future” (Steyn, 2001:93). *Présence européenne* (Rutherford, 1990:233) could very well still be a constitutive element of a white South African identity and perspective. According to Steyn (2001:31), South Africans of British descent tend to cling to their European identities. In Conyngham’s text, Chris and his girlfriend, Sally, think of themselves as English, even though their families have been in Africa for five generations. Peter Jacobs (*LG*), similarly, insists on his British identity. *Disgrace*’s David Lurie, again, frequently alludes to European intellectuals in his communications and writings, so aligning himself with Europe. In contrast, people of Dutch derivation are inclined to feel that they are one with the soil (a variation of the German *Blut und Boden* earth-mysticism). John Dalton in *Heart of Redness* (2000:160) points out that the Afrikaner “belongs to the soil. He is of Africa. Even if he is not happy about the present situation he will not go anywhere. He cannot go anywhere.”

Since the advent of a black-majority government – the postmodern “return of the repressed” (Engle’s [1989] phrase) – wide-ranging changes have taken place in South Africa. Besides the land-claims initiative alluded to before, changes include socialist reforms, the legalisation of strikes led by workers’ unions, and affirmative action – which some, especially those who do not profit from a pro-black quota system (encompassing the workplace, sports, politics) judge as a new form of racism or reverse discrimination. The practical implication of these reforms is that black elite and middle classes have emerged, while the white population is politically subordinated. In *The Good Doctor*, a black woman occupies the position of superintendent of a hospital and outranks the white doctors. Especially white men, whom some still see as the oppressors, find it increasingly difficult to obtain employment in the post-1994 dispensation, disputing the delusional structure of superiority based on race. With the polarities of the modernist master narrative of whiteness becoming fragmented, alternative and competing narratives replace it. Thus, whiteness is no longer the measure of all things. In fact, being “white means that one is a has-been, discredited, untrusted ... whiteness is a discard” (Steyn, 2001:91).<sup>13</sup> No longer an “internal, immutable essence” (Steyn, 2001:xxx), whiteness has become irrelevant. Moreover, whiteness is construed as rendering whites uniformly complicit for the distress and devastation caused by racial discrimination; it has become a position of disgrace and despair (De Kock, 2006:186). One is reminded of Conyngham’s words (interview with Blair, 2003:75): “It’s a sense of insecurity of being part of a minority culture, being a piece of the flotsam and jetsam of a former empire ...” All three protagonists discussed in this thesis grapple with feelings of uncertainty and apprehensiveness. Although in a different context, Frantz Fanon designates people who have been thus dispossessed as the wretched of the earth (which is also the title of his book on the colonised people of Africa, Asia and Latin America). Fanon describes the wretched as “without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless...” (1963:176), which encapsulates the emotions of Euro-Africans (for example Chris (*LA*), Frank (*GD*) and Peter (*LG*)) after having had to

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<sup>13</sup> Steyn quotes a dentist she interviewed.

relinquish authority and dominance, power and privilege as well as uncontested entitlement to the land. Steyn (2001:155) submits that the disintegration of a belief system can be very traumatic; in fact, “like the end of the world ...”. The dissolution can subvert social roles as well as destabilise the interpretation of personal identity that is tied in with these roles, this stirring up feelings that range from grief, disorientation and nostalgia, to freedom and excitement.

Those who before were in a position of privilege and defined themselves in disassociation from other racial groups, now have to contend with a dramatically altered reality that “does not support, and indeed is hostile to, many of the taken-for-granted assumptions of superiority and entitlement” (Steyn, 2001:152). In the ambiguous and contradictory space of a society they do not regard as theirs any longer, whites ordinarily cannot negotiate a place that supplies the security of a stable and shielded sense of self. Schreiner’s Lyndall and Waldo, who both desire “a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow ... an identity better than that of visitor, stranger, transient” (Coetzee, 1988:8), feel out of place in their interstitial non-position. Chris Jameson (*LA*) and Peter Jacobs (*LG*) also experience ostracism and substitute one society for another in the search for affinity. David Lurie, for a similar reason, leaves the city and flees to the farm. What he took as coherent and constant has become decentred and unfixed. In other words, the postmodern condition of identity as “a process of interaction with various geographical, social and cultural contexts over a period of time” (De Lange *et al.*, 1995:143) – this multimodality countering the conceptualisation of identity as static and stable – has caught up with South Africa’s white population.

That the former settlers (and especially males, according to Steyn, 2001:16 and Debra Castillo, 2007:116) have undergone and may still suffer from an existential crisis of identity concomitant with feelings of ambivalence about the continent and their place in it is made evident in two postcolonial novels: Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Mda’s *The Madonna of Excelsior*. In the former novel, David Lurie is unwilling to articulate an identity along new lines when present political structures no longer underwrite past

narratives of whiteness. Lurie does not wish to discard the inflated and narcissistic “perception confabulated as part of the colonial master narrative” (Steyn, 2001:138). The character, furthermore, dismisses guilt as a pointless and unconstructive emotion, and averts an admission of personal culpability by ascribing the seduction and rape of one of his students to Eros. It seems that corporeal connections with women provide a form of escape from his dysfunctional self. Unable to reciprocally relate to other human beings, he withdraws in the cultural areas of his life, notably art (poetry and music).<sup>14</sup> Lurie’s only true friend is a crippled dog, dubbed Driepoot, that he eventually has to put down. Like Lurie, Tjaart Cronje in *The Madonna* is emblematic of the limited white male consciousness that demarcates itself in opposition to others as per the Manichean allegory (JanMohamed, 1988). Apartheid power structures have indoctrinated Tjaart to think of blacks as communists and criminals. When power changes hands, the character is stripped of his identity as master, yet Tjaart refuses to conform to the new society. The character remains caught up in defunct discourses that deem the destruction of the other’s distinctiveness as integral to the functioning of the self (Steyn, 2001:10). Tjaart seemingly equates separateness from other races with having respect for oneself and one’s culture. In the face of the growing Africanisation of his country he feels besieged and becomes embittered toward those he has formerly oppressed. In *The Lostness of Alice*, Conyngham suggests that similar sentiments are shared, at least in part, by a percentage of South Africa’s white population who (like Tjaart and Chris) experience an acute sense of loss – of home, of selfhood and of certainty and safety. Aware of their marginalised, contradictory non-African identity on an African continent, they may feel undervalued, isolated and marginalised, and even victimised. Consequently, since apartheid’s abandonment the former colonisers have undergone and probably are still undergoing an existential crisis of identity. *The Madonna of Excelsior* insinuates that Tjaart’s spiritual deformity causes his physical deterioration. The character dies, rather grotesquely (as Barris, 2001:79 puts it), by “political rigour mortis”. On a more optimistic note, Tjaart’s Coloured half-sister adapts and forgives his

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<sup>14</sup> One cannot help noticing a parallel between Lurie’s psychological withdrawal and Coetzee’s physical withdrawal by emigrating to Australia.

behaviour toward her. In this fashion, Mda makes a case for emancipation through postmodern hybridisation.

What is the way forward for the approximately four million or so people of European descent remaining in South Africa in the light of their being outnumbered 1 to 10 by the other races? After 1994, authors appear to advocate that all citizens of the country, specifically whites, should face the truth about the past rather than pretending it has not happened. The past permeates the present and governs the future, and apartheid's essentialising categories still inform political, social and individual subjectivity. Whites have to accept accountability for conscious collusion with the system (as in the case of Tjaart), or in committing acts of omission or passivity (*Disgrace's* David Lurie). This holds true for both Afrikaans and English-speaking white people. Steyn (2001:104) maintains that in South Africa the tendency exists to conflate racism with apartheid. A percentage of the English-speaking population blame apartheid on their white Afrikaans-speaking counterparts. Since English people did not identify with Afrikaner nationalism, they are supposedly not implicated in racism. Pointing the finger at Afrikaners relieves the English from responsibility and eases their conscience. Nevertheless, *all* white people's lifestyle of privilege depended on the deprivation of others. The trader John Dalton, who is white outside but "a raw umXhosa" on the inside (Mda, 2000:75), berates his English acquaintances in *The Heart of Redness*:

[you] prided yourselves as liberals. But now you can't face the reality of a black-dominated government. It is clear that while you were shouting against the injustices of the system, secretly you thanked God for the National Party which introduced and preserved that very system for forty-six years (161).

In one way or another the majority of South Africa's white people are complicit in the injustices of the past and have a responsibility towards those whom they have previously subjugated.

In Steyn's (2001:98) opinion, some white people believe that the democratic elections equalised society and, on this score, they are exempt from further compromise. Yet statistics reveal that South Africa is still riven with financial and social disparities and

“caught in absolute contests” between hopelessness and hope for the future (De Kock, 2006:186). At the beginning of 2012 the South African Institute for Race Relations announced that 29 per cent of black people were unemployed and the average income per black person was R21 075 per year. In contrast, only six per cent of whites did not have jobs and the average income was R149 000 per annum. Bearing this discrepancy in income in mind, the awareness of guilt and the need to make restitution may account for the mood of confessional introspection, questioning and self-censure that surfaces in contemporary South African literature, including these three writers’ works. Self-appraisal and re-evaluation of the effects of colonisation on the self as well as the other have induced the more liberal section of the population to orient themselves again in space and time and reconsider their place and purpose in the new South Africa. The discovery of a new personal and public consciousness starts when making contact with others and realising that individuality comes about because of, and not despite, difference. Consequently, the more liberal people discern qualities of the other in themselves and define their identity in difference rather than in essence (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:167). Characters such as Peter (*LG*) and, to a lesser extent, Frank (*GD*) have rejected the imperial idea of an essentialised, monological identity and now draw on varied choices of redefinition. The search for new subjectivities within inclusive global structures, according to Bhabha and Mda, paves the way for the hybridisation of cultures and the transformation of society.

## **2.10 Narrative frame: The detective/mystery novel**

In an endeavour to uncover the identity of the guilty, a detective also has to familiarise himself with novel locations and make contact with others. The three authors investigated all use the detective novel as a frame, in addition to relying on literary strategies of intertextuality and irony to create a wider context for interpretation. Common characteristics of the genre are outlined in the following paragraphs. In subsequent chapters these characteristics are applied to the texts.

The detective novel is a complicated and extended riddle or mystery cast in fictional format, principally in the present tense. Traditionally, writers of detective fiction utilise a simple and straightforward style, since a “literary” style, awash with long descriptive episodes, word pictures, atmospheric concerns and lingering over the characters’ temperaments, acts “as a clog in the narrative machinery” (Wright, 1927) and impedes the actional flow by distracting readers from the facts.

Detective fiction can generally be classified as cosy or hard-boiled (Wiehardt, 2014). The cosy type can be described as a mystery in which the characters in the story or the readers are not singularly distressed by the murder; it is not personally threatening. Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot and the Miss Marple stories could be mentioned as examples. In the hard-boiled story, a sense of reality and inclusivity permeates the text. The murder does not take place in the drawing-room or library but rather on the street or in some such realistic locale. In Conyngham’s novel, an unknown individual or individuals snatch Alice while she is walking to a friend’s house. The crime strikes home and the readers empathise with the victim and the bereaved. The mood is mostly gloomy. In the light of South Africa’s violent history, the detective genre has integrated itself in this format into the country’s literature, including the three novels that fall into the hard-boiled category.

The material for the plot of the detective story is realistic and everyday. Bizarreness or fantasy is not suitable subject matter. The plot features a violent crime, preferably murder, which seems to be the perfect crime. It may appear to be an accident or suicide, but it should not actually be so. The offence has to occur before the narrative action gets underway – that is, within the first three chapters of the story – but its consequences should make up the rest. *The Lostness of Alice* starts with Alice’s disappearance; *Lost Ground* with Peter’s return to his hometown to write a newspaper article on his cousin’s murder. (In *The Good Doctor*, though, Frank’s mistress disappears only at the end of Chapter Thirteen, while Laurence and Tehogo go missing in the penultimate chapter.) From the beginning the detective is actively engaged in

investigating the mystery; he<sup>15</sup> does not simply come up with one crucial clue at the end. The antagonist must also be introduced early in the story as one of the suspects, because if he enters too late, readers will feel cheated of a fair chance to identify the perpetrator. As there is only one criminal, there is one detective (who may or may not have an aide). The detective usually belongs to one of four archetypes: the amateur detective (Miss Marple and the three selected works' protagonists), the private investigator (C. Auguste Dupin, Hercule Poirot), the police detective (Inspectors Morse and Barnaby of television fame) and the forensic specialist (Quincy M.E., Dr Kay Scarpetta and CSI). Detectives do not have to be authentic sleuths; they may have other means of earning a living and supporting themselves. Outside interests and hobbies lend interest and credibility. Some detectives may be doctors of medicine (Quincy, Scarpetta and Frank Eloff (*GD*)) or lawyers, while others are former lawbreakers; Arsène Lupin, for one, is a thief turned detective. Of late the journalistic crime expert has been a popular figure in both British and American detective fiction. Such extra-legal detectives also figure in *The Lostness of Alice* (Sally) and *Lost Ground* (Peter). It is fortuitous if these extra-legal detectives have police connections. Sally, in Conyngham's novel, assists Detective Sergeant Hannes Marais, while Peter's former best friend is a police station commander (although Peter also suspects him of being the murderer).

Peter Jacobs has clearly followed a trail of false clues to deduce that Sergeant Nienaber has killed Peter's cousin, yet Peter is not presented as an ineffectual fool. Modern-day detectives should not be superior to the reader (as Hercule Poirot and Sherlock Holmes are) and misjudgements make them more human. Readers can follow such characters as equals, match wits with them and share in their discoveries. In contrast, agents of law and order of the late nineteenth century possessed exceptional acuity and attainment. These, usually British detectives, were colourful and eccentric characters. Wrestling with a lawless world, they were the embodiment of innocence and honesty,

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<sup>15</sup> With the exception of Sally in *The Lostness of Alice*, the other detectives are all male. For this reason, the masculine pronoun will be used when referring to a detective/detectives in general.

and courage and chivalry. In recent times these intelligent, inspired and intuitive super-sleuths have been replaced by somewhat unimaginative, hardworking middle-class investigators with whom readers can identify. The “ordinary” investigators form relationships, acquire histories and undergo character development.

The detective solves the mystery by looking for clues – footprints, traces of cloth or hair, or a distinctive cigarette or cigar – and then analysing or forensically examining them. The novelist informs the reader of all the circumstantial evidence. Though the evidence may seem superficially convincing, it initially points to the wrong person and heightens the mystery. A bungling police force arrests this person.

In the postmodern detective novel, rational and scientific methods often fail to ascertain the truth. In such instances the detective may have recourse to the supernatural or to the press. In *The Lostness of Alice*, Alice’s mother consults a psychic. In the traditional detective story (as in the aforementioned text), supernatural elements enhance the atmosphere or plot but should not solve the mystery. The investigator may also call upon the press to publicise the case and request information from readers. Edgar Allan Poe, the originator of the modern detective story, made use of newspaper clippings to add a touch of realism to the genre. Poe also presented the logical analysis of accumulated data and forensic examination as a means of unravelling the crime (Wright, 1927).

In the traditional detective novel, everything in the plot converges on the surprising and startling denouement (Green, 1997:214). The novelist should wait as long as possible to make the identity of the culprit known. The culprit must not be disclosed accidentally or coincidentally, neither should s/he of his/her own free will confess. Instead, the brilliantly logical yet slightly eccentric detective explains the steps s/he followed to arrive at the truth. These steps comprise the orderly observation and analysis of data, shrewd logic, and perspicacious inference and deduction. Because *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground* are literary detective novels where the emphasis falls on aesthetic sensibility, technical virtuosity and authorial self-consciousness (Black,

2010:78), the detective does not clear up the mystery. (In *Lost Ground*, the murderer does this, not the detective.)

When detectives do reveal the murderers, they succeed in neutralising the upheaval in society and restoring order. On this score, Green (1997:180) postulates that the detective novel plays on a specific class's fears of social disturbance, as a rule a privileged majority who idealises a rural lifestyle and has everything to lose by change. Social reassurance is one of the main reasons for the genre's popularity. In the traditional detective novel, deviants distort the social fabric. Criminality derives from individual perversion, not social or structural malfunction. When the representatives of law and order discover the offending individuals, they solve the mystery and mend the holes in the social fabric. In so doing, they prevent the overturning of society and prove that the social order is not in a state of complete "unravelling and decay and horror" (Conyngham, interview with Blair (2003:85). In traditional British detective fiction, the police assist the detectives in protecting the innocent and bringing the wicked to justice. In contrast to the British version that never puts the law on trial, the American genre is more radical and like politically-motivated South African crime stories tends to question an "aspect of law, justice, or the way society is run" (Symons 1972:175).

## **2.11 Narration and narrative strategies**

Whether detective novel or any other genre, every literary composition includes a real author, an implied author, characters and readers, as Wayne Booth propounds in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Smit-Marais (2012:38) points out that when a character in a story is the narrator, he bridges the textual gap between the author and the reader by acting as mediator. His impressions interpose between the readers, the characters' emotions and actions. The personality, beliefs and values of the narrator affect the representation of the events in the story. The narrator – as the source of information – selects perspectives and events to be presented and omits others. As such, focalisation hinges on his point of view. A reliable narrator is one who subscribes to and acts in accordance with the norms of the text, which agree with the implied author's

norms. The narrator “sees” with the implied author’s eyes and “speaks” with his tongue (Smit-Marais, 2012:37). Collectively, narration and focalisation influence readers’ responses to and judgment of characters and events (Smit-Marais, 2013:38). Since the dramatised I-narrator inhabits the fictional world, readers presume that they have ample access to this person’s thoughts and feelings (Smit-Marais, 2013:120). Nevertheless, his rendition of events remains more biased than that of a third-person omniscient narrator.

Giving an inside view of the narrator is one technique writers use to cultivate sympathy for him. Another way relates to the knowledge the readers have of this character’s thought processes and feelings. The more access readers have to the focaliser and the more sympathetic they feel toward him, the more the distance between them and him decreases and the more likely readers will be to accept his version of the narrative action. In short, a link exists between narrative distance, the readers’ sympathy for the focaliser and the credence they give to his opinions.

#### 2.11.1 Intertextuality

In a postmodern and postcolonial context, the real author of a text may challenge the authority and impartiality of the narrator-focaliser by resorting to intertextual referencing. Intertextuality (a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966) is one of the heterogeneous modalities within a postmodern and postcolonial discourse (Slemon, 1991:3) and features in all three texts under review. This narratological device refers to a writer borrowing from or transforming an earlier, usually authoritative, text or, alternatively, a reader referencing such a text while reading another (Adam & Tiffin, 1991:5), consequently transplanting both in a different kind of context. Postmodernism coincides with intertextuality in that both engage with history by critically assessing and commenting on previous documents and discourses. Postmodernism and intertextuality both confront forms of past knowledge and show these to be processes of interaction with varied political, social and cultural power structures. Intertextual enquiry illustrates the revisionist and reconfigurative nature of writing and reading: works and their

meanings shape and are shaped by other works by way of allusions and citations. As Antonia Susan Byatt (2000:46) explains, a text is “all the words that are in it, and not only those words, but the other words that precede it, haunt it, and are echoed in it”. Such literary reiteration ensures that a text comes into being in the presence of an unbounded, illimitable weave of different voices, connections and associations, paraphrases and fragments, texts and con-texts (Kristeva, 1980:66). The transformative narrative (Turk’s definition, 2001:296) functions as a palimpsest – layers of voice and history inscribed on a preceding creation. While the second narrative places and dis-places the traces of the first, both narratives are adapted and transformed, and new meaning comes to the surface. Texts should therefore be read and interpreted beyond their immediate contexts (Viljoen, 2013:xxvi), in a new register. By (ironic) revision and (subversive) reconfiguration, intertextuality – similar to postmodernism – stretches textual boundaries (Smit-Marais, 2012:166). Postmodernism, by the same token, opens out and dissolves boundaries between different practices, disciplines and discourses (Bowker, 1989:56), thereby revealing all interpretations to be ideologically circumscribed.

By transgressing textual boundaries to enter into dialogue with earlier material, narratives relying on intertextual referencing, not only investigate the past, but also rewrite it from an alternate, often ironical or critical, vantage point. When intertextual linkage to an earlier text contradicts the newer narrative and brings to light its omissions and preferences, “relativity and partial truths” (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2007:7), it lays bare – as postmodernism and postcolonialism also do – residual politics, usually of the colonial era. The counter-discursive technique of inserting metanarratives thus destabilises the absolutisms created by centralised meaning and the concept of the text as a self-sufficient whole (Smit-Marais, 2012:122), deconstructing its ideological dimensions (Wittenberg, 1997:139).

### 2.11.2 Irony

Comparable to intertextuality, the discursive rhetorical strategy of irony works within the dominant culture's power structures and its discourses, and contests these discourses by doubling or splitting them to ultimately subvert them (Hutcheon, 1989:133). The counter-discourse of irony, with its incongruity between what is expected and what takes place (so revealing an aspect of human folly), brings history under scrutiny. In the same way as intertextuality, the subversive literary trope of irony is complicitous with the postmodern and postcolonial mode by decentring and reconceptualising hegemonic binaries and hierarchies.

The titles of the three novels are all ironical. The presence of the definite article in the first two titles of the novels underlines, but also questions the quality of "lostness" and "goodness" as both titles express a subjectivity that seems presumptive or even exaggerated. The third novel's title, *Lost Ground*, is also ironical, because it could imply the historical loss of ground, or ground lost in an argument or competition, or a more personal, ideological or political loss, due to the introduction and demise of colonialism. Moreover, it could also refer to the South African's relationship with the soil and with his farm.

## 2.12 Conclusion

This chapter has established that postmodernism interrogates First-World cultures and institutions as well as objective and scientific conceptions of history, knowledge, the truth and meaning. Postmodernism proposes that history is made up of a series of stories that implicitly negates the existence of absolute truth and meaning. Due to the dissolution of boundaries between disciplines, a postmodern identity finds itself in an indeterminate, interstitial position. Boundaries rupture, previously unheard voices from the margins insist on being heard, and notions of difference and plurality, hybridity and heterogeneity inform identity as well as narratives. While humans construct narratives "in order to create a significant and orderly world, a world that is stable and predictable"

(Steyn, 2001:188), postmodern and postcolonial narratives disrupt and displace traditional notions of the world and people's place in it. These narratives may thus be seen to reside in the undefined space of the liminal (Smit, 2005:13).

Postmodernism recommends a revision and reconfiguration of the conventional, modernist outlook on the world, and so does postcolonialism. Postcolonial literature emanates from and/or focuses on countries and cultures that were previously under colonial rule. While postmodernism impugns Enlightenment ideology, postcolonialism contests Eurocentric hegemony and its literary conventions and assumptions of ascendancy and entitlement. Identity in its many facets, place and displacement are central concerns in postcolonial literature. According to Dirlik (1994:311), the postcolonial period coincided with the emergence of globalisation. The domination of the non-capitalist countries on the periphery by a powerful political and economic system corresponds to colonialism in the sense that internationalising ideologies spurn and suppress local differences.

Globalisation destabilises the equation of personal and social identity with place. Place may be understood as inhabited and experienced space that provides a point of orientation from which to view our position in the world and construct a common culture. Because people interact in and invest places with significance, places reflect the experiences, attributes and characteristics of those who live in them. When people inscribe their own culture and history on places, so overwriting and obliterating inscriptions of former cultures, places become multi-dimensional palimpsests of previous practices and knowledge. To express dominance and ownership, people label and map spaces. During the 1800s and early 1900s, maps mirrored a particular political power's interests. Foreign spaces such as Africa were mapped as empty so that Europeans could explore and exploit them. Africa was looked upon as a landscape promising adventure and prosperity, or a primeval and evil place that ensnares Europeans and erodes their sense of right and wrong. The farm and the house offered refuge from the African wilderness and supported selfhood. Testifying to the Afrikaner's ability to tame nature, the farm epitomised Afrikaner character. Nonetheless, in a

postcolonial age of spatial deprivation and diasporic displacement, subjectivity can no longer be attached to place. Those who are uprooted from their point of origin and not able to adapt, experience an unsettling sense of *Unheimlichkeit* and an identity crisis.

To counteract the sense of *Unheimlichkeit* that people suffer in a particular locale, they may take recourse to travelling. In literature, travel can be associated with exploration in order to discover, map and name the new environment; this inadvertently enhances travellers' knowledge and experience. In intermediate spaces, travellers encounter others whom they either view as different and inferior or another and equal version of the self. During their journeys, travellers cross borders. Borders influence interaction between people, determine cultural norms and contribute to the effective functioning of society. Customarily, borders separated the self from the other, yet in a postmodern and postcolonial period barriers become bridges where centre and periphery meet and engage in dialogue. In the in-between space between lines of demarcation, individuals may experience freedom and exercise creativity.

Borders denote who we are and who belongs with us and who does not. Identity, accordingly, is based on belonging and disassociation; in other words, we define ourselves in relation to people who share the same race, language, traditions and beliefs, and distinguish ourselves from those who do not. Binary classifications of people account for others' marginalisation, objectification and oppression. When the insider does not grasp that self and other are created at the same time, the dehumanisation and displacement of the other beget the isolation of the self.

Social subjectivity may be seen as unchanging and static, transcending the vicissitudes of time and place; or as in flux, a matter of becoming instead of being. What is generally referred to as the postmodernism condition favours the interpretation of destabilisation: identity is governed and manipulated by hegemonic forces and interacts with geographical, social and cultural factors, rendering it perpetually dynamic and shifting.

## CHAPTER 3

### JOHN CONYNGHAM: THE LOSTNESS OF ALICE

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter illustrates that John Conyngham's *The Lostness of Alice* (1998) reflects on some of the major issues expressed in contemporary South African literature (both English and Afrikaans), namely the former white settlers' standing in South Africa, Africa and Europe. Within this context, their experience can be summarised in terms of two main perceptions: their orientation in African space as an unknown and alien environment and their encounter with the indigenous population as the other in contrast to the self, this giving rise to self-examination and self-confrontation. It is argued that the colonisation of Africa and apartheid have left a legacy of suspicion and resentment that is still felt in the present. Although perspectives on the colonisation of Africa and its repercussions have changed over the last century as the settlers gradually acclimatised to Africa and intensified their interaction with the land, novels like *The Lostness of Alice* still reveal an underlying unease. In his novel, Conyngham depicts the collective psyche of post-liberation South Africa, to evince that the inherent tensions (vestiges of which were already present at the beginning of the twentieth century in the protagonist Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* [1899]) have now become more prominent.

It is postulated in this study that the former settlers have become increasingly subject to feelings of ambivalence and alienation as regards their perception of self and place in South Africa, Africa and Europe; that having surrendered their power over the land and lost it to racially different others, they experience a sense of loss, not only in terms of physical orientation and belonging but also of truth, trust and love. No longer able to configure their subjectivity as "master of the estate" (estate denoting the country) and in opposition to others, they are politically marginalised and haunted by the impermanence of their position. They may cross geographical boundaries and explore different spaces by way of travelling in an attempt to find permanence elsewhere. In the light of this

context, the chapter aims to address how the white settlers view their identity and place in the “new” South Africa, the African continent as a whole and Europe. For this purpose, the first novel in the trilogy to be discussed in this thesis, *The Lostness of Alice* by Conyngham, is analysed to indicate how the initial sense of unease can be detected in this novel. Related to this question, the chapter also investigates Conyngham’s use of two parallel texts (Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*) to expand the literary frames of reference and allude to the role of myth and the fairy tale (denoting a sense of make-believe) in identity examination and definition. In addition, Conyngham draws on the genre of the detective novel as a framework for his novel and to structure the settlers’ search for a self that is situated in space and time. In brief, the objective of the chapter is to provide insight into the white settler experience in Africa and the West, as well as address specific postcolonial aspects of self-definition in relation to others.

### **3.2 Contextualisation**

In the third novel of Conyngham’s Natal trilogy, *The Lostness of Alice*, the narrator, Christopher Jameson, lives with his girlfriend, Sally Bowen, and her elderly father, Will, on Will’s dairy farm. Although the three people act as a prototype of a family, Chris is essentially a *bywoner* (tenant farmer) on the farm. Without family or heritage, he stands outside the matrices of patriarchy, ownership and masterdom in terms of which the white South African male identity has customarily been structured (as Viljoen, 2004:115 avers in relation to a character in Van den Heever’s *Somer*). The character’s condition is evocative of the settlers’ displacement and *unheimlichkeit* (not-being-at-home) in Africa among non-Western others.

The settlers projected their fear of the unknown and their repressed sexual anxieties onto the others. Otherness was perceived as the site of difference and the source of phobias (Rutherford, 1990:10). In addition, the myth was propagated that indigenous men’s lust was uncontrollable and deviant. Native men, deemed “the embodiment of psycho-sexual degeneration” (Fincham, 1990:4), desired white women’s bodies as

bounty. White men constructed their identity around being the hero and the protector of white women. So, when a sixteen-year old girl, Alice Walker, walks through the garden gate of her parents' home in Bushmansburg, a fictitious and a former exclusively white suburb in KwaZulu-Natal, she crosses the boundary between known and unknown, never to return home, for which the majority of white people hold a non-white person – the other – responsible. Except for a few liberal whites who propose that a white male has abducted Alice in an attempt to incriminate a black person, most people do not contemplate that one of their own race might be involved. The whites' racist and prejudiced attitudes are demonstrated when the army's assistance is enlisted to find Alice and one of the army troops steps on a black vagrant sleeping in the bush. The troops deride the vagrant and arrest him, not because he is guilty, but because he is other, and, as such, the embodiment of the black peril to whites' political-racial distinctiveness. In this novel Conyngham renders the temper of post-apartheid South Africa, posing pertinent questions about the relationship between self and other.

Indian and Coloured correspondents are divided on the issue of the offender's race, while black South Africans believe that a white person is involved – that is if they give any thought to the case. Blacks, in general, appear not especially concerned about what fate may have befallen Alice but marvel why the disappearance of a single white girl should make front-page news when abductions and murders are rife in township life. These conflicting sentiments are expressed in letters to *The Natal Times*, the newspaper for which Sally works as a reporter. Besides reporting on the case, Sally becomes entangled in the investigation. To Chris it seems that his girlfriend has turned “a simple disappearance into a crusade” (86) and that she and Alice have merged (46). In other words, Sally, who is also blonde and blue-eyed like Alice, has taken on Alice's identity, and the search for Alice may well be the exploration of her own consciousness. Sally's editor fears that Sally has breached the line between objectivity and subjectivity and suggests that she and Chris take a trip to Kenya. This trip becomes the first of many of Chris's attempts to transcend boundaries in his search for significance. After their return home, Chris infers from reading Sally's diary that she has betrayed him. Experiencing a crisis of emptiness and struggling to orient himself in space and time, he

decides to leave the farm and South Africa. Differently put, he severs the connection with the land and its people and escapes into the outside world. Crossing borders and making connections with other countries and cultures, he exchanges one in-between place – the farm on which he only lives – for another – the “interplaces of travel” (Feld & Basso, 1996:39). He becomes, as Kate Darian-Smith *et al.* (1996:124) would phrase it, one of “the dispossessed who travel over the land rather than existing within it”. What has been a mystery or detective story becomes a travelogue and a quest for self-affirmation, belonging and the meaning of existence when the narrator starts negotiating strange spaces and questioning the familiar. The main aspects of Chris’s journeys may be distinguished as gaining a broader knowledge of life, becoming disillusioned with superficial sexual exploits and realising his own dislocation and disconnection.

In England, Chris finds a job on a dairy farm in Exmoor. He attempts to establish human interaction by having a sexual encounter with another farmhand. Chris finds England too cold and sets out for Barcelona. Barcelona may be warm, but the Spaniards seem self-absorbed (99). Like the settlers of old, the character has difficulty reaching across spaces of separation and adjusting to a new environment. As in South Africa, he feels marginalised and isolated, his sense of self imperilled. To overcome his condition of dislocation and disconnection, he again resorts to sex – this time with a Catalan prostitute. The prostitute, however, is a poor substitute for Sally and human tenderness, and Chris experiences remorse afterwards. His most personal encounter in Barcelona is with a Jew and his daughter, who, like him, inhabit a fraught peripheral space in Europe. Chris eventually decides to return to Africa, a continent with which he has a “delicate empathy” born of “time and great intimacy” (111). On a train to Morocco, he meets a young female tourist from New Zealand who “has left Cambridge just as abruptly as he did Natal, or Alice did Bushmansburg” (Woeber, 1999:278). Anna reminds him of both Sally and Alice: she is “the link-pin between [his] two approaches”, “alternatively Sally’s arch-rival and an Alice clone” (116).

After assaulting a Marrakeshian hustler-thief, Chris flees to Gibraltar. As the perpetrator of white on black violence, he does not expect to get a fair hearing on a continent that

has not forgotten colonial crimes. In Gibraltar Chris initiates a relationship with a service widow from Kenya. This woman, Jill, and Mrs Olive Rook, with whom he resides, become like family to him, replacing Sally and her father in his mind. Chris feels that he has finally found people with whom he belongs and a place where he can reconfigure his life-world and be at home. His travels, undertaken to keep his “lostness at bay” (115), have come to an end – at least for now.

### **3.3 Narrative frame: The detective/mystery novel**

In addition to being part travelogue and part romance, recounting the main character’s journeys and romantic entanglements in his quest for perspective and a coherent and connected self, *The Lostness of Alice* is designed as a detective novel. The genre acts as a frame narrative to enhance the meaning and interpretation of the original text. The detective’s pursuit of a missing teenager against the backdrop of an unfathomable continent corresponds to the main character’s search for clues to individual and social parameters of subjectivity. The detective’s position as outsider may be compared to that of the former settlers. A detective, similar to a reporter, navigates spaces of separation to unearth clues; the settlers, in the same way, embarked on journeys to discover the truth about their identity and their place in the world.

*The Lostness of Alice* adheres to many of the requirements of the detective story. The material for the plot is routine and realistic: in South Africa the disappearance of children and youths occurs frequently. In fact, Alice Walker’s physical appearance and disappearance remind one of Leigh Matthews, a case splashed on the front page of daily newspapers in 2004 until 2005, when her non-white abductor and murderer was sentenced to life imprisonment. The crime, one that is “sufficiently” violent for detective fiction, precedes the narrative action, but its consequences constitute the focal point of the first part of the text and shape the rest of the story. In *The Lostness of Alice*, the alleged crime takes place within the first three chapters (Wiehardt, 2014). The opening sentence – “She vanished at noon ... .” (7) – presents the reader with a complicated and seemingly insoluble riddle.

*The Lostness of Alice* may be classified as hard-boiled detective fiction (as opposed to Agatha Christie's and Dorothy Sayers's "cosy" whodunit mysteries). This was the format in which the detective novel first integrated itself into South African literature. The gritty realism of the hard-boiled genre compels the reader to face up to the noxious aspects of a diseased and crime-ridden setting, marked by disillusionment, insecurity and pessimism. Such a setting also scars the psyche of the detective, who is oftentimes a damaged and disturbed individual. Set round about the time of the 1994 elections, a time of turmoil in South Africa, *The Lostness of Alice* exhibits a segment of society's preoccupation with crime as well as an imagined cataclysmic future. Frustrated with the apparent indolence and inefficiency of the black government, whites attribute the endemic violence and upsurge of crime in residential areas to the government's passing of anti-apartheid legislation, for example the abolition of the Group Areas Act and influx control. All that has stood between them and the overflow of violence from the townships and social upheaval has been totalitarian rule; in other words, the boundary that protects (white) essences against (black) contamination. Whites cannot adapt to the post-transitional period and mourn the dissolution of the old regime. They idealise former times before non-Western others had taken political control of the country. People belonging to the former privileged class presume that Alice has been abducted, raped and murdered by a non-Western other. They see themselves in the teenager as she symbolises the vulnerability and impermanence of their position in Africa. It is as if Alice has all along been an intruder in a space from which she has now been cast out. The disappearance of this "very pretty: slight and blonde and blue-eyed" (107) girl – innocence personified – is construed as a loss of civilised values, white identity and all hope for South Africa: a "triumph for Evil" (50). Alice's fate may prefigure the end of the white settlers' sojourn in Africa, now that meaning-producing differences are disintegrating and the continent borders on shedding its "veneer of civilisation over a savage abyss" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:210). As Viljoen (2013:xxxi) summarises it: "What is at stake is the loss of white power, the disintegration of social structures, of Afrikaner identity, and even of a coherent self."

As a main character in the first part of the narrative and looking into Alice's disappearance, Sally Bowen initially complies with the criteria for female detectives. Traditionally, these women were snooping spinsters or some other meddling "dame" (Barnhill, 1991). Sally plays the role of the hard-boiled female detective: a strong, independent woman who is usually single. Like the protagonists of *The Good Doctor* (2003) and *The Lostness of Alice*, Sally does not earn a living by bringing lawbreakers to justice. Working as a journalist (as Peter James from *Lost Ground* (2011) also does), she belongs to the archetype of the reporter sleuth – a popular figure in both the European and American detective story. She appears early enough in the novel: on the first page of the second chapter. Although she has outside interests and forms relationships, the details of her temperament are at first not dwelt on. As Willard Huntington Wright (1927) points out, character analysis clogs the "narrative machinery" and impedes the flow of the action. (Only later when Chris reads Sally's diaries, does she emerge as a more rounded character.) From the beginning the readers experience a sense of familiarity with Sally. During her exploration of a lawless world in her search for Alice and her own subjectivity, they follow her as an equal and match their skills of observation and interpretation against hers. They have the same opportunities – or lack thereof – to solve the riddle.

For the detective who is an extra-legal agent, as Sally and the two other protagonists are, it is expedient to have police connections (Wright, 1927). The amateur detective joins forces with the police detective, Detective Sergeant Hannes Marais. Together Sally and Hannes try to prevent, or at least postpone, the overturning of society. The white middle-class detective – the representative of law and order – should mend the holes in the fabric of society by seeing that justice is done and order restored. One of the main reasons for detective fiction's popularity was social reassurance (Green, 1997:180). In South Africa this means that "all the Alices were [not] fair game for the dark forces" (24); and, since Alice with her blonde hair and blue eyes symbolises white people in Africa, that society as they know it is not in a state of complete "unravelling and decay and horror" (Conyngham, interview with Blair, 2003:85). There are still borders to impose control on chaos; all hope for the white person's survival in Africa is

not lost. Another reason for the detective story's popularity was nostalgia for a "world already almost gone" (190). Some of South Africa's white population long for earlier times when they felt out of harm's way in their exclusive enclaves. In *The Lostness*, catching the perpetrator would "rebuff the powers of darkness" (50).

When the reporter-detective Sally discovers the first and only clue – a fragment of Alice's bikini – she demonstrates the classical detective's keener powers of observation in comparison with those of the plodding police and the arrogant army. Green (1997:186) remarks that traces of cloth, strands of hair, footprints, and a distinctive brand of cigarettes, etc. are typically associated with the genre. As a rule, superficially convincing evidence often acts as a decoy in detective stories. This also happens here. The troops rush to apprehend a suspect found in the vicinity of the discovery. There is no logical reason to connect the rastaman sleeping in the pine plantation with Alice, but the troops treat him as a criminal because he is black – i.e. a primitive, racially inferior "other" (Carey-Webb, 1993:127) – unkempt and in the vicinity of the girl's home. Whereas in British detective fiction the armed forces serve to protect the innocent; in Conyngham's detective novel – as in the American version – the reader condemns the actions of the representatives of law and order when the troops threaten to inflict undeserved and unjust violence on the black man. They do this because the other does not comply with the ideological fixing of what JanMohamed (1988) terms the Manichean binaries which stipulate that the self should be here and the other there. What is more, he does not have "the decency to hide" (Coetzee, 1986:361), thus not be visible, in a white area. As Coetzee (1986:361) writes in an essay in which he denounces the political geography of apartheid:

If people are starving, let them starve far away in the bush, where their thin bodies will not be a reproach. If they have no work, if they migrate to the cities, ... let there be roadblocks, let there be curfews, let there be laws against vagrancy, begging and squatting, and let offenders be locked away so that no one has to hear or see them.

Will, Sally's father, explains that with apartheid gone, the predominately white troops reckon that the black man – like all of Africa – covets "a piece of white suburbia" (21), particularly now that divisions are disappearing and they have got a whiff of the "heady

smell” of freedom (23). Since the return of the repressed, the “stable, centered position” of whites is in danger, to draw upon Lars Engle’s jargon (Martin & Mohanty, 1987:201). Those who refuse to evaluate past discourses of self and other and establish the essence of their being within inclusive, egalitarian structures, find themselves to be an emasculated minority. The black other functions as the repository of all the apprehensions and anxieties of the white self (Rutherford, 1990:10), these fears confirming and compounding the other’s status as alien and evil (Armstrong, 1994:4).

When there are no more clues to interpret and inferences to be drawn and still no trace of Alice, Sally keeps the case alive in the press. The inventor of the modern detective novel, Edgar Allan Poe (Marling, 2012), was the first to make use of newspaper clippings to add an element of realism to the genre. Nevertheless, when rational and scientific methods – such as calling on the public for information, the accumulation and analysis of data and the forensic examination of details – fail to solve the case, Sally and Marais subsequently transgress the boundary between “normal” and paranormal when they obtain a clairvoyant’s opinion. Sally later also accompanies Margaret to a spiritualist church service where another clairvoyant supposedly contacts Margaret’s deceased mother. While an author may avail himself of supernatural elements to enhance the atmosphere or plot of the story, these elements should not contribute to solving the mystery. True to detective fiction, none of the supernatural leads results in the discovery of Alice or her abductor.

Though the detective genre shapes the narrative, interesting deviations relating to the themes emerge. Firstly, the style of a detective story should be unadorned and uncomplicated (Wright, 1927). Long descriptive passages of, for instance, characters’ emotions and natural scenery, word pictures and atmospheric preoccupations, are extraneous to the mere recording of facts (Haycraft, 1992). Conyngham’s postmodern novel, though, does yield to literary descriptiveness and atmospheric concerns. The opening paragraph reports that Alice goes through a gate arched with roses, passes large houses flanked by spacious gardens while the Walkers’ Zulu maid is vacuuming the sitting-room with its Laura Ashley chair covers and curtains (7, 12). When the

teenager's parents go looking for her, they have to cross a stream in the bush that resembles a "spine down the middle of a leaf" (8). Duncan, Alice's father, is "touched by an icy presentiment" (9). Secondly, while in the traditional detective novel, individual perversion spawns criminality, in Conyngham's text, it is in consequence of social malfunction. Now that frontiers are beginning to crumble, the "dark forces" (24) of the black townships invade white residential areas and white-owned farms and "distort the fabric of society" (Green, 1997:190), stirring up tension and turmoil.

A third departure from the genre relates to the detectives. In traditional detective stories only one detective, who may or may not have a sidekick, investigates the crime. In Conyngham's story, Sally, Sergeant Hannes Marais and Chris all attempt to uncover what has happened to Alice. Secondly, the male detectives also make their appearance later than is customary. Thirdly, Conyngham convincingly depicts two of the three detectives: Chris, the protagonist of the novel; and Sally, when the reader gains access to her diaries and emotions through Chris. Furthermore, neither of the detectives is a paragon of bravery and honesty. The author insinuates that Sally and Hannes have deceived Chris. Chris, in turn, does not have the courage to confront his girlfriend. In the fifth instance, traditional detectives always have a believable means of earning their keep (Barnhill, 1991); yet Chris, who works as a farmhand, seems to be supported by his girlfriend and her father. Finally, not one of the three detectives succeeds in neutralising the upheaval. In fact, it seems that they rather contribute to the confusion: Sally, for example, falsely accuses the Movement for Azanian Liberation when she writes in a newspaper article that these black militants have abducted Alice, raped and killed her. Chris, on his part, composes an anonymous letter in which he claims to know where Alice's body is buried, so sending the police on a wild goose chase. The denouement also diverges from the genre. Because all three detectives, the police and the army fall short of solving the puzzle or of finding Alice and her abductor – if indeed such a person exists – the reader, who is the final interpreter and judge of the characters and events, is robbed of the revelation towards which the novel should have been working (Green, 1997:214).

Similar to *The Lostness of Alice*, another South African detective novel – *Closed Circle* (1990) by Ebersohn – also resists a fixed, one-dimensional representation or reality. In terms of the postmodernist context, its final pages do not give any clarification but rather leave the reader with more questions and uncertainty. In Ebersohn's words, the reason for *Closed Circle's* ending is that he is

aware that there have been many of these sort of killings in South Africa and almost none, in almost no cases have the killers been brought to justice, so [he] just simply couldn't have the fictitious character brought to justice ... (Green, 1997:217).

This appears to be Conyngham's conviction. So, rather than rendering a resolution, *The Lostness of Alice* "swerves aside" and confronts a different issue: the metaphysics of the main character's self-confrontation (Green, 1997:214), anti-climactically presenting the reader with an ending that is as elusive as the novel's title.

### **3.4 Narrative strategies: Intertextuality and irony**

#### 3.4.1 Intertextuality

To foreground the notion of the confrontation of the self in relation to the other and against the backdrop of the political and emotional insecurity of the time, Conyngham also makes use of intertextual references. Intertextuality is a postmodernist narratological device that reacts to the past by citing or alluding to previous, usually authoritative literary and non-literary materials. Intertextuality illustrates that a text comes into being in the presence of "an unbounded, illimitable tissue of connections and associations, paraphrases and fragments, texts and con-texts" (Kristeva, 1980:66). The strategy challenges the notion of a literary production as a self-sufficient, absolute totality with a centralised meaning (Smit-Marais, 2012:122). It thus diffuses and dissolves textual boundaries by revision and reconfiguration. A hypertext inscribed on a subsequent creation typically inserts itself to subvert through irony.

One of the hypertexts or transformative narratives inscribed on *The Lostness of Alice* is that of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1596). Conyngham's protagonist

compares himself and his female fellow-traveller to Pyramus and Thisbe, two young, ill-fated lovers from feuding families, who, like Romeo and Juliet, commit suicide because of a misunderstanding. In this way, Chris suggests that his and Anna's relationship will also not last. The author also alludes to William Burroughs's landmark publication, *Naked Lunch* (1959), a novel which portrays the drug-addicted William Lee's journeys from the United States to Mexico, Tangier and then to the dreamlike Interzone, and reminds the reader of Chris's voyages which, likewise, end up in a liminal space.

More important than these two texts, Conyngham makes use of postcolonial textual strategies. His narrative resonates thematically with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's/Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Conyngham echoes Conrad's ambivalence about the territorial invasion of foreign country that Marlow expressed a hundred years earlier when he embarked on his odyssey into the interior of the unfathomable African continent and the depths of the European psyche. Marlow discovers that the object of his quest, Kurtz, had elected to step over the dividing line between civilisation and barbarism and lost his way in the "impenetrable darkness" (1902:149) of the Congo. The "[g]odforsaken wilderness" (78) "whispered to him [Kurtz] things about himself which he did not know" (133) and drew him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions" (144). Hence, the colonial creed by which white men such as Kurtz (and also Christopher Jameson) structure their existence and base their selfhood on, is of no consequence in Africa. Conyngham's literary reiteration of *Heart of Darkness* emphasises that Conrad's 1899 prediction has come to pass by 1998: an ideology of discrimination cannot survive in Africa and will have dire consequences for those who conserve it.

In addition to the oblique references to Conrad's canonical text of colonialism in Africa, Conyngham draws directly on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) to stretch textual margins and add another layer of meaning to this narrative, presenting a tapestry of post-apartheid South Africa. Carroll composed *Alice in Wonderland* at the height of the British exploration of Africa. Some reviewers (for instance, Stratton,

1990:170) conjecture that Carroll also commented on the exercise of territorial expansionism and the societies that instigated it. Be that as it may, Conyngham's motivation for invoking Carroll's children story, by his own admission (interview with Blair, 2003:78), is that "the oddness of *Alice in Wonderland* [i]s quite a good environment in which to try and look at the oddness of a country that's unravelling, or an order that's unravelling, and a new country that's being born". Both Carroll's and Conyngham's protagonists and Alices represent their respective societies: Alice Liddell, British society and Chris Jameson and Alice Walker, South Africa. The journey motif further connects the two texts: Carroll's Alice and Conyngham's Chris transcend boundaries to explore another world and get a new perspective on the old. The distance each has to travel – Alice from England to Wonderland and Chris from South Africa to England, Spain, Morocco and Gibraltar – signals the country of destination's difference from the country of origin's presence (Stratton, 1999:171). The presence of both characters clashes with their surroundings. When in Wonderland, Alice is for the most part smaller than when she is at home. Yet, whether larger or smaller, she is an anomalous presence, and is thus inevitably disadvantaged. Chris feels that "as an outsider, a colonial" (95) he does not belong in Europe but exists in an in-between space, between borders. The two characters, similar to the original settlers, are thus out of place when in a new locality.

During their journeys Alice and Chris encounter others who are both the same and different from themselves. Even when these others speak English, and wear European clothes, they more often than not escape Alice's and Chris's comprehension. Whereas Alice engages with the card creatures, trying to mould them to her understanding of what constitutes civilised behaviour, Chris hardly registers the other's presence, betraying that he still subscribes to separateness, sees the world in black and white and establishes his identity in essence, rather than in difference. In Wonderland, Alice meets a number of animals such as the Blue Caterpillar, the Dormouse and the Cheshire Cat; some of the white characters in Conyngham's novel (for instance Will and the readers of Sally's newspaper) will not recognise the self in the other and think of black people in terms of nineteenth-century anthropology as "primitive" and "savage"

types “lower down the scale of social evolution” (Carey-Webb, 1993:127) or as animals. As previously mentioned, the soldiers who capture the destitute man in the forest effectively dehumanise him. The difference and otherness of the homeless man as well as of Wonderland’s weird creatures run counter to and invalidate the self’s fixity of meaning, giving rise to agitation.

Alice Liddell runs into the other when she crosses the border between the real world and Wonderland and follows the White Rabbit into Wonderland. The Wonderland in *The Lostness of Alice* is Africa, a continent to which the early colonisers attributed wondrous qualities. Conyngham foregrounds the connection between Africa and Wonderland when Detective Sergeant Marais speculates that the goldfish in a pond have swallowed Alice Walker’s body (50). When Sally expresses horror at the thought, he pointedly tells her: “This isn’t wonderland, you know.” (50) Conyngham has confessed to deliberately including this and other references (such as the taxi driver who transports Chris and Sally to the Mombasa Airport, and reminds Chris of the Cheshire cat) to reinforce the intertextual connection between his and Carroll’s narratives. Conyngham makes it clear that neither Wonderland nor Africa is charmed ground. When Alice Liddell falls through the dark rabbit hole, she finds herself in a world of disorder and nonsensicality, and when Alice Walker passes through her house’s garden gate neatly “arched with roses” (7) – the garden being a metaphor for European culture (McEwan, 1996:23) – she leaves behind the ordered world of safe suburbia in which Western norms apply, and enters a strange and sinister space beyond the threshold. By extension, Alice traverses the limit between the rational and the irrational, culture and nature. If Africa is indeed a wonderland, it is, as the critic Jones (1998:26) maintains, “an angst-ridden wonderland”. Even so, Carroll’s Wonderland is populated by belligerent beings such as the Frog-Footman, as well as malicious and murderous ones like the Queen of Hearts, who commands the decapitation of everyone around her. To all appearances, Alice Walker has also come across a cold-blooded other and met an equally permanent fate as being beheaded. References to death abound in Carroll’s seemingly innocuous tale; Conyngham, by the same token, intimates that violence and death are integral to the daily existence of

people in Africa and South Africa. The novelist's concern with a country in crisis is made clear by the impact media reports of unrest have on the consciousness of the white characters in this narrative, in particular the protagonist. The latter is burdened by memories of his past: "baggage [he] cannot jettison" (137), signifying a boundary he cannot transgress. His parents were murdered when he was at boarding school. And later, as a young man, his military superiors expect him to do his "fair share of maiming" (110). Even when away from Africa, Chris senses the continent as being a brooding and menacing presence on the horizon. He describes Alice as "a pall, an omniscient non-presence" (37) that causes him and Sally to suffer. The same may be said for Africa. In this novel that captures the mysterious and treacherous quality of Africa and its inhabitants, it is hinted at that the protagonist and other whites will not be able to step out from under the shadow the continent casts over their existence.

In summary, the counter-discursive allusions to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* not only define Conyngham's fiction but supply another stratum of significance to it in terms of the presentation of Africa and the similarities between Africa and Wonderland. The references offer opposing interpretations of life in Africa as a fairy tale on the one hand and brutal reality on the other, in the end to deconstruct the fairy-tale reading.

### 3.4.2 Irony

Intertextual allusions to *Alice in Wonderland* are inserted in *The Lostness of Alice*, yet the discursive trope of irony subverts the power of those allusions. By comparing Africa and Wonderland, Conyngham conveys the notion that the original colonisers had an exotic and fabulous image of Africa, conceiving of Africa as a wonderland, a pristine place where they could pursue adventure and realise their potential. They equated the "unoccupied", unknown continent with the elusive promised land. Here they could lead an Arcadian existence. Ironically, these dreams evaporated as soon as they met the "traditional wasteland of confrontation" head-on (Van Wyk Smith, 1979:30). Africa entrapped Europeans and lured them into the "heart of an immense darkness", to use

Conrad's (1899:158) phrase. Reminiscent of the early colonisers, Western Europeans had high expectations of South Africa after the inauguration of a democracy. Nonetheless, escalating unemployment and crime rates, along with slipping service delivery standards, have disillusioned a percentage of the country's white population so that they long for the days before the abolition of a regime of racial qualification and categorisation. Instead of hope, an atmosphere of desperation and trepidation prevails. In the novel, Conyngham presents whites, rather than blacks, as the main perpetrators of violence. Chris, for instance, beats a hustler until he no longer moves, while white men mutilate and murder a guiltless black man in retaliation for Alice Walker. Although this white girl is implicated in racism, having directly benefited from the prevalent system of racially-based privilege, she personifies purity and is pitted against the power of darkness and evil that threaten to engulf the last outpost of Western civilisation in Africa.

In the traditional detective novel, the person who attempts to locate a missing person or a murderer should be of unimpeachable character (Marling, 2012). But in Conyngham's narrative, instead of protecting the innocent, the armed forces persecute a vagrant purely on the basis of his race. Secondly, the police dupe the public by pretending that the teenager is still alive. Thirdly, the amateur detective, Sally, writes a fictitious newspaper article in which she charges the Movement for Azanian Liberation with Alice's supposed abduction and murder. As a journalist, Sally should be objective and report facts and not make speculations. Neither of the persons investigating the case solves it, so that the purpose of detective fiction – social reassurance – is not accomplished.

Chris, imagining himself to be a detective, invades Sally's privacy by reading her journal. Upon discovering that she has deluded the readers of her newspaper as well as him, he discloses that Sally's deception hurts more than her complicity in murder (as if deception is a greater crime than murder). In spite of his having experience of the consequences of deceitfulness – the disintegration of his relationship with Sally – Chris lies to his new girlfriends, so putting his relationships with them at risk, as Sally has also

done with her and Chris's. Chris's lostness and loneliness are by his own doing, but he does not realise this.

Chris and Sally both misrepresent the truth by purporting to be liberals, yet both disregard the value of human life. Sally accuses the wrong people of the crime. While Chris insists that he seeks "equality and a place for all in the sun" (44), his actions belie his words and he struggles to form significant attachments to other people. Ironically, he strives to satisfy his desire for human interaction by contracting the services of a prostitute, but this encounter leaves him "unfulfilled" (102). Sally speculates that Chris holds animals and plants dearer than human beings; he seems to share Gordimer's character Mehring's "superior" kind of love, one "without people" (1974:178). The irony in this, however, does not register with the character. The traversal of physical boundaries also does not appease Chris's need for interconnectedness. Because the traveller acquires knowledge of what lies beyond a threshold – usually of otherness – travelling is an enlightening and edifying experience. Chris's wanderings, though, are purposeless since he does not constructively engage with the other and little cultural transgression takes place. Wherever Chris roams, he remains disconnected from others and himself. His journeys, intended to achieve the opposite, intensify his sense of dislocation and alienation. Ironically, in Barcelona, it strikes him for the first time that he has all the while been seeking Africa – in Europe.

### **3.5 Themes**

*The Lostness of Alice* presents Africa as a dangerous place and Africans as inferior and irrational creatures. White people no longer occupy a privileged position and they fear an unpredictable future under black rule. Belonging to neither Europe nor Africa, white people think of themselves as outsiders wherever they go. In addition to the loss of home, the loss of truth and essential human connections also manifest themselves in the novel.

According to Chinua Achebe (1977:788), Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* shows Africa to be "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril". Conyngham's protagonist metaphorically associates Africa with a dangerous animal that slumbers but can wake up and attack at any moment when he observes that "across the sheet of inky water, the bulk of Africa, [lies] sleeping" (145). In *Cry, the Beloved Country* Alan Paton also has a dystopic vision of "Africa awakening from sleep, of Africa resurgent, of Africa dark and savage" (1959:93)

The narrator also insinuates that Africa and its inhabitants are inferior and irrational, on a par with animals. He compares the vagabond near the missing girl's home to "a thing of the forest .... While the (white) soldiers and their families [jie] tucked in their suburban beds at night, the dishevelled rastaman lope[s] through the dark trunks, foraging, searching." (21) The phrases "of the forest" and "lope[s] through the dark trunks, foraging" may imply that, if not objects (vs. the subject position of whites), Africans are animals. The wilderness is their natural habitat, whereas whites belong to civilisation. Haggard also portrays more than a few Africans as irrational beings. In *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), the Kukuanas led by Gagool desire to kill Ignosi and in *She* (1887), the Amahagger tribe tries to eat Mahomed before attacking the rest of the party. Haggard and others represent the home of the Africans, Africa, as a relic of a primal past possessed by "demonic darkness" (Carter *et al.*, 1993:71). In *The Africa House*, Gore-Browne thinks of Africa (specifically the former Rhodesia) as a place of

poisonous snakes that devoured infants, diseases which could turn urine black and fell a grown man in less than a day, insects which could wipe out cattle, and terrible beasts of prey with growls that could freeze a man's blood (Lamb, 1993:114).

From the point of view of "relics of colonial Africa" (31) such as Major James Leonard and his wife, there is no hope for Africa; it is "a bloody cock-up" (30). Ironically, in the wake of freedom follow failures of governance, educational deprivation, unemployment, poverty, corruption and a crooked criminal justice system (Attwell & Harlow, 2000:2). Social decay, disintegration and imminent disaster accompany liberation. Moreover,

wherever one is, whether in the Deep South or in “Algeria, Kenya, the Congo, Mozambique and Angola, Rhodesia”, it is “the same situation ...” (21). “Whether Kikuyu tillers or Zulu or Arab herdsman, Africa’s players follow the same slow drum beat.” (118)<sup>16</sup>

To all intents and purposes, apartheid has not ended. Yet white people now perceive themselves to be “low on the priority list”, as Conyngham notes in an interview with Blair (2003:85). A burgeoning black middle-class puts whiteness under pressure and undermines it as a position of privilege. Since the enfranchisement of the masses, whites can no longer delimit their distinctiveness in terms of Manichean dualisms, they consider themselves to have become politically irrelevant. Conyngham (interview with Blair, 2003:84-85) contends that one feels “one’s world doesn’t exist anymore; what was good about the world is now passing”. Young Alice Walker, with her blonde hair, blue eyes and fair skin so at variance with her surroundings, is the personification of civilised values and the white population’s defencelessness. This “fragile beauty” (24) acts as the antipode to the powers of darkness and evil. Just as the Jersey calf was conceived with imported semen, “its delicate beauty attesting to the quality of its genes” (17), “the quintessential female Caucasian” (Woeber, 1999:279) sprang from imported, superior European semen. The night of the day she vanishes, the calf dies.

White South Africans feel besieged and fear that they, like Alice, will become “fair game for the dark forces” (24). In *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Paton articulates: “It is fear that rules the land” (1959:22). The same is true for postcolonial South Africa (and perhaps even more so than when Paton’s Arthur Jarvis was murdered). After two centuries of exploiting and suppressing others, feelings of disquiet have intensified and whites are left alienated, “spiritually deformed” and “rotten with fears”, as Rian Malan (1990:412-413) rather subjectively words it in his autobiography. An atmosphere of utter hopelessness and *fin du monde* prevails in Conyngham’s narrative of political consciousness. In brief, the predominant theme of this novel may be understood as

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<sup>16</sup> *City Press* critic Zolile Nqayi (1998:25) finds this generalisation in the novel “alarming”.

white angst in the face of an impending apocalypse when remaining boundaries rupture as well. Sally wonders if it is “our time next” (60). South Africa’s indigenous inhabitants may decide to appropriate white-owned farms, and those who have committed or condoned human rights outrages will be made to bear the burden of their guilt. The wheel will turn full circle: the crimes of the past will be redressed in the future and those who have dispossessed others and stigmatised them by virtue of their skin colour will be disgraced and driven off the land. In a worst-case scenario whites may even experience a similar fate as the colonists in Kenya did at the hands of the Mau Mau.

The first entry in Sally’s diary captures the insecurity of the present and the fear for the future (and is a metafictional comment on Conyngham’s novel of dread). It is in the mode of what Engle terms the “political uncanny”, an approach to writing that is neurotic, foreseeing the return of the repressed:<sup>17</sup>

... now what? What retribution lies in wait for those of us whose forebears chose the southern tip of Africa and who now have no other home? Will we be dispossessed as we dispossessed others? Will we lose representation in the decision-making bodies as we deprived others of such representation? Will we be stigmatised because of our skin colour as we stigmatised others for theirs? (53)

In a nightmarish vision of approaching doom, Sally imagines how she and her boyfriend flee the homestead when civil war erupts: while he is “riding shotgun” (1998:65) to keep the mob at bay, she drives the truck. They have set their house on fire, so as not to leave anything for those who take their place. Chris has a similar “scorched-earth exodus” (67) visualisation: panga-wielding gangs stage forays at the convoy of whites and Indians trying to reach the harbour or airport in a desperate bid to escape devastation and retribution.

A theme that emanates from the preceding one of fear for the future is lostness. The term “lostness” is used here to describe a particular community’s apprehensiveness in the face of an indeterminate and unpredictable future. It is not an existential concept

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<sup>17</sup> In Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* the repressed takes the form of a black corpse that resurfaces from its shallow grave after a flood. In this way the dispossessed and discarded “other” of imperialism asserts his presence and begins to “speak”: reclaiming the land (Barnard, 2007:76).

but a concept peculiar to South Africa and Africa signifying the former settlers' insecurity after the trauma of transition. Being of European extraction but their families having lived in Africa for decades, the former colonisers are unresolved as to which continent they belong to. Chris and Sally view themselves as English, even though their families have been in Africa for five generations. (Peter Jacobs in *Lost Ground* feels the same.) Similar to Chris and Sally, white South Africans who have benefited from apartheid have misgivings about their place among non-Western others. They presume that they are not welcome in the country of their birth but also do not have a home elsewhere: "A lifetime of apartheid ha[s] cast [them] adrift." (26) Watching Anna, a girl from New Zealand, while she sleeps, Chris muses: "Do you know who I am? I'm one of the world's pariahs. A perpetrator of a crime against humanity." (110) And Chris has no home. While he was at boarding school, his parents died, and their lostness intensifies his lack of belonging. Without a permanent home and experiencing feelings of alienation and rootlessness in Africa as well as in Europe, outsiders such as Chris are as "lost as Alice" (108). They occupy a "fractious limbo" (43), a position of insubstantiality and peripherality imposed by imperialism and its aftermaths. The protagonist speculates that he and other whites are to see Alice's fate symbolically: as a glimpse of all their lostnesses, now and to come (117). The lostness of the protagonist, who epitomises colonialism's castaways, serves as a bleak symbol for the displacement and disillusionment (Petzold, 2008:149) of those white South Africans who still cling to preconceived colonial ideas.

Settler lostness manifests itself at various levels in the novel, as in the lostness of truth. Deception is shown by the police, then by Sally and it is present in Sally's relationship with Chris and Chris's with Anna. The police, whose profession it is to find facts, perpetrate the first instance of deceit when they play down the discovery of Alice's bikini bottom. "To retain the public's help, Alice had to remain a beautiful teenager whose reunion with her parents everyone could look forward to enjoying. Any suggestion that she was no longer alive had to be suppressed." (43) Alice is the ideal that has to be safeguarded at all costs. Sally similarly blurs the boundary between truth and fiction when she writes a newspaper article in which she points the finger at black agency – so

making plain her own prejudice (McEwan, 1996:41). Disastrous consequences result from the reporter's fabrication. A black man is first mutilated and then murdered, most likely by racist perpetrators who fear that their own survival is at risk; it is an "us" or "them" situation (Sewlall, 2004:106). The black man's attackers then also announce that they have avenged Alice by engraving the words: "1 Alice, 10 kaffirs" on the man's chest (79). With this death on her conscience, Sally has betrayed liberalism's "most sacred" pretext (McEwan, 1996:43): the value of human life. Yet she neither confides in Chris nor takes responsibility for having "committed a near-perfect crime" (79), albeit unwittingly. Having an unstable sense of self which cannot commit to candour, she continues the deception when she informs Chris that she is attending a farewell party for a journalist who is emigrating to Australia, when, in reality, she is going to Sergeant Marais's house. When Chris discovers the truth in her diary, he remarks that her "deception ha[s] begun to hurt more than [her] complicity in the murder" (85). She has become another person whom he does not know.

Despite first-hand knowledge of the consequences of duplicity, Chris starts his relationship with Anna by telling her a lie: that he left South Africa because he and Sally argued. He does not inform her that he is one of the world's "pariahs" and a "perpetrator of a crime against humanity" (110), namely apartheid. In his journal, Chris then also admits that he also puts his "own spin on things" (127) and his so-called confessions to Sally "are full of artifice" (127). It seems that distorting the truth is contagious and that relating untrue stories has become a habit for Chris, especially concerning Sally. Irvin Cemil Schick (1999:21), as well as Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004), and Brown (2006), explain that stories play an important part in constructing the identity and determining the individual's behaviour and place in the world. The self, just like place, depends on a series of stories (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2004:8) that give significance and coherence to it (6). (The protagonist and his girlfriend both write stories: in diaries and in newspapers.) The stories people tell serve as a narration of the past (77), shape their present and future life-world and help them survive (75). Chris fails to recognise this and, since his stories are false, one may assume that so is

his identity. His inner dividedness accounts for his being unable to locate himself vis-à-vis people and places.

The loss of an essential human connection with others also features as a theme in the text. The protagonist does not grasp that withholding and/or distorting the truth brings about the disintegration of relationships and the loss of love, even though this happened when Sally deluded him. All of Chris's relationships that lack trust flounder: with Sally and later with Sally's "arch-rival" (116), Anna. One imagines that in due course his relationships with Mrs Rook and Jill will also unravel.

Wherever he wanders, Chris has no personal encounters (104) and forms no significant attachments. Intercourse with a prostitute in Spain leaves him "unfulfilled" (102). However, he does gain a degree of insight into himself and his relationship with Sally:

As I reread the scribbled pages I learn a lot about Sally and myself. I can see the withdrawn young farmer who exasperated her so: the young man absorbed by the production and welfare of his cows and the vigour of his fodder crops; the young man apparently unaffected by the anarchy spreading through the country. How misleading appearances can be. Or how inaccurate are the images we project, even to our loved ones. That I was as concerned as Sally about the poverty and lawlessness escaped her. That I was also seeking equality and a place in the sun for all seems also to have gone unnoticed (144).

Chris presumes that Sally thought that he cared more about animals and plants than the people around him. In an interview with Walters (1987), Gordimer proclaims that a passion for the natural environment, such as *The Conservationist's* protagonist, Mehring, displays, can become "something unpleasant and almost evil", since it often goes hand in hand with a "lack of concern for human beings". In fact, Mehring's mistress, Antonia, ridicules her lover for having invented a new type of love, a "superior kind, without people" (Gordimer, 1974:178). Gordimer gives one to understand that an antisocial affection for "rocks and stones and plants" actually masks possessiveness and selfishness.<sup>18</sup> Chris, however, does not realise this. He insists that Sally is

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<sup>18</sup> On 26 December 2012, in his first speech after being re-elected as president by the African National Congress, Jacob Zuma bewailed the fact that white and privileged South Africans from

mistaken and does him a disservice by assuming that the poor economic prospects, corruption, criminality and violence endemic to the new South Africa as well as the general lostness of the settler condition do not trouble him.

As a result of his penchant for fabricating falsehoods, Chris does not have “a nest for his body, padded to his measure” (to use Bachelard’s image of a home), where he can live “in complete confidence” (1994:101, 103). Being a tenant on the farm, Chris cannot claim a rooted identity there. It may also be said that, being a white man, he does not truly belong to the African land and is only tolerated for the time being.<sup>19</sup> Like Olive Schreiner’s Lyndall and Waldo in *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), he cannot negotiate a place that supplies him with a stable and shielded sense of self. The roots that his ancestors put down in the soil are being extracted after the termination of the National Party’s domination. No longer *eingewurzelt* (“rooted in”)<sup>20</sup>, South Africa is clearly not a name he “can call with love”. Nor is he disposed to love its inhabitants or accept responsibility for them. Since nothing ties him to the country and its people, Chris embarks on journeys to England, Spain, Morocco and Gibraltar. Regardless of where he goes, he cannot find a permanent home and remains disconnected from the world and emotionally alienated from others and himself. What is more, he lacks the ingenuity of Coetzee’s Michael K to find “a way to reclaim displacement and tracklessness as a form of freedom”, as “something to be desired” (Barnard, 2007:31). Bachelard (1994:10) points out that in a postcolonial era the “normal unconscious knows “how to make itself at home everywhere”, very much like a snail that carries its house around with it. Chris does not know this, and his geographical lostness leads to psychological lostness (and vice versa).

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other races “lacked humanity”. Apparently they cared more about dogs than poor people, and, in his opinion, this means that they were wanting in dignity and ubuntu, respect and love for their fellow human beings.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Cranwell from *The Desecration of the Graves* (1990) wonders whether persons buried in African soil can belong to Africa; that is, if a grave denotes having a place in Africa and being accepted (Kearney, 2010:77).

<sup>20</sup> The linguist, David Lurie, uses the word “*eingewurzelt*” in *Disgrace* (Coetzee, 1999:117).

### 3.6 Space, place and identity formation

This section engages with historical and political reality as it addresses aspects of colonisation and integration or belonging. The discussion of these aspects attempts to come to grips with the settlers' complex and contradictory connection with the African continent, the significant issue of land (possession of which defined the settlers' identity and is a topic still pertinent today in South African politics) and connectedness, and the difference between Europe and Africa in terms of culture and home.

At the beginning of *Out of Africa* (1937), Blixen reflects on the reciprocity of the settlers' relationship with the continent: "If I know a song of Africa, does Africa know a song of me?" This quotation not only underscores the continent's importance but also personifies it as a living presence. Conyngham, in an interview with Peter Blair (2003:85), poses a similar question: "While we have evolved through four generations in Natal, becoming more African generation by generation, are we getting any closer to Africa accepting us?" Differently put, can colonised land ever be home to those who reckon they have become expatriates in the land of their birth and doubt their right to ownership of usurped soil? As Engela van Rooyen (1994:3) asks in *Met 'n eie siekspens* [With my own sixpence]:

Does this landscape even want people in it, or does it consistently try to work them out with the untameable high waters and the stinking muddy stagnant pools, with the thick cloying dust storms, the searing heat and the terrible plagues?

The reality of living on the African continent soon dispels all traces of idealism; Africa is not as welcoming as the nineteenth-century traveller may have thought. "[P]ost-apartheid disappointments such as corruption, failures of governance, populism, and xenophobic outrages" (Barris, 2008:2) have tarnished the colours of the rainbow nation. As Chris observes: "... so much for our notion of an African paradise" (55). The "real" Africa is a "peculiar blend of beauty and squalor" (111). It is paradise and hell at the same time (55); at best, it is "paradise enriched by the hell within it" (114). Although white South Africans' perception of and relationship with the continent are tinged by ambivalence, they struggle to sever their ties with it. Africa holds a strange fascination

for them. After returning from Europe to Morocco, Chris acknowledges that “it is a tonic to be back in Africa. The harsh sunlight, the dust, the poverty, the vigour of a racial polyglot and the brooding threat of terrible violence [a]re all part of [him].” (110) Regardless of Africa’s problems, here the former settlers feel fulfilled and whole.

South Africa, though, is not the real Africa as places like Lamu and Marrakesh, for instance, are. Chris’s search for Alice may also be interpreted as a search for the real Africa, but before long he comes to the conclusion that South Africa is sufficiently real for him. After the overthrow of the white government and the inauguration of a black one, South Africa evidently is a tamer version of Africa – yet still “with the possibility of rawness” (103). Chris summarises it as follows: the country is a fractious and “fragile limbo where the Old and New Worlds meet” (103). In its liminal state, it hovers between political and social orders, as well as between two identities – “one that is known and discarded, and the other unknown and undetermined” (Wright, 2009:9). South Africa is not first world, but it is also not third world. Although their ancestors came from Europe, settlers like Chris and Frank Eloff (from *The Good Doctor*) are at home in South Africa until such time as the land reverts to the “real” Africa and its custody to the indigenous inhabitants.

The white population seemed to regard themselves as a chosen people (akin to the Biblical Israelites) and as the stewards of the new world. For this reason, white men believed they were entitled to the land. In essence, as McEwan (1996:2) puts it in his M.A. dissertation, they defined who they were in terms of the ownership of land (and authority over others who were considered part of the land). Land was (and still is) of central importance, both as “marker of identity, as heritage, as political issue and as commodity” (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2004:21). That it still is, is substantiated by the on-going debate over land reforms. While a growing number of citizens denounce the government for not making significant strides to rectify the imbalance in ownership, others dread the forceful and violent appropriation of their land. It follows that an interconnectedness exists between land and identity; land and its borders influence the

individual and social constructions a person makes. A lack of land and borders means losing the essence of one's being and the purpose of one's existence.

The space of the farm may be considered a microcosm of the country, according to Smit (2005:46) and Petzold (2008:143). Jochen Petzold theorises that the farm is an ideological space imbued with political and emotional connotations. An icon of natural and numinous identity, it expresses the soul of the white man's being. It is also a space that is inscribed with the history of colonial domination, appropriation and occupation. Since it excludes the wilderness and destructive elements, here the colonial, patriarchal mentality can perpetuate itself without much interference from the outside world. The farm, furthermore, is seen as wasteland that the white man, through his labour, has transformed into fertile farmland (Petzold, 2008:143). Since he has imposed control on disorder by cultivating the land and demarcating its borders – very much like Robinson Crusoe does with the island – it belongs to him. Because Robinson Crusoe has conquered nature by domesticating and “civilising” his surroundings and transforming them into landscape – a controlled and hospitable space of prospect and refuge for himself – the island becomes his empire. And as Robinson Crusoe would never have contemplated handing over his island-kingdom to his domesticated slave or the cannibals; so the white man cannot give back the land to the native inhabitants. The native inhabitants, from a colonialist point of view, are judged as other and an extension of Nature, liminal to Culture (of which European men are the guardians). They belong to the soil that has to be reclaimed from the wilderness on its outskirts and civilised. Giving the land to them would result in chaos and ruin.

Chris, however, does not own the land. Given that identity is frequently territorially delimited (Smit, 2005:16), he – suggestive of the landless and powerless Lyndall and Waldo (*The Story of an African Farm*) – cannot configure his individuality in terms of a stable space. Entrapped within hegemonic colonial discourse that deems ownership and dominance – as opposed to collaborative relationships – a requirement for the shaping of subjectivity, he also questions his connection with the country. Chris's

situation may be likened to that of Wynand in Van den Heever's farm novel, *Somer*. Viljoen (2004:115) describes Wynand as having

a non-identity; he stands outside the usual matrices in which identity is constructed: he has no family, no heritage, no future; he is always yearning for the faraway horizon; he has no security and no responsibility; and above all, no land.

At the same time as Christopher Jameson's relationship with the woman flounders, his tie to the ground is rent apart. Although he has a strong emotive bond with the land, he does not possess it, and nor does he the woman. Sewlall (2004:159) notes that the feminisation of land, principally of *terra incognita*, is "a common trope in postcolonial discourse". In *King Solomon's Mines*, Haggard (1972:40) metonymically links the African topography with a woman's body: "at times the mists and shadows beneath them take the form of a recumbent woman, veiled mysteriously in sleep" (Ching-Liang Low, 1996:197). He describes the mountains as "shaped exactly like a woman's breasts". The colonial, patriarchal mentality dictated that men pacified and possessed the land, its occupants and women. White women, on the score of their "smaller brain size" (Stott, 1989:75), apparently fell into the same category as children or savages. Hence, the treatment of land echoed that of women (Driver, 1988:13 & Crang, 1998:65). Quoting Anne McClintock (1995:24), Sewlall (2004:159) stresses: "... a familiar symptom of male megalomania, it [the feminising of *terra incognita*] also betrays acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss". When Chris leaves South Africa, he loses both the woman and his homeland. Since selfhood requires a sense of belonging – if not to a place, then to a person – this absence of a significant attachment precipitates psychological lostness and a schism in subjectivity.

For settlers whose identities have not kept up with the changes in the country, Western Europe and other first-world countries are perceived to be places of progress in the arts, science and commerce, and they represent culture and civilisation. The "Dark Continent", in contrast, is conceptualised as "a primeval place of origins" (Bunn, 1988:18). Chris hopes that Britain, "like a forgiving parent, [will] overlook the

waywardness of its prodigal sons and daughters” (90). Though it is common to refer to the country where one was born as one’s fatherland, the fact that Chris compares unknown territory to a parent attests to his ontological isolation. Even though Chris admits that he comes from Africa (143), he quickly points out that the settlers originally came from Europe. *Disgrace’s* David Lurie aligns himself with white Europe by frequently alluding to European intellectuals in his communications and writings. Europe – a foil to Africa – is the settlers’ former home and remains the source and arbiter of meaning (Ashcroft, 1998:91). Since a Eurocentric worldview has served white South Africans well in the past, *présence européenne* (Rutherford, 1990:233) still supplies them with a secure and stable identity. This reluctance to relinquish loyalty towards Europe may explain why the protagonist’s consciousness is divided between two continents. On this account Chris fails to integrate into a truly African identity but instead wavers on the margins between two divergent spaces and experiences lostness in both. Heather Mackie (1998:8) refers to him as “a piece of flotsam”.

During his sojourn in England and Spain, Chris soon intuits that although he may have come from Europe first (143), he does not belong there. Except for an Australian pub partner, a Jew who has visited South Africa and remembers it with fondness, and a Catalan prostitute in Spain whom Chris does not even kiss because it would seem immoral, the protagonist fails to establish any essential human connection. Since he does not distinguish the self in the other, hardly any cultural transgression takes place. Similar to the Australian, Jew and prostitute, he is a border figure and an outcast in Europe, displaced and disoriented. Conyngham states, “If one were to go to another country, one would always be an outsider.” (Blair, 2003:85) In England Chris is simply a hired hand, a disposable entity low on the priority list and floating on the fringes of society. Roles are reversed when the master becomes a slave and a white South African performs manual labour, work traditionally reserved for the black man.<sup>21</sup> Along

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<sup>21</sup> The trope of role reversal figures in many South African novels such as Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* where Gregory Rose disguises himself as a nurse, and in Galgut’s *The Quarry* (1995), where the fugitive dons the minister’s cassock.

with social boundaries, geographical borders are also navigated when the character exchanges the rural (the African farm in the south) for the city in the north (England). The contrast between the two entities marks the boundary between the former colonial periphery and the metropolitan centre (Viljoen, 2013:154). Texts such as *Cry, the Beloved Country*, *The Heart of Redness* and *Somer* show the city to be a site of inequity, injustice and corruption. In the city the son of Paton's Reverend Khumalo loses his moral bearings and murders a man. In England Chris is commodified and instrumentalised and more removed from home than before.

According to Schick (1999:24), places, and, by extension countries, are not "objective realities" but exist through people's affective or emotional relationships with them. People forge such relationships by inhabiting spaces, experiencing and conceptualising them. Every place or country thus reflects its inhabitants' experience and knowledge, beliefs and practices. The accretions (and erasures) of these traces of "cultural memories and residues of past practices and knowledges" (Carter *et al.*, 1993:23) make up a record of change, called a palimpsest. A place is thus a palimpsest or a reservoir of feelings and memories (Carter *et al.*, 1993:116), and a sense of "us" originates from the shared relationships to a lived space. In *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), the farm functions as a palimpsest onto which the anxieties and aspirations of the farm dwellers are etched (Smit, 2005:3). Because Chris did not play a part in the palimpsest of place or the constitution of mutual identity, he feels excluded and metaphorically dislocated. Consequently, wherever he goes and whatever he sees, he remains estranged from his surroundings and is reminded in some way or another of Africa. Africa appears to keep him in thrall as do the desolate mudflats Boesman and Lena in Fugard's play (1974). Even when away, his consciousness continues to be tied to the continent. It is in a cathedral in Barcelona, with the orange flame of the devotees' candles stirring up "subtropical memories" (102), that it dawns on him that "it [is] Africa, not Europe, that [he is] seeking" (103). In Africa he can be alone but never feel alone (Conyngham, 1998:100).

In an effort to establish a home away from home and regain a sense of perspective and self (subjectivity being contingent on spatial relations), Chris tries to find similarities between his new location and South Africa. He recalls Natal's coast upon smelling Casablanca's salty air. The scenery in the Moroccan hinterland looks like the Drakensberg Mountains in KwaZulu-Natal. In Volubilis, a partly excavated Roman city in Morocco, he notices icons of apartheid South Africa: Afrikanerdom's Voortrekker Monument and Bloed River laager. Gibraltar's Rock, again, reminds him of Isandlwana, a hill in Zululand where he spent his childhood. Even Chris's job as a barman, "pushing tumblers up under the inverted spirit bottles", calls to his mind calves "nudging udders for milk" (143) on the Bushmansburg farm. The protagonist's desire for "reassuring" (138) resemblances makes manifest that he is attempting to replicate the colonising moment – the inhabitation of new territory while striving to find parallels with the old – because he is homesick and wishes to control the new space. The inference may be drawn that for South Africans there is indeed no place like home, the concept of which evokes feelings of nostalgia and memories of the past and origins in those who are away from it. For those who are there, it provides the comfort of a secure and stable identity.

### **3.7 Travel and borders**

Ironically, Chris seeks out Europe and later the interior of Africa to escape his peripherality, reorient himself in new milieux, and discover identity and meaning. Not unlike the original colonisers, he goes out into the world with the intention to explore and to conquer. Although traversing topographical borders "entails physical and spiritual dislocation and alienation" (Viljoen, 2013:xii), there are also benefits to be gained from travelling. While travellers cross physical, geographical borders, they, more importantly, transgress social, cultural and mental borders as well, in the process acquiring knowledge of what lies beyond a threshold and broadening their experience. As travelling is a liberating experience that expands conventional perceptions of space and place, travellers can challenge the boundaries of conventions. For this reason, numerous scholars (for example Van Coller, 1998:53, 62; Wenzel, 1999:137 and

Rowley, 1996:137) proclaim that the expansion of horizons and exposure to other countries and cultures may act as an enriching and a transformative experience, opening up new possibilities. The perspective of the traveller is based on “mobility, transience and difference” (Rowley, 1996:137). As voyagers make connections with the outside world, they obtain a different perspective on people and places and are able to appraise and adjust previously biased perceptions. They may come to comprehend that difference from the self does not constitute inferiority in the other. As a matter of fact, Jon Stratton (1990:84) conceives of travel as the “trace of productive difference”. The Afrikaans author, Elsa Joubert claims her journeys beyond a geographical and cultural threshold have opened her eyes to South Africa’s social and racial inequities (Wenzel, 1999:122). Traversing the concrete and abstract lines of separation between “here” and “there” and “us” and “them” has given her access to otherness and resulted in recognising the other as an extension of the self. So, at the same time as travellers’ knowledge of others and other places increases, they also gain insight into themselves. In Mda’s *Heart of Redness* (2000), Camagu, after having moved to Qolorha-by-Sea recovers the essence of his being. Sofia Kostelac (2010:59) posits that distance from familiar contexts is “a precondition for a confrontation with the strange and disavowed aspects of the self”.

Navigating geographical spaces, societies and cultures, travellers find themselves on the outskirts of society – in a peripheral space between boundaries where they have to reposition themselves in space and time and adjust their perspectives. After his journeys, Kurtz finds himself caught up in “the void formed in the interface between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism’ ...” (De Lange *et al.*, 2008:112). In accordance with Bhabha (1994:4), Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004:17) postulate that such liminal zones are creative spaces where the consciousness expands and imaginative awakening occurs. Liminality ensues from separation from the old society and endures until the subject returns to this society or integrates himself/herself with a new society. The undefined, intermediary spaces of a liminal situation are of the essence for the adaptation and transformation of identity. For instance, Alice’s disappearance has indirectly instigated Chris’s voyages through milieux of transformation, a circuitous way

of discovering himself, and on this score he exclaims in a letter to the missing teenager: “Alice, I am who I am because of you” (117). Through writing this and other letters, Chris tries to understand “better how Alice Walker’s disappearance [has] set [him] on a long and winding road to this small room in this forgotten outpost” (143), in this liminal zone. Incidentally, Chris writes the letters during his stay in Tangier. While he and Anna are “weaving through the labyrinth” (114) of the city, they are under the influence of marijuana or alcohol; and their consciousness, in the current author’s opinion, likewise lingers in a liminal state, between the boundaries of reality and hallucination.

Because borders enable contact, communication and exchange (a boundary *to*) as much as they divide (a boundary *between*) (Viljoen, 2013:xv), travellers can compare different places and avoid assimilation within existing cultural norms (Wenzel, 1999:122). Travellers reevaluate their sense of self and different societies’ norms and sense of justice. They also become aware of the significance of roots and belonging, as well as their own place in the world. Because travelling involves a disruption in time and space, it may provoke self-confrontation, so resulting in internal change and spiritual renewal.

However, Chris does not appear to experience change or transformation. Drifting from one strange space to another (“blown at random by the winds of fortune” (97)) and crossing several borders, Chris’s meanders appear to be without direction and purpose. He moves around from one place to another “not driven by curiosity but by the bored anguish of staying still”, to distract himself. The narrator compares himself to an autumn leaf that is tossed around by the gusts (94), never finding a place to settle down and where he can realise himself in relation to the environment. His journeys translate as an “endless running away” (Galgut, 2004:176); and similar to Alice’s journey, his are also to nowhere. Constant relocation situates him beyond borders, so that he does not fit in either at the centre or the periphery and, as a result, it alienates him from people and places so that “history happens elsewhere, it has nothing to do with him” (15). Popi from Mda’s *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) endures the alienating position of the periphery, of participating in a place without belonging there (*participation sans*

*appurtenance*) (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2007:223). Hence, the navigation of topographical boundaries and globality can also translate as homelessness, and the dividing line between home and world fades. There is not always salvation or serenity to be found through travelling. What is more, the diaspora experience of “globalisation and a lack of belonging” exacerbate the character’s “cultural fragmentation, displacement and exile” (Wenzel, 2008:143). Hence, the search for Alice and an integrated, coherent self remains fruitless; “the centre is elsewhere” (14). “Marooned by his inflexibility” (31), like Major James is, Chris Jameson<sup>22</sup> is unable to escape his secluded, insubstantial self. Said (1993:27) emphasises that there are three themes in the literature of settler colonies which persist in postcolonial society: the problem of finding and defining one’s own “home”, physical and emotional confrontations with a new land, and exile. These three themes are pointed up in Chris’s peripatetic and isolated condition and encapsulate the ubiquitous concern with place and displacement in postcolonial societies.

Chris eventually comes to rest at the southern extremity of Europe, the Strait of Gibraltar, a place from where he, “a poor Robinson Crusoe figure marooned in a colonial backwater” (153) (by his own admission), can glimpse Africa – home and also not home – in the distance. Here, poised between the borders of Europe and Africa, “adrift on that fluid highway between two continents” (108), which, according to Jones (1998:26), constitutes the “geographical equivalence” of the narrator’s in-betweenness; he – like Belle from Joubert’s *Isobelle’s Journey* (1995) – experiences *Entgrenzung*. Wolfgang Müller-Funk (2007:83) defines *Entgrenzung* as the “more or less sudden disappearance of any inner and outer limitation”. Paradoxically, in Gibraltar Chris attains some measure of “foundness”. Conyngham (interview with Blair, 2003:87) conjectures that this is as close as the character will “get to foundness within the central lostness of the human condition”. The next section will determine if the “foundness” Chris attains is sufficient for the reader to set store by his judgement.

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<sup>22</sup> The similarities in names are probably not coincidental but serve to stress the similarities between the two characters’ attitude to Africa and Africans.

### 3.8 Narration and narrator

McEwan (1996:49) speculated two years before *The Lostness of Alice* was published that

Conyngham, in his third novel would move away from first-person narrative mode which in the first two novels [was] the prime vehicle for the ironic treatment of the protagonists' limitations and the position of the protagonists outside the political mêlée. The third protagonist [i.e. Christopher Jameson] may possibly be treated less ironically and may be a more reliable witness in his account of a country in turmoil/transition.

In my opinion, Conyngham has not lived up to McEwan's prediction that the protagonist could be regarded less critically and be trusted more. This retrospective postmodern narrative is in the same mould as *The Arrowing of the Cane* and *The Desecration of the Graves*.

The first two chapters of *The Lostness of Alice* appear to render an omniscient third person account of Alice's disappearance and the start of the search for her. The readers have access to the actions and thoughts of all the characters. In Chapter Three, however, a shift in focalisation takes place when Christopher Jameson introduces himself in relation to his girlfriend, Sally Bowen, whom the readers were led to believe was the novel's protagonist. It becomes apparent that the readers have been privy to the recollections of a character who has hitherto been unknown. In Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), the opposite occurs: Susan Barton focalises and relates her experiences in the first person before an external third person, the implied author, enters the text. This destabilisation and dissolving of boundaries between third- and first-person narrative parallels postmodernism's resistance to a fixed and one-dimensional realist representation and resonates with the "often irreconcilable facets of the self" (Kostelac, 2010:58). To evoke the postmodern condition of instability and insecurity, multiple potentially legitimate interpretations of reality present themselves to the readers. In consequence, readers doubt the absolute authority of the author and recognise that the reality and the truth he reveals are relative concepts, mediated through his subjectivity. The author chooses to silence or exclude characters or episodes.

Being the focaliser, Christopher Jameson bridges the textual gap between the author and the reader. Since this character's views interpose themselves between the reader and the event or other characters' actions and motivations, the reader has a high level of access to him but not to other characters whose actions and motivations are interpreted by him. Chris shapes the reader's responses, and controls his/her judgement. Because an autodiegetic dramatised I-narration is potentially more biased than an omniscient third-person narration (Smit-Marais, 2012:39), the audience has to treat the assertions of this narrator with circumspection and, it would seem, distance these contentions from the author's. To cite Jeanette Kearney's (1990:1) commentary on *The Desecration of the Graves*'s protagonist: "We have to beware ... of following too closely the tracks pointed out by our sophisticated guide." Yet at the outset of *The Lostness of Alice* Chris does come across as a dependable and impartial speaking subject whose thoughts and conduct correspond to the criteria implied in the text. Conyngham depicts him as a responsible, industrious man with a gentle disposition. The reader feels sympathy for this man when he cannot bring himself to shoot a dying calf but instead hopes for "a miracle" (16). All the derogatory remarks about Africa and Africans are made by the other characters. The inside view of Jameson's psyche, combined with the ostensibly honest narration, creates the semblance of unmediated access and closeness between focaliser and reader (Currie, 1998:20).

Nevertheless, it soon transpires that the I-narrator is a former white settler living in a country fraught with racial tension. Implicated in two centuries of exploitation, he is at odds with those around him and "rotten with fears", as Malan (1990:412-413) articulates. He conceives of himself as an interloper who does not truly belong to the land, and suffers the impermanence of his position on the continent. Ideologically marginalised from both Africa and Europe, he has no home to call his own, no family; in other words, no borders to provide a framework for his existence and no safety-net to shield him. On the flight from Mombasa to Lamu the reader then also starts to suspect a lapse in Chris's detachment and a growing discrepancy between authorial and narratorial views (Robinson, 1992:14), which impacts on the assessment of Chris's reliability. For the first time Chris directly addresses the readers: "You can't imagine

how difficult it is piecing together these fragments from a lost world.” (37) Booth (1996:150) classifies a narrator such as Chris as self-conscious. This postmodernist, fragmented mode of narration runs counter to the realistic novel’s clear demarcation between writer, speaker and reader; it blurs the boundary between writer, speaker and reader, and situates the reader as both recipient and interpreter of the text. Chris’s statement further implies that no one incontrovertible interpretation of reality and the truth exists. Depending on perspective, these concepts are relative and not absolute. One of these viewpoints belongs to the reader whom the narrator invites to co-author the text, to help Chris assemble the “fragments from a lost world” (37): Alice’s and his own. The participation of the reader in locating the culprit and solving the mystery reminds one of murder mystery games or the Cluedo board-game. This narrative technique diminishes the disjuncture between speaker and reader as both have the same goal. The illusion of intimacy is further enhanced by the narrator’s self-reflexive style and his realisation that he is the (main) writer.

By drawing attention to Chris’s constant misinterpretation of persons and events, his erroneous assumptions and biased assertions resulting from an inflated perception of self engendered by the colonial and apartheid narratives of whiteness, Conyngham, nonetheless, alerts the readers not to put a premium on Christopher’s conclusions (McEwan, 1996:21). The feeling of closeness is undercut when one looks more closely at the aforementioned quotation (“You can’t imagine how difficult it is piecing together these fragments from a lost world” [37]). This declaration conveys that the missing teenager is the world to him. This random girl is more than a person; she has attained supernatural stature in his mind. He credits his crossing geographical boundaries to travel around the world to her, so shifting accountability for his own choices and actions onto another. It is not entirely understandable why the disappearance of the girl should affect Chris so much: he has never met her or her parents, she does not know him, nor is he directly involved in the investigation. It does, however, make manifest Chris’s dependence on another person to assuage his existential distress and give him a sense of foundness and wholeness. Before Alice, Sally acts as Chris’s emotional crutch; he relies on his girlfriend for a coherent and connected self and a meaningful existence.

For this purpose he does not think twice about reading Sally's diary. The readers are already privy to Sally's innermost thoughts, but here they give another perspective on the male protagonist's character.

As negotiations break down, why isn't he traumatised by the sense of impending loss? Is he being strong or weak? For him life is peacefulness and cattle and the pleasure of rye grass growing green during winter (65).

In Sally's estimation, Chris ensconces himself in a pastoral paradise, so shielding himself against the ambiguities of the present and a future of possible dispossession. Even so, the possibility exists that her boyfriend conceals his emotions because he conforms to outdated colonial notions of masculinity which stipulate that a man be strong, dominant and stoical (McEwan, 1996:68), in addition to lording it over women, others and the land. Sally further supposes that her boyfriend uses her for his own gratification: she is just "his best friend whom he kisses or bonks when he wants to" (65). The man's complete ignorance of her feelings indicates his misunderstanding of people and events and, coupled with his unsound suppositions and slanted statements, shows the disparity that exists between the narrator's and the author's points of view. It may be argued that Chris uses Alice too, albeit not in the same way. His behaviour reminds one of Conyngham's two other protagonists, Colville and Cranwell, who seek solace in women and engage sexually with them to circumvent confronting their dysfunctional, lost selves. At the same time as the men forfeit genuine and reciprocal human interaction, they enlarge the rift between self and other. Just as Chris fails to notice Sally's emotions, he is unaware of black people's thoughts. This, once again, underscores the link between Africans and white women – also regarded as other – in the patriarchal colonial consciousness. The classification of people in terms of Manichean polarities accounts for the other's marginalisation, objectification and oppression and the self's constriction in a postcolonial setting. As it happens, no substantial black personalities feature in the novel, and the blacks who do make an appearance (with the exception of Doris Bhenga, the Walkers' maid and the last person to see Alice) are perceived as different or dangerous, drifters or murderers. If not inferior, black people are seen as irrational, immoral and even malignant. On this score,

the author silences them or removes them from his texts, as people of colour were under apartheid emptied out of areas designated for white occupation. Zolile Nquayi (1998:25) finds this portrayal of black people “disquieting”, and, to Ken Barris (1998:27), “it seems obvious that anyone wishing to explore his or her relationship with a continent would have to engage with its people”. Yet Conyngham (together with his narrator) does not cross the border between “us” and “them”; instead he omits “the other side of the story – that is, black South Africans’ perceptions and feelings about South Africa” (McEwan, 1996:26). For this reason the author has been slated, by inter alia Kostelac and Barris, for being out of touch with and not accepting answerability for South Africa’s socio-political reality.

Chris, after seeing the extract in Sally’s notebook, and wounded by her criticism of his pacifism, surrenders to suspicion and mistrust, emotions which McEwan (1996:13) regards as emblematic of insecure and fearful white South Africans who wrestle with articulating their identity along new lines. During the course of his life, Chris has assimilated and internalised the paranoid and xenophobic attitudes of the whites around him (such as Will and the police), and, like Sally before, he now has a doomsday vision in which he imagines whites making a hurried exit from South Africa, fleeing for their lives from the multitudes who are demanding restitution for dispossession. Chris imagines Sally weaving the truck in and out of wreckage strewn in the road, while he is firing out of the passenger window at the black people obstructing their way, thereby confirming this white man’s horror of and hatred for the different other. Chris’s aim in shooting is to maim, “to blow limbs to pieces” (1998:67), not to kill – or so he says. This may be the character’s translation of the rights of liberalism: people’s right may be trampled on; one may even take pleasure in their pain, but as long as their lives are not taken, the conscience stays unblemished. In this fashion Conyngham exposes the limitation, “pretension and duplicity prevalent in South African liberalism” (Kearney, 2010:79).<sup>23</sup> The author further puts the flimsy foundation of this marginalised and

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<sup>23</sup> Collville in *The Arrowing of the Cane* and Cranwell in *The Desecration of the Graves* may also be categorised as “pseudo-liberals” (McEwan, 1996:38). These two men validate “liberalism at its

compromised character's liberal values on display when at the harbour Chris attempts to bribe the captain of a ship to ensure Sally and himself passage on a ship by offering the captain a gold dagger which was part of Chris's grandfather's imperial booty (89). His grandfather profited from imperialism and Chris hopes that he will too. With his limited perspective it does not register with him that imperialism has brought about his and other white people's current predicament. Wanting to flee the country and banking on his "Englishness" to get a seat on a plane, the character reveals that he would rather withdraw from South Africa's political reality than participate in it: "I had to get away from it all. Politics, politics, politics. It wears you down in the end." (144) By desiring to go to another country, Chris recalls the more than half a million white South Africans who since 1994 have traversed physical borders and emigrated to countries such as England and former British colonies to escape the violence and crime that follow in the wake of the new dispensation.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, Chris – hypocritically and unaware of the irony – refers to these people as "fools who have fled their homeland and embarked on a journey to nowhere" (126).

Not long after this, Chris himself departs from South Africa. Like Alice, he vanishes, without leaving a note and without a trace. On his way to the airport, with the revolver on the seat beside him, he wills

... every passerby to be reckless enough to attack. Gone [i]s my studied intention to avoid killing anyone .... Opening fire and bellowing out my pain, my hatred, my disgust of everything and everyone who ha[ve] driven me to run for it as I squeeze the trigger again and again until all five chambers [a]re empty, [will be] the ultimate catharsis for me (89).

It is illuminating that although Sally has wounded Chris, rather than meeting her head-on, he takes the coward's way out and contemplates taking revenge on strangers. Sally's betrayal becomes part of the psychological baggage he cannot jettison. Much

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most limited and self-deceiving" (Kearney, 1992:81) by using it to ease their consciences. While claiming to have sympathy with the oppressed, they do nothing to engage in and improve their life-world.

<sup>24</sup> Affirmative action and the crime wave are recurring themes in post-1994 texts (cf. novels by Deon Meyer, Mike Nichols, J.M. Coetzee and Zakes Mda).

later in the novel the narrator discloses that his parents, through no fault of theirs, also abandoned him when they were murdered. The fact that he has kept silent about this life-altering moment in his childhood illustrates that he has attempted to portray himself in a positive light. Chris has further been traumatised by his military experience in Angola. Desensitised to death, he does not know any longer how to respond to it: “With delight, sorrow or indifference?” (81), he asks when a farmer’s attackers are shot and arrested. In Tangier he wishes for a firearm, because then he could do “something very rash” (109). The fixation on images and symbols of violence alerts the reader to the latent aggressiveness in the protagonist’s nature and his inability to act in a positive and constructive manner. Chris’s antipathy and belligerence towards others eventually beget bloodshed: he savagely beats a hustler in Morocco who tries to steal from Anna.

The discussion in the previous paragraphs of the protagonist’s character and his inability to interact with other people in a productive manner bears out the thesis statement of this section of the chapter that Chris Jameson does not articulate a balanced and truthful perspective and can by no means be regarded as a role model for white liberals. Scarred as he is by his past, this compromised character cannot be seen to share the author’s views. Chris’s assertions should be dissociated from Conyngham’s and read ironically. The narrator’s interpretation of events is limited and prejudiced, exhibiting the constriction of a neo-colonial mentality in a postcolonial environment. His professed liberalism, his “seeking equality and a place for all in the sun” (44) at the beginning of the novel, is just a smokescreen, disguising his prejudice. His insights and self-censure amount to no more than “lip-service into the realm of constructive change and personal growth” (McEwan, 1996:43); they serve to ease his privileged white conscience and disguise the “impulse for mayhem” (109) that “so often rises in his gorge” (80) – and finally erupts in violence. Like David Lurie and Tjaart Cronje (*The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002)), the character’s consciousness, inherited from the past, is not capable of transgressing boundaries that marginalise or exclude and therefore he cannot enter into the domain of others and accept them. McEwan (1996:68) submits that accepting the other is a prerequisite for a re-conception of an integrated self and a commitment to the broader society. Contrary to Belle in *Isobelle’s*

*Journey*, who renounces her white racial and cultural superiority after falling in love with an Indian man, Chris, rather than confronting and examining his consciousness, defines it against “inferior” others. Though present political structures no longer underwrite past discourses of whiteness, he does not discard the inflated perception of self “confabulated as part of the colonial master narrative” (Steyn, 2001:138). In addition, he refuses to relinquish his paternalistic and proprietary attitude towards others as well as towards the South African land. He also avoids taking responsibility: for who he is in relation to others and where he is. Like the other two protagonists in Conyngham’s “loosely constructed triptych” (Woeber, 1999:277), Cranwell and Colville, Chris thinks of himself as a pawn “in an unjust game” (Conyngham, 1990:129), blaming the ostensible dissolution and collapse of the country and his personal predicament on forces outside himself, forces more powerful than the individual, without appreciating that he, too, has a role to play in the construction of a non-exploitative, post-apartheid South Africa. Akin to Dr Frank Eloff of *The Good Doctor*, another relic of the colonial period, Conyngham’s protagonist is not ready to be part of the “rainbow nation”. Caught up in the neo-colonial preconception of what he should be and what others are (McEwan, 1996:69), he is “confined within the narrow space for Self” (28) he has mapped out for himself. A manifestation of the limited neo-colonial consciousness, he feels “the frustration of such confinement” (67) and stays “forever haunted by that which [he] seeks to oppress and reject” (28). Unable to dispense with divisive binary systems on the basis of which white South African subjectivity has been constructed (Van der Merwe, 2004:126), his identity remains restricted and he does not attain a purposeful, socially integrated existence, wholeness or closure (Van der Merwe, 2013:100). Nonetheless, that three protagonists of Conyngham’s are in the same dilemma, that all three cannot transcend the psychological barriers of their historical identity and its limitations (McEwan, 2006:69) but are entrapped in a web of superseded colonial discourses and white male supremacy, their attempts at insight into themselves and their relationship with others doomed, may indicate that there is a place for this point of view in the South African context.

### 3.9 Conclusion

As the contextualisation and analysis of this chapter have shown, some white male settlers, for example the narrator of *The Lostness of Alice* and that of *The Good Doctor*, still carry the burden of the colonial past and apartheid with them. Colonial discourse and a colonial mind-set still prevail in contemporary South Africa. As Christopher Jameson demonstrates, a number of whites consider that the political changes and the Africanisation of South Africa will imperil their position that formerly depended on possessing land and subordinating those deemed “other”. The former settlers now have to reconfigure and integrate their identity with the new South Africa (which, as “new” implies, has become an unfamiliar space to them), “accept all that is Other, and reject the binary systems which have been instrumental in the construction of their identity” (McEwan, 1996:69). Contrary to Conyngham’s protagonist, Damon Galgut’s Frank Eloff illustrates that this new identity should derive from inclusion rather than exclusion so as to be consistent with an all-encompassing and egalitarian society (McEwan, 1996:69). Conyngham also utilises the narratological device of intertextuality to interrogate Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, as well as the genre of the detective novel to emphasise the exploration of identity in a postcolonial setting.

## CHAPTER 4

### DAMON GALGUT: THE GOOD DOCTOR

#### 4.1 Introduction

Whereas John Conyngham's male protagonist crosses several geographical-physical boundaries, he fails to break through his own inherent bias and psychological boundaries to establish an identity that is inclusive of others. Damon Galgut's protagonist, on the other hand, remains in one place for most of the novel, yet he confronts himself and strives to surmount social and racial barriers as well as divisive binary systems between self and other. This chapter will continue to examine the impact of colonisation and apartheid on the white South African male consciousness and perspective as outlined in *The Good Doctor* (2003). Galgut's fifth novel distinguishes itself on account of its intertextual allusions; it presents a counter-argument to Conrad's evaluation of colonisation as a futile and fruitless process that can neither succeed nor be sustained for long in postcolonial Africa. In light of this context, the chapter sets out to address how the decolonisation of Africa and the democratisation of South Africa have determined the original settler's sense of identity and perception of his position and place in the new South Africa. Related to this issue, the chapter also focuses on the postcolonial concepts of self-examination and social responsibility – for the past, present and future of the country – and refers to the relevance of postmodern trends of retrospective and self-critical first-person narration, authorial disruptions and ambiguous endings. The objective of this chapter is to demonstrate that the disquiet expressed in Conrad's archetypal text of colonisation, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), has become more prominent at the end of the twentieth century, but that this tension does not necessarily preclude personal development and reconciliation between races.

## 4.2 Contextualisation

*The Good Doctor* provides a realistic image of post-apartheid South Africa which is not a positive picture but “a stark portrayal of things going wrong” (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2007:3). Apartheid may be gone, but its lingering presence makes itself felt in the persistence of racial and socio-economic schisms that need to be addressed and mended. The social patient is a country in crisis that requires a “good” doctor to heal it. Yet neither of the two doctors – each other’s opposite in that the one represents innocence, idealism and the future, and the other guilt, disillusionment and the past – is equipped to cure the physical problems of the patients in the hospital or the social ills that afflict the country. The need to make and take restitution for the past remains. As a social problem and politically engaged narrative, *The Good Doctor* denounces social and moral values in the new dispensation. However, according to Barris (2008:5), Galgut strives to position *The Good Doctor* as a post-apartheid narrative, but does so by resorting to the topoi and tropes of anti-apartheid convention. In Barris’s biased opinion, instead of making restitution for whites’ complicity in apartheid injustices and redefining the nation’s image of itself and its identity, Galgut mourns the dissolution of the old order. Barris (2008:72) thus reads the novel as a “failed attempt to relate the episteme of anti-apartheid to the post-apartheid condition” (Barris, 2008:72), and contends that Galgut does not contribute to the “rebirth of the country” (2005:24).

*The Good Doctor* presents the reader with the reality of change and corruption in a postcolonial South Africa. A poorly-funded hospital in one of South Africa’s former homelands (created by the apartheid government) with very few patients and necessities and the depopulated town in which it is situated serve as the setting for the novel. A middle-aged doctor, Frank Eloff, accepts a position at this desolate place after his wife betrays him with his business partner and best friend. The doctor leaves his practice in the city and relocates to this remote rural area where he knows nobody and nobody knows him. Existing in a sort of hiatus, he finds comfort in this no-man’s land – in a liminal position between borders – where nothing ostensibly changes and he hopes that he, too, can remain unchanged. The doctor’s complacent existence is thrown into

disarray by the arrival of a young man who has come to the hospital to do his internship. Dr Laurence Waters moves into Dr Eloff's room and starts making disproportionate demands of friendship on the older doctor. The innocent and inexperienced newcomer discomfits his colleague by seeing only positive possibilities and believing that people can change things. Dr Waters's idealism and utopian outlook are shared by a Cuban couple who have also intended to make a difference but whose ideals are shattered when they witness the carnage of a Sowetan hospital's emergency room. The Santanders' encounter with South Africa's violence leaves them (as it does Christopher Jameson from *The Lostness of Alice* (1998)) psychologically scarred.

In contrast to Laurence and the Santanders, Dr Eloff aligns himself with the old South Africa. He has three unlikely "allies" in the novel: Dr Ruth Ngema, the superintendent of the hospital, who claims to champion change and innovation but in reality resists any form of progress; the Brigadier who was chief minister of the homeland and maintains that his "time is coming still" (112) but is "outside history now" (111); and Colonel Moller, Frank's superior during the Angolan War. In addition to Dr Ngema, the Brigadier and Colonel Moller, two other characters who still carry the baggage of the past with them are a surly and apathetic hospital orderly, Tehogo, and Frank's mistress, Maria. Tehogo wears expensive clothes and jewellery, and is alleged to be a relative of the Brigadier who is implicated in criminal activities. Frank discovers that Tehogo pilfers discarded metal pipes and bed-frames from the hospital (reminiscent of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition band in *Heart of Darkness* who "tear[s] treasure out of the bowels of the land" (99) and informs Dr Waters of this. Laurence has a crisis of conscience: he knows he should report Tehogo, but Tehogo is a colleague. Besides, Frank insists that doing the right thing may sometimes be wrong. When Laurence does not heed Frank's advice and tells Dr Ngema that he (Laurence) has witnessed the stolen items in Tehogo's room, Dr Ngema blackmails the intern by threatening not to support his travelling clinic should he continue spreading lies about Tehogo. Laurence faces another dilemma when Frank's mistress becomes pregnant and requests him to abort the baby. Frank, who does not want to get involved, shifts responsibility onto Laurence. After the termination of the pregnancy, the woman disappears. In an effort to save her

life, Frank relays to Colonel Moller the whereabouts of the Brigadier (who, Frank believes, has something to do with Maria's disappearance). Because Frank suspects the Brigadier of smuggling arms and ammunition, drugs and ivory across the border, Frank conjectures that the Brigadier has abducted Tehogo from the hospital to prevent him from divulging the Brigadier's clandestine criminal operations.

#### **4.3 Narrative frame: The detective/mystery novel**

From the above information it emerges that *The Good Doctor* does contain elements of the detective novel. Galgut's protagonist resembles the detective figure. Traditionally, the detective is a loner, isolated from society. In the pursuit of an elusive wrongdoer, he has to navigate boundaries and orient himself in strange spaces. In this instance, the action occurs in the closed setting of a small village from which a young doctor disappears. The classical detective novel draws attention to a privileged social class's fears of anarchy; these people presume that the world as they know it is on the verge of disintegrating. This social class looks to the detective to protect them against deviant individuals within their midst who threaten their stable positions.

*The Good Doctor* may be styled hard-boiled detective fiction. The dangerous, crime-ridden surroundings into which the detective wanders signal moral decay and social disorder. In the novel, South Africa, "a mêlée of mild anarchy and creeping corruption" (as Jane Rosenthal [2003:4] describes the country), denotes this dystopia. Patients with "knife-wounds and shotgun blasts and maimings and gouging with broken bottles" (51) flood hospitals. Illegal immigrants and contraband cross the borders virtually unchecked, and corrupt and sadistic officials get top positions in the police force. The narrator points out that "[s]omething in this country had gone too far, something had snapped" (52).

Unlike the old-style detective who is an intelligent and intuitive super-sleuth (Wright, 1927), superior to the readers not only for his powers of meticulous observation and logical analysis but also in social standing, the detective of the hard-boiled genre is a

somewhat uninspiring middle-class investigator who forms relationships and is somebody with whom the reader can identify. Authors foreground the detective's feelings and motivations, and the evolution of his character is central to the plot. The detective may not possess a stable sense of self and be a cynical, damaged individual. Frank, for example, admits that he has missed the target of his life (203) and that he cuts a "ridiculous figure" (202). Unable to deal with the distress of having indirectly collaborated with the cruelties of apartheid, he avoids emotional attachment and questions his position in the new South Africa. Not unlike Frank, the hard-boiled detective may lack insight and perspective, yet his character flaws and professional blunders make him credible as a human being. The readers, being the investigator's equal, join him in the search for the truth; they observe the clues he uncovers and the progress he makes and try to figure out the puzzle before he can. Similar to Dr Frank Eloff, the detective often supports himself by other means; his outside interests and occupations make him more intriguing as a character.

Frank is not only an under-performing doctor, but he may also be described as an anti-detective who supposes that he has no stake in his surroundings and displays indifference towards the contradictions that characterise the country. Rather than dispelling disorder, the doctor does not "want something for which he will feel "obliged and responsible" (27); he does not "live for words like duty" (200) and remains passive when he finds out about Tehogo's theft of hospital equipment. Whereas the classical detective epitomises moral virtue and truthfulness, Frank lies to Laurence about his sexual exploitation of a married woman (Maria). He admits that his affair with another married woman, Claudia Santander, has taught him to conceal betrayal (117). Whereas the typical detective bravely enters into unknown spaces, Frank panics at the "strange, unknown, maybe dangerous" (80) world outside his room, a world where he believes even the trees watch him (73). Moreover, the doctor does not even know what he is looking for in the outside world (117); nor does he know the answers to his questions (199) because "it happened in another country, while [he] slept" (199) (whatever "it" may be). A detective should shield innocents from harm; Frank, in contrast, senses a stranger, "a dark brother", existing "behind the visor of his face" (162) who desires to

inflict violence on his roommate's "soft and pale" body (161). As with this detective, the armed forces do not protect and serve the citizens of the country. At a roadblock two policemen push Frank around, and the army's "calibrated and intense" (164) activity does not result in a single arrest being made.

*The Good Doctor* is strictly speaking not a detective novel since Maria and Laurence's disappearance does not occur before the narrative action commences. In fact, Maria goes missing only on page 172, and Laurence and Tehogo on page 199 of 215; that is, eight- and nine-tenths through the novel. This means that the consequences of these events cannot constitute the focal point of the text. Secondly, the detective genre dictates that the crime be violent, preferably murder. Maria leaves voluntarily and is only gone for a short while. Tehogo's disappearance does not bother Frank because he presumes "Tehogo is one of them .... they won't harm him" (209). Laurence vanishes – as Alice also does – without a trace, but, unlike Alice, Laurence is a grown man who does not need to account for his decisions and actions. The young doctor could have left of his own accord when it became apparent to him that he could not realise his ideals at the hospital. Thirdly, no clues or obvious culprits present themselves. Although Dr Eloff, the detective, makes a valiant effort to rescue the intern – as he has previously tried to rescue Maria – he does not find the key to the mystery, nor does he locate Laurence or the person/s responsible for his fate. *The Good Doctor* therefore offers no catharsis and the postmodern author deprives the readers of a convincing denouement, this chiming with conditions in a postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa.

#### **4.4 Narrative strategies: Intertextuality and irony**

##### 4.4.1 Intertextuality

In *The Good Doctor*, Frank traverses physical and psychological boundaries when he attempts to liberate two people whom he has regarded at one point as other, while in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow sets out to rescue Kurtz from "the elsewhere, the otherwise

and the foreign” (Viljoen, 2013:xi). Referred to as a rescue narrative by Sarah Cole (1998:259), *Heart of Darkness*, which serves as a matrix for the themes in Galgut’s text and his conceptualisation of space, is a frontier novel – in more than one sense. The protagonist of Conrad’s novella traverses geographical boundaries between two continents, to find himself psychologically torn between two contradictory cultures and disoriented in the interspace. Since Marlow encounters difficulty in expressing the enigma of Africa to a European audience, his narration fluctuates between speech and silence, but it also extends across temporal borders (past and present) as he recounts events that took place at an earlier time. Apart from providing evidence of temporal borders and spatial demarcations separating metropolis from colony and land from sea, symbolic divisions between light and dark and white and black also feature in the novel (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2007:227). Parry (1983:31) proposes that “by inventing meanings for Africa”, Marlow “exhibits the geography and *boundaries* of the imperialist imagination (my italics). In his embedded narrative, Marlow espouses colonial hypostatized notions by equating blackness and darkness with barbarism and evil (Sewlall, 2004:30; JanMohamed, 1988:4). Whiteness and lightness, conversely, resonate with civilisation and goodness. Seeing (through Marlow’s eyes) Kurtz trapped in “the void formed in the interface between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism’” (De Lange, 2008:112), white and black, light and dark; readers realise that good and evil cannot be clearly distinguished from each other. Due to the narrative framing of Marlow’s interpretations – this augmenting the distance between readers and the narrator-cum-character (Bowker, 1989:60) – readers also have doubts about the latter being the “ultimate authority to represent whiteness or blackness” (Sewlall, 2004:30).

*The Good Doctor* is a type of rewriting of Conrad’s key modernist text, so creating the impression of a cyclical structure. Galgut reproduces Conrad’s presentation of Africa as the “other world”: an ambivalent continent that is “the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilization ...” (Achebe, 1977:784). A wilderness that can never be fully known or tamed, and a far cry from the European ideal of a pastoral paradise, Africa defies and disrupts European civilisation and culture. Abandoned in the bush, as Marlow and Kurtz, and Frank and Laurence are, social graces and moral restraints recede (see

Stott, 1989:70 and Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:109). Both Kurtz and Frank contravene the boundaries of conventional, colonial morality and pursue the “possibilities of living on the other side” (Armstrong, 1996:2) when they take African mistresses. Conrad’s narrative purports that the only defence against degeneration and regression to a state of savagery is the “power of devotion, not to yourself but to an obscure back-breaking business” (Conrad, 1899:22). Marlow keeps himself busy with cutting up dead wood to keep the steamboat afloat, while Laurence’s “back-breaking business” entails taking care of an ungrateful patient in a decrepit hospital in a nondescript town. Marlow presumes that performing pointless yet arduous tasks will prevent him from questioning the hegemonic ideology (1899:89) and keep his mind on “the redeeming facts of life”. Dr Laurence Waters, in turn, proclaims that “[w]ork is the only thing that matters” (130). The young doctor maintains his work ethic and carries out his duties sedulously, regardless of the shoddy and unsanitary conditions under which he operates, just as the chief accountant does despite the “great demoralization of the land” (83) around him. The accountant keeps his papers in “apple-pie order” (83) and dresses himself impeccably. Marlow regards this miracle’s “starched collars”, “got-up shirt-fronts”, “vast cuffs and brushed hair” as “achievements of character” (83), and *The Good Doctor’s* Frank remarks on the “anomalous brightness” of his colleague’s white coat (11), “buttoned stiffly, all the way to the chin” (119), in a hospital where nobody else wears a uniform. Laurence’s commitment to duty, honour and obligation (199) – words for which he supposedly lives and dies – finds a parallel in the Russian harlequin’s blind devotion to Kurtz and the colonising rhetoric this “emissary of pity and science and progress” (1899:92) disgorges. The Russian and Laurence share the same “unreflecting audacity” (1899:129) and optimism. As Marlow observes, if “the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure ha[s] ever ruled a human being, it rule[s] this bepatched youth” (129). The intern, who hankers after recognition and self-actualisation, convinces himself that a grand design has determined his choice to come to this threadbare hospital and town. With his lofty aspirations, the doctor is a heroic individual on a demanding and dangerous quest – if not to domesticate the jungle then to medicate it. In the character of Laurence, *The Good Doctor*, like *Heart of Darkness*,

thus restages the imperial encounter by adopting and reshaping the tradition of male heroism.

Dr Waters resembles not only Conrad's Russian but also the missionaries who considered it their duty to uplift the rural people (Crous, 2010:4) by bringing the light of Christianity and civilisation to the coarse and uncouth heathens inhabiting the dark continent. Yet colonisation proves to be no more than a "cyclical interruption of the normal predominance of darkness over the course of historical time" (Watt, 1979:216), an interruption which in its evanescent and elusive nature amounts to scarcely more than "a flash of lightning in the clouds" (1899:68). Though Laurence, with his noble ideals, also endeavours "to change things" (40), he does not come to terms with the essence of being and fails to make a lasting impression on his surroundings. This is partly because the bedrock of his principles and moral identity is a lie (98) (something he refuses to admit to himself). The "moment of truth" – the defining experience he had when he was a boy – that purportedly redeems all actions and justifies the exploitation of space for the sake of playing god over his little artificial world"<sup>25</sup> (108) – has never taken place. Laurence's relationship with a pretend-African woman, Zanele/Linda, is also just "an idea" (97), not rooted in reality and as such dishonest. The relationship then also dissolves when Zanele comes to visit her boyfriend and they spend time in each other's company.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad, by means of his narrator, provides evidence that the narrative logic of European imperialist ideology and the colonial enterprise are founded on deception, hypocrisy and blinkered idealism. Those who judge themselves to be part of the great cause of "high and just proceedings" (Conrad, 1899:87) with a self-imposed "heavenly mission" (70) to humanise and civilise are no more than rapacious conquerors and plunderers; their mission is "just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale and men going at it blind" (69). The senselessness of the colonising process that *Heart of Darkness* hints at through images of decaying

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<sup>25</sup> The narrator uses this analogy in relation to the Brigadier, but it may also apply to Laurence, particularly in this context of comparison between Laurence and the missionaries.

machinery, broken pipes, etc. amid the African wasteland, is reconceptualised within the context of Galgut's dysfunctional hospital. With its surplus of drugs that the doctors rarely administer, shelves and shelves of condoms but scarcity of vital medicines, swabs and sterile gloves; the hospital – which may be regarded as an instance of colonised space – represents a sort of nothingness (Cartwright, 2003). The same atmosphere of torpor and aimlessness hangs over the stations where Marlow during his journey to Kurtz stops. It becomes apparent to the reader – who crosses textual and temporal boundaries between Conrad and Galgut to interpret the latter beyond its immediate context – that Galgut, by invoking the postmodern strategy of intertextuality, adds multiple layers of meaning to his text. The author engages with history in an ironical sense by exposing the false foundation and futility of the colonising venture in Africa, specifically in South Africa. In this fashion, he enacts Conrad's literary indictment of imperialist designs and domination, portending their imminent and inevitable doom.

#### 4.4.2 Irony

Ironically, *The Good Doctor* conveys the notion that decolonisation is no occasion for celebration but for dejection over the ostensible deterioration of the country. Politicians may preach the rhetoric of progress, but in reality they remind one of Conrad's colonisers who "grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got" (1899:69); they have no empathy with those they liberated a few years ago.

The incompetent and indolent superintendent of the hospital bears comparison with the new government rulers in South Africa. Dr Ruth Ngema hypocritically avers that she is "all for innovation and change" (33):

Outreach work, community work ... it's the kind of thing the previous regime didn't care about. We must commit ourselves to the new way ... (155).

yet she chooses to cling to the status quo; she undermines initiatives and does not take any action herself. From her point of view, the hospital and its staff "don't need any big initiatives right now" (122). Although Dr Ngema protests that she does not wish to be

stranded “on the edge of things” (31), her inertia attests to the opposite: she is content in her position and feels safe in an in-between existence. If the Department of Health does not transfer her to the city, it is more than likely that she will stay on at the hospital for yet another decade.

Even though Dr Frank Eloff reckons that he and his superior have little in common, the hospital is also the place where he finds peace. Existing on the periphery of things and having no desire to establish an essential human connection with anyone, he resents Laurence’s presence in his room. Laurence is white and also a doctor, but Frank treats the young man as if he were the other and vehemently denies it when people refer to Laurence as his friend. Laurence may share Frank’s room and Maria his bed (metaphorically speaking), but Frank will also not engage on an interpersonal level with his mistress, as is made clear by the following quotation:

coins and notes that I stuffed into her hand on my way out of the door were a symbol of a separation between us that couldn’t be measured: it was a disjuncture between our lives (28).

Frank’s indifferent and critical attitude towards others disappears when Laurence vanishes. With Laurence gone, Frank feels as if he has lost a part of himself. Secondly, his sexual involvement with the black woman has developed – at least in his own mind – from a clandestine affair into a real relationship, “as real as [his] life” (29). Finally, whereas Frank did nothing to stop the torture of a Swapo soldier, so breaking faith with the Hippocratic Oath, he discerns himself through Tehogo’s eyes and it dawns on him that his and the orderly’s existences are inextricably linked.

It is Laurence who changes Frank’s outlook on people and places. Ironically, Laurence has become a doctor to heal patients, yet he heals a physician. The intern convinces himself that some kind of grand design dictates his life. Yet the defining experience Laurence had as a boy that determined his decision to become a doctor never happened and is a fabrication of his imagination. Even though the intern professes that small acts can bring about big changes and that things somehow always “work out for

the best” (150), his actions and dreams come to grief: in fact, they may be the reason for his disappearance and, almost certainly, his death as well.

#### 4.5 Themes

The next section of the chapter deals with the impact of the consequences of decolonisation on the demarcation of white male subjectivity. Decolonisation appears to be accompanied by a decline of South Africa at all levels – governmental, economic and moral. Nine years after democracy the colours of the rainbow nation have lost their lustre, and the markers of everyday life are poor service delivery, violent strikes, unemployment and poverty.<sup>26</sup> The new rulers appear to be concerned only with their own advancement and enrichment. As Mda points out in *Heart of Redness* (2000:197-198):

the black empowerment boom is merely enriching the chosen few – the elite clique of black businessmen who have become overnight multimillionaires. Or trade union leaders who use the workers as stepping stones to untold riches for themselves. And politicians who effectively use their struggle credentials for self-enrichment. They all have their snouts buried deep in the trough, lapping noisily in the name of the poor, trying to outdo one another in piggishness.

Cynics presume that politicians and the elite do not care about the “small people, nothing people” (112) as represented by the rural hospital’s patients. There is an utter division between the rhetoric and the reality of progress; i.e. what is preached and what is practised. Indolence and incompetence, corruption and criminality define the collective consciousness. Barris (2005:34) argues that the novel makes it obvious that the demise of apartheid is not grounds for delight but for despair. Or as a journalist from *The Economist* speculates, Galgut’s aim, in depicting the disintegration, is to spell out “in fiction what no South African, black or white, would dare to even whisper among friends: that South Africa run by Africans is going to hell in a handbasket” (Venter, 2003:8): the government for the people has betrayed the people.

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<sup>26</sup> Alex Dodd (2004:6) talks about the “starved afterbirth of apartheid”.

Together the two doctors epitomise the consciousness of the former settlers and the latter's divergent responses to the ambiguities of the transition between a colonial and apartheid past on the one hand and a democratic present and future on the other. The two medical professionals are each other's alter ego, and they may be looked upon as mirrored sides of the same individual – the dark and the light, the past and the future (eNotes, 2014). Which of the two doctors is the supposedly good doctor is just as unclear. Confirmation that the men constitute one self (Grant, 2003:18) is that they sleep in each other's beds and also with the same woman (Laurence's girlfriend). After sleeping with her, Frank observes that it is "as if an agreement had been fulfilled: as if the contract was between him and me and she was the instrument" (115). Frank, acknowledging Laurence as an extension of himself, describes the younger man as his shadow and envisages them as two strands in a rope: "We were twined together in a tension that united us; we were different to each other, though it was in our nature to be joined and woven in this way." (170)

Similar to Dr Ngema, Frank, who symbolises the self-searching subjectivity of the former settlers after apartheid, resents change and therefore also Laurence's intrusion. With "his ideals and his sense of duty" (200), "his outrage and hope" (202), the intern upsets Frank's orderly existence. Because Frank is perturbed by the unpredictability of the future, he prefers staying inside comfortable boundaries (which Galgut states he, personally, does not believe in [interview with Miller, 2008:56]). Frank fathoms that the country is suspended between temporary boundaries – "a past which exists no longer – although it continues as a looming presence in whatever is happening now – and a future which has not yet taken shape" (Brink (2003:18). Frank himself is a man with a past, "caught on the threshold between past and present" (Viljoen's & Van der Merwe's expression, 2007:3). He is wracked with guilt for his complicity in former injustices and remains haunted by the recollection of his cowardice. The past dictates his perception of self as it does that of post-transition South Africa. Frank compares the past to "a dark seed" that will always sprout again (115) or a stain that keeps on spreading (130). To give meaning to the present and fashion a different future, he has to bridge temporal borders and deal with and make amends for the past. Differently phrased, because the

past permeates the present, the process of rebuilding the country cannot ignore or suppress its apartheid legacy. If this legacy is not acknowledged and social responsibility not taken, its evils will be repeated, and attempts at healing and reconstruction will be futile. Writers such as Zakes Mda and Njabulo Ndebele are in accord. Mda proclaims that forgetting the past means erasing one's history, and Ndebele warns that neglecting the past is to "postpone the future" (1994:158). In the same vein, María Jesús Cabarcos-Traseira (2002:48) divines that "a country that is stuck in the past will not meet the future".

Contrary to Frank, Laurence pays no heed to either past or present and rather strives towards an integrated, non-exploitative future. Dr Waters believes that bygones are bygones. To him the new South Africa is truly new: it does not have a history of inequality and acrimony. His way of thinking contradicts Frank's so much that Frank wonders: "Where do you come from, Laurence? What country are you living in?" (78) Laurence effectively quarantines past from present when he innocently informs his colleague that "politics is all past now. It doesn't matter anymore." (6) He also divulges to the Santanders: "I believe it's only the beginning of this country. The old history doesn't count. It's all starting now." (50) In brief, the intern chooses not to confront himself and take cognisance of the past and his involvement in it; instead he focuses on the future.

In contrast to Dr Eloff, who assumes that he cannot make a difference, Dr Laurence, in his naïveté, steps in without testing the waters in the belief that the smallest act or gesture can effect change. As he puts it: "How will you change anything by doing nothing?" (169) Laurence's first symbolic gesture is coming to this town and hospital far away from civilisation (142); he discloses to the two Santander doctors that he would not object to being stationed in Soweto, but "this is better. This is really nowhere." (51) It may be that, on a subconscious level, the intern intuits that his task is "to name and map those areas of the social topography that under apartheid became "points without name" (Barnard, 2007:46). His actions correspond to the government's delivery of electricity to a small community, designed to persuade the people that the leaders care

about their welfare. (That this is only one drop in the ocean is immaterial.) Laurence then also interprets the promises of the government as confirmation of its commitment to change and to a better future.

The cynical doctor will only believe once he sees: symbols and gestures of goodwill, and promises of improved conditions are of no avail if not accompanied by action, by both the colonised and the former colonists. He stresses that people require drugs and treatment instead of “crass obvious symbols” (113) and “long and pointless” speeches which are in most cases not understood (155). The government grandstands “with some big display that mean[s] nothing to anybody ...” (78); it makes “grand symbolic gestures for an audience” (159) and all that matters is the symbolic value of the effort. According to Frank, one village getting electricity or a talk on HIV and hygiene “means nothing. It is a sop, a symbol .... There are still millions of people out there who aren’t being helped.” (169) The youthful Laurence, who – not unlike the Russian harlequin – subscribes to specious slogans and empty promises, passionately disagrees, insisting that this is only the beginning: “Other things will follow” (169). What is more, things somehow always “work out for the best” (150).

Although Frank thinks Laurence is “slightly mad” (78) for trying to make a difference, living in the same space with him acts as a catalyst for change. Laurence disrupts Frank’s fixed ideas on the past and the future and Frank subsequently breaches psychological frontiers and reassesses his point of view. Laurence, by Frank’s admission, is everything that Frank is not (201); Laurence’s “involvement and effort show up a lack in me” (60). The intern’s positive attitude shakes up his world-weary colleague’s perception of the world and makes him examine himself and reorient his sensibilities. And one night, in Maria’s shack, Frank does experience a sense of liberation, something similar to the freedom from societal restraints the colonisers (of whom Kurtz is an example) experienced in new surroundings. Frank imagines that he can cast off his old identity and “put on” a new one – as one would an article of clothing. He subsequently has a dream in which he asks his mistress, now wearing a shiny yellow dress instead of her usual rags, to accompany him to the city and marry him.

Albeit in the abstract space of the dream world, Frank is able to make a change and assume a more inclusive African identity. Johan Jacobs postulates that “[e]ach of Galgut’s novels presents a fictional ‘space of crossing’ in which his protagonists transitively navigate boundaries or borders – geographical, symbolic, chronological, historical, psychological, intra- and interpersonal...” In *The Good Doctor*, Dr Eloff, by contemplating matrimony with a black woman, navigates historical, racial and intra- and interpersonal boundaries. Frank, furthermore, is stirred out of his ennui. By returning to Johannesburg and by engaging with the unresolved matter of his divorce, he confronts the demons of his past and evolves beyond “the resigned fatalism that has crippled him until now” (Titlestad, 2009:112). Frank also makes a symbolic gesture when he shakes Colonel Moller’s hand, so showing that he has made peace with the past. After Laurence’s disappearance, Frank searches for his friend and is even willing to exchange his life for the young man’s, illustrating that he considers the other as a part of himself. He anticipates that in his final moments he would exhibit real courage and transform himself (201-202) by shaping his subjectivity along new, less self-serving, lines. A death where he sacrifices himself for another would give significance to his life (202).

#### **4.6 Space, place and identity**

The conflict between idealism and cynicism, and the temporal tensions of past, present and future takes place in a hospital, a house in the bush and a room in a hospital. In the next section of this chapter, these places are related to the protagonist’s inner self, but also to his other selves, in order to illustrate the interaction between identity and location in the context of a country contending with socio-political tensions.

Christopher Hope (2003) maintains that the device of the dilapidated and dysfunctional hospital is allegorical. The hospital is South Africa under the microscope. Reminiscent of the descriptions of deterioration and decay in *Heart of Darkness*, the hospital, like the other structures in town – the vacant parliament building, the library without books, and the school without teachers or children – is “useless space” (38), “falling slowly into ruin”

(34). Bureaucrats from the previous regime planned the town and its “little jumble of discarded buildings” (34) on paper, although they, in all likelihood, had never been to any of the Bantu homelands. Hence, the town did not come into existence for one of the customary reasons: “a river in a dry area, say, or a discovery of gold, some kind of historical event” (4).<sup>27</sup> With political power changing from white to black hands in the capital of the country and with the independent nation state’s reabsorption into South Africa, “the meaning and the future of the hospital bec[o]me permanently unclear” (33). Once an emblem of national pride, this remnant of the order of enforced segregation is now “a sterile and purposeless” place (Barris, 2005:25), devoid of function or future. With its *raison d’être* gone, the building has a morally debilitating effect on its staff, who struggle to minister to the needs of their patients. In its state of desertion and decay, the hospital serves as a trope for post-liberation decline. As place reverts to space and Europe to Africa, the weeds thrive in the joints of pavements and bricks (4) and, in the plaster of the walls, cracks spread “like veins” (74-75). It appears that after decolonisation, structures representative of European civilisation will be reduced to nothing: Africa turns inhabited places into abandoned and desolate spaces.

In addition to being a metaphor for South Africa, the hospital’s and town’s sense of interruption and emptiness replicate the middle-aged doctor’s external appearance as well as foreshadow the original colonisers’ future fate in Africa. When Frank looks in the bathroom mirror, he observes “a face in slow decay, tumbling and sliding down from its bone, sprouting veins and moles and blemishes. You could see an old man in it already, and the expression on his face had a quality of defeat.” (138) Decay and defeat define conditions at the rural outpost where the doctor has accepted a position to forget his past. Because Frank has resigned himself to the ineluctable deterioration, he cannot comprehend why Laurence cuts the grass between his and Frank’s room and the main wing of the hospital, and pulls out the weeds and grass growing on the hospital roof, as “it makes no difference. And the stuff will only grow back.” (57)

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<sup>27</sup> In *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, the protagonist attests to the same when he points out that “the artificial lines marked out on maps” (1991:74) do not correspond to the landscape.

Ironically, Frank came to the homeland and the hospital because he wanted change. Now Laurence is the one who makes every effort to change things. At this remote hospital the young doctor imagines he can make the greatest impact on society and discover his uniqueness. South Africa is the blank canvas on which he will stamp his own impression, or write his *Bildungsroman*, as Cabarcos-Traseira (2002:48) phrases it. The intern endeavours to set himself apart from his fellow medical students and distinguish himself (“I don’t want to be like the rest.” (40))

While accompanying Laurence on his expedition to set up a clinic in the bush, Frank comes across a disintegrating house. The house and its garden in the middle of nowhere prefigure the doctor’s, the hospital’s and, by extension, the white person’s eventual destiny in Africa. Frank conjectures that the house had been owned by a white family who abandoned it when the area became a homeland. He describes the structure and its environs as follows:

There was no trace of a garden; it was all wild and rank. The windows were glassless and black. And the fence – which was once formidable – was folding and falling in on itself (74)

The ramshackle house with its overgrown orchard calls to mind Lieutenant-Colonel Gore-Browne’s mansion in Northern Rhodesia. After Gore-Browne’s death, Lamb, a journalist who wrote a biographical novel about this idiosyncratic Englishman, visited the “Africa House”. By that time it had become a ruin, a reminder of the “arrogance, paternalism, vision and sheer bloody-mindedness” of the British colonial attempt to recreate a blueprint for British imperialism in Africa (1999:xxxiii). The lieutenant’s once-spectacular mansion, in common with Galgut’s hospital in the homeland and the house with its “vacant shells” (74) for rooms, once again makes manifest that European edifices cannot withstand the encroachment of the African wilderness. As the protagonist of *The Good Doctor* points out: “Nothing [can] be maintained here, nothing stay[s] the same .... You could not clear a place in the forest and expect to find it again weeks later.” (14) This reiterates that with power in the hands of a non-white government, all vestiges of European civilisation will be obliterated in Africa. Laurence,

likewise, who has striven to shape the Bantustan into the image of Europe, vanishes into the wilderness. After 1994, many whites might have feared that this would also be their fate. Unable to conceive of South Africa as their land, they emigrated.

If the hospital represents South Africa, the room that the young and old doctors share within its walls exemplifies the enforced coexistence of different political and moral standpoints – hope and despair, redemption and failure in the South African space (Cabarcos-Traseira, 2002:52). As Frank proclaims, “the moment you put two people in a room together, politics enters in. Everything is politics ....” (18) Even Dr Ngema’s decision to put the two doctors together in one room is also politically motivated, since she probably assumes that all white people think alike and should therefore get on with one another – which is an ironic commentary on the European perception that all black people look and act the same. Be that as it may, even though Laurence is white and also a doctor, Frank initially perceives him to be other. Jacobs (2011:104) explains that they may be each other’s mirror image, “but like original and reflection, their images are also opposed”. Their optimistic and pessimistic personalities contrast, but they also replicate aspects of self and other and represent different ways of coping with change. After Laurence moves into the already-occupied room, Frank has to reorient himself in space. He discerns a disturbing duality within himself (Jacobs, 2011:93): “... behind the visor of my face a stranger – not entirely unfamiliar, a dark brother who’d left home long ago – had moved in” (182). Frank recognises Laurence as the dark other to his white self – thus, he defines himself within the self-other division. A generation younger than Frank, the intern has a wholly different outlook on the medical profession and the meaning of life. Frank’s prophecy that the intruder will not last could therefore be construed as wishful thinking. Frank also cautions Laurence against getting too settled in the room: it is just a temporary dwelling-place (43). Not unlike Frank, Tjaart Cronje, the right-wing Afrikaner in Mda’s *Madonna of Excelsior*, predicts that the Afrikaner population will regain political power since “they [the black people] will mess the country up. The country will be in a shambles and the Afrikaner will be called back to rescue it.” (1996:243) Because Frank seeks sole ownership of the room, he experiences “a flash of personal outrage” (43) and “feels under siege” (42) when Laurence rearranges the

furniture, replaces the curtains and puts up a “shrine of photographs” (43). By territorially delimiting his own identity, the newcomer colonises and appropriates Frank’s space and Frank feels no longer at home there and his sense of self becomes unstable. Frank’s antipathy towards the “unwanted usurper crowding [him] in [his] own room” (42) could be seen to replicate the realisation of dispossession experienced by a percentage of the Euro-African population after the abolition of apartheid. Now that the other has invaded their once-exclusive neighbourhoods, whites’ sense of superiority is challenged and they face feelings of *Unheimlichkeit* and lostness in space and time. They may either lash out at the intruders – as Frank does – or look upon themselves as neo-colonial invaders – strangers in the country of their birth whose European heritage is no longer valued in Africa. What used to be their place becomes unfamiliar, even alien territory in a postcolonial era (Steyn, 2001:157). That Frank supposes that his home is violated is ironic, considering that in all the years that he occupied the room, he has not added anything to it to situate his selfhood there. Frank does not want the room to be a repository of memories because he wishes to forget what he has done and who he has become. This also goes for his room in his father’s house in Johannesburg. Frank frowns on his stepmother’s well-intentioned attempt to preserve his “childhood refuge” (133) by attaching his model airplanes to the ceiling and placing “embarrassing photographs” (194) on the windowsill. In contrast, Frank’s father’s study, the biggest room in the house, prominently displays awards the old man received and photographs of himself. The room exhibits the personality of its occupant: the pride in past accomplishments and sense of self-importance.

As the space of the farm defines who Blixen (*Out of Africa*, 1937) is, so does the room reflect Frank. Contrary to Karen Blixen, Frank does not own land, nor does he own the room. Fanon (2001:176) would classify the character as one of the wretched of the earth: an individual “without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless...” Nevertheless, the drab hospital room anchors the doctor in place. The walls of the room function as boundaries, shielding his self against “the elsewhere, the otherwise and the foreign” on the outside, in Viljoen’s (2013:xi) phrase in a preface to a collection of essays on South African literature. The room is a safe and stable space

that he has invested with significance. What is more, the human spirit may feel at home in places others do not consider as nurturing, as Gina Wisker (2001:147) professes. For instance, the “professional” mourner from Mda’s *Ways of Dying* (1995) converts dreary and desolate spaces into desirable places (Gräbe, 2008:162). Remaining in the same position, Toloki uses the gift of his creativity and resourcefulness, and imagines a burnt-down shack to be a beautiful, almost magical work of art exuding life and joy. “Freed by the boundless realm of the imagination” (Wenzel, 2003:320), Toloki and his childhood friend, Noria, break free from and rise above their abject living conditions in the socio-political spaces of post-apartheid South Africa (De Lange *et al.*, 2008:xiii). By forging an identifying relationship with phantasmal setting, they reconstruct and transform who they are in terms of the new surroundings.

When the room is used as a venue for Laurence’s girlfriend’s welcoming party, it serves as a metaphor for democratic South Africa. To add insult to Frank’s injury, Laurence invites the entire hospital staff – black and white – to the party. Crous (2010:7) contends that the event implies that the only way in which people “from different backgrounds in the country can really come together and forget about their past experiences is within the context of a party atmosphere with artificial goodwill, temporary acceptance of one another and with a frenzied sense of madness fuelled by alcohol and music”. This also goes for Mama Mthembu’s bar where, “after-hours, none of the divisions and hierarchy of the work situation applie[s]”. For example, the black kitchen workers mingle with the two Cuban doctors. It is in the context of the party that Frank realises that Tehogo’s “grinning, sweating” face that “seemed mad” (90) to him (that is, strange and different), is, in effect, a reflection of his own face. It would appear that when inhibitions are suppressed (such as when alcohol is imbibed), social and racial barriers dissolve and the self recognises itself in the other. When Frank goes to Tehogo’s room to return Tehogo’s cassettes, Frank grasps that the room is actually “a place inside [him]self, “a sordid little room of [his] own heart, where a secret [i]s stored” (124). The black man’s room being at the end of the passage, thus removed from the two doctors’, is a potent reminder of South Africa’s past of segregation. In Frank’s opinion, the black man should not even be there; he is still too close for comfort. Frank

also does not care where the other would go if evicted (this bringing to mind some of the white population's attitude to the forceful removals of the residents of District Six from their homes and relocation to the Cape Flats<sup>28</sup>). The secret stowed away in Tehogo's room could convey that the black man has not forgotten the past; in fact, the word "store" signals that he guards it; it is part of who he is. After the party, Frank desists from his delusions of a truly democratic country. He sees the room (South Africa) for what it really is: a place of "rubbish and rubble" (91). All the "dourness and sourness and mistrust" (93) of the past return and "[n]othing is different after all" (94).

After Laurence has gone missing from the hospital and the room, Frank experiences a strange emptiness, as if his life has no purpose. He cannot orient himself in space and time and becomes "one of those aimless people who [are] coming and going, coming and going" (199), confined to a circular existence and without a home and stable sense of self<sup>29</sup> (calling to mind Conyngham's Chris.) In due course Laurence becomes Frank's friend and Frank grows dependent on his presence – as if the young man were a part of his body. In other words, Frank begins to derive his identity from the other.

To dispel the sense of seclusion and loss, Frank does his utmost to eliminate Laurence's presence from the room. He puts all Laurence's possessions into a suitcase and hides the suitcase out of sight. He cleans away "all the scuffs and marks, the shaving foam on the mirror, the cigarette stubs" (205) to remove all traces of his colleague's being. Frank also moves the furniture back to the way it was before the intern entered his space and his life. It is almost as if Laurence "ha[s] never been there" (205) and the room is as it was before the other's intrusion. However, Frank knows that this is not true: one cannot reduce a human life to the space of a suitcase or wipe out one's memories of it as one would a scuff mark.

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<sup>28</sup> See *Buckingham Palace, District Six* (1987) by Richard Rive.

<sup>29</sup> Galgut again utilises the theme of movement without direction in *In a Strange Room* (2010). The author's namesake walks for hours through the quiet suburban streets in an effort to escape himself.

So when Dr Ngema is promoted and transferred to Pretoria and Frank becomes director of the hospital, he is eager to move out of the old room into her room. Though he takes her room to be “bare and clean and empty” (215) – a place without memories – Ashcroft *et al.* (1998:175) maintain that, despite erasures and over-writings, places always retain “traces of previous engagements and inscriptions” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:175). Without being mindful of this, Frank gets the opportunity to move into and experience the life-world of the other. By reaching across geographical boundaries first in his search for Laurence and now by crossing the threshold of the black woman’s room, he also overcomes psychological barriers and gains a new perspective. Hitherto Frank has been sceptical of symbolic gestures, but he now purchases cloths and pictures to decorate the new room. His previous room, in contrast, had “no personality in the ugly, austere furniture; against th[at] neutral backdrop, even a piece of cloth would have been revealing” (2). One may surmise that if the doctor wants to leave an impression of himself on his surroundings, he has discovered his essential self. His sojourn in the space of the first room and his involvement with someone he has considered other enable him to overcome the schism within himself and re-invent his identity. In the new room Frank feels he is no longer lost but belongs. He has come home and, as he puts it: “I have come into my own.” (215)

#### **4.7 Travel and borders**

Nineteenth-century adventurers entertained mythical and romantic notions about Africa. Africa, one of the “dark places of the earth”, offered them what Rive calls a “scenic special”, which Rita Barnard (2007:19) explains as “the exotic appeal of a remote place with strange physical and human scenery”. Africa was a realm of possibility where young renegades from society could confront others and themselves and create independent lives (Darian-Smith *et al.*, 1996:84). It provided the opportunity for adventure and freedom from social restraints. In Africa they could breach the boundaries of social conventions that constituted proper conduct.

In *The Good Doctor*, Dr Laurence Waters, like Marlow from *Heart of Darkness* and Anna from *The Lostness of Alice*, exemplifies the romantic yearning for heroism of the Victorian adventure-explorers who opened up the interior by travelling into unknown territory whilst struggling “against the intransigence of the natural world” (Cole’s phrase, 1988:258). Laurence’s desire for recognition has prompted him to come to this remote hospital in the “bundu”, because here he will not disappear in the crowd.

When Dr Laurence Waters’s colleague Frank makes his way through the bush during one of his and Laurence’s excursions, he (as Laurence did when he opted for the hospital in the homeland) imagines himself to be a heroic explorer, “travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings”, to quote Conrad (1899:102). Not unlike Marlow and Laurence, Frank entertains the notion of the landscape as uncharted virgin territory – unpossessed and uninhabited. It is a tabula rasa to leave his masculine imprint upon. What is more, the place does not even appear on Laurence’s map. It may be thought of as one of those “many blank spaces on the earth” (1899:70) that seemed so inviting to Conrad’s Marlow and other explorers. Lieutenant-Colonel Gore-Browne from Lamb’s *The Africa House*, like Frank and Marlow, perceives Africa to be a “vast thrilling unknown, a place of wild beasts” (1999:8) and wild hordes. The British aristocrat takes pleasure in traversing the dividing line between his “safe, cultured, and ordered world and ““their’ unsafe, barbaric, and chaotic world (to quote Viljoen [2013:xiii]) from the preface to *Crossing Borders, Dissolving Boundaries*) by “going off into the bush where perhaps no white man ha[s] ever trod, the feeling of being surrounded by unsuppressed nature, and travelling like a king” (Lamb, 1999:12).

Not only does the foreign continent provide a platform for developing masculinity and examining and redefining one’s identity, but it is also regarded as a relic of a primal past, possessed by “demonic darkness” (Carter *et al.*, 1993:71). After his initial elation, Frank Eloff senses a sinister presence in the wilderness: “There was nobody with me, but it felt as if somebody was there ... it was a faceless figure, on the verge of being human, not a personality as much as a face. Malevolent but amused .... It meant me

harm.” (75) In addition, he feels watched by the trees and personifies them as “a dark cryptic presence all around [him]” (73). In *Heart of Darkness*, the trees look “[p]atiently after this grimy fragment [the steamboat] of another world, the forerunner of change, of conquest ...” (146).

Frank comes across a house with a garden in the midst of the bush. McEwan (1996:23-24) and Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004:114) state that gardens are in-between spaces, linking unbridled nature and manicured lawn: that is, Africa (Nature) and Europe (Culture). Gardens are places where nature has been tamed and ordered, and the “geometric regularity and order” (Carter *et al.*, 1993:33) of these places express a stark contrast to the uncontained chaos lying beyond their borders. Gardens, furthermore, are enclosed areas of shade and coolness, providing protection, safety and respite from the (non-European) wasteland on its periphery. They are usually demarcated from the external world by a fence. This house’s garden is awash with weeds so that it is more of an “anti-garden”, and its fence is collapsing (74). European cultivation cannot contain the fecundity of Africa.

As the African wilderness encircles the house and the garden, so does it the hospital where Frank and Laurence work. This edifice, illustrative of civilisation, may be deemed an in-between place. Frank describes it as a “strange twilight place, halfway between nothing and somewhere” (34). South Africa, a country on the southern tip of the African continent, and largely disregarded by its former colonial masters, is likewise in an interstitial position, vacillating between an African and a European identity. According to Bhabha (1994), in such an interspace rules are relinquished, freedom is experienced, original thinking thrives and growth is experienced.

This does not seem so in Frank Eloff’s case. In this non-place, symbolising his fractured inner being and interpersonal relationships, the doctor figures he can remain uninvolved and uncommitted. For seven years solipsism has been the main feature of his life, and the doctor, who refers to himself as a “piece of flotsam” (203), has existed in some sort of equilibrium, “outside history” (117), between borders. One may speculate

that it is as if he believes that “monstrous and unknown things” (Galgut, 1991:66) dwell beyond the border, as Patrick from *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991) surmises. Given that Frank feels insulated and safe from the world and his past in this in-between place, he has never experienced the desire to cross the border and return to South Africa and his family. As Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2007:2) observe: “Experience of the unfamiliar world beyond the threshold often causes anxiety, even the desire to return to ... familiar life ....”

The doctor’s life in the hospital depends on what happens in his mistress’s shack, or so he declares, and his experiences in the shack give meaning to his existence (28). The shack may also be seen as a liminal space, opening up onto otherness and difference, as Viljoen (2013:xi) explains liminality. This “exotic backdrop to a nightly escape” (20) is a place of meetings and exchanges with the other, what Pratt (1992:4) designates a contact zone. While the hospital epitomises Europe, the shack with its African artefacts may be visualised as the world of the other, signifying Africa. Working in the one space and amusing himself in the other, Frank incorporates both continents in his being. He himself recognises that he leads two distinct lives: “one that [is] empty and adrift” and “another that [is] illicit and intense” (26). In the liminal zone of the shack, colonial rules of conduct are dispensed with and his “empty and adrift” European side becomes “something separate to [him], a hat or a shirt [he]’d dropped on the floor and could push at ...” (160). Exploring the “illicit and intense” other side of himself liberates him from civilisation’s obligations and presages his future transition to a coherent and connected consciousness that incorporates political awareness and social responsibility.

When Frank subsequently gets the opportunity to move into another black woman’s room, he opens himself up to change as well as the prospect of the unknown and the unforeseen: “I know I won’t be stuck here for ever; other places, other people will follow on.” (215) He envisages one day leaving the hospital and the homeland and forming attachments to other people and places; in other words, he will conquer spaces of separation as well as his fear of the unknown and the unpredictable.

#### 4.8 Narration and narrator

*The Good Doctor* is a retrospective first-person novel comprising Dr Frank Eloff's interpretation of events. In this section of the chapter the narrator's character, the complexities of his relationships with other people and the past are evaluated in order to determine whether the reader might look upon the character sympathetically and accept his construal of the aftermath of colonisation on the white South African consciousness.

At first glance Dr Eloff does not appear to be a likeable character. He is a dour, middle-aged man with no ambition and a bleak outlook on life. Succumbing to self-exile and personal and professional irrelevance at a rural outpost, he believes in nothing. On account of the damage done by his experience in the army and the "double betrayal of trust" (Titlestad, 2009:115) by his best friend and wife, Frank's sense of self has been eroded and he resists opening himself up to an intimate relationship with another person. He has no friends and does not want any. His emotional alienation sits well with him and he seems to care little about other people, including his patients and his roommate. Even when the latter tells Frank that he likes Frank and that Frank is his friend, and the two are constantly in each other's company, Frank will not traverse interpersonal spaces of separation and fervently and repeatedly denies it when others call Laurence his friend. Only vaguely conscious of the "possibilities for connection and completeness" (Jacobs, 2011:97), the doctor exists in a state of metaphorical paralysis and on the periphery of things, looking at them "through a thin but impervious barrier" (111). Michael Titlestad (2009:115) indicates that the narrator is practically "emotionally cauterised". Estranged from society, "stranded – alone and futureless in the middle of his life" (14) as Adam Napier from *The Impostor* (2008) is – and aware of an inner division he cannot overcome, Dr Frank Eloff may be deemed a prototype of the Galgut protagonist.

The other relationship of which Dr Frank Eloff underplays the significance is with a black woman who sells trinkets to tourists. Frank is content not to know the woman's real name or anything else about her, although he regularly has sex with her. The affair

demonstrates the asymmetry of power between white men and black women. The sex is mostly “quick and urgent” (25): a “primal intimate act” that does not draw him out of his isolation but keeps a “huge distance open between [them]” (26). Racial spaces of separation remain intact and the self does not recognise it in the other. Spivak submits that the servile subaltern is not permitted to speak, so as to become human. A “mute, sad, pathetic and passive victim” of male domination (Zulu, 2006), the black female stands “in a passive and auxiliary relation to white colonial culture” (Chrisman, 2000:139). The silence between Frank and the woman suits him; he makes no attempt to connect on a personal level with her, just as Marlow’s position as master proscribes and precludes dialogue with his African crew. One may view Frank as Europe and his black mistress as Africa, the foreign and primal other who is the object of the white man’s fantasies. Titlestad (2009:121) avows that the “obviously exploitative relationship between former coloniser and colonised is just another way Dr “Eloff avoids the actual demands of intersubjectivity”. It reminds the readers of the interracial sexual relations between the white men of the Free State town, Excelsior, and their black female workers.

The forerunner of Frank’s relationship with Maria is his affair with a woman of another nationality. The Cuban doctor’s husband works with Frank and the man probably knows of this betrayal by a colleague. It is telling that Frank, who has been cuckolded himself, does the same to another man. This makes evident that he disregarded his own feelings in the past. Neither does Frank consider the woman’s emotional state. He takes advantage of Claudia Santander when she is emotionally vulnerable after witnessing the “horrors” (51) of a Sowetan hospital. There is also no intimacy to this union: the sex is animalistic, “lust fuelled by grief” (52). The narrator declares that he has nothing to lose, but whether or not she has anything to lose, does not cross his mind. Claudia is simply an object to fill a lack in him (52). It is not surprising that after the affair Claudia is “permanently embittered” toward her seducer (51).

Perhaps worse than the protagonist’s callousness towards his mistresses is turning a blind eye to the torture and murder of a Swapo prisoner during his (Frank’s) military

service. The doctor betrayed the Hippocratic Oath and his own ethics when he assisted in the “calculated demolition of nerves and flesh” (66), instead of healing and repairing, so becoming part of a cruel, inverted world. Whereas the Swapo soldier could not denounce the white man, in a postcolonial South Africa some poetic justice takes place when Dr Ngema, a black woman and Dr Eloff’s superior, accuses him: “Only your own life is real to you.” (210) Remaining anchored in the memory of his cowardice, cannot transcend the past and make “an uncomplicated commitment to the future”. As Titlestad (2009:15) phrases it: “... any gesture into the future will be proscribed and qualified by his experience”. In Patience Bambalele’s (2004:20) words, “the cruel corpse of the past weigh[s] on the living as they grapple to give meaning to their lives” and locate themselves in new times. Frank’s frequent lapses into memory coupled with a realist style then also show his search for identity (Crous, 2005:88). Because the character is “caught in a present interrupted continually by the past” (Titlestad, 2009:115), he has difficulty conceiving of a new life narrative and contributing to the construction of the rainbow nation. Laurence, the voice of young South Africa, divulges to Frank that other people regard Frank as not part of the new country (169). He travels in an altogether different landscape to his fellow South Africans. Frank has earlier noted that he and Laurence do not live in the same “country” (78). It is possible that after 1994 many white South African citizens also do not judge the country as being theirs any longer.

Dr Frank Eloff, however, does have redeeming qualities. Despite his fear of betrayal, he breaks out of his solitude, reinterprets his identity and becomes more involved with the intern’s life. Whereas he initially thinks of Laurence as merely his roommate, “a temporary presence “who [is] disturbing [his] life” (47) and a “manic disconcerting figure” (59) following him everywhere, he later begrudgingly admits to himself that the other is his friend and that he (Frank) is no longer alone (70). He has grown dependent on Laurence’s presence, so much so that Zanele (Laurence’s girlfriend) exclaims: “The two of you are obviously in love with each other, so why don’t both of you just fuck off.” (101) The camaraderie between the two men brings to mind the nineteenth-century trope of masculine intimacy as portrayed in *Heart of Darkness*. Writers of Victorian

adventure travel tales depicted Africa as a place where white men, by way of companionship, created personal and cultural coherence in order to “consolidate a community bound by the ideology of empire” (Cole, 1998:263). In his late nineteenth-century work, Conrad foregrounds the convention of an imperial and idealised friendship when Marlow announces: “Intimacy grows quickly out there .... I knew him [Kurtz] as well as it is possible for one man to know another.” (1899:154) It seems as if closeness develops just as quickly in the confined space of the hospital room. After Laurence vanishes, Frank sees “only the long, lonely passage and that blank space in the ward, like a pulled tooth” (200) and the rest of his empty, meaningless life ahead. Philip Womack (2010) describes Galgut as “a master of isolation and intensity” while Toby Lichtig (2010:21) remarks that the narrative “radiates alienation”, and Eileen Battersby (2010) identifies the overall theme of the author’s oeuvre as “loneliness and the search for love”.

Frank’s first friendship in seven years paves the way for insight into himself and personal development. He understands how “narrow and constricted” (91) his life has been up to now and that he has chosen to think the worst in order to shield himself against its contingencies (102). Frank’s unfolding identity makes him reappraise discourses of self and other. He breaches psychological borders that previously protected him and becomes more sympathetic towards other people. When he happens upon Tehogo’s thievery, he does not report the nurse, asserting that “in this case, human feelings are more important” (128). The doctor assures Tehogo on more than one occasion that he is not his enemy. After Tehogo has been shot, Frank intuits that his own life is connected to the orderly’s (190). He changes the sheets of the hospital bed when Tehogo soils them and washes Tehogo – a task Galgut’s namesake, Damon, also has to perform when his emotionally unstable friend is hospitalised in India (*In a Strange Room*, 2010). Frank did not do his duty towards the Swapo soldier when he (Frank) consciously colluded with the system, but he now takes care of his patient in the most physically intimate manner. After all, “that [is] what people [do]: they help each other” (201). Clarkson (2004:11) intimates that the doctor’s caregiving is the ultimate image of reconciliation between a black and a white man – with the white man making

amends for the past and the part he plays in constructing the present. Tehogo is no longer an other but an equal. So, when the orderly regains consciousness, the white man notices his own image reflected in the gaze of the black man (195), and remarks: "... the dark stranger in my head, who was so easy to blame for everything, seemed less separate from me than before" (175). Frank's inclusive identity allows for his acceptance of social responsibility and the merger of self and other.

Frank, furthermore, feels guilty about using Maria as an object to gratify his sexual needs and to explore the "other" side (as Kurtz also does). At first he does not give her money; that would reduce her to the status of a prostitute. But when she asks to borrow money, he tells her to keep it, and thereafter continues paying her – a possible attempt to compensate for his exploitation. He also tries to find out more about her life, so integrating her into his existence. At first he looked upon their relationship as a "weird romance that belong[s] to night and silence", to be kept secret and not to be discussed, but from his altered perspective it becomes an "ordinary daytime affair, as real as [his] life" (29). When Frank finds out that Maria may have a husband, he feels jealous and does not visit her for a while. She has become more than an object to satisfy his physical needs, and his desire has given way to a strange and subversive feeling (81): presumably some sort of emotional connection. Before Frank knew of the husband, he had already felt "obliged and responsible" (27) and understood that he had to end the affair. The sense of obligation and responsibility now increases to "an obscure weight of guilt" (160), which testifies to the character's self-confrontation and personal growth. While Laurence struggles with the decision of performing an abortion on Maria, Frank gets drunk every evening. That the doctor makes an effort to dull his conscience shows that he can distinguish between right and wrong. Unlike the Excelsior farmers, the protagonist has made a psychological adjustment and now looks at his mistress through different lenses. She is no longer an abstract problem or an other "on the side somewhere". Dispell'd is the image of the archetypal African woman (Kurtz's mistress) who strains for the imperialist romancer to possess her; Maria is "solid and warm and

real, a human body” (171) he has slept with.<sup>30</sup> When Maria and the shack disappear, the doctor feels more alone and lost than ever.

For the first time the protagonist registers the other absences of attachment in his life (Jacobs, 2011:95). This produces an extreme anguish in him – an anguish that is “like the first feeling ever to touch him: its rawness, its power, [is] almost like love” (173). Frank accepts answerability for his actions when he reveals to Colonel Moller that he (Frank) is the cause of Maria’s disappearance: “I am the reason for this. I know that. Not you, me.” (189) His beseeching the former apartheid torturer to tell him if Maria is dead or alive makes evident that the doctor really cares about the woman, if he does not love her. Since both Maria and Tehogo are black, one may suppose that the white man – as a result of his interaction with Laurence – adapts to South Africa’s changed political situation. He grasps his accountability towards others and seeks to surmount the separation between self and other to establish an interpersonal connection. This awareness of responsibility for the sins of the past and towards others leads to a re-evaluation of his place and purpose in the world and, similar to the Afrikaner lawyer, Adam de Vries in Mda’s *Madonna of Excelsior*, who successfully initiates cross-cultural communication and friendship with a former revolutionary, Frank Eloff deconstructs the inflated perception of self derived from colonial binary classifications and acquires a new, enlarged sense of identity based on the inclusion of others. In contrast to Christopher Jameson (*LA*) and *Disgrace*’s (1999) David Lurie, the subject of *The Good Doctor* assesses and articulates his being along new lines when present political structures no longer underwrite discourses of domination that deem the destruction of the other’s individuality as integral to the functioning of the self. Hence, his identity is not static but dynamic; it “is” not, but it “becomes” when it rises above its limitations. This fluid identity provides bearings for his future and will direct his choices.

In addition to Frank’s perception of events, there are also those of the other characters. According to Laura Grant (2003:18), Frank’s “elaborate” theories and pessimistic

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<sup>30</sup> It is the current author’s contention that Frank still objectifies Maria by referring to her as a “body” rather than an individual. His colonial prerogative permits him to take possession of this body.

assessment of the new South Africa and its past, present and future are not shared by others. De Waal (2003:70) concurs: "Frank het weinig gronde vir sy interpretasie." Galgut, together with Clarkson and Cabarcos-Traseira, maintains that although the authorial narrator is cynical and even pessimistic, Laurence's idealism is superficial, blind and ultimately dangerous (Clarkson, 2004:111). The latter's rose-tinted rewriting of history (if he indeed acknowledges history) is revealed to be a delusion and costs him his life. Galgut then also creates sympathy for Frank by using a self-reflexive and self-aware narrative style. Frank, the survivor, sees things clearly and, even though his theories are not what people like to hear, "his brutally honest outlook on life, on the past and the future, [can be] adopted as a reliable point of view from which the country as a whole can move forward" (Cabarcos-Traseira, 2002:47). In the main, his perspective can be trusted.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

The chapter has demonstrated that despite the decolonisation of Africa and the democratisation of South Africa, the past still lays claims to the present and the repercussions of colonisation – apartheid – still have a bearing on and shape the white South African male's consciousness. Galgut portrays present-day South Africa as being in a downward spiral. Political and social chasms loom large and moral challenges afflict the non-stratified society. Post-democracy degeneration prefigures the European settler's destiny in a country and continent that have become unfamiliar, even alien territory. Earlier certainties have been replaced by ambivalence and apprehension. Implicit references to Conrad's presentation of the clash between two continents and cultures anticipate the annihilation of Western civilisation in Africa.

By means of the two doctors who have widely divergent views about their duty towards the country and its people, and the impact of the past on the present and on the future, Galgut represents the mind-set of the former colonisers and gives one to understand that they may respond in one or two ways to the new democracy. The optimists reorient themselves in the space of the new South Africa and look forward to change, while the

cynics (with whom the first-person narrator initially identifies himself) bewail the termination of the National Party's domination and foretell failure for Africa and an Africanised South Africa. Nevertheless, Galgut seems to imply that if these individuals re-evaluate their point of view and make a psychological adjustment to time and space, they will realise their responsibility for the past of the country as well as for its people. This awareness of accountability will prompt the transgression of intra- and interpersonal boundaries, the recognition of the self in the other and personal development – as it does in the case of the protagonist of the next chapter. To conclude, this chapter on *The Good Doctor* has provided insight into postcolonial subjects' concern with self and other, and the significance of space and place in the construction of identity on a continent where their culture and values, by and large, have become outdated and irrelevant.

## CHAPTER 5

### MICHEL HEYNS: *LOST GROUND*

#### 5.1 Introduction

Whereas Frank Eloff appears to assume a new identity in a new room at the end of *The Good Doctor*, Michiel Heyns's protagonist, Peter Jacobs, concludes that he has ignored crucial details about himself and his relationships with other people, and that he would need to acknowledge, accommodate and integrate the past in his perception of self and identity. *Lost Ground*, like *The Good Doctor* and *The Lostness of Alice*, analyses the white male's perception of his position and place in a society that is no longer racially or sexually stratified. In the light of this context, this chapter addresses similar concerns as the previous two novels with regard to feelings of apprehension and alienation experienced by the respective protagonists as former white settlers, seventeen years after the dawn of a democracy in South Africa. Consequently, the main issues that affect identity formation will feature in this chapter: the postcolonial and postmodern person's preoccupation with space, place, displacement and loss, as well as the expansion of boundaries by means of travel, in a search for selfhood, belonging and meaning. These concerns are expressed by a retrospective and self-critical first-person narrator who (unwillingly) examines himself à propos of the role he played in the past of the country as well as his present relationships with others and the other. By alluding to parallel texts, the author adds another layer of meaning to his narrative.

#### 5.2 Contextualisation

*Lost Ground* (2011) presents a realistic image of post-apartheid South Africa. The novel begins on 19 January 2010 and the events span eleven days in the life of Peter Jacobs, the first-person narrator of the novel. After writing his matriculation examination in 1988, Peter, the son of a British-born Jewish chemist and an Afrikaner *boeremeisie*, left the country to avoid military conscription. Peter regards his decision to have been a move of principled emigration: he would not sacrifice himself for a government he did

not support and that categorised humans into “us and “them”, brainwashing “us” into looking upon “them” as communists and the enemy (261). In England Peter acquires a new identity, or so he convinces himself. After studying at the University of Sussex he becomes a freelance journalist for a British newspaper. Seeing the opportunity for a story in the murder of his cousin, but also to overcome his condition of dislocation and disconnection and discover his true roots, Peter chooses to return to Alfredville, a fictitious rural town in the Klein Karoo.

Since his cousin, the beautiful blonde Desirée Williams, had presumably been killed by her Coloured husband, Peter could use the murder to write a state of the nation feature article for *The Independent*, expounding on racial and communal attitudes in contemporary South Africa. Apartheid might be gone, but its presence makes itself felt in the persistence of racial and socio-economic schisms between the races. In Peter’s mind, the circumstances surrounding Desirée’s death bear similarities to Shakespeare’s *Othello*. In terms of the *Othello* premise, Hector Williams, an ANC struggle veteran and a former member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, bludgeoned his unfaithful spouse to death in a jealous fit of rage with a statuette of Michelangelo’s David. It soon becomes clear that although Desirée comes from a conservative Afrikaner family – her father a former mayor of the town and both he and her mother actively involved in the Dutch Reformed Church – she is no innocent Desdemona but the “object of desire” of at least two white men in town. After Desirée’s return from Stellenbosch, where she studied English literature, she despises the dusty, dead-end *dorp* and implores her suitors to take her away to the city. Bennie Nienaber, second in command to Hector, agrees to leave his family for Desirée and get a transfer to Cape Town, but when he informs his wife, Chrisna, of his intention, Chrisna pleads with Desirée not to deprive her and her children of Bennie. Desirée declines Chrisna’s request and Chrisna kills her rival.

After Peter’s investigations exonerate Hector, he suspects Desirée’s two suitors of the crime. Cassie Carstens admits to striking Desirée but not killing her. Bennie confides in Peter that he was aware of Cassie’s calling on Desirée. Moreover, Desirée’s emotional games – “very lovey-dovey the one day, very fuck-you the next” (269) – drove Bennie to

his wits' end. Peter draws the conclusion that Bennie lost control after having learnt that he was not the only man on whom Desirée bestowed her affections, and accuses his former best friend of taking Desirée's life. Bennie has always thought that Peter believed in him, and the betrayal of trust results in Bennie shooting himself in Peter's presence. After having recovered sufficiently from the mental breakdown Peter has in the wake of Bennie's suicide, the journalist feels it incumbent upon him to apologise to the bereaved widow. Chrisna holds Peter responsible for first tormenting Bennie and then taking him away from her, something Desirée had also tried to do before Chrisna stopped her by killing her, an act to which Chrisna confesses. Peter realises that his return to Alfredville and his interference in the investigation may have contributed to Bennie's suicide. Denouncing Chrisna would be "far beyond the bounds of mercy" (295) and "a futile exercise in abstract justice" (295). Peter will also no longer write the article for the international newspaper. Even though he set out to be only an observer and a reporter of events, he has become an active participant. Evidently, living in South Africa entails becoming involved and participating. Ironically, when Peter is no longer able to distance himself from events and people, he crumbles and finds solace by holding on to the hand of another struggle veteran, Nonyameko Mhlabeni, whom he has befriended in Alfredville and who seems to be the only person who understands.

Peter has come to South Africa to find a career-defining story. The narrator – akin to the author – is a storyteller. *Lost Ground* may be classified as metafiction. The novel considers the way stories come into existence: how people compose stories and how, in the act of conveying them, narrators confront themselves. Stories, thus, shape their narrators' sense of self.

### **5.3 Narrative frame: The detective/mystery novel**

The detective story acts as a frame narrative to enhance the meaning and interpretation of *Lost Ground*. Heyns invokes different sub-genres of crime fiction – the classical detective novel including the cosy whodunit (Stasio, 1992), the hard-boiled crime thriller

and the literary detective novel – to complement the protagonist’s search for clues to a coherent and connected self and to define his place in the world.

The action of the British whodunit detective novel<sup>31</sup> is set in a small town. Heyns admits that he selected the fictitious Alfredville because murder makes a greater impact in a little village than in the city (Meyer, 2012). The offence (violent and a crime of passion) occurs before the narrative action gets underway and the crime’s consequences constitute the rest of the story. The detective, a paragon of moral virtue, remains untouched by guilt and retains a clear conscience. He and his sidekick – if he has one – are actively involved in the case from the beginning, as Peter and Nonyameko indeed are. By way of observation and the logical analysis of facts, clues and the relationships between people, the detective unmasks the villain and protects a privileged social class against individual perversion. The detective, rather than an incompetent and currently also corrupt police force, has to “rebuff the powers of darkness” (*LA*, 50) by catching the perpetrator. This would prevent the overturning of a social class who has everything to lose by change (Green, 1997:202) and restore order and certitude to it.

Since South African crime stories with their gritty realism reverberate with American hard-boiled prose, the detective-hero finds himself drawn into a dangerous and diseased dystopia (Naidu, 2013:733). Urban decay mirrors moral disease and social disorder (Naidu, 2013:732). *Lost Ground* foregrounds the anxiety and vulnerability that many people consider part of South African life. In fiction, the detective, while investigating a murder, therefore also delves into “the condition of the nation” (Naidu, 2013:728) as well as excavates the nation’s history of inequality and oppression. In this fashion, the novelist can analyse the challenges confronting the country – civil unrest and the precariousness of the transformation process – and the consciousness of its citizens. In such a menacing and crime-infested milieu, the detective himself does not possess a stable sense of self but is either a cynical and jaded individual, or, at worst, damaged and disturbed (Naidu, 2013:733). At the outset of Heyns’s text, his

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<sup>31</sup> For examples of the British whodunit, see Agatha Christie’s and Dorothy L. Sayers’ stories.

protagonist prides himself on his cynical detachment; at the end he registers the absence of attachments in his life (Jacobs, 2011:95) and the losses he has caused. He, too, is lost. This engenders feelings of disconsolateness and anguish, and he suffers a mental breakdown.

Whereas the classical detective (Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot) is an individual of exceptional acuity and accomplishment, and does not doubt himself or his place in the world; the modern-day sleuth, like Peter Jacobs, is no longer superior to the readers, and his character development does not take a backseat to the twists and turns the complex plot takes. The readers may identify with the investigator who forms relationships and whose personal flaws (for example immaturity, emotional ineptness, social isolation, alcohol abuse and drug dependency) and professional misjudgements make him all the more human.<sup>32</sup> In this detective story, Heyns lingers over the detective's temperament, describes his emotions and underscores the evolution of his personality as he struggles to negotiate his position. The readers regard themselves as the detective's equal since they share in his discoveries and pit their wits and skills of observation and logical analysis against his with the aim of unravelling the mystery before he does. The participation of the readers in locating the culprit and unravelling the mystery diminishes the distance between narrator and readers and creates a feeling of involvement and intimacy. While the readers play at being a detective, they also have to confront their own prejudices.

Like the readers, the modern-day detective may be an amateur who exercises another profession. The journalistic crime expert features in twentieth-century British and American detective stories (Wright, 1927). Peter Jacobs, like John Conyngham's Sally Bowen, makes a living by writing for a newspaper. The job of an extra-legal detective is facilitated by police connections. In *Lost Ground*, Detective Sergeant Hannes Marais

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, Chris Jameson (*LA*) is emotionally immature: rather than confronting Sally about her relationship with Detective Marais, he leaves without a note. Frank Eloff (*GD*) and Peter Jacobs shy away from an interpersonal connection while Deon Meyer's detective Bennie Griessel battles with alcoholism.

assists Sally, and, in *The Lostness of Alice*, Captain Bennie Nienaber discusses the murder of Vincent, the Congolese car guard, with Peter.

Sam Naidu (2013:737) notes that Heyns appears to follow the conventions of the classical murder genre: he presents a murder mystery involving a crime of passion and motivated by desire or jealousy. This mystery occurs in a closed setting. The material for the plot seems commonplace and may feature on the front page of any daily newspaper: the murder of a white woman by a black man. A parade of suspects is interviewed and one by one eliminated. The physical evidence and the fact that the husband is usually the primary suspect point to Hector Williams as the perpetrator. A fact is that Hector's bloody shoes match the stain on the bathroom floor and his fingerprints are lifted from Desirée's drinking glass. Moreover, he cannot account for his whereabouts at the time in question. Yet the superficially convincing evidence only acts as decoy and Peter discovers that white policemen, who resented the Coloured man's rapid rise in the force, have planted the evidence.

Desirée's other beau, Cassie Carstens, also had ample motive to commit a crime of passion. While seeing Cassie, Desirée has a sexual relationship with Bennie, or so Cassie is told. On the last night of her life Desirée ridicules Cassie's first name Septimus ("Septic Septimus") and his manhood. After Cassie has left Desirée's house, Vincent, the car guard, spots the Nienaber family dog waiting outside the house. According to Vincent, this would indicate that Bennie Nienaber was inside. The evidence against Bennie seems convincing, but – as in traditional detective fiction – the obvious suspect is innocent. As a makeshift detective, Peter tests his theories with his sidekick, Nonyameko, who questions his methods and assumptions. As more clues surface, the suspense intensifies. Heyns waits as long as possible to disclose the wrongdoer's identity. Up until the point that Chrisna owns up to the crime, the reader could hold on to the promise of disorder being dispelled and moral certitude restored.

However, just as Peter discards the *Othello* narrative framework, so does Heyns deviate from the pattern of traditional detective fiction. First, Alfredville is by no stretch of the

imagination the idyllic village of the British whodunit but comes to represent a country that is “a veritable hotbed of racial, political and sexual tensions” erupting in “the violent act of murder” (Naidu, 2013:736). Secondly, the black man who has allegedly killed the white woman is her husband. In the third instance, the person investigating the murder can be labelled an anti-detective (Naidu, 2013:735) in that he has several shortcomings. Naidu (2013:735) refers to him as “misguided, displaced [and] emotionally naïve”. Moreover, the journalist has “dubious motives” for researching his article and “ad hoc detection methods” (Naidu, 2013:735). With the smug superiority of the liberal English-speaking South African person (Wessels, 2012:60) and world traveller, Peter presumes that he will be able to manipulate and dupe the unsuspecting and ignorant Afrikaans-speaking folk of the sleepy little Karoo town into relinquishing private information. Before long, he realises that the people of Alfredville are not as trusting and naïve as he has thought.

Heyns further undercuts the conventions of nineteenth-century detective fiction by presenting a protagonist who lacks the classical detective’s moral authority, perspective and confidence in himself, and will thus be subjective in his interpretations. Peter Jacobs openly admits that he is neither a brave nor a good man. He denies accountability for others and for personal choices: his father decided for him that he would emigrate to England rather than going to the army. When Bennie reaches out emotionally, Peter gives him the cold shoulder, since Peter does not know how to deal with emotions that are not wrapped in a layer of irony. Because Peter – like Frank from *The Good Doctor* – will not traverse interpersonal spaces of separation between me and you, he also wishes to “walk out of the sad story” (239) of his cousin’s murder. Moreover, Peter eschews an ethical stance or even an overt investigative position. Yet, against his will, he becomes entangled in an ethical and moral quandary from which he cannot extricate himself. The supposed representative of law and order loses his way (moral ground), with the result that he behaves dishonourably. He misinterprets the clues and bungles the investigation when he accuses his best friend of killing his cousin. Peter’s detective exploits and errors culminate in tragedy, and the innocently accused and betrayed friend commits suicide. Even though everything in the plot prepares for

the denouement, which is certainly startling, it is not the shrewd detective who explains the steps he has followed to arrive at the culprit's identity. In fact, Peter is sorely lacking in powers of astute observation, logical and rational analysis, inference and intuition; he himself imagines that Hector Williams's pregnant girlfriend, Sarah Augustyn, must think him "exceptionally obtuse" (244) for not comprehending Hector's motive for killing Desirée. When Peter fails to pick up on Bennie's and Chrisna's insinuations as to the identity of the perpetrator, a frustrated Chrisna confesses. In the traditional detective novel, the guilty party never confesses voluntarily to the crime; the sleuth compels or tricks him/her into doing so. To add insult to injury, this detective wants to know from the murderer how to proceed, a notion that the murderer, with reason, finds preposterous. Although the readers are not robbed of the revelation towards which the novel works, the lawbreaker is not taken into custody. Peter's success in solving the crime may be attributed to luck rather than to the systematic gathering and analysis of evidence and perspicacious inference. Though the crime is solved, moral order is not restored to this murky and menacing world. In a crime-infested country such as South Africa – an indirect slur on the South African police force since they cannot maintain law and order – neat, final resolutions do not present themselves. The detective, who is supposed to serve the interests of a specific social class (in this novel the former settlers) who has everything to lose by change and idealises "a world already almost gone" (Green, 1997:202), rather contributes to the confusion. *Lost Ground's* denouement may therefore be deemed unsatisfactory and a parody of the traditional denouement, a "sorry tale of a stuff-up" (294). Yet the true focus of Heyns's novel is not the solving of the whodunit but the narrating of the detective's efforts and the progress he makes as a person. As literary detective fiction, Heyns' novel is a whydunit that challenges the intellect, and is typified by "aesthetic sensibility, technical virtuosity and authorial self-consciousness" (Black, 2010:78), as well as complex characterisation, psychological analysis and philosophical insights. Being "highbrow" literature, it combines "the art thrill and the thriller thrill at once" (James, 2009:95).

## 5.4 Narrative strategies: Intertextuality and irony

### 5.4.1 Intertextuality

Heyns not only extends textual boundaries by drawing on the genre of the detective novel, but he makes use of intertextual references to recall and ironically reshape other texts. The postmodern narratological technique of intertextuality denotes how literary compositions structure and are structured by other creations; all works are derived from other creations. This technique highlights the revisionist and reconfigurative nature of writing, and invalidates the perception of a work as a self-sufficient entity.

Heyns, who is conscious that *Lost Ground* must find its place among other literary material (Dowling, 2012), parodies his own literary endeavours and the art of writing by resorting to self-reflexive strategies such as intertextuality. Heyns readily admits that he intended *Lost Ground* to be a reworking of the Shakespeare play (Corrigall, 2012a:16). Several allusions to *Othello* are inscribed throughout the novel, only to be dismantled at one point or another. Inverting the symbolic logic of the drama and making a stand against racial stereotyping, the theatre company for which Peter's Jamaican boyfriend works proposes that James should audition for the part of the (white) Iago instead of the leading role. Moreover, with the exception of The Moor, the entire cast consists of black actors. The modernised play is set in Harlem, not Venice, and gangsters replace Shakespeare's warriors. In *Lost Ground*, one such warrior is Hector Williams – an ANC cadre who, after the struggle for a democratic South Africa has been won – victoriously returns home to become chief of police. Hector enchants his Desdemona (Desirée) with tales of his years in exile spent in overseas cities such as Moscow and London. The transgression of racial boundaries between Blik van Blerk's rebellious daughter and a Coloured other puts the patriarch's immutable, pure white identity under pressure. Oom Blik, who establishes his identity in difference and not in essence, will not re-evaluate past discourses of self and other, so as to deconstruct his old self in favour of a new one that corresponds to changing times. Just as Brabantio blames Othello for corrupting Desdemona with "spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (I, ii),

Desirée's prejudiced and judgmental father charges Hector with putting a spell on his daughter. In an ironic twist, Oom Blik tries to persuade Desirée and Hector to follow Othello and Desdemona's example by eloping, but Desirée is no docile Desdemona and is not to be dissuaded from being wed in the Dutch Reformed Church, the bastion of white Afrikaner identity. Hector's dark complexion renders him an outsider among his spouse's family and friends, as it does Othello in Venetian society. Hector shares Othello's intrepidity and intelligence, but also his less positive personal traits as he tends to act on instinct and is prone to "the kind of insecurity that, even after he's achieved total success, would still undermine his self-image to the extent that he's driven to kill. As with Othello" (LG, 108).

Heyns departs from *Othello* because, whereas Othello has no reason to doubt Desdemona's loyalty, Desirée's behaviour discloses that she could be "making the beast with two backs" (I, i); that wives do fail and sometimes slack their duties (IV, iii). When Hector presumably succumbs to the "green-eyed monster" (III, iii, 165-167) and murders his wife, the "hero" becomes a villain. Peter's investigations establish Hector's innocence. The police chief's complexion has exposed him to stereotyping and professional envy. Corrupt colleagues, insecure about their own status in the new South Africa and who deem the destruction of the other's distinctiveness as critical to the functioning of the self, frame him. The *Othello* theory holds no water and he can no longer present "The Othello Murder" to an international readership.

Just as Shakespeare in *Othello* explores the binary categories of "us" and "them" and their bearing on identity, Malan (Whitaker, 1990) looks into South Africa's racial divide and the profound psychological effects of apartheid's legacy on the various races. Peter sets out to probe race relations through a single murder case; in Malan's autobiographical novel the narrator does the same: while working as a crime reporter for a Johannesburg newspaper, *The Star*, he recounts a range of murder cases, and makes these tragic incidents part of the country's consciousness. Malan not only reveals his own racial prejudices and fears but also indicates that the notion of a rainbow nation is an illusion: the rainbow is close to breaking up "into its constituent

colours” (Adams, 2007). Akin to the liberal Peter Jacobs, the novelist of *My Traitor’s Heart* could not reconcile himself with dyed-in-the-wool Afrikaner nationalist values and also fled the military draft to become an expatriate. Yet, like many other writers, Malan does not cope well with “the ambiguities of living ‘in-between’”, in exile, to use Mohanram’s and Rajan’s (1996:57) expression. After several years the “traitor” returns to native soil in an attempt to reclaim “lost ground”, only to discover that South Africa is “stranger than ever” and that everyone now has “blood on their hands” (Cloutier, 2013). Unable to orient himself in space and time, Malan finds that he no longer has a home in South Africa but also does not fit in abroad. Hence, his perception of self remains unsettled and in perpetual flux.

Antjie Krog (Hunter-Gault, 2000), like Malan and Heyns, testifies to the comprehensive metamorphosis the country has undergone since 1994. Putting the experiences of individuals at the heart of South Africa’s history (Russell, 1999), Krog wonders if the citizens of the country can come to terms with their turbulent past and renege on colonial values and apartheid prejudices that previously constituted their consciousness. Similar to *Lost Ground’s* narrator, Krog draws on other people’s suffering to underpin her story.

In addition to Shakespeare, Malan and Krog, Heyns uses the protagonist’s two confidants in Alfredville, Drs Nonyameko Mhlabeni and Henk Pretorius, to introduce additional literary allusions for the purpose of enhancing the meaning of his text. Dr Mhlabeni reads Coetzee’s *Diary of a Bad Year* (2008) and Dr Pretorius Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name* (2007). In *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee brings narrative authority and the relationship between writer and narrator under scrutiny. Señor C postulates that when writing a novel, the author – like Atlas – carries the entire world on his shoulders. It gradually becomes clear to Heyns’s pessimistic narrator that he cannot meet the demands that narrative puts on a person and he abandons the idea of penning a feature article.

Aciman's narrative deals with a heated romance that blossoms one summer between a professor's teenage son and his academic expatriate family's guest, a young man doing his doctorate. To subsume each other's identities, the two lovers exchange names in their interaction with each other. The concept of fusing one's self with another's appeals to Alfredville's veterinarian who has had a liaison with a schoolboy and so pushes the boundaries of his sexual subjectivity.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, Dr Henk Pretorius appreciates that the townspeople will condemn same-sex unions as they do interracial relationships, and places the book face down on his coffee table. Peter's best friend of his youth, Bennie Nienaber, spiritually merged his being with Peter's. Bennie confides in his wife that Peter believed in him, and so Bennie could believe in himself too. The boy, whose poor white family did "fuck all for [him] except bring [him] into the world and then fuck [him] up" (233) thought of his friendship with the intelligent boy from an affluent and affectionate family as an achievement (56). Their adolescent friendship bestowed on him a secure sense of self and left an indelible impression on him. Peter, Proustian at heart, posits:

[p]eople do leave, you know, they don't stay in the same place for ever, which doesn't mean they don't miss the people they leave behind, which doesn't mean they don't love them, which doesn't mean they're not bloody *lonely* much of the time (236-237).

The universal agent of Time, the strongest force in the universe, 'is "ever fleeting and marches on" (GLBT Bookshelf, 2009). This force will come between people and tear all human bonds asunder. Identity, likewise, is subject to the vicissitudes of time and has to adapt to changing circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground* brings into play the counter-discursive modalities within a postmodern and postcolonial paradigm of intertextual referencing and metafiction, to simultaneously engage with and react to the past of literature. By

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<sup>33</sup> In *The Quarry*, the murderer exchanges his identity for that of a minister.

<sup>34</sup> Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1893-1927), to which Heyns refers in the epigraph, gives a picture of this search for lost time. The seven volumes of the work detail the narrator's recurring, fleeting flashbacks. Recovering and recreating memories from an otherwise forgotten past, the narrator in Proust's work – like Peter – confronts himself and acquires perspective on and an appreciation of his own distinctiveness and his place in the world.

inserting and absorbing metanarratives into the original text and transforming these directly and indirectly by rewriting them from a new vantage point – so subverting their original significance – the author highlights alternate possibilities of what could have been and what could be.

#### 5.4.2 Irony

The discursive trope of doubleness, irony, depicts an event or a situation that is at variance with what a person expects and what actually happens, with the intention of bringing about a comic or satirical outcome. Involving reflection and reversal (White, 1999), irony, comparable to intertextuality, decentres metanarratives by bringing to light the fictional illusion: thus, the duality and duplicity inherent in texts.

In Heyns's novel, references to Shakespeare's canonical play *Othello* figure, the power of which is called into question and dismantled at a later stage. Hector, like Shakespeare's Moor, returns home as a hero of the Liberation Struggle. He is appointed as chief of police but then supposedly murders his wife and is placed under house arrest. Ironically, the protagonist – who is convinced of Hector's culpability, proves him innocent.

Although *Lost Ground* appears to follow the format of the classical detective novel – the narrative action being set in a small town in which a violent crime occurs – Alfredville is not the typical peaceful village of the British whodunit but a melting pot of racial friction and frustration. The police detectives who delve into Desirée's murder do not remain untouched by guilt, as the classical detective does. In truth, they plant evidence to incriminate Hector, their superior. The journalist-detective has none of Sherlock Holmes's powers of observation and rational analysis; he makes the wrong assumptions so that both his former best friend, Bennie, and Bennie's wife comment that he does not have "much of an idea of anything" (132). Paradoxically, the person who should be the model of moral virtue, astuteness and accomplishment loses his way and misinterprets the evidence. Instead of restoring order and security to society, he

causes more confusion when he accuses the wrong person of the homicide, which prompts Bennie to make an end to his own life. Hence, Peter's dabbling at detection results in tragedy. Peter solves the mystery because the murderer confesses, and not because he has analysed clues and made clever deductions. Whereas the classical detective should explicate the steps he has followed to arrive at the answer to the riddle, Peter asks the murderer what his next step should be. Ironically, he feels sympathy for the murderer and decides not to denounce her to the authorities. This detective story, therefore, does not dispel disorder and put a privileged social class at ease.

Irony also relates to the presentation of place in *Lost Ground*. Though control of the country has been given to the majority, the changes have not reached the common man. With a few exceptions, relations between the races have not improved and prejudice thrives. The white people of Alfredville believe Hector guilty of his wife's murder because he is non-white. Not only the white, but also the brown and black inhabitants of Alfredville judge others on the basis of race and exercise xenophobia. In a nutshell, post-apartheid frustrations such as sub-standard education, poor economic prospects, criminal activities and the service delivery crisis (as regards infrastructure, electricity and water supply) have destroyed the illusion of a rainbow nation.

Alfredville symbolises South Africa on a small scale, and South Africa is "a small country on a backward continent" (35). The major characters in Heyns's novel all leave Alfredville for a while – Bennie to go to the army, Desirée to study and Peter to pursue a career – yet they all return. Even though Peter initially turns his nose up at living in Alfredville, he, who has had the opportunity to live in one of the biggest cities on earth, is the only one who sees a similarity between "perpetuating [a] pointless existence" on the colonial periphery and "perpetuating [a] pointless existence" (291) in the imperial centre. Living in the metropolis may not be more desirable to living in the country. Peter, in all likelihood, survives because he is the only character who comes to appreciate what he had in the past and what he has at present in this lowly little town.

## 5.5 Themes

In *Lost Ground*, Heyns provides the reader with a narrative about loss, prejudice and betrayal. Related to these two themes is that of the past and how it impacts on the present.

The epigraph to the novel underscores the theme of loss. Though the protagonist does not want to see himself as an expatriate, he involuntarily asks himself if his purpose in coming back is “to recover something of an easier time, of simple sensations and conversations” (174) – in other words, the lost innocence of bygone days when he felt secure in himself. For example, Peter is “pleased to see that [their] old house’s stoep is still open to the street” (49) and that the only change at the school is the razor-wire fence that “hideously” surrounds its grounds (50). The familiarity – the fact that “in all these years almost nothing has changed” (170) – appeals to him. Nevertheless, Peter resolves to resist the “embrace of the past”; he will not be “blackmailed into sentimentality” (176) by “sentimental claptrap” (175) and deny the “present in the name of an idealised past” (176). However, just because he has turned his back on the past, does not mean that the past and the people in it have forgotten him. As Bennie’s wife, Chrisna, puts it: “... you sail through life not looking back at the people you’ve left behind in your wake. But the people you’ve left behind don’t stop feeling just because you’ve forgotten them” (288); in fact, those people have contributed to shaping Peter’s subjectivity and outlook on life (50). As soon as the narrator arrives in Alfredville, he cannot but revisit and confront the past, and the people he left behind reassert themselves and reclaim their place in the present. Peter observes that having to take others into account goes “against every inclination of [his] nature” (198), bringing to mind Dr Eloff’s (*GD*) complaint that Dr Waters made disproportionate demands of friendship on him. Although the cynical and suave narrator has pretended to be “completely disaffected from the past” (Dowling, 2012) “the nostalgia trap, SpiderWoman and vampire all in one” (138), as James refers to the past, and thinks it absurd that he will find a clue to the past in this dusty little *dorp* (274), he gradually grasps – as Bennie does – that one cannot disown the past; as long as one is in a

specific place, the past and the people in it will not disregard him. Ignoring the past means erasing one's history and identity. Gramsci (1988:326) states that we are a précis of the past, and the past endows us with a sense of who we are today and tomorrow. Be that as it may, the past is not recoverable once it is lost; one cannot retrieve youth's "unfettered exploration of life, the life of the senses, [and] the unexamined joy of daily companionship in that exploration" (LG, 274). The true paradises are the paradises "we have lost".

In the novel it is evident that South Africa's apartheid past still lays claims to the present and dictates it. Relations between the races appear not to have improved. In the beginning of the novel, Peter displays traces of residual racism (and perhaps chauvinism as well), since it strikes him as odd that a black woman should be reading a novel by Coetzee (25). It further seems plausible to Peter that Desirée's husband killed her, probably because, as Vincent suggests, her husband is a black man (230). Prejudice is overtly expressed. For instance, a farmer tells a group of other farmers a racist joke in the Queen's Hotel, a public place, in close proximity to two black businessmen. When Peter joins a black woman, he suspects a racist slur in a comment one of the farmers makes (26). The woman introduces herself as Nonyameko and remarks that it was "so much easier for white people when all black women were called Doris and Agnes" (30). In fact, Nonyameko's mother's employer, called Nonyameko's mother Gladys, although this was not her name, while "Gladys" had to address the white woman as "Madam" (98). Mrs Viljoen paid for Nonyameko's school books and was "outraged" (98) when Nonyameko joined the African National Congress after her matriculation examination. Mrs Viljoen thought of the ANC as a terrorist movement and predicted that Gladys's daughter would ruin her own future. As for the hotel owner, Joachim Ferreira: there has been a hue and outcry when he allowed his employee, a black man, to stay in a hotel bedroom rather than in the servants' quarters behind the hotel (67). Joachim also explains to Peter that Desirée's choice to marry a Coloured policeman did not make sense to people and there was "a lot of talk" (66). Some wanted to run Hector out of town (66), while others denounced Desirée. After all, "they" do not "really understand our ways" (88), as Aunt Dolly carefully articulates, such as

eating salad on a side plate and getting up when a woman enters the room. Oom Blik, Desirée's father, is more outspoken. Promulgating public discourse and ideology, he bluntly announces that "they" belong in the jungle since "they" do not possess the capacity for rational thought (88). Both Oom Blik and his wife, akin to the majority of the white population of Alfredville, still choose to base their identity on the ideological fixing of Manichean polarities (JanMohamed, 1988), and uphold old prejudices and predispositions. Therefore, an interracial marriage where a black ram tups a white ewe, as Shakespeare phrases it in *Othello* (I, i), can never work. The white people of Alfredville therefore anticipate that the marriage would come to no good (107). Cassie declares: "... bottom line is she married a hotnot and lived to regret it" (164).

It seems that Oom Blik views Desirée's death at the hand of a black man as a setback for civilised values and white identity. Her fate, as Alice's (*LA*) apparently also does, foreshadows the white settlers' future in Africa and an Africanised South Africa. Like Blik and Dolly, the majority of Alfredville's white citizens mourn the demise of the previous order where they could openly define themselves in opposition to others. Since non-Western others have taken control of the country, whites no longer occupy a place of privilege; what is more, they have been relegated to a position low on the priority list. The wheel is turning full circle and the crimes of the past are being redressed in the present. Foreseeing failure for a country of which the political structures no longer underwrite past discourses of whiteness and fearful for their future, the white denizens of Alfredville echo the sentiments of Tjaart Cronje, the right-wing Afrikaner in Mda's *Madonna of Excelsior*, who predicts that "they will mess the country up. The country will be in a shambles" (1996:243). South Africa is in a state of complete "unravelling and decay and horror" (Conyngham, interview with Blair (2003:85), as evinced by all the "post-apartheid disappointments" (Barris, 2008:2) that dim the bright colours of the young rainbow nation. South Africa is reverting to the real Africa, which, in the Peter's boyfriend's mind, is a place where a person can get lost without a trace.

Setting the scene for the theme of betrayal are two other places: the house in which Desirée van Blerk grew up and the hotel where Peter resides when he comes to

research her murder. In the nineteenth century, Rachel Retief, the wife of a local farmer, used the Van Blerks' home as a town house. Rachel's husband, Isaak, preferred the company of one of his workers, Frederik Stoffels, to that of his wife, and bequeathed the farm to Frederik. The Queen's Hotel came into being in the late 1890s when South Africa was a British colony. British officers "on adulterous furlough from Cape Town" (8) frequented the hotel. The narrator compares the hotel to "a scream in a nunnery" (8) in the midst of prim and proper Alfredville; it is out of place in this whitewashed village, like its effeminate owner, "Fairy" Ferreira; his partner, Boris; and the narrator of the story, Peter Jacobs, also are.

Peter's unfaithfulness is signalled by a cock that crows three times the first morning that Peter wakes up in the Queen's Hotel. Peter's name recalls to mind the Biblical Peter who betrayed Jesus three times before the cock crowed. When Heyns's protagonist leaves South Africa to dodge serving in the army, he follows in the footsteps of his mother who defected from "volk en vaderland" (the nation and the country) by marrying a British Jew. Ironically, Peter criticises white South Africans for their politics, forgetting that he has also defected instead of participated in creating a tolerable future. In addition, Peter forsakes Bennie Nienaber, who is secretly in love with Peter, and takes Peter's decision to leave as treachery. As a matter of fact, Bennie feels that life betrayed him by giving him "one huge steaming mess of a family" (134). Aside from making his child feel like a "fuck-up" (233), Bennie's alcoholic father also beats his family; and out of fear of her husband's fists, Bennie's mother does nothing to protect her son against the verbal and physical abuse. When Peter comes back to Alfredville more than twenty years later, Bennie thinks that Peter has missed him, but Peter disillusioned Bennie for a second time when he reveals that the real reason for his return is to write an article about the violent death of his cousin, Desirée van Blerk. Peter lets Bennie down a third time by not giving Bennie the opportunity to unburden himself. Like Peter, his female double, Desirée, also commits her own share of betrayals. As a student, she snubs the Klein Karoo village when she goes to Stellenbosch and picks up all sorts of outlandish ideas (67). When she returns, it is only to save enough money to go overseas. Desirée insists on conducting her English classes through the medium of

English whereas her predecessor used Afrikaans to teach English. With her “outsider attitude” (146), the young woman does not want to play tennis on the school courts with the other teachers but joins the town club where she meets Hector Williams. Desirée then commits the worst kind of treason against her conservative parents and the white Afrikaner community when she weds a non-white policeman and a former ANC terrorist at that (68); subsequently many of her friends and the community shun her. Hector, on his part, marries Desirée not for love, but because she is a beautiful white woman, the mayor’s daughter; she represents “the spoils of war” (147) to him. After the wedding, Hector resumes his relationship with Sarah Augustyn, a girl from the Coloured township and conceives a child with her. Desirée, in turn, toys with the affections of two men whom she beseeches to take her away from her husband and Alfredville. One of these men, Bennie, is married to her best friend, Chrisna. When Chrisna learns that she has been duped by both her spouse and her friend, she kills Desirée. Hence, Desirée’s best friend becomes her murderer.

Not only individuals are guilty of duplicity. The police also deceive the citizens of the country by claiming that crime statistics are on the decline, but, according to Peter’s father, one can find more drug addicts per square mile in Knysna than anywhere in the world (133). Peter feels the need to report to his boyfriend in London that he has “survived [his] first day in Africa without getting mugged or raped” (19). The police also fail to protect foreigners from African countries against xenophobic attacks. Other than being incompetent, the police are also racist and corrupt. The people of the township speculate that envious white policemen planted evidence to incriminate Hector in his wife’s murder because Hector occupies a senior position in law enforcement. Like the vagrant caught in the vicinity of Alice’s (LA) home, it is taken for granted that Hector must be a criminal because he is black. Hector’s girlfriend, Sarah Augustyn, remarks that the police do well for themselves in South Africa, to which Hector replies that the policemen who prosper are those who take bribes (242). Boris and Joachim agree that everyone in the police force steals – from the lowest-ranking officer to the Commissioner of Police (251). In *Lost Ground*, nobody trusts the law enforcement services any longer. The perfidy of the police force parallels that of the South African

government which does not deliver on the promise of “a better life for all”, with the result that “generations of young South Africans ... seek security and opportunity elsewhere” (35). Indolence and inefficiency, corruption and criminality characterise the consciousness of the newly-elected. While the rate of unemployment and crime increases and basic services are not rendered, “overfed and probably overpaid government bigwig[s]” (32) laze around in plush, air-conditioned offices and recite regulations without any practical knowledge of the conditions to which they apply (93). Functionaries and their elegantly and expensively-dressed wives overspend “state money on the over-lavish trappings of office” (224). As in Mda’s *Heart of Redness* (2000) and Galgut’s *The Good Doctor*, the new rulers are shown to care only about their own advancement and enrichment, and not about the “small people, [the] nothing people” (*GD*, 112). The “small people” include whites. In Heyns’s narrative, many white people are under the impression that the ANC government has abandoned them. Bennie notes that “[y]ou can’t have a white station commander” (78). Oom Blik gets voted out as mayor of Alfredville and is superseded by a black man, Goodwill Mzweni. Oom Blik also holds the system accountable for his daughter’s death.

People may be deceived by other people, but they may also play false to themselves. As a teenager Peter refuses to own up to his sexual orientation (he compares Joy Duvenhage who offers him sex to a snake mesmerising small rodents with its eyes (42)) and the place that Bennie occupies in his life, a place that can never be filled again by any other man or woman. Peter goes back to Alfredville to locate himself and a meaningful connection to another but convinces himself that he is looking for a story. This story deals with his cousin’s murder, yet Peter tells himself that he will be able to write the story without making it his; that is, without becoming involved. When Bennie reaches out to Peter and tries to remind the latter of their relationship, Peter denies his own feelings and rebuffs Bennie. After Bennie’s death, the journalist pretends that “nothing really matters over-much to the cultivated mind” (238), and keeps “the monsters of the mind” (294) in abeyance by concentrating on the details of the story and narrating these in a lucid fashion (294) Only after Nonyameko insists that Peter still does not know himself, does he assume accountability and allow the shell, his “time-

hardened carapace, defence against feeling too much and showing too much” (297) to crack.

## 5.6 Space, place and identity

The speaking subject returns to South Africa in search of the time and self he has lost and betrayed by leaving South Africa. Providing a realistic image of post-apartheid South Africa, *Lost Ground* indicates that though the country has undergone political transformation, the changes have not filtered through to the ordinary people and they have not adapted to the transition.

Being a microcosm of and metaphor for the national landscape and representative of its demographic make-up, the village of Alfredville epitomises the enforced coexistence of different political and moral standpoints in the South African space (as Cabarcos-Traseira (2002:52) notes concerning the room that the doctors share in Damon Galgut’s novel). The people of Alfredville distrust outsiders, attesting to the fact that these people delineate themselves in terms of difference rather than essence. An argument could be made that the rural Karoo *dorp* may also be regarded as the farm in the pastoral farm novel<sup>35</sup> where the occupants of the farm take a dire view of those who come from the city, the supposed site of inequity where material wealth takes precedence over human relations.<sup>36</sup> For instance, Joachim terms Stellenbosch “a nest of liberalism” (68), while Mrs Rabie brands London a place “full of foreigners” (68) where people live like battery chickens in flats with people they are not married to. Even Peter refers to London as “a city that bought its own baloney and is now bankrupt” and “the flotsam of a civilisation sinking under the weight of its own pretensions ...” (238).<sup>37</sup> The local veterinarian warns Peter that he, Henk, would be labelled “a traitor within the

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<sup>35</sup> Surrounded by a desert-like landscape, Alfredville, similar to the farm, may be considered an in-between place. By the same token, it resembles the hospital in *The Good Doctor* that is “halfway between nowhere and somewhere” (*GD*, 34), and South Africa, that fluctuates between an African and European identity.

<sup>36</sup> *Cry, the Beloved Country*, *The Heart of Redness* and *Somer* demonstrate this.

<sup>37</sup> The “sinfulness” of the city seems to be a recurrent theme in Michiel Heyns’s oeuvre, for, in *The Children’s Day*, the inhabitants of Verkeerdespruit in the Orange Free State associate the metropole of Johannesburg with the threat of communism (Wessels, 2012:63).

gates” for speaking to Peter (145), Alfredville’s “confused and conflicted prodigal son” (Review *My Traitor’s Heart*, 2013) who “sinned against heaven (145) by going in search of greener pastures in metropolitan cities. The hotel owner, Joachim Ferreira, also tells Peter that Alfredville’s people suffer from paranoia. Desirée, Bennie and Peter often compare Alfredville with cities (Cape Town and London) and for the most part to the town’s detriment. Peter describes Alfredville as “a very small town in a very small country on a backward continent” where nothing really happens to anyone (35) (conveniently forgetting what happened to Desirée here). Living in this “aesthetically challenged” (220) desolate and dusty little *dorp* with its windmills and farm animals, bodes “an eternity of tedium” (162) in the opinion of the above-mentioned characters. These people variously designate the reservation of antiquated Afrikaner values and apartheid myths as a “godforsaken place” without interesting human company (James, 280), a “dump” (Desirée, 193), and a “pile of human garbage” (Elrina, 37) and “vrot fish” (Bennie, 27). In his email messages to his boyfriend in London, Peter, with “his metropolitan skill with words” (Lenta, 2011), caricatures the backwardness and parochialism of the townspeople. Covertly he sneers at the décor, the choice of literature, clothes and cuisine. Yet, as Peter grows as a character, he understands that there may not be such a vast difference between “perpetuating [a] pointless existence” (238) in the “downmarket version” of London, Alfredville, and London itself: “Here the farmer’s bakkie stinks up the main street; in London the tube fouls the lungs of a million passengers a day.” (291) Peter also communicates to Bennie that success is not subject to where you spend your life. “You can be a success in Alfredville and a failure in London.” (235) The postmodern subject can realise its selfhood in diverse settings, or as the car guard, Vincent, puts it: “... our garden is everywhere” (231). What is more, the owner of Alfredville’s Queen’s Hotel insists that Alfredville offers more sightseeing opportunities than London, and Peter communicates in a letter to James that he has “a livelier time socially in Alfredville than in Maida Vale” in London (116). Peter also comes to recognise that, though the stony landscape makes few concessions to conventional ideas of beauty” (62), there is

a certain appeal in the very emptiness, something melancholy in its meagreness and yet comforting in its permanence. [Unlike London] [i]t's a landscape without clutter, without noise, without much emotion, neutral, perhaps even negative. It's not a landscape that conforms readily to a formula: it refuses to be reduced to a cliché or even a meaning (62).

At a later stage he also delights in the mellow beauty of the village after the harsh glare of day has passed and contemplates that that these rural surroundings may render a “tranquil refuge from a more purpose-obsessed world” (62). For a moment Peter hankers after a rustic lifestyle – an attribute of the cosy detective novel. Continuing the analogy with the pastoral farm, Alfredville, from this perspective, emerges as a pure and wholesome place where people live by traditional values and customs. This idyllic setting, imbued with memories of the past, provides a point of orientation in the pursuit of belonging, meaning and identity. In this stable and safe place where one can live freely, transformation of the self can occur, as indeed happens to the protagonist. He envisions returning to the “stony comfort” (62) of Alfredville’s “bright open spaces and dry radiant heat” (45) which seem preferable to London’s “relentless drizzle” (45) and “pervasive gloom” (199). Besides, Peter does not have a home in London.

Pierre Bourdieu (1991:51) alludes to home or *habitus* as a set of social qualities and norms that governs how an individual thinks and acts. Nonyameko simply defines home as the location of one’s house, job and friends. Similar to Conyngham’s and Galgut’s protagonists, Peter does not have a home or own ground. However, when he was at school, he did enjoy the serenity and security of a family home in Alfredville (54-55). Bachelard (1994:4) observes that the houses we were born and brought up in make up our first universe. Enclosing memories of our past within their walls, they are part of who we are. An extension of family life, they represent attachment, belonging and intimacy. Peter now lives in a flat that belongs to his partner. Like Christopher Jameson (*LA*), Peter does not have “a nest for his body, padded to his measure” (to use Bachelard’s image) where he can live “in complete confidence” (1994:101, 103). Chrisna equates staying in a flat to a life support system, and not a life. “It’s like battery chickens who lay an egg every time they switch the lights on.” (291) Her mother, too, cannot fathom that any decent (white) person would wish to live in a flat. Usually

interim accommodation, a flat supplies no sanctuary from the loneliness and alienation of the external world, even more so in a foreign country.<sup>38</sup> A flat cannot anchor a person in his/her place of origin, so supporting a stable and secure self. Uprooted and estranged from his point of origin, “without an anchor, without horizon” (Fanon, 1963:176), Peter persists in the uncertain position of the periphery where a person participates without belonging, and faces feelings of marginality and *Unheimlichkeit*. According to Steyn (2001:157), home has become an alien place in a postcolonial era, and the protagonist fittingly refers to himself as a “foreigner in two countries” (237).

As regards home being the place where one works and where one’s friends reside, Peter, being a freelance journalist, can perform his job anywhere he can plug in his laptop and connect to the Internet. Peter and James share the same friends and Peter imagines that they find James’s conversation more scintillating than his. Though he espouses James’s maxim that we live in the age of emigration (62), and may presume that the postcolonial consciousness can orient itself in any space, he considers Angelina, the Van Blerks’ servant, as lucky because she has everything she needs in Alfredville, including a home, whereas he is still looking (81).

Since Peter is without a home, and identity is frequently territorially delimited, as Smit, (2005:16) explains identity, he hesitates to define who he is. Nonyameko, nonetheless, forces him to engage with his individuality. She does this by persistently posing questions such as whether he sees himself a writer or a journalist, a British or South African citizen. To Nonyameko one can be one or the other, not both. The mobilisation of a single, one-dimensional subjectivity corresponds to the imperial concept of an essentialised, monological sense of self. In accordance with this construct, identity is an immutable essence that presents people with “one true self” (Rutherford, 1990:223), instead of several fluid ones. This collective phenomenon originates from a mutual cultural remembering (223) of past experiences and cultural codes. Static and

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<sup>38</sup> In Galgut’s narrative, Frank also cautions Laurence against getting too settled in the room: it is just a temporary dwelling-place.

immutable, it is founded on the premise of belonging to people who are the same and disassociation from those who are different.

Heidegger (1971) holds that selfhood cannot be separated from our position in the world: we think and act only through “being in the world” and being located in place. Hence, spatial relations determine subjectivity and perspective. Since Peter has removed himself from the place where his identity and sense of belonging were formed by emigrating, he can no longer associate his consciousness with space and place. Differently put, the relation between identity, space and place is destabilised, and the sense of self becomes disoriented. Without a nurturing location, the self is neither here nor there, neither one nor the other (Sewlall, 2004:170). For this reason Peter prevaricates, rather than giving Nonyameko a straightforward answer to her question. Nonyameko Mhlabeni, whose business card boldly announces her identity, qualifications and occupation (BA (Fort Hare), MA (UCT), PhD (Boston), Director of the Institute of Women’s Mental Health at the University of the Witwatersrand) may *call* him a freelance journalist if she insists on a label (29). And he has *become* English, if she likes. Throughout the interchange, Peter refuses to state that he *is* a freelance journalist or English.

Nonyameko subsequently demands of Peter how other people classify him if he will not do so himself. Being relational beings, we derive our identity from the people around us – a fact Peter denies. In his opinion, the essence of our being depends on our national, social, sexual, professional and racial identities. Conceiving of himself as a postmodern subject, Peter resists a fixed, one-dimensional interpretation of identity but draws on multiple choices of self-definition. On the other hand, availing oneself of an assortment of identities that are always in flux, dynamic and shifting, may be construed as another way Peter dodges self-awareness and self-definition.

Peter eventually acknowledges that his name denotes his distinctiveness. Yet, Peter’s name is by no means unique. In any event, different characters call him different names. Aunt Dolly, for instance, persists in using the Afrikaans version “Pieter”, while

Bennie used to identify him by the sobriquet of Jakes. Jakes is a declension of Jacobs, Peter's surname which may be Jewish or Afrikaans. Peter declares that though he is the hybrid offspring of a Jewish father and an Afrikaans mother, he is neither "one nor the other" (99).<sup>39</sup> This not only conveys his marginalisation but also precludes the delimitation of a definite identity. His postmodern personality supposedly constructs itself in difference, rather than in essence (Ashcroft, 1998:167). In addition, when individuals migrate and cross boundaries (as Peter has done), the sense of self is no longer confined to one place but interacts with and defines itself in multiple geographical, social and cultural contexts (Wenzel, 2008:143); it knows many different ways of being at home (Hubbard *et al.*, 2004:164). In interstitial and indeterminate spaces, the self experiences the freedom to borrow cultural elements from the centre, assimilate these and transfer them to the periphery. The transcultural, transitional position between lines of demarcation is the site where the consciousness expands and imaginative awakening takes place (Bhabha, 1994:4). As a writer, Peter plumbs the depths of his creative imagination. He, therefore, needs to nurture a syncretised, cross-cultural subjectivity within inclusive global structures.

Regardless of the above, the protagonist suddenly resolves that he is a British citizen. Steyn (2001:31) theorises that South Africans of British descent tend to hold on to their European identities. Europe, as the settlers' former home and the inverse of Africa, remains the source of "spatial and cultural meaning" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:91), and supplies them with a secure and stable subjectivity. Conversely, South Africans of Dutch descent rather associate themselves with the African continent. Though Peter may claim that he is British, he points out that the "Brits can spot a foreign accent fifty years on" (96), and his boyfriend categorises him as "the Saffer honky" (69). Nonetheless, a little while ago, Peter maintained that national identity was not the only type of identity. Thus he now contradicts himself. Still later in the novel he makes known that his English identity seems unreal to him, "part of somebody else's existence"

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<sup>39</sup> The protagonist narrator of Heyns's *The Children's Day* (2002) is also a peripheral figure with his English father and Afrikaans mother (Wessels, 2012:59).

(199), somebody to whom it is difficult to ascribe a name and identity; and that he, from this perspective, appears insubstantial” (199). This is probably because the protagonist’s so-called British consciousness does not stem from “shared cultural remembering” (Rutherford, 1990:223) of experiences, cultural codes, rituals and myths. Neither has he sufficiently oriented himself in space to transform a transcultural location into his new home so as to become a member of the global village and a citizen of the world (Rutherford, 1990:89). From the above the reader deduces that the traversal of the border between South Africa and England has not produced a harmonious “hybridity milieu” (Newman, 2007:40) and an integrated selfhood. Peter’s displacement has obscured the boundary between home and world. Being neither here nor there, his postmodern subject comprises a condition of existential isolation and ostracism. Since he has not succeeded in deconstructing and reconfiguring his identity in terms of the liminal spaces in which he dwells, his perception of self fragments and he suffers an intra-personal schism of subjectivity. At the end of the narrative, he proclaims that he has “no volition, no identity even” (291).

## **5.7 Travel and borders**

In an endeavour to escape his peripherality, recover what he has lost, including his identity and the meaning of existence, Peter takes recourse to travelling. In England he forms no significant and lasting attachments (not even to his boyfriend), and without these he remains disconnected from his surroundings and himself. Akin to Chris Jameson (*LA*), he is a border figure in Europe, always on the outskirts of his boyfriend’s circle of friends, emotionally alienated and lost. Conyngham states: “If one were to go to another country, one would always be an outsider.” (Blair, 2003:85) Estranged from society, “stranded – alone and futureless in the middle of his life”, as Chris and Frank (*GD*) also are (14), Peter becomes aware of the significance of roots and belonging. To overcome his condition of dislocation and displacement, as well as discover clues to his own self and interconnectedness, he takes to traversing geographical boundaries and exploring different spaces.

It seems that in Peter's case there is no salvation or serenity to be found through travelling. Irrespective of where he goes, he cannot settle down and finds himself on the margins of society, in a peripheral space. Borders designate who we are and make our existences meaningful, but the diaspora experience of globalisation blurs the border between home and world, and begets homelessness and lostness. A stranger in the country of his birth whose European heritage is no longer in demand in Africa, Peter contends with feelings of ambivalence pertaining to his place and personality in Africa and Europe. As Darian-Smith *et al.* (1996:124) would phrase it, he becomes one of "the dispossessed who travel over the land rather than existing within it".

Narrative, at least, ensues from Peter's travels. One may speculate that the story the protagonist will tell to his London acquaintances will follow the format of the nineteenth-century sentimental travel novel that foregrounds the narrator and his experiences, as opposed to the manners and customs travelogue that gives an account of foreign folk. If Peter depicts himself in his tale as a dauntless adventure-hero, entering "a metaphysical battlefield" (Achebe,1977:788), he will be reminiscent of the colonial traveller-adventurers – who entertained mythical and romantic notions about the continent – as well as Dr Laurence Waters (*GD*) who embarked on an expedition into the wilderness to establish a clinic and his identity there. To portray himself as a hero on a gruelling quest, Peter may even exaggerate his own exploits. While underscoring the uncouthness of the citizens of Alfredville, he may also objectify them, if not as other then as different. While still in the Karoo town, Peter already does this in his emails to James as well as in his own reflections. Alfredville, in the middle of nowhere (like the village to which Laurence wants to introduce a clinic), with its windmills and farm animals in the main street, may seem to resemble a frontier civilisation. The continent provides a stage for the protagonist to act and revive his manhood and virile energy. This fact is significant if one considers that James has left Peter because James could no longer endure having a relationship with a "traffic light" (111).

Another benefit to be gained from travelling is that the expansion of horizons and the navigation of new spaces may trigger a confrontation with the unexplored aspects of the

self. When Peter leaves South Africa, he willingly relinquishes his heritage of power and privilege. The formative experience of travel sparks self-analysis, and Peter, in England, reconceives of his sexual and racial being when he engages in a relationship with a black man. This new identity destabilises the binaries on which traditional South African white masculinity has been constructed, and is based on inclusion rather than exclusion. Back in Alfredville, Peter befriends a black woman. During the colonial chapter in history, Nonyameko, being a woman and black, would have been relegated to a position of subordinate rather than friend and saviour. The Western European psyche centred on the “white patriarchal construction of difference” (Gittings, 1996:6-7) as lower on the evolutionary ladder and inferior to the superior white male consciousness. Others were kept at a distance, this compounding their status as foreign and fearful. Just the same, the colonisers defined who they were in opposition to those who were distant from and different to them. In apartheid South Africa the white population delimited their distinctiveness against the difference of the darker races. The black other provided a negative reference point for the white self, perceived as the “privileged site of presence” (Stratton, 1990:44) against the other’s absence. Yet Peter does not shape his self in contrast to Nonyameko. He has long since rejected the binary system on which the colonial consciousness was consolidated by taking a black man as a lover. Having confronted himself and transcended his historical identity and its limitations, he also relinquishes depreciating, preconceived notions about others. Peter listens to Nonyameko’s voice and enters into her life-world when he accompanies her to the township. He accepts her racial and gender otherness on equal terms and establishes a dialogical and reciprocal relationship with her. In McEwan’s estimation (1996:69), the acceptance of the other paves the way for an integrated identity, one which includes rather than excludes, and, as such, coincides with an egalitarian society.

## **5.8 Narration and narrator**

*Lost Ground* is a retrospective first-person novel comprising Peter Jacobs’s interpretation of events. The question arises whether a narrator who cannot configure his individuality rooted in a stable sense of place could be regarded as reliable. What is

more, an autodiegetic I-narrator tends to be more biased than an omniscient third-person narrator. This is significant in the light of Peter's former status as a settler involved in two centuries of racist oppression and exploitation. Since Peter has left the country during the years of conversion from institutional hegemony to a democratic state, Alfredville's white citizens also regard him as an interloper. Socially marginalised from Alfredville on account of his mixed parentage and ideologically marginalised from both Africa and Europe, without a home or his own friends, it is to be expected that Peter Jacobs – like Christopher Jameson (*LA*) – will not be an impartial narrator articulating a balanced and truthful perspective. The author alerts the readers not to blindly accept the conclusions this compromised character reaches.

Peter dismally fails as a detective as well as a journalist and, at first glance, he does not appear to fare any better as a human being. As a detective Peter makes erroneous deductions and – just as he misunderstands himself – he misreads persons and their motives. He first suspects Desirée's husband of her murder, then Cassie Carstens, and finally his former best friend who happens to be Alfredville's acting police station commander. Not even after Bennie pointedly tells Peter: "Oh, I think Chrisna knows who killed Desirée" (272) and Chrisna enumerates all her motives for disposing of Desirée, does it register with Peter that Chrisna has perpetrated the crime. Peter's errors result in tragedy: a family loses a breadwinner, husband and father – and "a complete surrender to a horrific breakdown of reason" (296) on Peter's own part. Moreover, the guilty party goes free and justice is perverted.

As a journalist, Peter, Nonyameko surmises, could not find a subject in England and hopes that Africa will supply him with a story for an international readership. Peter insists on numerous occasions that he is "trying to keep [his] personal history out of it" (33), that he wishes to remain objective and professional. This is because he shies away from examining the unexplored parts of himself. He objects to the "solipsistic appropriation" of stories by writers such as Malan and Krog who, it would seem, cannot write a story "without first making it mine" (65). To him, Desirée's death provides simply the opportunity for a story; her life narrative is unrelated to his. A story may deal with

sad situations, but then again storytellers seek out sad and sensational situations (102) in order to turn other people's suffering into stories. As observers and reporters, they distance themselves from events<sup>40</sup> and keep their own anxiety in abeyance by focusing on and narrating the details, while clinging to "a thin line of irony" (294) to preserve their sanity in moments of distress and dissolution. Peter will decide on the angle of the story to determine the main component (199). The tale is what he will make of it: an exposé of a white woman's murder by her black husband (reminiscent of *Othello*) in the context of social and racial attitudes in post-1994 South Africa. But Desirée was not any white woman; she was Peter's relative and, by all accounts, his female doppelgänger – just like Frank and Laurence (*GD*) reflect the same person. Peter and Desirée, furthermore, lived in the same house, though at different times. They both left Alfredville to pursue their studies and reconfigure their life-world someplace new: Desirée in Stellenbosch and Peter in London. Both Desirée and Peter had non-white partners as well as an ambiguous relationship with the hapless Bennie, a relationship that was not platonic, yet also not sexual. Chrisna mentions that Peter and Desirée do not realise how their actions affect other people, so they "sail through life not looking back at the people [they]'ve left behind in [their] wake" (288). One may add that they also do not grasp how their actions will affect themselves.

By telling his cousin's story, it increasingly dawns on Peter that the story intersects with his and that he is actually telling his own story. Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004:8) aver that stories explain our connection to other people and the past, influence our place and behaviour in the world and assist in the construction of a structured and purposeful existence. Peter's subjectivity, therefore, depends on a series of stories that gives significance and coherence to it. This also explains why, rather than being a chronicler of incidents, he becomes entangled within the action of the story (Von Klemperer, 2011), a player upon whom a leading part is "inflicted" (209). He admits to Nonyameko who, being a psychologist, also deals in stories (110), that he does not

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<sup>40</sup> Heyns has admitted to Mary Corrigan (2012b) that he is "attracted to the outsider concept". Barring *Bodies Politic*, his protagonists are all observers standing on the side-line, watching.

think of Desirée's death as a story any longer. Just as he cannot avoid participating in the "sad story" (239) of his cousin's death, so he cannot escape becoming embroiled – "knee-deep" (198) and "up to [his] ears" (295) – in the nation's story of bloodshed and collective guilt (295). And this is a story he cannot get away from by emigrating, just as one cannot "walk out of the ocean when a strong current has swept one away" (239).

Steyn (2001:188) posits that people construct narratives "in order to create a significant and orderly world, a world that is stable and predictable". At the end of the novel it becomes apparent to Peter that, because he cannot compose a coherent and connected self, he is unable to communicate his feelings. He subsequently discards his story. The article has not only "lost its punch line" (208) but also its purpose and moral (226). Secondly, the character reckons he lacks the vocabulary to dissect a tragedy so "bereft of beauty and dignity" (281). More importantly, since stories are "arbitrary constructs" (291), this story does not belong to him; he cannot claim sole ownership of it:

It's Bennie's story, and Chrisna's story, and Desirée's story, and only then is it [his] story, and every story has its own truth and its own moral, and they all contradict one another (294).

In a postmodern vein, the protagonist rejects the "claim to exclusivity" (Appiah, 1991:341-342) and absolute imperatives in order to contest a single rendition of history, reality and the truth. History, reality and the truth are contingent on a specific viewpoint, thus confirming their mediated and subjective nature. Truth and meaning, in the same way as identity, are characterised by ambivalence, contingency, deferral and displacement, and cannot be absolute and complete. Just as there are different versions of the truth in a postmodern context, expressing "the cacophonous voices of the democracy" (as Barris (2008:37) phrases it), so there are plural authors and narrators (Bennie, Chrisna and Desirée) instead of a supreme controlling authorial narrative voice (Peter's). Containing its own truth and moral, the story of each author – though opposing – makes equal sense to its respective creators. Peter modifies his earlier opinion that one can "nail things down to one certainty" (157). Because one cannot

ascertain which story has more merit, one cannot commit to and act on a single interpretation of reality and the truth. Alterity, plurality and heterogeneity inform postmodern texts; hence narratives afford no resolution or closure. Heyns's speaking subject concludes that since all stories are arbitrary in nature, it is of no avail to write them. What is more, he feels as if he never wants "to write another word" (291). All this journalist can come up with is a "sorry tale of a stuff-up" (294). As a journalist, Peter, therefore, also proves inadequate.

As a human being, Peter has many flaws. He admits that nobody has ever called him "a good man" (231), and being classified as such "feels like the heaviest burden anyone has ever saddled [him] with" (231). Neither does he consider himself brave. He recalls that he could not stand up in high school to the two bullies and to his father who decided that his son would not go to the army. Peter, however, did speak up for Bennie, insisting to the bullies that Bennie was one of them (51). And Peter himself chose not to go to the army. Bennie believes Peter was "too shit scared to ... fight for [his] country" (251). If this were true, then the character may be compared to Chris (*LA*) who withdraws from South Africa's political reality rather than participating in it. Peter informs Nonyameko that he went to England because he could not collude with the system (95), but when he is with Bennie who did do his military duty, Peter shifts responsibility for his choice to his father. When Bennie makes overtures to confide in Peter, Peter refuses to give him the opportunity, "because I'm not sure that I want to take responsibility" (176). Neither will he allow Bennie to revisit their friendship; this makes him "excruciatingly uncomfortable" (234). Peter has also not told his boyfriend about the central place Bennie occupied in his life (198); perhaps this is because Peter had never had clarity about his feelings for James: "How can I tell, when I didn't even know if I loved him when I was living with him?" (112) As mentioned above, James decries Peter's lack of emotional commitment and equates having a relationship with him to having a relationship with a "traffic light" (111). Nonyameko perspicaciously points out that South Africans speak of traffic lights as robots, mechanical apparatuses devoid of feelings like love and loyalty. In the absence of a secure sense of self, Peter will not open himself up to an intimate relationship with another person. He has no

desire to be burdened with the responsibility for others (297). On this score he would also rather not write the article about Desirée's demise. As he tells Vincent: "I don't even live in this place, it's none of my business what happens here." (231) It falls to the Congolese car guard to educate Peter that one's duty does not extend solely to one's surroundings.

Another reason for the protagonist not responding to the claims Bennie and other people make on him (50) is that he lacks a sense of loyalty: "Loyalty seems not to be a virtue I've been blessed with, or an inconvenience I've been saddled with." (199) This perhaps also elucidates why Peter has no qualms about misleading people (Joy, Aunt Dolly and Oom Blik) or lying to them as to why he has come back to Alfredville and finds his cousin's life and death suddenly so interesting. Cassie, Boetie van Blerk (Desirée's brother) and Henk Pretorius call Peter's bluff. Ironically, Peter – the detective – is deficient in the same discernment and awareness of his own motives. For instance, Peter did not for one moment consider that Bennie might have hoped that his friend returned to Alfredville to rekindle their relationship. Peter just assumed that everyone knew his return was for the purpose of researching an article. The protagonist makes several unfounded assumptions, for example that people, primarily women, in rural areas do not read literary novels and that a heterosexual man's home looks as if it requires "the ordering hand of a woman" (183) (another chauvinist remark). Though the veterinarian cautions Peter that "[t]oo many mistakes are made by people who are sure they've made the right diagnosis, and act on the diagnoses" (152), the journalist still treats his assumptions as if they were certainties and throws other people's lives into disarray by prying into their personal affairs instead of examining his own self. Chrisna, who before expressed surprise at Peter's obtuseness, has become convinced of Peter's limitations and laconically replies: "No, of course you had no idea." (287) Just as Peter does not understand other people and interprets the motives for their actions inaccurately, he does not comprehend himself. At the end of the novel he conveys to Nonyameko that she should not be concerned about him; by the following week he will be regaling the people in London with the tale of his "weird adventure in Africa" (297). Peter deceives himself by anticipating that distance from Alfredville and South Africa

and his elevated vantage point at the top of the world map will produce a detached perspective and objective panoramic observation.

Fortunately the reader of Heyns's novel does not share the protagonist's detached position. Heyns succeeds in creating the illusion of intimacy between reader and speaker as well as sympathy for his protagonist by using a self-reflexive and self-aware narrative style. The author also convinces the reader of his subject's humanity when the latter fathoms:

*I lost something years ago that I haven't been able to replace, and if that something isn't altogether Bennie, it is what he represented to me then, though I had no idea of it at the time: the unfettered exploration of life, the life of the senses, the unexamined joy of daily companionship in that exploration. And then, the unconscious knowledge that I was giving as well as receiving, that I, too, represented something to him that was worth having, that in that way we supplemented each other (274) (italics in original).*

When Peter left, he and Bennie lost the self-validation each found in the other. Only now that he has gone over "the same ground" (275), does he grasp that the past always stakes a claim on the present. Disowning the past entails erasing one's history and destabilising one's identity. By invading the ground he abandoned and lost, and intruding in other people's lives, he rakes up painful memories and emotions and sets off a chain-reaction which culminates in calamity and a casualty. However, to his credit, he has grown as a human being and no longer closes his eyes to "the blood on [his] hands" (297). He, the cosmopolite, is just as much of a murderer as the uncomely, uneducated housewife who has never ventured beyond the limits of the rural town where she was born. Chrisna killed Peter's cousin and he took the life of Chrisna's husband. Peter feels compassion for this woman whose greatest achievement in life was marrying Bennie, just as Bennie's greatest achievement was befriending Peter. An abstract justice has been served, and Peter will not pursue a legal justice "beyond the bounds of mercy" (295). Heyns's protagonist, like Galgut's, does redeem himself throughout the course of the novel and the reader identifies with him when he assumes accountability for the suffering he has caused. His "time-hardened carapace" of irony – the "defence against feeling too much and showing too much" (297) – at long last

cracks, and the once supercilious and self-satisfied journalist and world-traveller faces up to his own faults and is reduced to an insecure infant, clinging to the hand of a black woman “for all the world as if [he] could thus anchor [him]self to some saving vestige of identity” (297) Nonyameko’s assertion is validated: we are relational beings and we frame our identity in relation to others – who are the same *and* who are different. The novel concludes with the intimation of the speaking subject’s developed self-awareness and salvation and the possible peaceful coexistence of the races.

## 5.9 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter in relation to the central thesis is to demonstrate that the average white South African male does not know to which of two opposing worlds he belongs and still conceives of himself as a foreigner on two separate continents. Hence, Conrad’s doubts about the exploits of the colonial exercise and its consequences have become more pronounced in literature at the end of the twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In addition to the settler’s perception of self and other, and Europe and Africa, the chapter has investigated the former settler’s awareness of identity and the meaning of his existence in relation to others and spatial dimensions that are retained or transgressed.

As the contextualisation and analysis have demonstrated, the protagonist-narrator who returns to his hometown to recover the time and self he has lost does reclaim some measure of “lost ground” when he reassesses his identity in terms of the past and assumes accountability for others. The narrative concludes with the protagonist’s redemption and hope for reconciliation between the races as he crosses the boundary between self and other to establish a reciprocal relation with a black woman. Accordingly, Heyns’s Peter Jacobs relieves his identity of its restrictions and makes strides towards locating it – in people if not in places.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Introduction

This thesis has traced the impact of colonisation and apartheid on the white South African consciousness: it has focused specifically on the English male protagonist's experience of space and place in terms of the perception of self and other in the construction of identity, and the concomitant awareness of the expansion of space and place through the transgression of physical and psychological boundaries. As such, the thesis has indicated that the apprehension articulated by Joseph Conrad regarding the ideology of imperial expansionism has become more notable after the abrogation of the invidious prevalent system of social, racial and political segregation. Apartheid legislation may have been abolished, but its legacy remains and dictates the present. The colonisers' complicity in the injustices of the past has left an impression on the present. Failing to notice this is tantamount to erasing history and striking at the foundation of the self. Only when whites take responsibility for "the corpse of the past weighing on the living" (Bambalele, 2004:20) and toward the different other will they discover the truth about themselves and be able to commit themselves to the future.

The introductory chapter of the thesis gave an overview of the original white settlers' position in South Africa and Africa, with particular emphasis on the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. This chapter also argued that the ambivalence concerning white male identity had not yet been fully explored in a comparative study of novels by white South Africans with reference to the authors' situatedness in a postcolonial and post-apartheid paradigm, their innovative implementation of narrative frames and intertextuality. Chapter Two addressed the theoretical underpinnings of postmodernism, postcolonialism and globalisation, the narrative strategy of intertextuality and the frame of the detective novel. Special mention was made of space and place and the expansion of space and place through

the traversal, transgression or transcendence of boundaries to encounter the other, this bringing about an awareness of self and a sense of accountability. Chapters Three, Four and Five were devoted to critical analyses of three postmodern and postcolonial narratives – John Conyngham’s *The Lostness of Alice*, Damon Galgut’s *The Good Doctor* and Michiel Heyns’s *Lost Ground* – by assessing their position in the theoretical framework and investigating their narrative frame and strategies in relation to the myth of Africa.

## **6.2 Narrative frame: The detective/mystery novel**

To a greater or lesser degree, all three texts are framed by the detective novel which supplements their meaning and interpretation. The detective’s position as outsider bears similarities to that of the former settlers in Africa who navigated boundaries and oriented themselves in new surroundings to discover a coherent self rooted in place. The detectives or investigators in *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground* are all white males, thus descendants of the original settlers.

Conyngham, Galgut and Heyns all make use of elements of three different sub-genres of detective fiction: the cosy whodunit, the hard-boiled crime thriller and the literary detective novel. The cosy whodunit is situated in a closed setting. In *The Lostness of Alice*, Alice disappears from the suburb of Bushmansburg, in *The Good Doctor* Laurence vanishes from a semi-deserted hospital in a depopulated town, and in *Lost Ground* Desirée van Blerk meets her end in a backwater town in the Little Karoo. Except for the closed settings, the three novels follow the format of hard-boiled detective fiction. The same closed settings are no placid pastoral villages where one deviant individual upsets the social order for a while before the detective exposes the aberrant individual and the police remove him/her from society so that order and security are re-established. In the hard-boiled novel, the merciless milieu mirrors moral decay and social malfunction. In South Africa members of a previously advantaged racial group who struggle to adapt to the transition may concur with the view that society is sick. They bemoan “a world already almost gone” (Green, 1997:202) in which they

felt safe. The detective himself does not remain untouched by his surroundings, and often does not possess a stable sense of self. Whereas the cosy whodunit's detective embodies moral rectitude, the hard-boiled detective is either a disillusioned and despairing individual or emotionally damaged and disturbed (Naidu, 2013:733). Christopher Jameson (*LA*) distrusts his girlfriend and assaults a man until the man loses consciousness/dies. Frank Eloff (*GD*) detects a dark brother and a dark stranger in his head (162, 175), sleeps with his roommate's girlfriend and fantasises about inflicting violence on his roommate's "soft and pale and vulnerable" body (161). Peter Jacobs (*LA*) does not accept responsibility for his choices and for others, denies his emotions, deserts his one true love, and then unjustly accuses the latter of having committed murder. From the aforementioned it is clear that authors foreground the detective's emotions and relationships, which is not the case in the cosy detective novel where the plot takes precedence over the characters' motivations. The cosy whodunit's detective is endowed with almost preternatural perceptiveness; his powers of assiduous observation, uncanny intuition and cogent analysis by far surpass that of the reader. The hard-boiled detective, on the other hand, is a person in whom the reader can recognise him/herself and with whom the reader experiences a sense of kinship. Often the detective – in the same way as the reader – earns a living by non-detective means, and becomes a detective only by force of circumstance. Sally (*LA*) and Peter (*LG*) are newspaper reporters, Chris (*LA*) works on a farm and Frank (*GD*) at a hospital. These characters may be classified as anti-detectives (Naidu's term, 2013:735) in that they misinterpret evidence and make critical mistakes. Sally (*LA*), for instance, blames the Movement for Azanian Liberation for Alice's disappearance, and an innocent man pays with his life. Frank (*GD*) believes Colonel Moller has a hand in Maria's going missing. In *Lost Ground*, Peter never catches the culprit; the latter confesses. Readers can therefore deem themselves the detective's equal and attempt to find the key to the puzzle before he does. Conyngham and Galgut, though, do not allow for an elucidation of the mystery and a convincing denouement. As for *Lost Ground*, the author of this thesis inferred the identity of the offender well before the investigator does. Although the reader is not robbed of a revelation in Heyns's novel, the guilty party is not arrested

and the detective does not succeed in curbing social disquiet and restoring safety and security. Definitive answers are absent from all three novels and their authors leave readers with uncertainty and questions. Notwithstanding this, the purpose of literary detective fiction is not the unscrambling of the puzzle, but the progress the detective makes as a person during the process of investigating the crime.

### **6.3 Narrative strategies: Intertextuality and irony**

Conyngham, Galgut and Heyns not only invoke the genre of the detective novel to emphasise the exploration of identity but also the postmodern and postcolonial discursive devices of intertextuality and irony to propose alternative possibilities for interpretation. By rewriting canonical works from a contemporary point of view, intertextuality, in conjunction with irony, stretches textual boundaries and disrupts the representation of the past in literature. In Conyngham's *The Lostness of Alice*, allusions to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* underline the connection between Africa and Wonderland to comment on the colonial drive. Galgut draws on *Heart of Darkness* to reproduce Conrad's representation of Africa as "the other world" (Achebe's, 1977:784) satirical reference to Africa) and to reveal the absurdity of the colonising venture as well as its flawed foundation. Shakespeare's *Othello* serves as a matrix for Heyns's novel and Heyns's portrayal of South African race relations. By rewriting *Othello* from a post-apartheid point of view, the author interrogates and ultimately invalidates the authority of the metanarrative and the incontestability of the canon and the past.

### **6.4 Themes**

The thesis set out to answer the research questions as posed in Chapter One, questions that were addressed for the most part in the discussion of the themes of the selected novels. These questions related to the impact of colonisation and apartheid on the contemporary white South African male's consciousness, the role of space and place, boundaries and travel concerning identity formation, and the white, male

protagonists' experience of South Africa and Africa as represented in terms of cultural difference, the relationship between self and other and social responsibility.

Self-conscious identity examination and formation have been recurrent themes in most of the critical writing on postcolonialism since the 1980s and especially the 1990s, and also feature prominently in *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground*. In this thesis, identity formation was discussed in terms of three stages of experience: orientation in space and time, recognition of the other, and self-confrontation and subsequent self-awareness.

Since decolonisation and the democratisation of South Africa, the country has seemingly been vacillating between a European and an African identity. The three selected novels imply that under black rule South Africa has been in a state of deterioration. According to Barris (2005:36), literary works that prophesy the dissolution of the new democracy “most centrally define the properties of South African political writing under present conditions”, and judging by Conyngham’s, Galgut’s and Heyns’s novels, one tends to agree. In the wake of attaining freedom, failures of governance, a rising unemployment rate, a decrease in educational standards, poverty and populism are noticeable. Incompetence, corruption and criminality characterise the collective consciousness, including that of the government. What is more, with the political tables turned, a rising black middle-class has been “invading” the once exclusively-white residential areas. In *The Lostness of Alice*, both the protagonist and his girlfriend foresee white people having to flee for their lives. In *Lost Ground*, Peter Jacob’s father sent his son to England when it became evident that single-party rule could not be sustained for much longer in South Africa. Although it appears that Mr Jacob’s apocalyptic angst is unfounded (or has not come to pass yet), whiteness as a position of superiority and privilege has since come under attack. White people are cognisant of their minority status and find themselves to be at a disadvantage under affirmative action. Suddenly second-class citizens or, worse, strangers in the country of their birth, and plagued by the impermanence of their position, they experience a sense of dispossession and dislocation.

Said (1993:27) stresses that three themes – concerning space and place, boundaries and travel – in the literature of settler colonies persist in a postcolonial era: the problem of finding and defining a home, physical or emotional confrontation with a new land, and exile. Traditionally, white South African males have delimited their place and personality on the grounds of land ownership and command over the “inferior” other, including women. After having had to relinquish their power over the land and different others, white males are deprived of their role as owner and master. Neither of the three protagonists owns land or any other place to orientate himself in space and time; in other words, “a nest for his body, padded to his measure” where he can abide “in complete confidence”, as Bachelard (1994:101, 103) would phrase it. Without land and a family, the protagonists stand outside the matrices of ownership and patriarchy around which South African male identity used to be constructed (Viljoen, 2004:115).

Bachelard (1994:10) proclaims that in a postcolonial period “the normal unconscious knows how to make itself a home anywhere”; that is, a fluid postmodern and global identity can realise itself in multiple locations. To re-orientate themselves in space and time, the narrators of the novels take to travelling and the transgression of boundaries. Similar to a detective who probes unknown spaces in pursuit of clues and culprits, Chris (*LA*) and Peter (*LG*) (more so than Frank (*GD*)) embark on journeys. Chris escapes into the outside world and negotiates the spaces of Europe and the interior of Africa, while Peter returns to the Little Karoo to elude his marginality in London and locate a coherent and connected self in his hometown. Yet by exploring geographical spaces, travellers find themselves again on the threshold of society – between boundaries. Bhabha (1994:4), with whom Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004:17) concur, avers that thresholds are energising, creative sites where the personality expands and imaginative awakening occurs. On thresholds, travellers acquire insight into different people and adjust preconceived notions of other societies’ customs and values. At the same time as voyagers’ knowledge of others and other places enlarges, they confront “the strange and disavowed aspects of the self” (Kostelac, 2010:59). So, while travellers cross physical boundaries, they traverse psychological (intra- and interpersonal) barriers as well. Thus, distance from familiar climes is not only a liberating experience but also a

formative one, inducing internal change and spiritual renewal. Conversely, globalisation may destabilise the relation between identity, space and place, concepts that are continually brought under scrutiny by the alternative modes of writing of postmodernism and postcolonialism. In the three postmodern and postcolonial narratives, globality denotes homelessness; serenity or salvation does not arise from travelling. As a matter of fact, the “cultural fragmentation, displacement and exile” of Chris and Peter – the two characters who travel overseas – are exacerbated by the diaspora experience of globalisation (Wenzel, 2008:143). In their case, dislocation obscures the boundary between home and world, and the traversal of borders does not produce a harmonious hybridity milieu (Newman’s term, 2007:40).

Without an attachment to people and places, the three protagonists, who exemplify the psychological condition of the white South African male after the major temporal frontier of apartheid has been bridged, exist as border figures, “in a strange twilight zone halfway between nothing and somewhere” (*GD*, 34). Feeling lost, they struggle to support a stable and secure sense of self.

An integrated sense of self requires a sense of belonging – if not to a place, then to a person or persons (De Lange *et al.*, 2008:xii) (including the different other). Belonging originates from the shared relationships to a lived space (Carter *et al.*, 1993:112), the values, belief systems and experiences people share with others in a specific location. These values, belief systems and experiences solidify the connection to people and the past and inform future choices. Notwithstanding this, Chris (*LA*), Frank (*GD*) and Peter (*LG*) all refrain from reciprocally connecting with other people who wish to befriend them – for instance Laurence Frank and Bennie Peter. Chris is the only one in a relationship at the beginning and end of *The Lostness of Alice*, but both relationships lack trust. Throughout the novel Chris uses various women for sexual gratification. Frank’s marriage (*GD*) fails after his wife has found love with his best friend/business partner, and Peter’s boyfriend (*LG*) leaves Peter because Peter would not commit himself emotionally.

The lack of the narrators' affiliations with others reverberates with the similar affiliative lack between races in South Africa. In the three novels, most of the characters subscribe to separateness and make no attempt to move across the concrete and abstract lines of division between "us" and them". Some of the whites still express the essence of their being in keeping with the self-other axes of similarity and difference imposed by imperialism and subsequently apartheid. For example, in *The Lostness of Alice*, the "irrational" and "immoral" black other acts as the repository of all of the apprehensions and anxieties of the white self (Rutherford, 1990:10). Because the black homeless person represents the racially inferior other to the predominantly white army troops, they belittle him. Like *Lost Ground's* Hector Williams, the rastaman must be guilty of the crime of which he is suspected. In Galgut's novel, Frank feels that Tehogo, the black nurse, should not have a room in the same passage as the white doctors. In Heyns's *Lost Ground*, the hotel guests and villagers object to a black employee staying in a hotel room rather than in the servants' quarters.

In contrast to Heyns, Conyngham does not allow any individual black character to play a significant role in *The Lostness of Alice*; collectively blacks embody a hostile and fearsome presence. Galgut gives prominence to four African characters but depicts them in a stereotypical fashion: as inert and inefficient (Dr Ngema) or corrupt and criminal (the Brigadier and Tehogo) (Grant (2003:18). As for Maria, Frank – the speaking subject of the novel – treats her as an object to satisfy his sexual desires. In his subconscious, she is Africa, the passive, female body (Rebecca Stott's description of Africa, 1989:79), while he is Europe. When Laurence, whom Frank has thought of as the other, breaks through the barriers Frank has built around himself and then vanishes, Frank gradually fathoms the absence of attachments in his life. After Maria aborts a child – probably Frank's – he takes responsibility for her well-being. As the binaries collapse in terms of which white masculinity has been structured, Frank also starts noticing similarities between himself and Tehogo. Discerning that the other is an extension of the self, the doctor becomes more sympathetic toward the nurse and other people and makes headway towards diminishing the disjuncture between "us" and "them".

Even though *Lost Ground's* protagonist (like Frank), at first keeps others at a distance and perpetuates gender and racial stereotypes, he later makes the choice to enter into the domain of the other and acknowledges Nonyameko as an equal. Contrary to Conyngham's narrative, the black woman's otherness does not constitute inferiority in Peter's mind, and in contrast to how Frank treats Maria, Peter listens to Nonyameko and connects with her. In the same way as Frank, Peter makes a psychological adjustment in terms of his outlook on cultural difference, the relationship between self and other and social responsibility. After confronting himself (the third stage in the shaping of subjectivity), the character becomes more self-aware and comprehends that human existence encompasses both social and psychological dimensions. Though this postmodern text steers clear of a neat and easy ending and affords no closure, the reader suspects that Peter Jacobs will shake off his solitude, reorient his sensibility and redesign his identity. The new identity will centre on the acceptance and inclusion of others in place of their rejection and exclusion. Accordingly, Peter Jacobs resolves his alienation through surmounting the schism within himself and between self and other. At the moment of greatest distress, he does not adhere to colonial notions of masculine self-definition which stipulate that a man be dominant and strong, social and in control, and refutes the colonial stereotype of the other as foreign and fearful when he grabs Nonyameko's hand. McEwan (1996:69) hypothesises that acknowledging and embracing the other pave the way for the re-constitution of a cohesive consciousness and a structured and purposeful existence.

## **6.5 Narrator and narration**

The question that remains is whether the three protagonists' interpretation of events and other characters in the novels may be considered credible; that is, whether it complies with the characteristics and norms of the implied author and the text (Booth, 1996:152). If so, a reciprocal relationship will exist between the observer of events, the narrator of events and the reader (Smit-Marais, 2013:15). Booth (1996:147) notes that because the narrator chooses occurrences and perspectives to be presented and omits others, he controls focalisation. Collectively, narration and focalisation determine the reader's

responses to characters and incidences (Smit-Marais, 2013:38). When a character in a story narrates in the first person and from his own point of view, as is the case in the selected novels, this character mediates between the reader and the author; his rendition of events is potentially more biased than that of a third-person omniscient narrator.

Giving an inside view and perspective to the narrator is one technique writers use to cultivate sympathy for this character. Another way relates to the knowledge the readers have of the narrator-focaliser's thought processes and feelings (Currie, 1996:21). *The Lostness of Alice* opens with a third-person narration, and for the first few pages excludes the male protagonist from the text. This alerts the reader to the fact that Christopher Jameson's version is not the only one, and may not be accurate. In Galgut's and Heyns's novels, readers have access to the storytellers from the start and can immediately identify with them. Sympathy is sustained due to a self-reflexive and self-critical narrative style.

The more accessible and close the distance between readers and narrator appears, the more the distance decreases and the more likely the readers will accept the storyteller's account of the narrative action. Concisely put, a correlation exists between narrative distance, the readers' sympathy for focalisers and the recognition of their reliability. Distance between the reader and the narrator increases during the course of *The Lostness of Alice* on account of the author drawing attention to Chris Jameson's inability to make correct inferences, his misinterpretation of persons' motivations (for example Sally's) and events, and his erroneous assumptions and biased assertions. So, whereas the character appears trustworthy at the beginning of the novel, by the end it is evident that his and the writer's points of view are dissimilar, this giving an ironic twist to the novel. The opposite applies to the other two novels' narrators. In the first part of *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground*, the creators highlight their characters' flaws, yet Frank and Peter grow as human beings and redeem themselves, so that their outlook on the people around them and the situation in which they find themselves, as well as the past and future of the country, may be deemed valid.

## 6.6 Conclusion

The analysis of the selected postmodern and postcolonial novels evinced that the legacy of colonisation and apartheid still has a bearing on the white man's perception of self and his position on the continent during and after the turn of the century. The memories of the injustices committed in the past against others persevere in the present and will in due course disfigure the future if responsibility is not taken and amends made. South Africa's reversion to Africa after the dissolution of the white regime is cause for concern. As South Africa discards its European identity to assume an African one, whites believe that they no longer belong. Marginalised and ostracised, they remain on the periphery of society. To counteract their displacement and lostness and to rediscover who they are and where they belong, they may take recourse to the transgression of frontiers and the exploration of space. Christopher (*LA*) and Frank (*GD*) convince themselves that they have come home – Christopher in the liminal space of Gibraltar, between Africa and Europe; and Frank in the hospital room – yet soon enough realise that they have found only a temporary resting-place. As postcolonial subjects, they have no permanent home. Their journeys will continue, as will Peter's (*LG*), and, as with Peter, will probably lead back to South Africa. As a matter of fact, Chris goes to Europe but returns to Africa; Frank travels to Johannesburg and then remains in the former homeland (which has merged with South Africa); and Peter stays in and around Alfredville. The fact that the distances travelled by the protagonists decrease in the three novels discloses that the original settlers still conceive of Africa as their home, or at least the continent is as close as they will "get to foundness within the central lostness of the human condition" (Conyngham, interview with Blair, 2003:87).

In the liminal space of the new South Africa, the former settlers may alter their perceptions of others. While this does not hold true for Christopher Jameson and the other whites in Conyngham's novel who continue to see blacks as degenerate and malevolent others, desirous to dispossess whites; the fear of the other has tended to abate as the years pass since the advent of democracy. The protagonist of *The Good Doctor*, Frank Eloff, comes to recognise the similarities between himself and the black

hospital orderly and endeavours to establish an emotional connection with Maria. *Lost Ground* features three relationships to which colonial and apartheid dualisms no longer apply: between Peter and James, Desirée and Hector, and Joachim (the gay hotel owner) and Boris (his employee). Peter, Desirée and Joachim all accept otherness on equal terms and engage with those who are different to them. Whereas Chris traverses geographical boundaries in his attempt to orientate himself in space and time and gains a degree of self-awareness, Frank transgresses symbolic ones (racial and social) when he recognises the other in the self, while Peter, after doing introspection and accepting responsibility, transcends spaces of separation. Since the authors of *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground* reveal that their narrators' point of view can be accepted as objective, the readers may infer that novelists feel more positive about a changed South Africa the more time elapses since the transition. It seems to be a matter of getting used to the new and accepting there is no returning to what was. A future student could investigate whether this trend will continue and whether the three texts form part of a bigger tapestry unfolding in post-apartheid South African literature.

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